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**THEOLOGY OF THE LAND
IN LIGHT OF
THE CURRENT PEACE PROCESS**

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"THIS PEACE IS KILLING US!"

Such were the words on a placard in a recent demonstration in Tel Aviv against the current peace process. Since the signing of the "Declaration of Principles" (9/93), the famous handshake on the White House lawn, and the subsequent Oslo Accords (I, and II), the State of Israel has agreed to the negotiating principle of "land for peace". The Israeli public seems to be almost evenly, albeit bitterly, divided on this controversial principle.

The national trauma of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin (11/95), left an open wound, only to be displaced by the shocks of a spate of four successive Hamas suicide bombings (2-3/96). Is it true as Likud MK Uzi Landau said, *"The Oslo concept blew up with the Hamas bombings"* ? "Prime Minister Shimon Peres' government may well fall in the general elections scheduled for May 29, 1996. Pollsters predict that if there is even one more bombing, it will surely fall. With the fall of Peres, the architects of the current "peace process", the peace process itself will be in jeopardy. As always, only God knows the specific twists and turns in Israel's future.

The Rabin slaying rocked Israel and graphically revealed just how passionate, traumatic and gut-wrenching is the issue of the land. That a religious Jew would break the sixth commandment and take the life of a Jewish leader seems to have broken a taboo in the Jewish state. A lowered threshold for the restraint of violence may cause more internecine violence to occur as the hotly contested "land for peace" process continues.

These events throw the theological issue of the promise of the land and its fulfillment on to our front burners. It behooves us in Jewish ministry therefore to have a biblically based theology of the land. We need a land theology based on a balanced hermeneutic. This, I'm convinced, will yield a theology that is distinct from the evangelical equivalent of Gush Emunim on the right (some forms of Christian Zionism) and from the equivalent of the peace at any price far left in Israel (Replacement theologies).

As close as the issue of the land of Israel is to the Jewish heart, we as messianic and evangelical followers of Jesus the Messiah should have the teaching of God's word on this matter in our minds. We should be able to comfort the anxiety of Jewish heart with hope and truth, as well as answer the critic without confusion and ambivalence.

Indeed a clear theology of the Land, informed by both Tanach and New Testament, is necessary equipping to be effective in Jewish evangelism and Jewish pastoral ministry. How do we answer people who ask:

Did God promise all the Land of Israel to the Jewish people? What are its borders?

Is the promise valid today since the coming of Messiah?

Why is the New Testament seemingly so silent on the issue of the Land?

How is the promise of the land fulfilled? Has it been fulfilled? Or how will it be fulfilled? When?

What are the implications of all this for me as a disciple of Yeshua, and as a leader in Jewish ministry?

What can I do to align myself with God's purpose in all this and to influence others toward the realization of that purpose?

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDWORK

In order to develop a theology of the land, it is necessary first to have a theology of history. That is to say, we must have a clear understanding not only of God's major salvific purpose in history, but also how He is working out that purpose *within history, during this present age* in and through the cultural and geo-political realities of our world. Our presuppositions here will determine the theology of the land we will espouse.

This issue remains the most thorny point of contention between the two dominant theological systems of our times, *Dispensationalism* and the *Non-Dispensational* streams (primarily the Reformed and Covenant theology traditions). This is true especially as it relates to the nature of the fulfillment of the prophetic Scriptures concerning national Israel. These systems have influenced all of our theological thinking to some degree whether or not we can articulate them, or are aware of their effect.

Our faith communities and the social fabric in which we are embedded affect how we read Scripture.

The scope of this paper does not allow in-depth description or analysis of the tenets of these systems. Suffice it to say that:

The *Non-Dispensational System* has emphasized:

1) *Unity of purpose in history*, being spiritual redemption, the spiritual reign of God over the people of God. This is achieved through God's grace in all covenants and in all ages. Ultimate salvation is spiritual and is beyond history in the eternal state, the new heavens and the new earth.

2) *Unity of the one people of God*. All promises to Israel are now fulfilled in (transferred to) the Church, who is the people of God. The overriding concern for the unity of the people of God cancels out any special role for Israel in the future.

The Traditional *Dispensation System* has emphasized:

1) *A twofold purpose in history* in the program of God. One is related to the earth and is worked out through *Israel* (the Davidic messianic kingdom promises are to be fulfilled at the end of the church age). The other is related to heaven and worked out through the *Church* (the church age on earth is a parenthesis period between God's dealings with Israel). There are *two peoples of God: Israel and the Church*.

2) *Discontinuity within history*. Distinct ages (dispensations) throughout history within which God's terms of dealing with humanity differ (especially the law, grace, and kingdom dispensations). No part of Old Testament kingdom prophecies are being fulfilled in any way during this age of grace. Hence, there are sharp distinctions in this system between the peoples of God and ages in the program of God.

Both traditions have seen development and modification in recent years. Among non-dispensationalists, Daniel Fuller, sees dispensationalism and covenant theology coalescing on the problem of law and grace (1980), and Willem A. Van Gemenen accepts a theologically significant national existence for Israel in his study on the place of Israel in Reformed theology (1983, 1984). Reformed theologian, David Holwerda of Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids sees a future for Jewish Israel in the purposes of God (1995). Younger dispensationalists are redefining their own tradition such

that a recognizable movement of "Progressive Dispensationalism" has emerged (see Blaising & Bock, 1992; and Saucy, 1993).

The concept of the "Kingdom of God" as the theme of history is now accepted by a large number of biblical scholars from both traditions. But the issue of the nature of the Kingdom and how and when it is established is still debated..

Non-Dispensational systems (especially those who are amillennial), are reductionistic in that they tend to limit the many facets of God's redemption of the whole cosmos (Romans 8:19-21) to the forgiveness of sins and the regeneration promised in the new covenant. This is an over-spiritualizing, Platonic approach to redemption. Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof, for example, argues that the temporal blessings promised to Abraham, *"did not constitute and end in themselves, but served to symbolize and typify heavenly things."*(1953:296). In other words all the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant is relegated to heaven. The temporal aspects of the covenant with Abraham are merely shadows and types that have become outmoded by the coming of Messiah.

Traditional Dispensationalism draws distinctions too strictly or rigidly. It does this both *as to ages* (a distinct church age with Israel on the shelf, and then a messianic kingdom age for Israel on earth with the church in heaven): How then does this system account for Jesus' announcement that *"the Kingdom is at hand"* , that it had arrived in His first coming? And *as to the people of God* : What will happen to messianic Jews in the rapture? Will they go up with the church or will they stay behind with their Jewish people? A theology of the people of God must account for not one or two groups, but three: The Jewish people, Gentile Christians, and Messianic Jews (who belong to both Israel and the Church).

A *mediating position* which takes the best (most biblical) elements of both systems now seems to be emerging. This position is well articulated by a volume edited by Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L Bock of Dallas Theological Seminary entitled Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church (1992), and by Robert L. Saucy of Talbot School of Theology, Biola University in Los Angeles, in his recent book The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism (1993). This emerging view retains the natural understanding of the prophetic Scriptures that assign a significant role to ethnic Israel in the future, but rejects the radical discontinuity (earthly/heavenly) between the church age and the coming Davidic messianic millennial kingdom of traditional Dispensationalism . This view affirms Messianic Judaism, Jewish evangelism, and hope for a *"fulness of the Jews"* (Romans 11: 12) being realized in this present age, that, ". . .they also may now be

shown mercy." (Romans 11:31b), as well as in an eschatological reality.

In agreement with non-dispensationalists it holds to a unified program of God *within history*. The Kingdom of God is that purpose through which God affects his sovereignty in a comprehensive salvation within history (including the redemption and restoration of the whole cosmos). Jesus the Messiah inaugurated the Kingdom on earth in His first coming. So the Kingdom is *already here* now within history. It is, however, *not yet* fully here but will be more fully established at His second coming, and culminated at an even later stage after the millennial kingdom, when a new heavens and a new earth will be created. This view is depicted in the parables of Jesus in Matthew chapter 13 (the mustard seed, the leaven).

The historical plan of God is therefore a unified plan. The present age is not a parenthesis unrelated to the history that precedes and follows it. It is an integrated phase in the unfolding establishment of the Kingdom of God. The church today functions in the same messianic and salvific mission or kingdom program that Israel was and is called to serve. The fulfillment of prophecies spans the present church age, the coming millennium, and the eternal state. Thus a mediating position draws the *continuity* of God's historical working from the non-Dispensational system, and retains the biblical *distinctives* between national Israel and the Church from the Dispensational system.

Though there is by no means complete consensus among the camps, it is hoped that a theological environment is now beginning to emerge, that will bring greater faithfulness to the Scriptures (rather than to theological systems), a greater unity of thought, and hence more promising conditions for Jewish ministry.

THE LAND: AN IRREVOCABLE PROMISE

The Abrahamic Covenant. The foundation of all understanding of the land promise is the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:7-21). It is indeed the spiritual spinal cord arching through all the covenant promises in the unfolding of God's purposes in history. It contains in germinal form all of subsequent salvation history. The covenant contains three essential elements: 1) A seed, 2) A land, 3) A Universal Blessing for all peoples. These elements are a package deal and are not to be separated out from each other

1) *The Seed*. Abraham's descendants would be "*as the dust of the earth*" (Gen.13:16), and "*as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore*" (Gen.15:5; 22:17). The term usually applied to Israel is "am" (people). But here in Gen.12:2b, it is "goy" (nation). This term is usually used in the Old Testament for a governed political entity characterized by ethnic and cultural factors. William Dumbrell sees the use of the term, "nation" in this initial promise to Abraham as signifying Israel's later political constitution" (1984:66). The biblical plan of redemption includes more than just a saved people. It focuses finally on a governed world ("*. . .the government shall be on his shoulders, . . .*" (Is. 9:6). The image of the New Jerusalem descending to earth is a governed political entity (Rev.21-22). Israel's existence as a nation then is a sign pointing to the reality yet to be.

Abraham's descendants ultimately expand to include all who follow Abraham's pattern of the faith that justifies, Jew and Gentile alike (Romans 4:10-12). However, here is where many interpreters spiritualize and negate the literal physical dimension of this promise. Abraham's children would come from his "*own body*" (Gen.15:4). The calling of the Gentiles of faith as the seed of Abraham, does not negate or supersede Jewish Israel in the New Testament. If Abraham was considered only the father of the Jewish Israel, then we would have to conclude from the vantage of the New Testament that believing Gentiles are now part of Jewish Israel. But no, Abraham is considered as more than that; he is the "*father of a multitude of nations*" (Gen. 17:5).

The Jew according to the flesh remains Jewish and a descendant of Abraham despite his/her temporal spiritual condition (John 8:37; Acts 14:4, I Thess. 2:14-15.) The saying, "*Once a Jew always a Jew*" is biblical. The emphasis of the New Testament is that only those Jews who follow the pattern of Abraham's faith actually inherit the fulness of the promises in their eternal dimension¹.

¹Many refer to **Romans 2:28-29**, "*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, . . . but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; . . .*", to argue that Gentiles Christians become "spiritual Jews" or "true Jews" upon accepting Messiah. This interpretation disregards the context of Romans 2. Paul is here speaking as a Jew to Jews (he finished addressing the Gentiles in 2:16). Paul is not expanding the meaning of the term "Jew." On the contrary. He is restricting it. He is saying to ethnic Jews as it were, "It is not enough to be a Jew outwardly, you must be one inwardly as well." In this he is in line with Moses and Jeremiah who called the people to a circumcision of the heart, not just outward in the flesh (Deut.10:16;30:6; Jer. 4:4). However, even when they do not live like they should inwardly, they do not cease being Jews.

2) *The Land* - Because the concept of nation always carries a territorial aspect, the land would logically be a necessary corollary to the promised seed. In fact, we see that from the very beginning of God's choice of Abram and promise of a seed, the promise of the land is brought into immediate conjunction with it (Gen.13:16-17). When the covenant is formally ratified through the ritual of cutting the covenant, the land is in immediate connection (Gen.15:7-21, esp. vrs. 18). God reiterated it in more detail three more times in Abraham's lifetime. He then renews the promise to Isaac (26:3), and to Jacob at Bethel (28:13). Later Joseph in Egypt assures them of the promise (50:24).

The land was central and absolutely essential to the faith and life of Israel. As W. D. Davies writes,

"Of all the promises made to the patriarchs it was that of the land that was most prominent and decisive. It is the linking together of the promise to the patriarchs with the fulfillment of it in the settlement that gives to the Hexateuch its distinctive theological character. For the Hexateuch, the land is a promised land, and that inviolably." (1974:24).

The borders of the land are given here in Gen 15:18-21 and describe in general terms a broad geographical area, then inhabited by ten Canaanite nations. The land was promised in perpetuity, "*an everlasting possession*" (Gen:13:15; 17:7-8, 19; 48:4, Ps. 105:9-11). The promise is God's sovereign gracious initiative and the beginning of his plan to establish his Kingdom. The promise is eternal and assured of fulfillment. God confirms it by His own unilateral promissory oath. The promise is not subject to conditions.

The Abrahamic covenant was unconditional. The Sinaitic Covenant of law, however, was conditional, "*If you obey my voice, . . . then you shall be. . .*" (Ex. 19:5-6). This is where some interpreters confuse covenants. For example, Gary Burge, associate professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, in chapter three of his recent book, Who Are God's People in the Middle East?, (1993) begins his discussion with the Abrahamic covenant (which is unconditional) then moves to the Sinaitic covenant (which is conditional), and in his summary confuses the *irrevocable promise* of the land, with Israel's *conditional possession* of it. He states,

"To be sure, the nation of Israel is promised *possession of the land as an everlasting gift* (emphasis mine), but this *promise is conditional*

(**emphasis mine**) it depends on Israel's fidelity to the covenant and its stipulations." (p.67).

In fact, the truth is exactly the opposite of what he states. The *possession of the land* is *not* an everlasting gift. Possession is conditional. The *promise of the land*, however, is unconditional and irrevocable.

Thus when Israel faces the prospects of losing the land in the declining days of the divided monarchy, we find increased reference to the Abrahamic covenant (Saucy, 1993:47). This is because people and prophet knew that the Sinai covenant had been seriously transgressed. They would experience divine judgment and lose possession of the land. Therefore the prophet's message of a future for Israel was anchored by references to Abraham (Isa. 29:22-24; 41:8-10; 51:2-3; Jer. 33:1-26; Mic. 7:20). The impending loss of the land was not the last word. God's irrevocable promise of the land was still in force.

3) *The Universal Blessing* - The third aspect of the Abrahamic covenant was the promised blessing for "*all the families of the earth*." (Gen. 12:3). The people of Israel were called to be a channel of God's grace to all the peoples of the world. The bottom line of the Abrahamic covenant was world blessing. The aim was missional. Paul tells us that the atoning work of Messiah, seed of Abraham, God brought justification through faith to the Gentiles and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:8). With the coming of Messiah and His completed atoning work, the focus of God's mission becomes the spreading and application of this universal blessing.

When the disciples ask about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6,7), Jesus said the timing of this is known only to the Father, and shifts their focus to world evangelization. The language, "*times and epochs*", seems to suggest that the national promise is a long way off, but Jesus nowhere negates here the national and land aspects of the promise. He nowhere reinterpreted it as now belonging to the church. Thus they remain in force and their future fulfillment is anticipated. The fulfillment of the universal blessing does not cancel out the particular blessing to national Israel.

The shift in focus rightly became the emphasis of the apostolic teaching in the first generations of the church. The time had arrived for this aspect of the Abrahamic covenant to be implemented. This is one reason for little explicit mention of the land in the New Testament documents. We will look more in depth at the New Testament perspective on the land below.

The New Testament and the Land - The most decisive question regarding the continuity of the land promise to Jewish Israel is: **What difference does the coming of Jesus the Messiah make to the Old Testament hope of Jewish Israel?** Specifically for our purposes here: **When Jesus announced that the Kingdom had now come in Him, how does that change the fulfillment of the land promise to Israel. How much continuity; how much discontinuity?**

Much is made by interpreters who claim that the land promise has become irrelevant with the coming of Messiah, of the fact that little explicit reference to the land in the New Testament.² The New Testament does *appear* to be strangely silent. But is it really? Are the promises of the gospel are now spiritual and transcendent only?

Many from the no-Dispensational traditions have taught precisely that. W.D. Davies, for example asserts that Paul interpretation of the promise is "a-territorial", that "in Christ" that the fulfillment of the promise is "personalized", and "universalized." (1974:179). Davies says that,

"In the Christological logic of Paul, the land, like the Law, particular and provisional, had become irrelevant."(1974:79).

The concept of the finality and superiority of Christ (Epistle to the Hebrews), and that all things are summed up in Him (Eph. 1:10) is biblical, but this must be explained as to what this means and what it does not mean. Certainly it does not negate the continuing historical fulfillment of the promises on earth. The truth that all the promises are fulfilled in Messiah does not dissolve their meaning into the person of Jesus. They are not all now somehow mystically fulfilled in some ethereal or non-material realm.

Messiah did not bring an end to history with His first coming. Nor did He implement perfection in history. The application of Messiah's fulfillment of the promises is progressive.

² David Stern argues that the NT refers no less than 18 times to the physical land of Israel (1994:8-9). **Two are explicit** (Mt.2:20-21), **four are citations** from the OT (Mt. 5:5{Ps.37:11}); Mt.24:30 and Rev.1:7{Zech.12:10-14}); Eph 6:3{Dt.5:17), **Five are based on the OT** without being direct citations (Lk.4:25 and James 5:17-18{I Kgs 17:1;18:1, 45}; Heb.11:9{Gen.12,13,15,20,23}, Rev. 20:9{Ezek.38-39}, The remaining **eight are implied by the context** (Mt.5:13; 10:34; 27:45; Mk 15:33; Lk.12:51;21:23;23:34, and Rev.11:10). Several of these are debatable as to whether they refer specifically to the land of Israel, and if they do, of what significance they are. But the point is made that the NT is not silent about the land of Israel.

It is still unfolding in the present age and moving toward the final perfect realization (Saucy 1993:32). For example, though Messiah has become our final high priest, this fact does not negate the reality that the church is still functioning in a priestly role on earth (I Pet. 2:5,9).

Certainly, the "in Christ" relationship is a key to Paul's understanding of the fulfillment of the promises. But what does this mean? Is it possible that Paul, so highly educated in the Torah, and so deeply committed and passionate about his own Jewish people would now be uninterested in the issue of Eretz Israel? Or consider the land now irrelevant? If not, then what has happened to the promise of the land in the New Testament?

We are given a clue by Paul Ephesian 6:2f. Here the apostle quotes the from the Ten Commandments, the *"first commandment with a promise."* Paul modifies the original form from Deuteronomy 5:16 which reads, *"Honor your father and mother. . .that it may go well with you on the land that the Lord your God gives you."* Paul now omits the emphasized phrase above, and replaces it with, **"and that you may live long on the earth."** (Eph. 2:3b). Holwerda points out,

"By omitting this specification, Paul declares that now in Christ the promise applies to any land. The promise has indeed been universalized, but it has been universalized precisely with reference to the land. What was once a blessing promised to God's people in the particular land of Canaan, given by God as a gift, is now promised to God's people living anywhere on earth, which was given by God as a gift. . . . A universalized land is not an irrelevance; it is in fact what the prophets anticipated." (1995:101-102).

Indeed, *"a universalized land is not an irrelevance."* Paul writing to Gentile Christians in Galatia tells them, *"If you belong to Messiah, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise"* (Gal.3:29). Let us remember that all of the Genesis promises to Abraham about the land are connected to the promised seed element of the promise (13:15; 17:8; 24:7). Paul treat the promises as an integral unity. So, the descendants of Abraham, who are a multitude of nations, are heirs to what? Paul tells us in Romans 4:13, *"For the promise to Abraham and his descendants was that he would be heir to the world. . . ."* Holwerda says it so well,

"For Paul, the promise to Abraham had a cosmic sweep, including not just the territory of Canaan but the entire inhabited world. . . . The promise that the land will be inherited has become the promise that the Kingdom of God, which embraces all nations, the entire creation, and even the cosmos itself, will be inherited." (1995:103-104).

In Messiah, believers already "*possess all things*" including "*the world.*" (I Corinth. 3: 21-23). Thus, just as the seed of Abraham has been transformed into a universal people, so the promise of the land embraces the world. This is what Jesus meant in the Beatitude, "*The meek shall inherit the earth.*" (Math. 5:5). The fulfillment is nothing less than the restoration of humanity's lordship over all the earth lost in Eden.

Having said this we must be quick to say that the universalization of the promise does not negate the particular literal physical fulfillment of it. It is a "both/and" fulness, not an "either/or" negation. The promise as it relates to the land of Israel is transcended but not canceled. In the early chapters of Luke when the coming of the Messiah child is described, its relation to the Davidic promises strongly suggest association with real land. (Luke 1:32-33: 71-74). As Walter Brueggemann says,

"The theme of kingdom is crucial for our consideration. IT clearly includes among its nuances the idea of historical. political, physical realm, that is land. It may and surely does mean more than that, but it is never so spiritualized that those elemental nuances are denied or overcome.(1977:171).

We conclude that the promise of the land, far from being absent in the New Testament, is central in the New Testament, but is focused on its broadest universal fulfillment.

Thus Paul says in the context of discussing Jewish Israel, "***For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.***" (Romans 11:29). God's promises are absolutely trustworthy. The integrity of His character is at stake in their fulfillment.

"For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are 'Yes'; wherefore also by Him is our 'Amen' to the glory of God through us." (2 Corinth. 1:20).

THE LAND: A CONDITIONAL POSSESSION

On the basis of the Sinai covenant the land is a conditional possession. Israel's continued possession of the land is linked to covenant righteousness. Let us look at various aspects of this as stipulated in the Torah and the Prophets.

Who Owns the Land? - God made it very clear to the people of Israel before they ever crossed the Jordan and entered into the promised land, that, "*The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is mine, and you are strangers and sojourners with me.*" (Leviticus 25:23). The land belongs to God. The temptation to which the Israelites repeatedly succumbed was to treat the land as if it was theirs in the sense of having absolute property rights, or an independent claim to it. They presumed they were entitled to do with it and in it whatever they wanted. Biblically, absolute property rights do not exist. Not only the land of Israel, but, "*The earth is the Lord's and all it contains, . . .*" (Ps. 24:1).

The Land as Gift - The nature of the land as gift is reflected in that the land was to be divided by lot (Num. 26:55), expressing God's sovereign disposition of the land. Through the concept and the practice of the Jubilee (Lev. 25), God was teaching Israel their responsibility to maintain social justice in the land. All land holdings, which may have been transferred from those to whom it was originally allocated, were to revert to their original stewards every fifty years.

The demand for the offerings of the firstfruits of the harvest, and the tithe of all yield, also symbolized God's ownership of the land.

The fact that the land itself was to keep a sabbath to the Lord (Lev. 25:1-4). This was to reach Israel proper stewardship for the soil as well as expressing God's creation and ownership of the land.

Sojourners - God used a concept which had a very clear and concrete meaning to them: the "ger" (sojourner). They were sojourners or resident aliens for four hundred years in Egypt. They beware to remember this in the way they treated the resident aliens among them. Israel was to learn that they were tenants and stewards of the gift of the land. The keynote statement for Israel's self-understanding and ethical stance in the land is, "*The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.*" (Lev. 19:34).

They were sojourners in the land of Egypt; now they were live as sojourners in the land God entrusted to them. This land was unlike

any other land. It is, *"a land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year."* (Deut. 11:11-12).

Righteousness was to be practiced in God's land. Hence, the non-Israelite "gerim" (resident aliens, sojourners) were to be given nearly the same privileges and responsibilities as were the people of Israel. There was to be *"one law for you and for the alien who sojourns with you, . . . as you are, so shall the alien be before the Lord."* (Numbers 15:15). The aliens were included in religious ceremonies and worship (sabbath, Ex. 23:12; feasts, however, circumcision was required for celebrating Passover, Ex. 12:48; Num. 15:14; Josh. 8:33). They were cared for in the same social programs that assisted the needy Israelites (Lev. 19:10; 23:27; Deut 24:19-21). They had access to the same system of justice enjoyed by the Israelites (Deut. 1:16' 24:17). Access to cities of refuge, as well as liability to the death penalty were applied to them.

This has implications for the modern state of Israel's treatment of the Palestinian Arabs. The question needs to be asked: Does Israel still live under the standards of the Torah? Does God hold modern Israelis and the Israeli government accountable to this covenant righteousness? If Israel makes a biblical claim to the land, does it not follow that she must accept biblical standards as well? Can one pick up one end of the stick without picking up the other?

Land Defilement and Land Loss - The gift of the land has always been grasped by faith. While yet in Egypt the land was grasped by hope and faith; Israel had their eyes on the promise of the *"land that flowed with milk and honey."* When at the borders of the land in the Sinai desert, the people's faith faltered, that generation was not allowed to possess the land (Numbers 14). Only the few men of faith entered. Moses himself was denied entry due to unbelief/disobedience. Here again Brueggemann is good,

" The land will be given not to the tough presuming ones, but to the vulnerable one with no right to expect it. The vibrations begin about the 'meek' inheriting the land, not the strident. This is a discernment that Israel would no doubt have wished to reject. The world believes that stridency inherits, but in its vulnerability Israel learns that the meek and not the strident have the future." (1977:39).

Possession of the land is conditional yet not merited. The conditions are more the means for maintaining possession of the gracious gift of the land than they are a basis for a self-established

claim to the land. God made it clear that His choice of Israel was not based on any merit in Israel. It was not because they were "*great in number*" (Deut.7:7), or because of any "*righteousness*" in them (Deut. 9:4). The reason for God's sovereign choice resides in God alone. After the conquest of the land and the prosperity Israel enjoyed, the people were warned to, "*Remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, so He may confirm the covenant He swore to your ancestors.*" (Deut. 8:18).

Yet faith and obedience are necessary to maintain possession of the land. The Deuteronomic Blessings for faith/obedience and curses for unbelief/disobedience (chs. 27-28) stand guard over the land as do Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim from which they were first proclaimed. Prosperity and continued possession of the land are promised **if** they keep the commandments. Exile and disaster will fall upon Israel **if** they violate the covenant. Joshua also warned them of the covenant sanctions,

"And it shall come about that *just as* all the *good* words which the Lord your God spoke to you have come upon you, *so* the Lord will bring upon you all the *threats*, until He has *destroyed you from off this good land* which the Lord your God has given you. When you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods, and bow down to them, then the anger of the Lord will burn against you, and you shall *perish quickly from off the good land* which He has given you." (Joshua 23:15-16).

A solemn warning is given in Leviticus 18:24-28. If the people defiled the land, the land would vomit them out. The land is graphically personified here. The Lord Yahweh has a relationship the land, "*You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the Lord dwell in the midst of the people of Israel.*" (Numbers 35:34). Because of God's proximity to the land it has a derived (not inherent) holiness. A holy land cannot tolerate an unholy people, and it will vomit Israel out when Israel defiles the land just as it vomited out the wicked Canaanite nations before Israel entered the land.

THE LAND: MAXIMAL AND MINIMAL POSSESSION

Very relevant to this concept of land possession as covenant blessing and land loss as covenant cursing is the fact that the borders

of the land were never defined with geographical precision. Various descriptions were given at various times under varying historical circumstances. In the initial promise to Abram, the extent covers, "*from the River of Egypt (presumably the Nile) to the River Euphrates*" (Gen.15:18). Later it is "*all the land of Canaan*" (17:8). Later it is, "*from the Red Sea to the Sea of Philistines (the Mediterranean), and from the wilderness to the River Euphrates*" (Ex.23:31). Other descriptions are given (Numbers 34:1-10; Deut.11:24; Josh 1:2-4). Questions are left open in the descriptions as to how far north the borders extended, and how much of the southern desert was controlled. The point is that the borders are somewhat fluid. What principle governs the extent of land possession? The Deuteronomic blessing and cursing is most obvious. There is a range of greater or lesser extent of land possession (or fulfillment of the land promise) contingent upon the faith/obedience level of the people. How then has this principle been worked out in Israel's history?

Land Possession in the Biblical Period. Let us first consider the biblical period of history. IT is clear that Israel eventually experience total exile from the land when the Babylonians finally destroyed the city and temple (586 B.C), and at the hand of the Romans in 70 A.D.. But what about the outworking of blessings and cursing before and after the Babylonian Exile and before and after the Great Diaspora?

From the time of the conquest under Joshua the son of Nun, Israel lived at various levels of faith and obedience. They did not possess all the land and drive out all the Canannites as they were commanded (Joshua 13). During the days of the Judges we see the principle fleshed out in a way that I want to posit as a paradigm for understanding the application of the Deuteronomic principle in Israel's history. I will call it "*The Principle of Maximal and Minimal Land Possession.*" See the graphic depiction below:

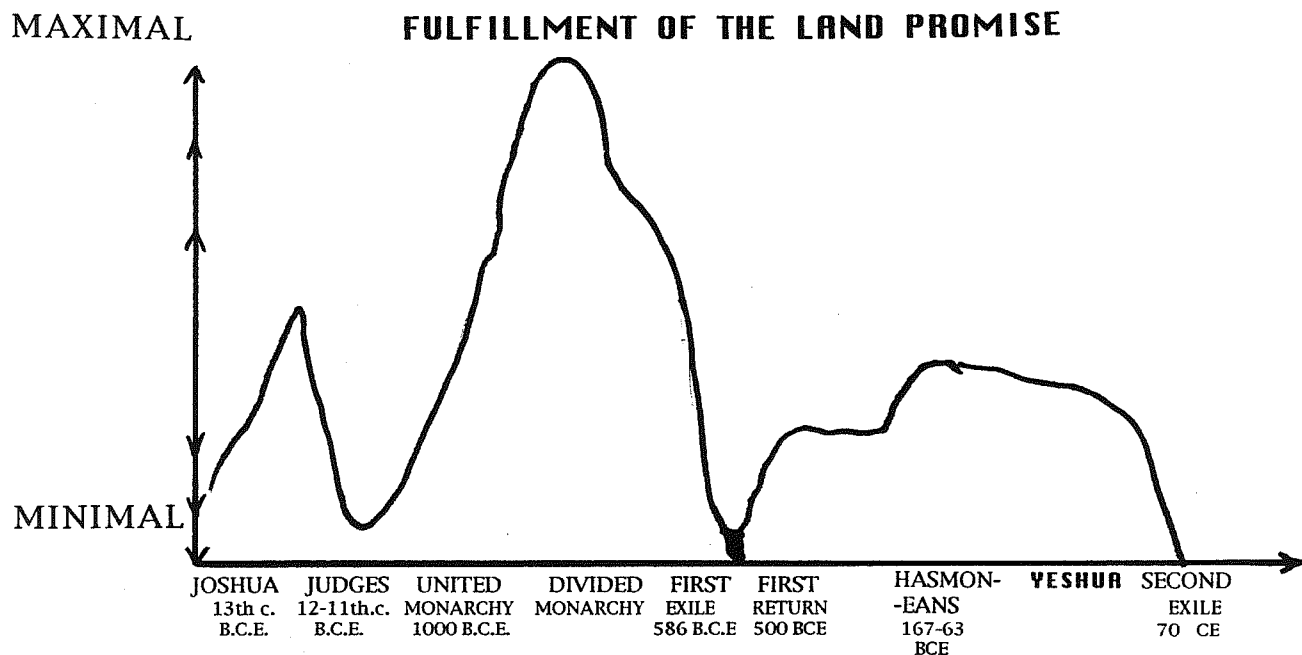


Figure 1 - Fulfillment of the Land Promise in Biblical History

During the time of the *Judges*, Israel lost cities and territory to the Philistines. God allowed Israel's enemies to defeat them because of their unbelief/disobedience. When the people repented and turned back to God, he would send them a deliverer (a judge) who would lead them to victory and repossession of lost territory. When Samuel, the last of the judges and first of the prophets, led the nation to spiritual revival and covenant renewal (I Samuel 7), we see that territory was restored and a greater level of land blessing was enjoyed,

"So the Philistines were subdued and did not come any more within the borders of Israel. . . . And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, . . . and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the

Philistines. So there was peace between Israel and the Amorites" (I Sam. 7:13-14).

Here is peace with land, rather than land for peace! The spiritual revival led by Samuel lasted for a few generations. As a result the **United Monarchy** under David and (at least the early) Solomon had enough covenant righteousness such that Israel was able to reach the **maximum level of land possession**. David had reminded the people that continued possession of the land was based on faith and obedience (I Chron. 28:8). This period of maximal fulfillment lasted a brief eighty years.

With the **Divided Monarchy** it was mostly downhill. The kingdom under David/Solomon held various areas east of the Jordan that paid tribute to Israel. Many of these holdings were lost, and God "*raised up an adversary for Solomon, Hadad the Edomite. . .*" after Solomon's sin and disobedience (I Kings 11:5-7, 14-25). Later, "*God also raised up another adversary to him Rezone. . .*" (11:23). During the Divided Monarchy, various invasions of Israeli territory took place, e.g Pharoah Shishak of Egypt (I Kings 14:25). Loss of land as judgment during this period is very clearly stated, "*In those days the Lord began to cut off parts of Israel. Hazael (the Syrian) defeated them throughout the territory of Israel.*" (2 Kings 10:32-33).

Thus we see there were varying degrees of severity of judgment and corresponding degrees of land loss. Israel continued down the path of moral and spiritual degeneration. Correspondingly, the campaigns and conquests of the Assyrian superpower eventually destroyed and took captive the northern kingdom (721 B.C.) as the people refused to respond to prophet word calling them back to covenant obedience. Land possession was now reduced to only the to the southern kingdom of Judah.

With the continued unrepentant sin and disobedience of Judah came the final blow-Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, and the people of Judah taken captive to Babylon. With **First Exile** Israel had the **most minimal level of land possession- no possession at all**.

The **First Return** was a disappointment. Only a small percentage of the people returned from Babylon and Persia under Ezra and Nehemiah. The Second Temple was not as glorious as was Solomon's in this "*day of small things*" (Zech. 4:10). Gentile enemies were occupying the land and harassed them during the reconstruction period. But all in all the Persian period was a time of blessing and a degree of land re-possession due to the mercy of GOD

and a semi- revival and covenant renewal conditions brought by Ezra's leadership.

But Israel failed to truly keep the covenant and the land did not blossom again as Isaiah prophesied (ch.35). In reality Israel's affairs were dominated by foreigners during the period from the First Return until the *Second Exile* (70 A.D.). Poignantly, Ezra declared that they were slaves in the Promised land (Neh. 9:36). A brief period of independence won by the Maccabees and maintained by their descendants the Hasmoneans lasted for a hundred years. While they still lived in land they did not experience the blessings of rest and peace in the land under foreign occupation. The fulfillment that had begun did not continue to its fullness because righteousness had not been achieved. Without holiness and righteousness the full blessings in the land could not be realized.

So finally the land was lost again. This time for nearly 2000 years. Because as Jesus said, *"they did not know the time of their visitation"*, the armies of Rome would level the city to the ground and her children within her. (Luke 19:41-44). The Deuteronomic curses had been fulfilled just as they were enunciated.

Land Possession in the Modern Period. We come now to the crux of the issue- ***How does this apply to the modern State of Israel and the current peace process?*** How great is the continuity of this principle from the biblical to the modern period? Can we draw a direct line from ancient Israel to the Knesset and Shimon Peres?

Certainly there is discontinuity in terms of political and social forms, and historical circumstances. Israel today is not a monarchy, but aspires to be a modern democratic state. Many other contextual factors are different. Two very important difference are:

1) The conquest of the land under Joshua the Son of Nun is not the model or method of God's giving the land in the 20th century, and should not be the State of Israel's model. Joshua had a clear and distinct command from God to conquer and kill the seven Canaanite nations who were inhabitants of the land. This was God's drastic judgment on nations for who God had given 400 years to repent (Gen. 15:16). The Palestinian Arabs in the land today are definitely not in the same category as the Canaanites of Joshua's day.

2) Some of Israel's major Her enemies are different. There is no relation between the Philistines of biblical times and the Palestinians today, even though the names are related. The Philistines are descendants of Japheth. The Palestinians are descendants of Shem.

But there is definite continuity in the things that matter: The Jewish people are still the Jewish people. God has not changed, nor

have His Word and law been canceled. The theological and moral principles governing this issue are the same now as they were then.

A few points strengthen the case for continuity:

1) God is sovereign over the rise and fall of nations, and over the *"boundaries of their habitation."* (Acts 17:26). If this is so for all nations, how much more for the one with whom He has dealt with covenantally as to their temporal, national existence?

2) God is the One who gives positions of authority to temporal rulers and government officials. *"Promotion comes neither from the east or the west, nor the south. But God is judge. He puts down one, and sets up another."* (Ps. 75:6-7). *"...He removes kings and sets up kings;..."* (Daniel 2:21). Add to this the New Testament teaching of Romans 13:1-5, which in essence states that:

- a) Government agents are established by God.
- b) How that government will affect God's people depends upon the conduct of God's people.
- c) If God's people are obedient, the government agents work for their good.
- d) If God's people are not obedient, the government agents become agents of God's judgment.

In summary, it can be said that: God's people get the kind of government they deserve. (Prince 1973:54).

So with this in mind, let us apply *the principle of maximal and minimal land possession* to modern Israeli history and the current peace process. See graphic depiction below:

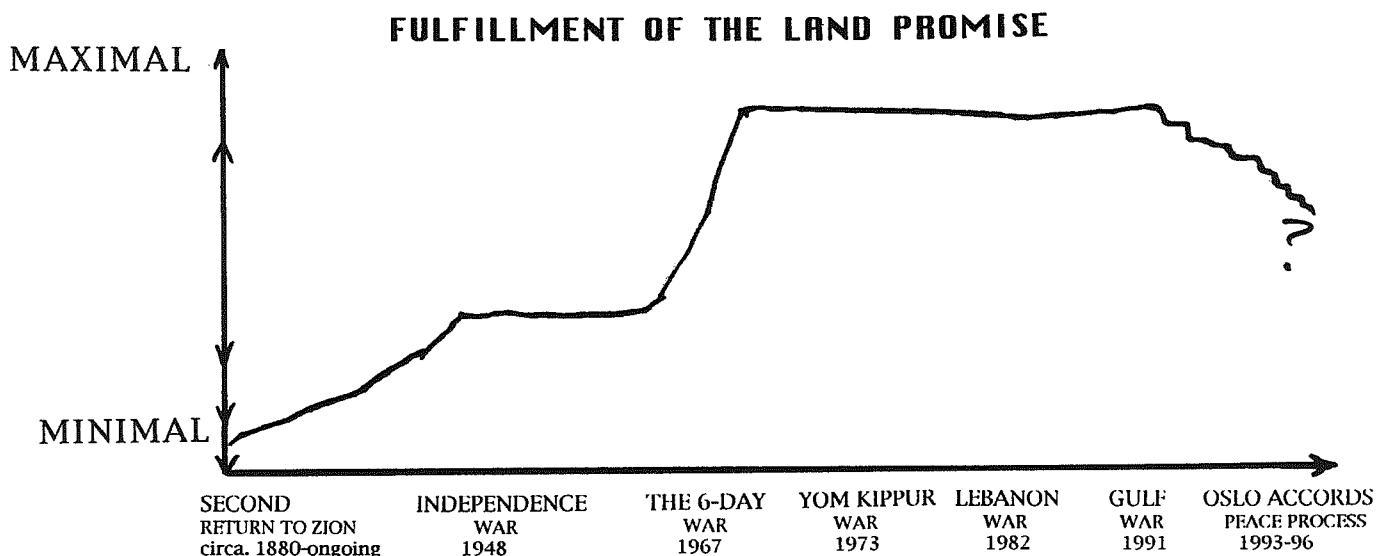


Figure 2- Fulfillment of the Land Promise in the Modern Period

After the severe judgment of 1900 years of no land possession at all, God began to sovereignly restore land to the people of Israel through the Zionist movement and the *Second Return to Zion*.

Land was gradually restored up through the *War of Independence* in 1948. As a result of the *Six Day War* of 1967, Israel had a maximal level of land possession, a level not seen since that days of David and Solomon. More research needs to be done as to whether factors of faith and obedience on Israel's part brought this as a blessing from God, or whether this was but His prevenient mercy. At any rate, it is known that bumper stickers appeared in Israel after the war that read "*Kol ha Kvod l' Tsahal*" (All Glory to the Israel Defence Forces). Clearly there was a heady euphoria in Israel in those days. These were days of chutzpah. Israel felt invincible; in themselves. Not in God. This may have led to the complacency and false sense of security that led to the disaster of the *Yom Kippur War* of 1973. ³

Israel almost lost the land in 1973. IT is reported that bumper stickers appeared after this war that read, "*Hinei lo Yanum v' lo Yishan Shomer Yisrael*." (He Who Keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps). Surely this is only symbolic, and we have no data on how many Israelis may have turned to God after the war. There certainly was no widespread revival or turning to Yeshua among Israelis; though by this time the charismatic renewal, the Jesus movement, and the growth of the messianic Jewish movement was happening in the broader world scene. With this certainly came more prayer for Israel by true believers. In 1978, the Camp David Accords were signed bringing peace with Egypt at the price of withdrawal from the Sinai. This set a precedent as to the return of land for peace. The spiritual/theological significance of this is an open question.

THE Lebanon War of 1982 was also traumatic as Israel invaded and Bombed all the way to Beirut. This was the first was widely considered not a defensive but an offensive was. Ariel

³ I remember hearing a eulogy for Yitzchak Rabin (the architect of military victory of 1967) in November, 1995, in Los Angeles, by an Israeli who worked with Rabin in the 60's. He was boastfully saying, "*This victory did not come from the heavens! It came from the strength and brilliance of Yitzchak Rabin.*"

Sharon then Minister of Defense, architect of this grand scheme for a PLO free Lebanon allied with Israel, "spoke out of both sides of his mouth" to Prime Minister Menachem Begin. This was a strong factor in Begin's personal demise. THE results in terms of land possession or prosperity in the land were not discernibly relevant.

The Gulf War of 1991 was another precedent. IT marked the first time Israel did not retaliate with force under attack, and compromised the strong Zionist value of not allowing foreign troops on their soil to aid them in war. American troops were stationed in Israel. The mercy of God was evident in this war as there were next to zero casualties as dozens of Iraqi scud missiles fell on the cities of Israel.

In the current peace process embodied in the Declaration of Principles signed on the White House Lawn in Sept., 1993 and in the subsequent *Oslo Accords*, Israel is definitely working from a land for peace principle. Israel is withdrawing from land; first Gaza and Jericho, and as a result of *Oslo II* (signed 9/95) they have withdrawn from several major cities in the West Bank. The agreement calls for further withdrawals and negotiation on the final disposition of the territories to begin on May 4, 1996 and must be concluded by May 4, 1999. Shimon Peres is more committed to the principle of land for peace than was Yitzchak Rabin. Negotiations are taking place over the Golan Heights.

An application and assessment: I think it would be a mistake and simplistic to try apply a rigid, one to one correspondence of land loss as a direct response of divine judgment to all the behaviors and sins transpiring in Israeli society today. There are many other variables involved, such as defense and military needs, God's mercy and longsuffering, God's judicial hardening of part of Israel (Rom. 11:25), the prayers of God's people, and other contextual factors.

Nevertheless, in light of the Deuteronomic principle and the principle that God's people get the government they deserve, can we not say, generally, that if Israel loses the Golan Heights and the West Bank it will be a form of judgment on Israel- a more *minimal level of land possession* just as in the days of the judges and kings, when God began to "cut off parts of Israel" (2 Kings 10:32-33)?

This makes sense when we look at the moral and spiritual state of Israeli society. Israel has one of the highest abortion rates per capita of any nation in the world (the land is defiled by innocent blood), there have been countless incidents of injustice, violence and oppression against the modern "gerim" (sojourners), that is the

Palestinians.⁴ The incident of the discarding of the blood banks of the Ethiopian Jewish immigrants was a great insult and a condescension to these Jewish people. The level of occult activity, immorality, and godlessness has increased apace with the new materialistic affluence.

If Amos, Isaiah, or Jeremiah were to visit Tel Aviv today do you think they may have some hard words of warning and judgment? Would they warn of impending land loss unless the people repented and turned to God and His Messiah? I can certainly picture it.

The bottom line is this: To the degree that modern Israel claims continuity with the biblical Israel (and they do to a degree, calling the territories "Judea and Samaria", etc.) to that degree they must and will also be judged by the ethical standards by which biblical Israel was judged. More important of course than the question of modern Israel's self-understanding, is how does God view her? His moral law and standards have not changed. The Jewish people remain an elect people called to bring glory to His name. The Apostle said it well,

"There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Gentile, but glory and honor and peace to every one who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. For there is no partiality with God." (Rom. 2:9-10).

Modern Israel has not reached the level of degradation that ancient Israel reached in the days of the Judges (Judges chs. 19-21), or the level of corruption she reached during the days of Jeremiah Ezekiel. God's longsuffering then gave the people a matter of a few centuries before the ax fell. God's mercy is great. Modern Israel is but half a century old.

This should be a cause of comfort and hope for the Body of Messiah in the land, the Israeli believers. It should not be a cause for

⁴ For a shoking and greiving example see the series of events which happened at the Palestinian village of Beita in April of 1988. A group of Israelis initiates violence against the villagers and killed some of them. The Israeli armed guard in the group accidentally shot and killed one of the Israeli teenagers in the group. Even after CHief of Sataff Dan Shomron admittred it was the Israeli bullet who killedthe girl, the Palestinians were blamed. Several were deported to Lebanon without trial for throwing stones, and many houses were blown up. (For sources and documentation see Burge 1993:86-100). The Israeli system of justice refused to work on behalf of the "alien", the "widow", and the "orphan" as the Torah commands.

complacency, however. Ultimate judgment will happen on the Last Day. But God's assessment of ripeness for judgment may well be different than ours. But God is also always judging within history. "*He came unto his own, and His own received Him not.*" The offense to God in the continued rejection of His unique and eternal Son, the Messiah will have to be calculated by God alone.

Complete loss of the land, the destruction of the Third Jewish Commonwealth, the modern State of Israel remains a theoretical and theological possibility. The promise remains irrevocable. Possession remains conditional.

Realistic Political Scenarios. The Israeli attempt to make peace is commendable. Jesus said "*Blessed are the Peacemakers.*" Rabin and Peres rightly perceived that Israel cannot continue to oppress and control the Palestinian people. Abraham Lincoln said, "*No people has the right to control another people without that people's consent.*" To cease to control and oppress the Palestinian people cannot but bring God's favor and blessing on Israel. But in the reality of the present fallen condition of humanity, it appears to me that one of two scenarios are in the offing in the in the near future:

1) ***Separation.*** IF the Peres led Labor Alignment remains in power after May, 1996 the Oslo Accords will move forward. The Israeli Defence Forces will withdraw as scheduled. Rabin always envisioned an ultimate strict separation between the two peoples. Peres held out for his vision of the "New Middle East" economic and political integration between the Palestinians and the Israelis. After the recent Hamas bombings, Peres now more realistically realizes separation is inevitable. There are plans in the works to build a fence (hopefully not like the Berlin Wall) along the borders (Jerusalem Report, Susser 1996:14). But nobody yet knows where the "final" borders will be drawn. But given our principle of temporal divine judgment through ***maximal and minimal land possession***, the borders may well never be final.

2) ***Re-occupation of the Territories/the End of the Oslo Accords*** If the Likud bloc comes to power, leader Benyamin Netanyahu has promised a beefed up military presence in the territories as the only answer for Israel's security needs. This would mean the dissolution of the Oslo initiatives, a likely resumption of oppression and the Intifada.

Do you notice the dilemma? Neither of these alternatives will express the biblical ideal. Loss of land with separation between the peoples is less than fullness of the land promise. Possession of the

land for force will not bring blessing. Shimon Peres' vision is correct, but it is unattainable given the unregenerate human nature, and the history of pain, grief and revenge characterizing modern Arab-Israeli relations. On the human political level there is no hope. A third scenario is possible though, which brings us to our response.

OUR MISSIOLOGICAL RESPONSE

1) ***Prayer and Intercession*** - As in the days of Samuel the Prophet, or Mordecai and Esther and throughout the history of the church, sustained serious corporate prayer with fasting prayer precedes revival. Mordecai's first response to the state of emergency in Israel's dilemma was first prayer and fasting, then action as was Queen Esther's (Esther ch 4). Throughout the world today (notably Korea, Latin America, esp. Argentina), a prayer-evangelism movement is afoot. Prayer leaders are developing city-wide prayer strategies for impacting their cities with the gospel.

Prayerwalks in areas seeking to be impacted are conducted. Prayerwalking is "praying on site, with insight." Many of these leaders are saying that prayer and evangelism, once separate activities are merging into one. Prayer is evangelism and evangelism is prayer. These two activities are inseparable.

Prayer accesses both the mind of God and the power of God breakthroughs in seeing people open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. The promise to the people of Israel holds true today,

"If my people which are called by my name will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and heal their land." (2 Chron. 7:14).

We need to encourage a prayer movement among the indigenous Body of Messiah in the State of Israel, and well as corporate prayer internationally. Prayer should be focused on revival and the spiritual issues rather than political solutions.

An example of the kind of ministry we need to see more of is that of **Reuven Doron**, a native Israeli believer now working with River of Life Ministries in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Reuven takes Intercession into the land twice a year. They pray on site with increased insight for the needs of the society. They focus on the

"living stones" of the land (the believers) rather than the dusty archeological stones that most Christian tourists do.

See appendices "*Intercessory Prayer*" and "*Samuel the Prophet: A Model for Intercessory Prayer.*"

2) *Evangelism* - I'm' preaching to the converted here. The LCJE audience are all committed to Jewish evangelism. But let us continue to add prayer to our evangelism for empowerment, as well as be missiologically astute in developing the most effective methods we can which best fit our Jewish subgroup. And let us support evangelism to Israeli's as much as we can. They are the one's who are best placed to reach their own people and thereby increasingly influence their country toward God's purposes.

3) *Reconciliation* - There is a beautiful picture in the typology of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 32) which is instructive and illuminating. Jacob (the Jewish people) is exiled from the land of his fathers for a long period (Diaspora), to work for his uncle Laban. His brother Esau (the Arabs) is back in the land. When God's time came for Jacob to return to the land (return to Zion, aliyah) he is apprehensive and concerned because he knows Esau wants to kill him. On the way back to the land, Jacob's distress and fear motivate him to pray and ask God for deliverance from his brother (32:9-12). May Israel's crisis today drive her to pray! Could it be that God will use continued crisis with the Palestinians to drive her back to God?.

But after prayer, Jacob (whose name "*Ya'akov*" mean's "*heel grabber*", the modern Hebrew word for "*crooked*" is derived from the same word), typically goes to great lengths and schemes to secure his own well-being in the face of Esau. He devises a strategy of appeasement (32:20), and prepares many gifts for Esau (modern Israel's appeasement, "land for peace" efforts with the Arabs).

On his way to meet Esau, Jacob is encountered by the Angel, the God-Man figure who wrestled with him through the night (Messiah Yeshua). Jacob was left alone to reckon in his own soul with the reality of his lot and dilemma(In modern Israel's dark night of the soul, as she faces the unresolvable dilemma with the Palestinians, will she turn to and face the God -Man ?).

The Man required him to confess his name, to confess that he was crooked, a schemer, a manipulator. Upon his confession, He changed Jacob's name to "*Israel*" ("*one who strives with God and prevails*", there is also a play on the word for "*prince of God*"

{*sar-El* }). Jacob was a changed man, he experienced tshuva and inner transformation (new birth). The was the turning point in Jacob's destiny.

In the end, when he finally met Esau, all his machinations were worthless. Esau had already forgiven him. They fell on each other's necks with tears of joy and kissed each other in a blessed reconciliation. The appeasement gifts were unnecessary. It was Jacob's prayer that was answered, not his humanistic schemes. Esau's heart was supernaturally changed in answer to Jacob's prayer.

So it is for Israel today. Modern Israel is still Jacob. Only when she yields to the God-Man (Messiah) and is transformed through new birth to become truly "*Israel*" will she find true reconciliation with the Arabs. First reconciliation with God in Yeshua, then reconciliation with the Arabs.

"Now the sun rose upon him (Jacob) as he crossed over Penuel, . . ." (32:31). Yes, a new day! A new man! And so it will be for Israel in the day that she sees the face of God in Yeshua the Messiah.

The ministry in Israel today that is living out this reality as a sign of what must and will expand is *Musalaha* (the Arabic word for "*reconciliation*") directed by *Salim Munayer*, a Palestinian Arab Christian, who is also dean of Bethlehem Bible College. Salim takes groups of Arab and Israeli believers regularly on overnight treks into the deserts of Israel, tracing the footsteps of their mutual father Abraham and discovering each other through their unity in Abraham's Greater Seed, Yeshua. Other venues for fellowship, and cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian believers are conducted by Musalaha.

May other's follow Musalaha's lead, and may these ministries grow and be an increasing witness and sign in the State of Israel of what it will be like in the New Jerusalem.

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APPENDIX A

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

What Is It ? - Jeremiah defines intercessory prayer in his prayer, "*... Remember that I stood before you (God) and spoke in their behalf. . .*" (Jer. 18:20b). To intercede is to stand before God in prayer for the salvation and well-being of others.

How Important Is It ? - God has chosen to work through the prayers of His church to accomplish His purposes (Ephesians 3:10). God says, "*I looked for a person among them that would stand in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.*" (Ezek. 22:30). Again, "*The Lord looked . . . He saw that there was no one, He was appalled that there was no intercessor,. . .*" (Isaiah 59:16a). The high value God places on our intercessory prayer is evident here in His impassioned statements.

Significant Scriptural References -

Genesis 18 - Abraham's intercession for Sodom
Exodus 32, 33 (and Num. 11, 14, 17) - Moses' intercession for Israel.

I Samuel 12 (esp. v 23) - Samuel states and demonstrates its value. For him as a leader not to do so would be to sin against God.

II Chron. 6 - Solomon's' intercession for Israel

Daniel 9 - Daniel demonstrates identificational repentance and intercession for Israel's return from the Exile.

Nehemiah - Throughout the book it is illustrated (esp. 1:4-2:8).

Ezra 9 - Ezra's intercession for his people concerning their neglect of God's word in their lives.

I Timothy 2: 1-3 - Distinguishes between various types of prayer, intercession being one of them.

Romans 8:26-27 - Describes the Holy Spirit's intercession in, through and for us.

APPENDIX B

SAMUEL THE PROPHET: A MODEL FOR INTERCESSORY PRAYER

The three intercessors par excellence in the Old Testament are Moses, Samuel and Jeremiah. Many times Moses stood in the gap between the people and God in times of crisis and thus changed the course of events. Jeremiah defines what intercessory prayer is in this prayer, **"...Remember that I stood before You (God) and spoke in their behalf..."** (Jeremiah 18:20b). To intercede is to stand before God in prayer on others behalf. God's own assessment of Samuel the Prophet's efficacy as an intercessor comes to us in his word to Jeremiah, **"Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people."** (Jeremiah 15:1). Samuel is classed with Moses again in Psalm 99:6 as to his intercessory prayer power with God, **"Moses and Aaron were among His priests, Samuel was among those who called on His name; they called on the Lord and He answered them."**

Samuel's name in Hebrew ("Shmu-El") means "One heard of God." His own birth was, in fact, an answer to his mother Hannah's intense prayers. It is thus appropriate that one of the lessons most strongly exemplified in Samuel's life and ministry is intercessory prayer. Samuel models the principle that leader's are called to pray for those to whom they minister. He had practiced prayer and intercession throughout his ministry and articulated its place most succinctly in his farewell speech to the nation, **"As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you."** (I Sam. 12:23). He had always prayed for Israel because it was part of his responsibility as a leader. Note that if he were to cease to pray for his followers it would be a sin against God.

The powerful presence of God in Samuel's life and his tremendous spiritual authority were directly related to his prayer life. His prophetic ministry came largely through an ongoing vital connection with God in prayer wherein he received fresh word from God for the people. Samuel had interceded publicly for the nation and this was accompanied with a divine intervention of supernatural power at the First National Assembly at Mizpah (I Samuel 7:5ff). This powerful spiritual warfare led to successful military victory at the Second Battle of Ebenezer (I Sam. 7: 9-14).

When the delegation of elders had asked for a king, Samuel interceded directly and intimately with the Lord (I Sam. 8). When it became clear that Saul would be rejected and removed from office, Samuel was grieved and **"cried out to the Lord all night"** (I Sam. 15:11). We can surmise that Samuel interceded with God in great passion for Saul, the people, and the future of Israel during that time of crisis.

For a leader to influence any group of God's people toward God's purpose for that group, he/she must pray and intercede before God for that group. The essence of ministry is more in passionate prayer and the discernment gained in intercession than it is in the preaching and teaching that comes from intellectual study and theological scholarship. Both are important, but theological scholarship and teaching without intercession is ineffective or worse.

Walter Wink has recently written concerning intercession,

"History belongs to the intercessors, who believe the future into being. . . . Intercession is spiritual defiance of what is, in the name of what God has promised. Intercession visualizes an alternative future to the one apparently fated by the momentum of current contradictory forces." (in Engaging the Powers 1992, Fortress Press, pp.298-299).

Intercession can change history and individual people within history because God has willed that His people participate with Him in the Drama of Redemption.

God is continually seeking leaders who are real intercessors, **"I looked for a person among them that would stand in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none."** (Ezekiel 22:30). Again, **"The Lord looked... he saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no intercessor;..."** (Isaiah 59:16a).

Will you be an intercessor?

Bill Bjoraker, Pasadena, CA, 1995

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