

The Middle East, 2 Is Israel Secure?

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I'd like to invite you to turn with me to the book of Acts and chapter one and we will begin reading at the very first verse. That is page 1690 if you are using the Bibles in the pews. This is a little short series on the Middle East. This is part two.

In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit."

So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."¹

May we pray?

Lord, I confess that I have had a lot of anxiety for eight days ever since last Saturday night as I was riding by myself back from Baton Rouge and was meditating on my ser-

¹ Acts 1:1-11 (All Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated).

mon for the next day that I had planned to preach finishing up Hebrews 13:17. Lord, I sensed in my heart—as I have so very often—that you wanted something else to be said and it was that you wanted me to address from Scripture alone the situation in the Middle East and the events that they may be a harbinger of.

Lord, it is with fear and trembling that I stand before you, as always, and before your people. Over the years of preaching for 40 years, Lord, over 40 years, people have often not heard what I am saying and have often heard what I am not saying. I pray in the name and the authority and the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, that you would bind every spirit in this place that would distort what I am about to say. I pray for clarity and succinctness. I pray, Lord, that I may be as repetitious as I need to be in order to get a point across. For the Bible is a very repetitious book and it is by repetition that we learn. And yet, Lord, in that repetition I pray that I will not become wordy in an unnecessary way.

I pray, Lord, that what I teach will have practical and compelling application to everybody's every day lives. And I pray that that Word will come to us in the power of the Holy Spirit who alone can impart the gift of repentance and faith so that we, being your people, may have peace and confidence in our hearts as we look to the future in Jesus' name. Amen.

As we look here at Acts chapter one, verse eight, and I spoke from this very passage—though in a very different vein—Friday night out at the Methodist Conference Center with the Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church which is going to be using our facility beginning the first Sunday in November at 12:30 on Sundays as their church is torn down and rebuilt. So I spoke from this passage but in a very different vein than I would present it to you today.

I want you to see that Jesus has told his disciples, here, just before he leaves, that they are to wait in Jerusalem for the power of the Holy Spirit to come. And we know that that power came on the day of Pentecost, 10 days after the Lord Jesus ascended to Heaven.

It is interesting, however, that Jesus is speaking about something that is about to happen right away and his disciples are interested in something, perhaps, in the very distant future, something that is very tangible, something they can measure and see and evaluate. And so their response to Jesus' statement about the coming of the Spirit is in verse six. "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"²

Now, that's a very, very interesting question. I want you to think with me for a moment about the implications of that question. "Are you going, at this time, to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

What does that tell you? It tells you that at the time they were asking this question the kingdom had not been restored to Israel. They are looking still to a future restoration of Israel in its land. And yet, where were they when they asked this question? Why, they

² Acts 1:6

were right there in the Middle East in what we call today Israel. They were in Israel when they asked the question and they had been there in Israel; the Jewish people had been back in the land for over 500 years.

So it is an interesting thing. They are talking about something that, in their time, had not occurred even though Israel had been living on that piece of real estate for over five centuries.

I think it's interesting that Jesus answers this in verse seven in a way that we don't like to hear. He said to them, "It's none of your business." That's what he really says. "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."³ See, that is an important truth. "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."⁴

There are events that are going to happen—to be sure—but when those events happen not even Jesus—when he was on earth—knew. He says that. And that's an amazing thing, isn't it? Because Jesus is both God and man. And in his divine nature he is everything that the Father is. And in his human nature he is everything that you and I are except he never sinned. He didn't have a sinful nature.

He spoke of his Second Coming and he said, "But of that day and hour knows no man, not the angels in Heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only."⁵

So when we get down to date setting. When we get down to say, "Well, this is going to happen at this specific point," we have to be very cautious. "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."⁶

Instead he tells them, "I want you to be thinking about the future near at hand." And the future near at hand in verse eight is: "You need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit so you will get over your natural shyness and begin with boldness to tell people about me, Jesus." That's the thing. We can get all consumed about the distant future, but the reality is—according to Acts 1:8—that our neighbors don't know the Lord, probably. Sometimes they do. And it's our task, in the power of the Spirit, with boldness to testify with that Lord Jesus has done in our lives.

Verse eight: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses starting in Jerusalem and going to Judea and then to Samaria and to the ends of the earth."⁷

And at that point the next to the last great acts of Jesus in terms of this cluster of events that occurs around 30 AD occurred. What are those great acts? Jesus died. He was bur-

³ Acts 1:7

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Paraphrase of Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32

⁶ Acts 1:7

⁷ Paraphrase of Acts 1:8

ied. He rose again. He demonstrated that he was a live by walking the earth for 40 days, even eating food with his disciples, letting them touch him. Then he ascended to the Father and then 10 days later he poured out the Holy Spirit. And those events, together, are absolutely essential. And when we think about the work of Christ we're thinking about all of those events together.

Well, the Lord Jesus has ascended to Heaven. And the disciples are standing their gawking. "What are we going to do now?"

Well, he told them what to do now. He told them, "Go back to Jerusalem and pray and seek the Lord until you receive the power of the Holy Spirit." But they want to have the game plan all laid out.

Somebody said that the headlights of an automobile only show you a short distance into the future. They don't show you the whole journey. But if you will drive with your headlights on you will be able to complete the journey. Go by the light that you've got. Don't worry about the light you don't have. Just keep using those head lights and you will get to the end of the journey even though the headlights don't show the whole way.

Well, there they are, gawking up in the sky wondering, "What do we do now?" when he's already told them.

In verse 10 we are told, "They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men [these were angels] dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.'"⁸

Now, that verse is packed with meaning. And I won't go into elaborate detail with it, but I'll give you just the essence of it. What it is telling us is this: Christ's return to earth is future. Christ's return to earth will be literal. It will actually, physically take place. It will be an event that is going to be public and knowable and known because he is going to return in physical form. It is very important because throughout Church history people have talked about the return of Christ as an event that has already occurred and they're saying, "Well, this event marked it. This event marked it." And they are speaking figuratively.

But I want you to understand that this verse—in Acts chapter one—rebutts any kind of spiritual Second Coming of Christ. Jesus, verse 11, is going to come back how? "In the same way you have seen him go into heaven."⁹ How did they see him go into Heaven? They saw Jesus in his body with his flesh, the flesh they had handled, the flesh they had seen, the voice they had heard speaking to them moments ago; they saw him go up into Heaven. And the angel's say, "When he comes back it's going to be just this way."

⁸ Acts 1:10-11

⁹ Acts 1:11

So real Christians have confessed since the time of the New Testament, they have confessed that Jesus will come again. And if you find someone who is a teacher who doesn't believe in the future Second Coming of Christ you need to get out from under that teaching because such a teacher is a heretic. As I say, again, Christians have confessed this from the earliest days. Christ will come again. Christ is risen.

Well, let's see. Christ shall come again. Let's see. Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again. Ancient liturgy of the Church. Or the Apostles Creed: "He will come again to judge the quick and the dead; the living and the dead."

So these are things that have been confessed and have been in the worship of the Church for 2000 years. Jesus will come again, literally, actually, physically. That is important.

Now, if you read religious novels there is a set of religious novels that have become best sellers. As long as you remember those novels are novels that's perfectly fine. I happen to prefer Tom Clancy to Tim LaHaye, although his language is a bit saltier. But he's a better author and more entertaining and it's easier for me to distance myself from the plot in real time and space than it is the Tim LaHaye novels. And Tim LaHaye's novels are plagiarized from some novels that were written in the 19th century—back in the 1800s—one of which was called *In the Twinkling of an Eye*.

But if you have read those novels, there is a rather elaborate plan laid out. And I want to say this: It could take place like that. Just as when I've read some of Tom Clancy's stuff I've thought, "You know, it could take place just like that." It could. But what I want to address in this short series is: It ain't necessarily so.

That's what Crown is saying in *Porgy and Bess*, Gershwin's Charleston, South Carolina based American opera. It ain't necessarily so.

What you read in Tim LayHaye's novels ain't necessarily so.

Here's a problem. The things about the Second Coming of Christ as they are presented in the Bible are actually pretty simple. And Mr. LaHaye has presented them—I heard him speak back in the 60s before he wrote all his books and got rich—Mr. LaHaye's scheme that's in his book is a very complex scheme. In fact, in order to understand it you really need a wall chart. And once you learn the wall chart, the trouble is, you always read the Bible in light of the wall chart.

But what does the Bible really teach us about the Second Coming of Christ?

Fundamentally it is right here in Acts chapter one, verse 11. Jesus is going to come again in the future; literally, actually, physically, really and truly so that people will really know it and everybody everywhere will know that it has happened.

Secondly, the Bible teaches that there are clusters of events that surround that Second Coming. But the Bible never lays out for us the exact sequence of those events. There is

an apostasy that takes place. What does that mean? It means that those who have professed to follow Jesus suddenly begin to continue to profess to follow him, but no longer to stand for Bible truths. I think we can see that in our day to a great degree in major denominations.

Another interesting event that is connected with the time of the Second Coming of Christ is the massive turning of the Jewish people to faith in Christ. Romans chapter 11. And as we saw last week in just a little glimpse of that in Romans 11, we see that God does have a future for the Jewish people. The Jewish people in the plan of God have a special place. We're going to explore that more this morning. They have a special place.

And so near the time of the return of Christ, lift it off the chart and just put it down here. It's safe. There is some connection with the Jewish people turning to the Lord Jesus as their Messiah.

Another event related to the Second Coming of Christ—connected with the apostasy—is the revelation of a person whom the Scripture calls the man of sin, the man of sin. Some people refer to him as the antichrist. I'm not sure that we should call the man of sin the antichrist. There are many antichrists according to John in the New Testament (1 John, for example). But there is only one man of sin. There are many antichrists. There is only one man of sin.

Who is the man of sin? The man of sin is a figure near the end of human history, near the time of the return of Christ—whether before or after is debated—but he is a figure who will promise peace and prosperity, but who will deceive multitudes of people and will usher in great persecution.

Now, that's all there is to say about the Second Coming of Christ and be really dogmatic. Christ is going to return again literally, actually, physically. There are events that are related to that. The revelation of the man of sin; a fellow who will attempt to be a one world dictator. There will be persecution of believers. There will be a departure from the Christian faith among so-called Christian churches. The Jewish people will turn *en masse* to Jesus as the Messiah. And when you go beyond that and try to put those things in a sequence of events, then you are going to beyond the Scripture and you are imposing on the Bible your imagination rather than simply letting the Bible speak to you.

So, with that in mind notice, again, that in the eyes of the disciples in Acts 1:6 it's apparent to them that they believed that the kingdom had not yet been restored to Israel. "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"¹⁰

The kingdom was lost to Israel in the year 586 BC when an Assyrian king—Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the second ruler in the neo-Babylonian Empire—wiped the city out and destroyed the Jewish temple.

"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"¹¹

¹⁰ Acts 1:6

In the captivity—if you will turn with me to the book of Daniel, chapter nine—in the captivity Israel is waiting for a restoration to the kingship. Daniel chapter nine, if you'll turn there—page 1387—Daniel chapter nine. Israel has been in captivity for a long period of time. Actually, the kingship has been lost—in a real way—since the year 605 BC. What happened in 605 BC? That's when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judea and took captive some of the royal family, the heirs to the throne. Among them was Daniel. And so it is almost 70 years since that occurred.

It is interesting. There are two 70 year periods, roughly, that kind of overlap each other. There's the period of domination, actually, that begins in 609 when Judea is captured by Pharaoh Necco of Egypt and they become a vassal state of Egypt and then four years later switch to a vassal state of Babylon. So that Israel is under that domination from 609 to 539 when they are allowed to return to their homeland. It's interesting. The temple is destroyed in 586 and rebuilt in 516—two 70 year periods. That's neither here nor there.

Anyhow, Daniel is nearing the time he believes, in verse one—page 1387—when he is going to be able to return with the Jewish people. His big concern is not his return; it is that his people would be allowed to return to the holy land.

Verse one:

In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed:¹²

Now, it's interesting. He uses a particular Hebrew word there for confession that's taken from Leviticus 26 that we'll look at in just a minute. And if we look over at verse 20 of Daniel nine—next page, 1388—as he...and this is a beautiful prayer you ought to read it this afternoon. In verse 20 he sums up what he was doing and he says, “While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for his holy hill.”¹³ Let's look and see what he is doing.

What he is doing is obeying the Word of God as it is found in Leviticus 26. Turn with me, if you will, then, to Leviticus 26 and pray for me that I can make this very clear and simple.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Daniel 9:1-4

¹³ Daniel 9:20

In Leviticus 26 and verse 40—page 199—Leviticus 26, verse 40, we read these words: “But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers...”¹⁴ I want you to see this. There is an “if” here. “But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers...”¹⁵ What? I want you to understand that Daniel has gone back to the book of Leviticus in the Torah. He has gone back to the book of Leviticus because he wants the people of God, the Jewish people, now to be able to have the holy land and have it securely. And here’s the condition; verse 40:

But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers—their treachery against me and their hostility towards me, which made me hostile towards them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies—then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. For the land will be deserted by them and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them. They will pay for their sins because they rejected my laws and abhorred my decrees.¹⁶

So Daniel is at this point in Daniel chapter nine. He is in captivity—as are the people of God. He’s concerned. We want to go back to the holy land. It’s our land. It’s the land that Abraham was given by God to his descendants that would stretch from down on the border of Egypt to the Euphrates River—a vast stretch of real estate. And he knows that they don’t have that land. He knows they are outside the land and he realizes they have been punished by God for their disobedience. And so he has turned to the book of Leviticus and he is obeying the Word of God; specifically by confessing his sins and the sins of his ancestors. And so what is this?

Well, Leviticus 26:40 is at the end of a chapter. So we might begin that chapter for a moment in a brief scan where God says—page 197—through Moses, Leviticus 26:1: “Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves, and do not place a carved stone in your land to bow down before it. I am the LORD your God.”¹⁷

So he goes through and he tells them all these commandments. And he says, “Now, if you’ll do this I’m going to bless you incredibly. I’ll bless you with physical health. I’ll bless you with financial reward.”

Verse 13—page 198: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high.”¹⁸

Verse 14. Here is where it begins.

¹⁴ Leviticus 26:40

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Leviticus 26:40-43

¹⁷ Leviticus 26:1

¹⁸ Leviticus 26:13

But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it. I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no-one is pursuing you.¹⁹

Look at verse 18 and you will see a theme that is repeated each paragraph in Leviticus 26. “If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over.”²⁰ Listen to what he is saying.

Have you ever noticed that with God in your life? When your ways displease God and you are a Christian he will chastise you. Have you ever thought about that verse in the book of Hebrews? It said, “Whom the Lord loves he chastens and scourges everyone whom he receives?”²¹

If you have a relationship with God, you’re not going to get by with sin. Worldly people get by with sin. That’s the message of Psalm 73. The psalmist in Psalm 73 is looking around and he is seeing wicked people prosper. And he said, “Here I am, a believer, and I’m trying to serve you, Lord, and everything that happens to me I’m just getting one bad thing happen to me after another. What are you doing, Lord?”

And the Lord says, “The world—out there—those aren’t my special people, the people in the world. I let them go their own way and they prosper in the world and suddenly they have a heart attack and die and go to hell. But if you belong to me, I’m not going to let that happen to you. I’m going to deal with you. I’m going to deal with you. I’m going to spank you when you do wrong,” in effect God says. And so, therefore, if you know the Lord you’re life is sometimes harder than people who don’t know the Lord.

Have you ever found it that way? I mean, anybody here ever had some trouble in your life? And you look around and you see the people in the world don’t seem to have that kind of trouble. Read Psalm 73. That’s where the psalmist expresses this. Whom the Lord loves he chastens and scourges every son he receives.”²²

Now, God still loves you when he spanks you. That’s what your momma told you, didn’t she? And you’re daddy. I remember the first lie my daddy told me. “This hurts me more than it hurts you.” Did your daddy lie to you? “This hurts me a whole lot more than it hurts you, son.”

¹⁹ Leviticus 26:14-17

²⁰ Leviticus 26:18

²¹ Paraphrase of Hebrews 12:6

²² Ibid.

It really does. God does not delight in inflicting us with pain. And as you read Leviticus 26 you discover that God's chastisement is moderated. And then when they don't respond it gets more severe. And that's what happens in your life. God wants to chasten you simply by his Holy Spirit breaking your heart. And if you will respond when the Holy Spirit pricks your conscience as you are reading the Word, that's the end of the matter. But when you don't respond when the Holy Spirit pricks your conscience, God sends a little trouble your way so you'll say, "Lord, what are you trying to say to me?"

And the Lord will tell you if you ask him.

And then if you don't respond to that, what? It gets a little more severe, a little more severe. And finally, if people really walk in disobedience and they are born again, God will take their life.

Look at what he does with Israel. It's very much like that. And this is before they ever entered into the Promised Land. Look at verse 18 again. "If after all this you will not listen to me."²³ God has already given them a big spanking starting there in verse 14. "If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over."²⁴ In other words, "I'm going to increase. The spanking is going to be more intense." And then he describes it here. He says, verse 19: "I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze."²⁵

He goes on. Verse 21. Let's say that doesn't work. Verse 21: "If you remain hostile towards me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve. I will send wild animals against you."²⁶ And so and so forth.

Verse 23. Let's say that doesn't work.

If in spite of these things you do not accept my correction but continue to be hostile towards me, I myself will be hostile towards you and will afflict you for your sins seven times over. And I will bring the sword upon you to avenge the breaking of the covenant.²⁷

Verse 27: "If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile towards me, then in my anger I will be hostile towards you, and I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over."²⁸

Verse 29. What form of punishment does it take? Verse 29:

²³ Leviticus 26:18

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Leviticus 26:19

²⁶ Leviticus 26:21-22

²⁷ Leviticus 26:23-25

²⁸ Leviticus 26:27-28

You will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters. I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars and pile your dead bodies on the lifeless forms of your idols, and I will abhor you. I will turn your cities into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries²⁹

And so on.

And then verse 34: “Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it.”³⁰

This is an amazing prophecy. It promises blessing on covenantal obedience. And it promises curse and judgment on covenantal disobedience.

Think about it. Has it been fulfilled in history? Many times. Many times.

It is interesting. I mentioned last week and also in a Wednesday night that I spent—as of January the first this year—I got some talking going on or singing. As of January first this year—and that’s because I’m a little edgy in my power of concentration, a little diminished, that I need to avoid some of those distractions. As of January first this year I began to read—as I do each year a different Bible—an orthodox Jewish translation. And in that orthodox Jewish translation of the Bible were many wonderful footnotes of interest taken from the Talmud of the great rabbis of the past.

And one of the things that was really spelled out in there, which I knew about in the past, but was really spelled out was a particular day in the Jewish calendar that occurred this past week. See, we are now in the Jewish month of Av, the Jewish month of Av. And on the 9th day of the month of Av terrible things have happened to the Jewish people throughout history.

You see, this curse that is spelled out in Leviticus 26, a curse that talks about people doing what? Eating their own children. Do people ever do that? Sure they do. When people are starving to death and they see no hope that either they or their children will survive, throughout history various people have killed and eaten their own children saying to themselves, “Well, they’re not going to live anyhow. I’ll spare them this suffering and I will eat their body.”

People have done that.

Do you know that that particular curse has been fulfilled at least three times, actually four times, in Jewish history that we know of? The first occurred in the eighth century before Christ when the northern kingdom—the kingdom of Israel—fell to the Assyrian Empire. When the city of Samaria fell, people ate their own children.

²⁹ Leviticus 26:29-31

³⁰ Leviticus 26:34-35

In fact, even before it fell, this thing happened as recorded in 2 Kings. Then, when Jerusalem is surrounded by the Babylonians and the southern kingdom fell, again, the Jewish people were reduced to such suffering and deprivation that they ate their own children.

And then, again, in the year 70 AD the people were again reduced under a siege to such deprivation they killed and ate their own children according to the captured Jewish general Flavius Josephus.

When did the city of Jerusalem fall and the temple was destroyed? In the year 586 BC on the ninth day of the Jewish month Av the first Jewish temple was destroyed. Then the city is rebuilt. The temple is rebuilt 70 years later only to be destroyed in 70 AD, once again, on the ninth day of Av.

And, as we saw last week from the gospel of Luke the Jewish people at that point were sent, once again, into captivity, into exile.

What is different about what occurred in 1948 when Jewish people rose up against the British and drove them out and took the land? What's different about that?

Well, let me tell you another historical incident. In the year 118 AD the Roman Emperor Hadrian came to power. The Jewish temple had been destroyed. The Jewish people were in captivity and under Hadrian the Jews began to receive favorable treatment. And the Roman Emperor Hadrian promised the Jewish people that they could rebuild their temple. Yet, what happened?

Hadrian, as Gentile rulers have done from time immemorial with the Jewish people, broke his promise. Hadrian broke his promise to the Jewish people and they were no longer permitted to build their temple on the site of the old Jewish temple. When Hadrian moved his forces back towards Rome an event occurred beginning in the year 132 AD. Under the leadership of a man by the name of Simon Bar Kokhba a revolt occurred.

It's an amazing thing because Israel came into the land again. Israel existed again as a political entity and set about to rebuild the temple. They had some 50 fortresses and they had almost 1000 cities and villages under their control. They became a political entity. They became a national group again. And they were greatly encouraged because it seemed as if God himself was fighting their battles for them as they stood up against the Romans and defeated Roman legions. It's an amazing thing.

So here you are around 132 to 135 AD and you see the Jewish people once again in control of their homeland, once again in control of the city of Jerusalem. Not like today where the temple is still controlled by Muslims. In that time the Jewish people actually controlled the temple mount. They minted coins. They had an army. They had a political nation in existence. And they were defeating Roman legions right and left. And they were very confident that God would not allow their new state of Israel to be wiped out.

And yet on the ninth day of Av, the same day of the same month that the first temple was destroyed by divine authority, that the second temple was destroyed by divine authority, the Romans surrounded the last strong hold of the Bar Kokhba revolt and crushed the Jewish people. And a half million Jewish people were annihilated and put to death.

What a sad history has occurred. As we look at these promises, as we look at these prophecies in Leviticus 26 we find that the remedy in exile in verse 40—Leviticus 26:40—is the confession of not only my own personal sins, but the sins of my fathers. Their treachery against God, their hostility toward God, that treachery that made God hostile toward to them so that he sent them into the land of their enemies. “When their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin I’ll remember my covenant.”

See the difficulty that we face today is that the question that the disciples asked has not yet been answered. “Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

You say, “Well, Israel is back in the land.”

And, as we saw last week, God has a special purpose of the Jewish people. The Jewish people are the only ethnic group—as a distinct people group—from ancient times that have survived in tact into the modern era. God has a special plan for the Jewish people as we saw in Romans 11 last week.

And there is a connection with all that and the Promised Land. The question that we face is this: What is going to happen?

And the answer to that, in the light of Scripture is: I don’t know.

Now, there are some Bible scholars who would say that the Jewish people now being in the land will not be driven out. That if they were to be driven out of their land today that the Bible promises would not be true. And I will simply ask this question: If that is so, then, how does the state that was erected on May 18, 1948 differ from the state that was erected in the fourth decade of the second century of the Christian era when Israel controlled a huge portion of real estate in the Middle East, had an organized army, minted coins, had a government and was beginning to rebuild the temple.

And the answer to that is: There is no difference.

What am I trying to say? What I want to say in this message and the next message is this. You need to be prepared, if certain prophecy teachers are wrong, that you don’t think that the Bible is not true. That’s my point.

You need to be prepared that if things don’t turn out the way that certain prophecy teachers tell you that they will, that you don’t say, “Well, the Bible’s not true.”

Because I’ve got to say this to you as I study the Word of God. Turn with me, if you will, to Amos chapter three. I’ve got to say to you as I study the Word of God that I see a

promise of God to the Jewish people and I see a promise of God to the Jewish people regarding the Promised Land, but I don't connect those things necessarily with the modern state of Israel not yet connected to the Messiah. And that's not only my view. That's the view of some orthodox Jews.

Amos chapter three, verse two—page 1422. Pick it up at verse one. “Hear this word the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel—against the whole family I brought up out of Egypt: You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth.”³¹

Stop right there for a moment.

This is a word from the prophet Amos to the people of Israel and here God says, literally in Hebrew, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” What is he saying? He is saying that he has this special relationship only with Israel—at least at that time. You can enter into a special relationship with God through Jesus Christ by faith today. But at that time God had a unique relationship only with Israel.

Notice what he says here. “You only have a I [known, or you only have I] chosen,”³² because the word know and the word chosen there are in the Hebrew are virtually synonymous. But I want you to notice the consequence of God loving you.

I'm chosen. Ok. What does that mean. Well, here it is. “Therefore I will punish you for all your sins.”³³

In other words, whom the Lord loves he chastens. Whom the Lord loves he chastens. God has a special relationship with you. You're not going to get by with things the way that other people get by with them.

Where am I going with this? Where I'm going with this is this: And now I am going to speculate. And I want you to know that I am speculating and I am not being dogmatic. As I look at the future I see the that the future could go in several directions. We look back at the 1967 war, we look back at the 1973 war and we see how Israel dramatically defeated the people around them. And many people attribute that to special divine power. And I would say, “Well, of course, nothing in the world happens outside of divine power. God is in control of everything. Yes, that's true.”

We have to also understand that no nation in the Middle East has been equipped militarily so effectively as Israel has by the United States. So Israel has tremendous material and armaments relative to other nations.

Let me warn you that we should not presume as we look at the future that what has happened in the past is going to happen again because there is no promise of God that would be broken as long as the Jewish people survive. And they have survived in spite of Po-

³¹ Amos 3:1-2

³² Amos 3:2

³³ Ibid.

groms and Nazis and Cossacks. They have survived and they will continue to survive. And there is a promise for the land. But there is no promise in the Bible that says that the modern state of Israel will survive.

What happens if the nations of the Middle East are successful in removing Israel as a nation? Well, I think that would be a horrible disaster. It is a disaster of unprecedented proportion. Israel is, at least as far as the Jewish people are concerned, a democracy. If you go and criticize your government in virtually every other nation in the Middle East but in Israel you may expect severe and quick reprisal. But in Israel, like the United States, they are free to criticize their government. And there is much debate, much controversy back and forth. It would be an unprecedented disaster.

What I want to say to you is this: It does not in any way mean that God's Word is not true. Why do I feel the need to press this on you? Because as I was driving back from Baton Rouge by myself a week ago last night I felt God impress me to tell you the truth about two events with regard to the future that may not happen the way that most people who are Christians believe.

Let me tell you another event which we will address next time. I believe that the Church will go through part of the tribulation. Do I believe in a rapture? Yes, I do. But I do not believe that the rapture is secret and I do not believe in two Second Comings of Christ. I believe that when Christ comes for his Church he then comes to earth to judge it. And, therefore, and I will demonstrate to you in two weeks when I am able to address that topic, why the Bible teaches absolutely and clearly that Christ will not return for his Church until the man of sin has been revealed. And there is no way to read that second chapter of 2 Thessalonians any other way but that. And anyone who denies that is simply allowing his prejudice to be imposed on Scripture.

Why tell people that? Because I have to tell you: If, indeed, we are near the time of the Second Coming of Christ we may expect to go through severe persecution.

So there are two things that I want you to have today and in two weeks. And it is this: In case the prophetic pundits are wrong—as I think they likely are—I don't want you looking and wringing your hands and saying, "God lied."

God didn't lie. God has told you you are going to go through tough times. And God has said that Christ won't return for his Church until the man of sin is revealed. But the other thing is this—coming back to the topic of today: We really need to pray for the Middle East. The problem with some Christians is they simply assume that because these prophetic schemes have been laid out so compellingly in novels and even film that that's the way it's going to be. They think that God is going to swoop in dramatically and just do something. And all I'm telling you is this: We have no guarantee in Scripture that the modern state of Israel is going to be any different than the state of Israel under Bar Kokhba's revolt in 132 to 135 when on the ninth day of Av, 135 AD the Jewish state was wiped out.

So what do we do? We pray, brothers and sisters. We pray for the Middle East. We pray for cooler heads to prevail. We pray for fanatics to be muted and for reasonable people to be able to speak. We pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May they prosper who love you? We pray for the Jewish people. But we also pray for the Muslim people. We pray recognizing that when it comes to being able to go to Heaven Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me."³⁴ There are no special people in terms of being able to go to Heaven except people who, seeing that they are sinful and casting themselves on God's mercy, come to him in brokenness.

So what do we pray for the Jewish people? What do we pray for the Muslim people? We pray that self-righteous religion may give way and that the truth of God may come home and that people would repent of their sins and come to the Lord. That's what we pray. And there's nothing more important in our world to pray about politically than that because I tell you that the events that are transpiring can pull the world truly into World War III. We are up against forces in the modern world that are beyond our comprehension. Our own nation is extremely vulnerable going back to Amos 3:2.

"You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins."³⁵

So the speculation is this: What if the only way to break pride is to allow people to assume that the future is bright and rosy and there will be a divine deliverance only to lead them into a trap? God forbid. But if I read the Bible, if you read the Bible, you discover that that kind of trap has been set by God again and again and again because the heart of a relationship with God is found in one word and that word is humility; humility before God.

It isn't that I deserve this, that it is my right, that I can claim this because of who my daddy is or my momma is, that I'm entitled to better treatment. It is in brokenness I come and confess to God not standing in the shoes of Daniel, but kneeling at the bench where Daniel knelt and confessed my sins and the sins of my ancestors. And I confess my treachery and the treachery of my ancestors because it is only when I am honest with myself that I can be honest with my God. And it is only in that place of humility and brokenness that I can ever hope to see the blessing of God on my life and my people. That's the heart of the matter; a religion that does not break you, a religion that does not shake you from your own self-confidence and leave you wounded at the foot of the cross is not biblical religion whether of the Old Testament or the New.

The religion of the Old Testament, the religion of the New, have this in common: I am not good enough to win God's favor. God owes me nothing. God owes my people nothing.

³⁴ John 14:6

³⁵ Amos 3:2

“Nothing in my hands I bring.” That’s the essence of biblical religion; not arrogance, not pride, not self-confidence, not racial pride or ethnic pride or religious pride; brokenness. And that’s what the Lord’s Supper reminds us of.

The Lord’s Supper reminds us that it is not our performance, but Jesus’ performance that is the only way to be right with God. It is not my sacrifice, but his sacrifice that earns the way. It is not the power of my faith, but the power of the one in whom my faith rests, the Lord Jesus. It is about one who came from Heaven and became a man and suffered and died in your place, in my place, in the place of the Jew and the Gentile, in the place of a Muslim and a Jewish person and the Baptist and the Methodist and the Catholic and the Episcopalian and the Hindu. It is one who offers himself to all people.

“Come to me,” says the Lord Jesus, “all who are weary and all who are heavy laden. I will give you rest.”³⁶

The Lord’s Supper reminds us of that; that just as Jesus’ body is broken on the cross, so He broke the bread. And so you and I must know true brokenness in repentance and casting ourselves on God’s mercy.

And it reminds us also of the fact that it isn’t by our perfection or good works, but it is by the blood of the covenant that was shed on the cross for our sins that we are entitled to anything with God.

“This cup,” said Jesus, “is the new covenant in my blood. All of you drink it.”³⁷

Transcription by Audioposting: (www.audioposting.com/transcription.php)

³⁶ Paraphrase of Matthew 11:28

³⁷ Paraphrase of Luke 22:20