

"In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice" (Romans 11:5)

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Israel and the Battle for the Universe

By Galen Peterson

With its application for statehood recognition at the United Nations and its acceptance for membership in UNESCO, the Palestinian National Authority has initiated a movement with very significant political implications. By acting unilaterally, it is an attempt to force international recognition without an actual peace agreement with Israel.

The nations of the world are predominately supportive of this movement. Clearly we are witnessing the world turning its back on Israel, creating an environment that calls for Israel to make all the concessions, while ignoring the core position of its enemies calling for their destruction.

No wonder the Palestinians are making these moves rather than trying to settle their differences at the negotiation table. From the world's perspective it is like a parent

promising a reward to a child if the he improves his behavior, but when the behavior doesn't change and the parents get tired of waiting and just want to make their kid happy, they give in and give the reward anyway. That is the parenting style, it seems, of our world today.

In contrast, we can consider what the ultimate parent in this universe, our Heavenly Father, has to say regarding the land of Israel and surrounding regions.

Biblical Principles on Israel and the Holy Land

- All land belongs to God and is therefore His to do as He pleases (Ps. 24:1).
- The land of Canaan was given by God to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12:7).
- God gave the land to Abraham as an everlasting possession (Gen. 17:7-8). and an unconditional covenant (Psalm 89:30-37).
- God gave the land of Canaan to Abraham's son, Isaac (Gen. 17:18-19).
- God gave the land of Canaan to Isaac's son Jacob (Gen. 28:13-14).
- God gave the land of Canaan to the descendants of Jacob—the nation of Israel (Deut. 1:8).
- God gave the land of northwestern Arabia to Abraham's son Ishmael (Gen. 17:20; 25:16,18).
- God gave the land of Edom to Isaac's son Esau (Deut. 2:4-5).
- God made provisions for non-Jews who seek to live in the land of Israel (Num. 15:14-16,30).
- National sinfulness of Israel would cause their removal from the land, but not their right to the land (Lev. 26:40-45).
- The people of Israel would be

restored to the land prior to a spiritual renewal (Ezek. 37:11-12,14).

Rarely is God's granting of lands to the descendants of Ishmael and Esau acknowledged anywhere. Those lands are now comprised of the modern Arab nations that surround Israel. There is no movement in our world today to take possession of those lands (as it should be). Yet a double standard exists regarding the land decreed by God as a possession for the Jewish people. It is the former land of Canaan and Kingdom of Israel that is in dispute and coveted today.

The problem is that both the Islamic world and the United Nations reject those words in the Bible as having any authority, because in their mind, the Bible is not the final word, and the God of the Bible is not the ultimate ruler of the universe.

The rejection of God's authority, especially when it comes to the Jewish people and the land of Israel, is nothing new. When Pharaoh heard God's command to release the Israelites from slavery, he responded:

"Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and besides, I will not let Israel go" (Ex. 5:2).

When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity in order to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, he was confronted by some of the local leaders who had filled the territorial vacuum of Israel. Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, we are told:

"When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about it, it was very displeasing to them that

someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel" (Neh. 2:10).

Not only did Sanballat and Tobiah reject the authority of King Artaxerxes who had granted permission to Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, they rejected the authority of the Lord who had given perpetual possession of Jerusalem to Israel.

Nothing has changed today. The world rejects the Lord as having spoken authoritatively regarding Israel. And the world gets displeased when someone seeks the welfare of the people of Israel. Persons who love Israel truly are a remnant (a faithful few) among the nations.

We should not be surprised by the latest international developments. But we would also be wise to consider the question, how can we explain this break between what the Bible declares and the world's behavior?

The 83rd Psalm provides us with some important insight regarding the hostility toward Israel. We are told that the enemies of God

"conspire together against Your treasured ones. They have said, 'Come, and let us wipe them out as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more'" (Ps. 83:3-4).

Later in this passage, the enemies are identified as the nations around Israel (vv. 6-7). They state their purpose as making a covenant against God (v. 5), and they also make this striking declaration: "Let us possess for ourselves the pastures of God."

This prophetic passage, which unmistakably describes our modern day, portrays the nations of the Middle East seeking to destroy Israel, and then taking

possession of their land. But it is not just depicted as a land battle. As shown in this Psalm the enemies of the Lord are attempting to do away with the Jews in order to do away with the God of the Jews.

In many ways, the battle erupting around Jerusalem is a test to demonstrate whose God is the True God. But whose God would it be? Many people are asking questions along these lines today. Are the Gods of Christianity and Islam one and the same? Or is one real and the other a myth? Or is one real and the other a powerful being who is not truly divine?

The Bible reveals that we are not alone. There is another created being who dwells in our midst, yet is unseen in the physical realm. According to Isaiah 14, between the time of creation and the fall of humanity, the angel Lucifer (meaning "star of the morning") led a rebellion against God. Lucifer became known as Satan, the Hebrew name meaning "Adversary" (1 Pet. 5:8).

In his opposition to God, Satan tempts and deceives people (Matt. 4:3; Rev. 12:9) and manifests himself as an "angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). That means a sense of attractiveness, glory and legitimacy. That means he will appear the way people envision *God* to be, not as the stereotypical horned devil depicted in art and the movies. He makes people believe that he is deity.

The reason for this scheme is his stated agenda—to reign supreme over the universe. With unequalled arrogance, he boasted in Is:14:13 -

"I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of

the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”

He wants to be God. But if Satan is to supplant the True God as sovereign over the universe, he must defeat Him somehow. How can Satan possibly believe that he could accomplish such a plan? He really must have a lot of self-confidence and audacity.

Where is the place of supposed vulnerability that he is attacking? It is God’s Word. Satan’s reasoning is not complicated. If he can break God’s ability to keep His word, Satan will prove God to be a liar. This is Satan’s plan to defeat the Lord.

God has made a series of covenants with Israel that are based on His name (representing His power and sovereignty). In fact God has proclaimed that the very existence of the universe is linked to His promise to preserve Israel:

Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; the Lord of hosts is His name: “If this fixed order departs From before Me,” declares the Lord, “Then the offspring of Israel also will cease from being a nation before Me forever.”

(Jer. 31:36-37)

Can you see Satan’s scheme? His strategy is very apparent—destroy the Jews and thus break God’s power. Through temptation and deception, Satan tried it with the Nazis who despised the God of the Bible and sought to restore the worship of pagan gods in Germany. And now he is trying it in the Islamic world, which seeks to expand the worship of Allah to cover every inch of Israel.

No Israel....no Jewish

people....no fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel....means no more enforcement of God’s promise to cast Satan into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10). If Satan would be successful in his scheme, he could stand before the Lord and say, “I beat you!” The end result would be the defeat of the One who created him, and he would then reign over the universe.

Now let it be said that the True and Living God is still on the throne. One thing that Satan can never change is the victory over sin and death that Jesus won by giving His life as our atonement on the cross and by resurrecting from the dead. May we recognize that the Lord is all-powerful and can never, ever be defeated.

Nevertheless a day is coming when Satan will unleash his final assault upon Israel and against God Himself. In great desperation for his own survival, Satan will deceive and lead nations to surround Israel and to seek her destruction. A great tribulation does indeed lie ahead for Israel, and we are witnessing right now the next step in this Satanic obsession.

But he will ultimately fail in that plan, just as he failed to prevent Jesus from going to the cross and raising Himself from the dead. Just as God has sworn by His name, He will never allow Israel to be completely destroyed, because He will never allow His sovereignty to be destroyed. Zech. 14:3 foretells that

“the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle.”

When all is said and done, “the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one” (Zech. 14:9). That end

of the story is our great hope.

In the meantime, what responsibility has God given to us? The Bible cries out to all of us to bless Israel and warns us not to curse Israel (Gen. 12:3). It is clear that people and nations make their own choices and, as a result, they will bear the consequences. Surely there are grave consequences in store for the people of the Middle East, and for us as well if our country turns its back on Israel.

But should we be content with the understanding that a great number of people will be cursed by God? Or shall we just sit around and turn on the TV to lament the latest developments in the apparent demise of Israel? Or is it good enough to rest in the knowledge that the Lord wins in the end?

Without question we need to be faithful to the biblical model of spiritual warfare—prayer. It is not just our last resort when things get really bad. It should be our primary means of effecting change in our world. Remember, if God is sovereign, then we must do things that are consistent with God’s will, not our own.

The Bible strongly depicts the power of prayer. God desires our prayers and has promised to act upon them. When it comes to Israel He instructs us to “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: ‘May they prosper who love you’” (Ps. 122:6). It is neither a plea nor a suggestion; it is an imperative command.

But there is one more thing to consider. It’s easy to pray for people you love. And it’s against our nature to want to pray for people we hate. Yet that is the very command that we have been given. As Jesus declared:

“I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you”

(Matt. 5:44).

He could say that because God showed His love for us when we were His enemies:

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Messiah died for us.”

(Rom. 5:8)

Therefore, we are obligated to pray for not just people we know and love, but also our enemies. So as intercessors for others, we should be praying for people of nations considered to be enemies. Thus as far as the Middle East is concerned, that means praying for both Jews and Arabs.

It means praying in love, not condemnation, and genuinely praying for them to come to peace not just with each other, but with the True and Living God. One of the strongest ways that we can pray for the peace of Jerusalem is to pray for the salvation of the enemies of Israel, and then to trust in God to act in both sovereignty and compassion.

So in spite of the turmoil and uncertainty taking place in our world, God has given us a practical calling for personal obedience centered around spiritual warfare through prayer.

We know that God is on the throne of the universe whether other people realize it or not. And the temptation is to think that it

doesn't matter what we say or do, God is just going to work His prophetic plan anyway.

But God has made it clear that our obedience is independent from His control of the circumstances of this world. We must be faithful in what He calls us to do. And then we must be faithful in trusting God to answer our prayers and to bring things to pass as He sees fit. Our calling is not very different from the way that Mordecai exhorted Esther when the Jewish people were slated for destruction in that day.

“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will come for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. For who knows if you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

It's all about accepting God's sovereignty, following through on His instructions, and then being blessed in turn for doing so. God will preserve Israel whether we pray or not. But we will either be blessed or will miss out on the blessing that He has in store for us. Each and every day we need to let God bless us like Esther by not remaining silent.

God has established Israel as a means of demonstrating His sovereignty over all humanity,

over every nation, and the very universe itself. It's up to us individually how we will respond.

Others may deny it as being true. But as for me, I accept what God has declared, exactly as it is written in His Holy Written Word. And I shall act upon it in faithfulness—praying, trusting, believing—and calling upon you to do the same.

In Loving Memory

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