

Israel: Spiritual Versus Physical

The past couple of weeks, we have been writing about the “two state solution” and the Biblical context that surrounds this highly controversial subject. In continuing this discussion, I will be attempting to give a Biblical basis for the interpretation of God’s promises over Israel as a physical reality rather than only spiritual. Though not overtly about “two state” or “one state” solutions, this gives a basis for how we interpret the events occurring in Israel.

In so doing, I will be the first to say that many times the prophecies, regarding not just Israel but many other historical events, are hard to interpret and it can be unclear whether the prophecy was already fulfilled or whether it was only speaking of a spiritual reality versus a physical reality. However, there are some prophecies that seem quite clear if we take God’s Word literally. Hence, I will look at the claim regarding Israel being only a “spiritual” concept and provide some answers to this.

First of all, many assert that because Gentile Believers were grafted into the covenant, then all prophecies regarding Israel include Gentiles who believe in the Messiah. This would imply that all prophecies about an inheritance are going to be fulfilled through the Body of Messiah worldwide. Many people point out that Paul says there is no longer a distinction between Jew and Gentile and we are all heirs now (Galatians 3:28-29) as an argument for this view. On the spiritual level, this is true and it will be true in God’s Kingdom.

However, on the physical there are still differences between men and women, as well as Jew and Gentile, differences that affect how they are to live their lives. A man cannot give birth due to physical constraints and so only women are able to experience the pain, responsibility, and the intimate joy and blessing of birthing and providing sustenance to a child.

In the same way, while Gentiles are no less valuable than Jews, there are still certain commands and promises that are specific to physical Israel, some painful and some beautiful, and are specific to the time period before the world’s restoration. Others are regarding all who have faith in Yeshua and will occur after the restoration. Even in Romans 11, Paul differentiates between Israel and Gentile Believers by saying that Gentiles are coming to faith in this time, but eventually God will turn His attention back to Israel and save her. Clearly, “Israel” here does not mean the entire Body of Messiah as He speaks of the Gentiles being grafted in due to Israel’s blindness.

Furthermore, those who are already in faith will not be in mourning because of the time wasted not believing in the true Messiah. There are prophecies that refer to an Israel that is already in the land but is still unjust and not living in faith and yet comes to knowledge of the Messiah at some further point. In fact, several of the prophecies about Israel’s return say explicitly that it will not be for their righteousness that they are returned to the land but, rather, they will be returned because, if they are not, it will be a bad testament to God’s faithfulness in standing by His promises (Ezekiel 36:20-23).

Since the Body of Messiah has not profaned God’s name among the nations (quite the opposite), this could only be interpreted as a prophecy about physical Jews being brought

back to a physical land, not because they earned it, but because of God's divine mercy over them. This fits into the concept of grace – God chooses us and is faithful even when we are faithless (2 Timothy 2:13)!

Additionally, AFTER Israel is brought back to the land, Ezekiel says “*Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices*” (Ezekiel 36:31). Similarly, the prophet Zechariah refers to a great physical battle victory for Israel and then, AFTER God drives away Israel's enemies, God says, “...*They will look on me, the One they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for Him, as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be as great as the weeping of Haddad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo...*” (Zechariah 12:10-14). So, despite a physical victory which they should be celebrating, the spiritual revelation of the Messiah will bring Israel into such repentance that they mourn all of the unjust acts that they committed in their time of faithlessness and they will realize all that they had missed. This cannot be speaking of the Body of Messiah in any way, as the Body of Messiah will already be living in faith. Furthermore, this cannot be speaking of a past event, as no such thing has occurred yet.

So, from these passages, it seems that Israel is brought back to a physical land and continues for a time in some form of ungodliness and is then restored. That restoration is not some easy event that suddenly makes Israel better than the Gentile Body but rather a heart wrenching realization of all that was lost and a regret over many unjust actions. However, it will be “life from the dead” for the world (Romans 11:15). So this ingathering is an event that can give us hope rather than dismay, though we must also realize that Israel is not acting righteously in this present time. Amos also talks of Israel returning and being planted in the land, “never to be uprooted again” (Amos 9:15). God did not just change His mind about this but rather will use it for His glory and will bless Gentiles, including Arab Palestinians, through it.

On that note, there is a Gentile Body of Believers within Israel that is no less important. There are many Arab Believers in the Messiah who truly embrace the God of Israel in their lives, but who are often forgotten by fervent supporters of Israel. God has a plan for these Gentile believers to partner with Him and they may also inherit in the physical along with Israel (Ezekiel 47:22-23) and be considered as native Israelis. Some are also descendants of Israel from many generations ago. It may, in fact, be a revival among the Arab people that causes Israel to experience restoration or that provokes Israel to jealousy. Obviously, God is not going to just forget the Arab people, and He is not going to require that they become Jewish to remain, but values them as they are. Those who follow the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be rewarded for all that they have suffered and those who have caused suffering, Jew or Gentile, will be held accountable.

In sum, there are both spiritual and physical realities, and prophecies many times speak to both. What is most important to remember, however, is that God does not abandon His promises and He can, and will, heal both physically and spiritually. The Body of Messiah worldwide will benefit when Israel is restored, though it will be painful for Israel. The gathering of physical Israel from the four corners of the world will be because of God's divine grace and

sovereignty, and not because of their actions or importance. This gives us hope of a greater restoration to come; one which will bring fresh life to both this region and the world!