

The Evangelical-Israeli Connection

It is a remarkable fact that, at the present time, one of the strongest concerns of U.S. Evangelicals—is for the success of the Israeli government. Although relatively few Adventists include the restoration of Israel as part of their creed, a remarkably large number of Evangelicals do.

How did this strange development occur? To find out, we must go back 150 years and work our way forward.

In the 1800s, few Protestants paid much attention to the theory that the Jews would ever return to Palestine. Instead, the popular idea was that God had rejected the Jews and had transferred His attention and favor to the Christian church. The church was spiritual Israel, and the recipient of all the promises made in the Bible to ancient Israel.

One of the few exceptions was the Dispensationalists. Although not large in number, they urged their ideas vigorously.

Dispensationalism is a type of premillennialism (Christ will return to earth before setting up His millennial kingdom), which teaches that the Bible and all human history can be split into several eras or dispensations. Primary among these was God's plan for an "earthly" people (Israel) and a later one for a "heavenly" people (the church).

In the mid-1800s, John Nelson Darby, an English theologian, became well-known as a leader in urging this teaching. His followers became known as "Darbyites."

In the 1870s, Darby traveled to America several times and his influence, along with that of most U.S. evangelists since D.L. Moody, gradually added to the strength of the movement.

The publication of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, from 1909 onward, greatly accelerated acceptance of Dispensationalism. Another important development at the beginning of the century was the rise of Pentecostalism—which also favored Dispensational themes.

By the mid-1920s, Dispensationalism had been accepted by many fundamentalists.

In view of the fact that it is now believed by a large number of conservative Protestants—especially the ones most likely to initially push for a National Sunday Law (the Evangelicals and Pentecostals)—

what does Dispensationalism teach?

Dispensationalism developed the concept that, based on strange interpretations of Daniel 7 through 9, Israel would fall under the control of four successive Gentile powers and then, when the "times of the Gentiles" were ended, the Jews would once again rebuild their fallen walls in Palestine. Then would come the 69th week, when Messiah would come to Jerusalem—and be rejected by His people. After this, in the 70th week, the Antichrist would arise and try to destroy the Jews. Immediately, Christ would come (at His second advent), defeat him, and ascend the throne of David in Jerusalem.

But the Dispensationalists had a problem: The events of the 70th week, as they interpreted them, had not occurred in the first century A.D.

So they decided that, at the last minute, God decided to postpone the last part of the prophecies—for 2,000 years or so.

Of course, to one conversant with the grand, overarching themes in the *Conflict Series*, especially *Great Controversy*, Dispensationalism seems like a hodgepodge of foolishness. And so it is. But this is the theory which has taken the Evangelical world captive.

Thus, according to the theory, no Bible prophecies applied to the centuries between Christ's death and final end-time events. (Obviously, Jesuit agents helped formulate the theory, since it combines preterist and futurist thinking in declaring that no Bible prophecies point to Rome as Babylon.)

In order to solve the problem of when prophetic time would begin ticking again in the last days, the Dispensationalists decided it would begin when the fabled "pretribulation rapture" occurred—and Christ suddenly took His people to heaven.

According to the theory, God could not focus on the Jews until He had taken the church to heaven. But, as soon as He has,—then the attention of Heaven would again be on the Jews, they would become His special end-time people. At that time, the 70th week of Daniel 9 would begin.

Looking at those last days more closely, through the eyes of Dispensational theories, after the "times of the Gentiles" would be finished and the Jews would all have been gathered into Palestine, wars and rumors of wars would occur. Apostasy would intensify in organized Christianity—and there would be a

strong need to return to Bible Christianity.

In the height of the crisis, Christ will rapture His people to heaven. Following this, a persuasive man will arise, promising peace and prosperity. He will be the Antichrist, and will take control of a ten-nation confederacy in western Europe.

This confederacy will sign a treaty with Israel, guaranteeing its security. Israel will then rebuild its Temple. Three and a half years later, the Antichrist will break the treaty, and declare himself to be god. He will persecute those who do not worship him and receive his mark in their foreheads. A religious leader (called the “False Prophet”) will help the Antichrist by working miracles. Persecution of those converted to Christianity after the rapture will continue for three and a half years. This will be the Great Tribulation.

At some point here, a vast Russian-led, 200-million man army from Eastern nations (the “Kings of the East”) will prepare an attack against Israel. The European confederacy under Antichrist will decide to become involved.

As armies from East and West converge on Israel, the western European armies under Antichrist will try to keep the Russian coalition from destroying Israel. God will step in and destroy the Russian segment of the armies. Then the armies of Antichrist will fight the rest of the “kings of the East” in the valley of Megiddo (“Armageddon”). [Obviously, this part of the interpretation is out of date. The Russians do not have the manpower to defeat a small province in southern Russia.]

In the midst of the battle, Christ will return with His raptured church, destroy the armies and overcome Antichrist, and set up a millennial kingdom here on earth.

During this thousand years, Jesus will rule the world from Jerusalem, where the Jews will once again offer sacrifices in the restored Temple. For they will continue on as His special people.

—*What utter confusion!* It is nothing more than a great network of international politics and warfare without a shred of solid, Biblical principles. Yet this is what you are confronted with, when you try to teach Daniel and Revelation to most well-read or seminary-trained Evangelicals today.

Thus you can see why Dispensational theories would lead Evangelicals to give special attention to the nation of Israel.

What we are discussing here, quite obviously, is a gigantic, decades-long attempt to interpret Bible prophecy to fit current events; *i.e.*, the newspapers.

Back in the 19th century, most British and American Protestants gave no attention to Palestine or the Jews, and laughed at the idea of the Jews returning to Jerusalem.

The Zionist movement was organized in the 1890s, based on the concept that a Jewish state should once again be established in Palestine. But few Jews were interested in the idea.

William Blackstone, a Chicago-area businessman, published a book on Dispensational theory in 1878, entitled *Jesus is Coming*, which was widely sold and translated into over three dozen overseas languages.

After visiting Palestine, he organized the first Christian-Jewish conference in Chicago. Although he urged the establishment of a new Jewish nation in Palestine, most of those who attended considered the idea an impossibility.

Because their Dispensational theories required that it occur, Blackstone and other Dispensationalists continued urging the establishment of a Jewish state.

Time passed, and then World War I began. The Ottoman Empire (in what is now Turkey) controlled Palestine. During the war, British forces entered Palestine from the south. A growing number were wondering whether, when the war ended, the Jews might go back to that land.

In the fall of 1917, Arthur Balfour, the British foreign secretary, wrote a letter to James Rothschild, a leader in international Zionism. This quasi-private letter came to be known as the *Balfour Declaration*. Although without any solid governmental backing, it was trumpeted by the Zionists and Dispensationists as granting British permission for the Jews to return to Jerusalem.

Five weeks after that letter was penned, the Turks surrendered Jerusalem to the British. Now the Dispensationists were sure the “times of the Gentiles” were about to end—even though all that had happened was that Gentile Turks had handed the territory over to Gentile British.

In 1918, the Dispensationists organized two sizeable prophetic conferences in New York and Philadelphia. Then time passed, and most of the excitement subsided.

In the 1930s, several anti-semitic groups were teaching that the Jews were the cause of World War I, the Great Depression, the rise of Nazism, and most of the other ills of mankind. In reaction, the Dispensationists defended the Jews, declaring that it was sinful to speak badly of them.

Oddly enough, by the 1940s, a number of Dispensationists were preaching that the death of Jews in Nazi-controlled Europe was ordained of God—to help drive the remaining Jews to settle in Palestine.

As for the Balfour Declaration, by the 1930s and 1940s, the British government was afraid of it. The Palestinians, angry as hornets that it existed, were striking, rioting, and committing occasional acts of terrorism against the British and Jews in Palestine.

So, in 1939, the British government issued a

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white paper, essentially repudiating the Balfour Declaration. In addition, it tried to restrict Jewish immigration. But when the British government suggested that perhaps Palestine could be “partitioned” between Jews and Palestinians,—the Palestinians were infuriated.

By the time World War II had ended, the situation had changed: The Jews in Palestine were well-armed (via donations from Jewry worldwide), and it was obvious a terrible war was approaching.

Frightened, the British pled with the newly organized United Nations to solve the problem. So a committee (the *UN Special Committee on Palestine*) was organized to study the matter. In August 1947, it issued a recommendation that Palestine be partitioned, thus creating an Arab and a Jewish state. At this, the Arabs declared they would not give one inch of land to the hated Jews. So the UN quickly retreated, and washed its hands of the matter.

All through 1947, there was sporadic sniping and fighting near Jerusalem. By the spring of 1948, it was clear that the best solution was for the British to just leave entirely—and let the feuding peoples settle it in warfare.

The date set for this was May 14, 1948. (Only a short time before, the first of the Dead Sea Scrolls had been discovered. See *The Story of the Dead Sea Scrolls [WM-753]* and *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fifty Years Later [WM-820-821]* for the history of that momentous discovery.) When May 14 arrived, the Jewish National Council declared that a Jewish nation now existed in Palestine!

Immediately, full-scale war began. The U.S. Government quickly recognized the new Jewish state, and the fighting continued for months. But by November 1948, it was clear that the Israelis were the winners; so a cease-fire was agreed upon. The next May, Israel was admitted to the United Nations.

Since modern Evangelical Protestantism had no particular message for the world, other than salvation-in-sin and theology-by-newspaper, they were electrified by the news. The Dispensationalists rapidly spread their message everywhere, and it became the dominant teaching of most Evangelicals.

However, Israel only possessed a small portion of Palestine in 1948. In 1956, Israel attacked Egypt. It wanted the Sinai; and France and Britain, which supported Israel, wanted the Suez Canal. When the U.S. government opposed this invasion, most Dispensationalists were upset. They considered it the will of God that the nation of Israel expand its territory. This attitude has strengthened in the decades since then. The general Evangelical view today is, “Whatever is good for the Israeli government is the will of God.”

Then came the Six-day War in 1967. Knowing

that Soviet-supplied Egyptian and Syrian forces were about to attack, Israel struck first. In less than a week, the Israelis defeated the Arab coalition.

In a few short days, they had gained control of the West Bank (the territory west of the Jordan River), the Gaza Strip (an area southwest of Jerusalem), the Sinai peninsula, and the Golan Heights (an area overlooking the northeastern corner of Israeli-held territory).

Evangelicals were overjoyed. Israel had not only acquired most of its ancient territory, but it now had all of Jerusalem.

Surely, said the Dispensationalist Evangelicals, the prophecy of Luke 21:24 has been fulfilled!

“Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”—*Luke 21:24*.

—But the passage had not been fulfilled, and for three reasons:

1 - The prophecy of Ezekiel 21:26-27 predicted that Israel would be overthrown, and never again come to power—until “He come, whose right it is.” (For more on this, see *Luke 21:24 and Other Matters [WM 411-412]*).

2 - The Jews cannot be said to have “returned to Jerusalem” until they have full control over it, with full authority to rebuild the Temple on the Temple Mount and reinstitute the sacrifices. Please understand that, at various periods down through the centuries since Christ’s time, Jews have lived in Jerusalem. “Returning to Jerusalem” means more than merely living there. It means having *full authority and control* over the city. This the Jews will never have. Because of the Islamic legend that Mohammed flew to heaven on a winged horse from the top of the Temple Mount, it is considered the second most sacred place in the Islamic world (after Mecca).

Instead of controlling Jerusalem and rebuilding the Temple, the Jews are forced to stay down below and worship at the Wailing Wall (now called the Western Wall)—while the Arabs worship on top.

3 - The Gentiles have trodden down Jerusalem for thousands of years, and they are still doing it. Go to Jerusalem and see for yourself how many foreigners, tourists, and Arabs are everywhere—including all over the Temple Mount and on the site of Solomon’s Temple—still treading it down.

In the 1970s, the Israelis began to see the value of the Evangelicals in helping to rally the government to the Israeli cause. Evangelicals were gradually becoming the most important political bloc in America.

As for the Evangelicals, they wanted to take a more active roll in supporting the Israeli government. One needs to keep in mind that the entire Dispensational theory hinges on the success of modern Is-

rael.

In 1971, Carl Henry convened a prophecy conference in Jerusalem. About 1,500 delegates from 32 nations arrived, and Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion greeted the delegates. The meeting hall was provided free by the government.

It was not long that Evangelical tour groups were arriving in increasingly large numbers. When such men as Jerry Falwell, Oral Roberts, Hal Lindsey, and other Evangelical/Pentecostal leaders arrived at the Tel Aviv Airport, they were given special briefings by Defense Minister Moshe Arens or Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

The Israeli Ministry of Tourism flew in Evangelical leaders at little or no expense, so they could return afterward with tour groups. Televangelists everywhere began scheduling tours to the Holy Land, so their followers could see for themselves how Bible prophecy was being fulfilled. (Privately, the Jews scorned Evangelical predictions as foolishness.)

Hal Lindsey's 1970 best-selling book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, proclaimed Dispensational theory to the widest audience ever while adding the latest newspaper touches to it: The European Common Market, the Soviet Union, the Eastern Bloc of nations, and an Arab-African coalition—all were said to be fulfillments of Bible prophecy. The Kings of the East were the Chinese Communists!

In his 1980 book, *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*, Lindsey added the Council on Foreign Relations, the Trilateral Commission, and other political liberals. He also urged the election of a conservative president who would help make Israel stronger.

At about the same time, Evangelicals went into politics in earnest with the Moral Majority and the Religious Roundtable, to help elect Reagan in 1980.

More pro-Israeli organizations were started by Evangelicals; and it was not long before no Israeli prime minister, from Menachem Begin onward, would dare step foot on America soil—without arranging, in advance, a meeting with Evangelical and

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Christian Right leaders.

Interestingly enough, the focus of modern Evangelicals is on Israel, not on the enactment of Sunday laws. That focus is soon to change.

Over the years, there have been those among Seventh-day Adventists who have mirrored portions of the Dispensationalist message. Whether they got it from the *Scofield Bible*, John Darby, Jerry Falwell, or Pat Robertson is anybody's guess. But there are Adventists who have preached a similar theme;—which is, in the last days, God is going to bring the Jews back to Jerusalem—and it must happen before Christ can return.

One of the best known of these is William Grotheer, who teaches that the Six-day War in 1967 fulfilled Luke 21:24.

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On the preceding page we cited reasons why Luke 21:24 has not been fulfilled.

In addition, Grotheer goes beyond the Dispensationalists—and teaches that, from 1967 down to the beginning of the loud cry, there is little need for evangelism to non-Adventists.

In 1992, the present writer prepared two studies on the entire subject.

The first, entitled *Jerusalem and the Mount—Part 1-3 [WM-393-395]*, provides a history of the city, from before the time of King David on down to 1967 and beyond. Luke 21:24 is also discussed.

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Keep in mind that there is not one Jew in the world who does not want his countrymen to return to Jerusalem! And they all know they will not really have done so—until they can rebuild the Temple on the Temple Mount site, where Solomon's Temple once stood. But, at the present time, a heathen (Islamic) temple stands there—and the Jews dare not touch it. Just south of it, on the Mount, stands a second temple, sacred to Islam. No Jew climbs the stairs to the Temple Mount to offer prayers. He would not dare to do such a thing! Although tourists, Israeli police, and others can go there,—all sides acknowledge that the Temple Mount is a holy place of Mohammedanism.

In this world, the literal Jews will never return to ownership of Jerusalem. They are no longer God's special people, regardless of what others may say.