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Does Israel Have a Divine Right to Its Land?

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The present land of Israel was carved out for the Jews in 1948. Since then, Jews from around the world have migrated to that land. Several wars have been fought between Israel and its Arab neighbors over the years. The Israeli-Arab problem continues to dominate the politics of the Middle East until this present day. The region continues to be a powder keg capable of escalating into full-scale warfare at any time.

It is not our purpose in this article to delve into the politics of the region. Whether or not we should be allied with Israel in the present turmoil is beyond the scope of our discussion. Only we will say that the United States needs all the allies it can find against the global war on terror that it is presently engaged in. The Islamic extremists are not only bent on destroying Israel, but the entire Western way of life. They would like to impose their "Islamic law" upon every nation they can. From all indications, Israel is one of the staunchest allies that the United States has in this struggle.

The purpose of this article is to answer the question: **Does modern Israel have a right to exist as a nation and possess its land by *divine decree*?**

Every Bible student knows the God at one time, had a chosen nation called Israel. Moses was the first great leader on that nation. He and other Old Testament writers refer to Israel as God's peculiar people above all the peoples of the earth.

"For thou *art* an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto

himself, above all the nations that *are* upon the earth" (Deut. 14:2)

"And the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that *thou* shouldst keep all his commandments;" (Deut. 26:18)

"For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, *and* Israel for his peculiar treasure." (Psa. 135:4).

It is interesting to note that similar language is used in the New Testament when speaking of God's people, the church. This alone indicates that God's holy nation or peculiar people is no longer the physical nation of Israel, but his spiritual nation, the church.

"Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Tit. 2:14).

"But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:" (1Pet. 2:9).

Ancient Israel was God's chosen nation through whom the Messiah (Christ) was brought into the world. God called Abraham out of idolatrous Ur and gave him a threefold promise. 1) He would make a great nation of Abraham's descendents, 2) He would give them a great land for a possession, and 3) He would bless the nations

of the earth through one particular descendent (Christ –Galatians 3:16).

The descendents of Abraham grew into a nation while in Egypt. After being enslaved to the Egyptians for many years, God raised up Moses to lead them out of Egyptian bondage into the promised land. Shortly after their escape from Egypt, God gave them their national law through Moses. Their entrance into the promised land was deferred for 40 years (during which they wandered in the wilderness) as punishment for not immediately entering the land after 10 of 12 spies convinced the people that they were not strong enough to take the land from its present inhabitants.

But eventually, under the leadership of Joshua, they entered and possessed the land (Canaan) they had been promised. God dealt with them as his own chosen nation until from it the Christ came. About 40 years after Jesus was crucified, arose from the dead, and ascended back to heaven the nation was destroyed by the Romans led by Titus in 70 A.D. In spite of Israel's shortcomings and, at times, outright rebellious history, it had served God's purpose. Having fulfilled its purpose, that nation with its promised land was now no more.

The present-day nation of Israel with its land came into existence, not by divine decree, but by the decree of the United Nations. Its right to exist and live on its land is protected by the United Nations and not by any promise of God to this newly formed nation. The promises and guarantees made by God to the ancient Israelite nation have no relevance to the modern nation called Israel.

Our politicians have a variety of reasons for supporting the present day Israel. Most are legitimate. Her strategic location in the Middle East is important to us as we deal with the often hostile Muslim nations of the region. Her commitment to a democratic form of government and values also makes her a suitable partner of the United States. All of this is crucial to dealing with worldwide terrorism and keeping the oil flowing to the West.

However, there is one rationale that has been used

for the unconditional support and defense of modern Israel since its establishment in 1948 that is flawed. That is that the world must facilitate the return of the Jews to possess their land *because they have a divine right* to exist as a nation and to possess the same land that Israel of the Bible was promised. Hence many support Israel on religious grounds more than on political, pragmatic and moral grounds. These include the Zionist Jews and many evangelical "Christians" who subscribe to the doctrine of premillennialism. Many of the politicians who pushed for the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine were evangelicals. The president of the United States (Harry Truman) at the time was among them. Over 60 years later, the most vocal supporters of the state of Israel are premillennial evangelicals. They believe that before the "end time" that God has decreed that the Jews are to return to their homeland, be converted, and form the basis for a worldwide kingdom ruled over by Jesus, the Messiah, for a millennium (thousand years). Different ones of them have little different twists concerning the details, but they all have the common view that Israel is still God's favored nation.

One of the reasons given for Israel's divine right to her land is that she never possessed all the land promised her in the past and that God is now using the present situation to bring her into the land that is rightfully hers according to the promise of God.

One premillennial writer wrote: "The crucial issues in relation to premillennialism are twofold: (1) Does the Abrahamic covenant promise Israel a permanent existence as a nation? IF it does, then the church is not fulfilling Israel's promises, but rather Israel as a nation has a future yet in prospect; and (2) Does the Abrahamic covenant promise Israel permanent possession of the promised land? If it does, then Israel must yet come into possession of the promised land, for she has never fully possessed it in her history." (*The Basis Of Premillennial Faith*, Charles C. Rylie, p. 53-56).

But the problem is that Israel did possess the promised land in its entirety hundreds of years before the first coming of Christ. The promise God made to

Abraham is recorded in the book of Genesis (12:1-3; 13:16; 15:5, 18; 7:4-5). The promise included a physical part and a spiritual part. In the physical part there was the promise of a great nation with its land. The spiritual part was that all nations would be blessed by Abraham's Seed. The spiritual part was fulfilled in Christ and his redemptive work (Galatians 3:16).

The physical promise to Abraham was conditioned on his obeying God (cf. Genesis 26:5). It was renewed to Isaac (Genesis 26:1-5) and to Jacob (Genesis 28:1-5). It was fulfilled in the days of the Old Testament. The "great nation" portion was fulfilled when the children of Jacob (Israel) grew into a great nation in Egypt (Genesis 46:1-7; Deuteronomy 10:22). They left Egypt as a great nation under the leadership of Moses (Exodus 12:31ff). They possessed the land promised them as a great nation under the leadership of Joshua.

"And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he sware unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass" (Joshua 21:43-45).

Some have objected that even then Israel did not possess *all* the land promised – i.e., the land from Egypt to the river Euphrates (Genesis 15:18). However, notice

the description of the land possessed by Israel in the days of Solomon (2 Chronicles 9:26; 1 Kings 4:21). They did possess all the land promised.

Others have objected that they did not possess the land *always* because it was taken away from them. So it is to be fulfilled again. Of course, once the thing is fulfilled it does not have to be fulfilled again. Besides that, their keeping the land was conditioned on their obedience (Joshua 23:14-16; Deuteronomy 30:15-20). The history of Israel, rather than one of obedience, was one of rebellion and disobedience (cf. Acts 7:51).

Also, some of the promises made to the Jews that they would return to their land after the Babylonian captivity are used by the premillennialists as proof (?) that God has promised that Israel will once again return and repossess the land she lost. But again that was fulfilled many years ago when the Jews by the order of the Persian king, after Babylon fell, under the leadership of Ezra, Nehemiah and others returned to their land, as recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Jesus prophesied of the fall and desolation of Israel in Matthew chapter 24. He declared that it would all happen during the lifetime of that generation (verse 34). No promise was made concerning the restoration and return of Israel after that fall and destruction.

So, whatever one may use as justification for supporting Israel will have to be on some other grounds than that the Jews are God's chosen and have a *divine right* to permanently possess the land.

How to Succeed at Griping Without Really Trying

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

After several years of observing successful grippers, I have concluded that maybe I am qualified to offer some tips to those who might want to succeed in the art of griping. Here are some proven hints that I have collected (having learned them purely from observation of course) which should make you the most successful griper in your congregation:

1. Learn as little as you can about the Bible. This will help you not to get too disturbed about such passages as: "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer." (1 Cor. 10:10). Once that passage really gets to you, your griping days are over.

2. Learn to apply what you do know about the

Bible only to the other person. This allows you to know enough about the Bible to answer some of the questions people might ask you -- but allows you to still use all your faultfinding time on other people.

3. Do not get disturbed about sin among members of the church. Do this and you can maintain a wide target area for your gripes. You can gripe about those who are concerned enough for the souls of men and women to “rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith.” You may talk about how “hard” and “unchristian” the reproof is.

4. Accept no responsibility in carrying out the work of the church. It is much easier to gripe when you are sitting on the side line without any responsibility. You see, it kind of works like the old maid telling folks how to raise their children.

5. Get as few facts as possible before passing Judgment. Facts only serve to confuse and might even take away your old spunk to gripe. Let our motto be: “Speak now, think later.”

6. Feed regularly upon gossip. Never let a telephone ring pass without swallowing at least a mouth full of gossip. You will be surprised at how many big complaints you can make from the smallest morsel of gossip.

We suggest that you clip this handy reference and attach it to the inside of your phone book, your TV guide, or the *outside* cover of your Bible. Then it can be seen easily and often, and you can be assured of being a successful gripper -without really trying.

What a Sudden Increase in Attendance Means

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

We usually sit up and take note when a congregation reports a sharp increase in her attendance. There is something about it that we ordinarily like to hear. What does a sudden up-swing in attendance

mean?

It can mean that:

- ◆ There has been an increased effort of the members to get people interested in attending the services of the church.
- ◆ The people of the community are awakening to the need for spiritual development.
- ◆ More people are getting tired of the world and its ways and are seeking the “kingdom of God and His righteousness.

However, it can mean that:

- ◆ Appeals are being made to the sensation-seeking public in the form of carnal gimmicks - such as games, parties, banquets, shows, give-aways, etc. This may get some to a gathering - but only the gospel can draw men to Christ and His kingdom and hold them there (Rom. 1:16).
- ◆ Standards of conduct are being watered down in order to appeal to more people.
- ◆ An appealing personality has been placed into the “limelight” (preacher, teacher, lecturer) around whom a balloon of temporary interest is being built. When more attention is paid to the “messenger” than to the “message”, then any growth from such is at best a veneer. While we should love and respect those who preach, we must not build upon them. (I Cor. 1:10-13; 3:5-10)

Of course this is not all that an increase may mean. I would like to see every congregation of Christ outgrow her facilities – but only if her growth is attributed to building upon the proper foundation, which is Jesus Christ.

(Editor’s Note: The preceding two articles first appeared in the bulletin that we published in Charlotte, TN over 40 years ago. They have appeared in various bulletins since then. With the passing of time we have seen no reason to revise them.)