



Is God finished with Israel?

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This article was written by Fr. Eusebius Stephanou in 1980. An anxious world is watching very closely the developments in the Middle East.

World leaders talk seriously about a Russian – American confrontation as a real possibility, leading up to a nuclear confrontation.

There is no doubt that Russia is covetous of an access to the Persian Gulf and to the oil fields in that entire region. But the Soviet Union has wanted a settlement of the Palestinian problem for a long time. If that issue is not resolved, it will settle it forcibly by its own military force.

It is therefore, commonly believed that the real cause of the crisis in the Middle East is the birth of Israel in 1948, as a sovereign nation, and its displacement of the Palestinian Arabs. National leaders agree today that the key to world peace is the settlement of the Palestinian question. The failure to find that solution could trigger an Arab-Israeli war that would surpass the previous ones of 1948 and 1967 in the gravity of its consequences. It could entice Russia to intervene in support of her Arab allies.

For the first time since World War 2 political and military leaders are talking seriously about the likelihood of another world war if the Soviet Armies were to penetrate the Middle East. World War 3 would engulf planet earth in a nuclear conflagration. It would bring an end to this world as we know it.

But we know that God is in control of the destiny of the world. We believe that God has a plan conceived

from the foundation of the world for man whom He created in His image and for whom He sent His Son to die as an atoning sacrifice.

Does the Bible have anything to say about the regeneration of the Jewish nation in connection with World War 3 and the end of this age? Yes. Definitely. God’s will has been revealed to us in His word about the restoration of Israel as related to the return of Jesus in glory and in power. Both are part of the picture of the close of this age. Bible prophecy does speak about the regeneration of the Jews to their homeland, as one of the “signs of the times”.

It is surprising to see the lack of any significant response on the part of the Orthodox Church (the Roman Catholic Church, also) to the miracle of the birth of the state of Israel in 1948. It is with unbelief that we observe that our theologians, theology professors and church leaders have let this extraordinary apocalyptic event go by virtually unnoticed. The emergence of an independent Jewish nation after some 3000 years has been flippantly dismissed as part of the grand conspiracy of world Zionism.

This is surprising in view of the protection that the Greek-Jews received secretly from the Greeks when Greece came under German occupation during World War 2. It should be mentioned that our Arab Orthodox brethren are obviously

averse to the emergence of an independent Jewish nation in Palestine.

There may be books written by Orthodox on the rise of the nation of Israel of which I am unaware. But the one book I know of in which this eschatological event is included in the prophetic program is *The Coming Double-Edged Sword* (Athens, 1966, P.85) by Fr. Neilos Soteropoulos, a Hiermonk of Mount Athos. It is interesting to see that the monks in the Orthodox Church are more concerned about apocalyptic things than the professional theologians.

Is it the will of God for the Jews to return to their homeland, or is it simply the arbitrary will of man? Is this God’s program for the preparation for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, or is it merely the decision of the United Nations?

Is God finished with the Jewish people?

Many churches profess that God is through with the Jews. They hold that they have been cursed by God since their rejection of His Son, their true Messiah. They believe there is no place in His end-time plan for the Jews. They were rejected by God and condemned to be scattered among the nations, never again to regain their homeland. God has no further plan for the Jews. They have lost their ancient rights and covenant promises because of their disobedience and rebellion against God.

Can we really say God is finished with the Jews? Those who believe that God is finished with the Jews usually hold that the church is the New Israel and the church has continued where the Jews left off. The church enjoys all the glorious promises of natural Israel in Jesus Christ. According to this position the church is “spiritual Israel.” The Jews have

been set aside forever. But is there any real basis for this view in divine revelation?

Those that advance this position claim as evidence the statement of Christ: *“The kingdom of God is taken from you and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof”* (Matt. 21:43). They also quote the curse stated by Moses in Deuteronomy 28:64-65.

“And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people from the one end of the earth even unto the other... And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest, but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind.”

Scripture in its entirety, however, compels us to say that God set aside the nation of Israel temporarily when they rejected Christ. There is overwhelming evidence in the Bible that clearly demonstrates a future fulfillment in the establishment of the state of Israel. No. God is not finished with the Jews!

When the Lord spoke of taking the kingdom from them and giving to the *“nation bringing forth the fruits of thereof”*, He was not referring to the Gentiles. Usually, Christ uses the word “nations” in the plural when He is alluding to the Gentile world. But here “nation” refers to the Jewish remnant that eventually will be saved, that is, to regenerated Israel that is coming just prior to the return of Jesus.

Paul explicitly tells us in Romans 11 about the remnant of grace that will be saved when *“the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.”* Despite the disobedience of Israel, “God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew” (11:2). After reminding us of the remnant during Elijah’s day, Paul states: *“Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant*

according to the election of grace” (11:5).

“Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (11:5). If God has not cast away His people which He foreknew, then what right do you and I, as Gentiles, have to cast them away?

What did you say, Paul? *“For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.” “Be not high-minded, but fear”* (11:20, 21). God has not transferred the kingdom to the Gentile world, though Gentile believers will be part of that kingdom. God has not changed His plans. His voice can still be heard: *“He that sits in the heavens shall laugh: The Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion”* (Ps. 2:4-6).

The heavenly Jerusalem (*ano Sion*) is the sequel and not a substitute for the earthly Zion. The Spiritual and eternal fulfillment of God’s promises is an extension of their earthly fulfillment. **We must be cautious against prematurely spiritualizing and allegorizing what God meant to be taken as literal.**

H. A. Ironside states in his book *Lamp of Prophecy*: *“Mount Zion means Mount Zion. All of the Old Testament prophets declared that the king’s throne should be established there.”*

Scripture provides convincing evidence that the principle that God is through with Israel as a nation cannot be justified. The Divine word clearly reveals to us that the regathering of the Diaspora is part of God’s end-time plan. It is only now, however, that the Holy Spirit is opening the eyes of Gentile believers to a clear understanding of this truth. In

the timing of the Lord it was permitted to the United Nations to provide the Jews a homeland in Palestine. The time-table of God would not have allowed it to happen a day earlier. The regathering of the Jews was just as much in God’s plan as it was their scattering.

The Regathering of the Jewish People to Palestine

We need to recognize that the growing acceptance among Gentile Christians that God is bringing the Jews back to Palestine is end-time work of the Holy Spirit. The growing love among them for the Jews is also of the Spirit of the Lord. The expanding evangelical outreach to bring the Jews to Jesus is truly an amazing phenomenon in the Christian world today. It is not the result of a committee meeting of church leaders of theologians. It is one of the results of the current apocalyptic outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh, as foretold by the prophet Joel (2:28). Jesus said that the Holy Spirit *“will show you things to come”* (Jn. 16:13). The unfolding of God’s plan for the end of the age is made known to believers according to His timing. God will not reveal anything to us prematurely. His infinite wisdom decides when it is time for everything.

The birth of the state of Israel is the fulfillment of prophecy. We read: *“Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth”* (Jer. 31:8f). The national regathering of the Jews is also prophesied by Isaiah 11:12: *“He shall... assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth”*.

In Ezekiel 20:34 we find: *“And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein you are scattered, with*

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a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out". "And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God" (Ezek. 20:41).

Some would like to apply this prophetic utterance to the return of the Jews to Jerusalem out from their Babylonian captivity, believing that it already had been fulfilled. They would have a difficult time, however, trying to explain God's explicit promise: "*They shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them*". We know that the Jews were pulled up and scattered after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by the Romans.

No. This divine promise is beginning to be completely fulfilled only in our own days. This time Israel will never be pulled up out of their land. The Lord is working out His final purposes in ways that appear to the human mind impossible.

The Restoration of Israel: A Prophetic Sign

The final and permanent restoration of the state of Israel is perhaps the most prominent "signs of the times". "*Now learn a parable of the fig tree: When his branch is yet tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So likewise, when you shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors*" (Matt. 24:32).

The fig tree in the Old Testament is a symbol of the Jewish nation. The restoration of Israel in our own day and the continuous regathering of the Jews to their new homeland is an unmistakable sign of the nearness of Christ's second coming. "You know that summer is near".

The rebirth of Israel is an apocalyptic phenomenon. It plainly points to the close of the Christian Dispensation. God is setting the stage for the return of His Son in glory. The ingathering of the Diaspora is no incidental event. There is no human explanation that can account for it. It has to be a miraculous happening. It is un-

doubtedly the work of God's direct intervention. Nothing and nobody could have prevented it from occurring. It was the moment appointed by God in His time-table from the foundation of the world.

To refuse to accept it as part of the prophetic program is to be blind to what Scripture clearly tells us. For an Orthodox Christian to deny that God is fulfilling His covenant promise in today's regeneration of the Jewish state is an act of willful disobedience and rebellion against the divine will. God promised Abraham that He would bestow His divine blessings upon all Gentile nations in and through him and through His seed. That includes the Messiah and the remnant of His people who would be saved in His blood. "*I will bless those that bless thee*" (Gen. 12:31).



Jewish disobedience even of the most heinous kind was never capable of causing God to reject His chosen people. To begin with there was nothing inherently righteous about the Jews. Until the call of Abraham, God treated all nations equally. The Jews were called by divine election to enter into a special covenant relationship with God. The election of Israel was the work of sovereign grace and not the result of the fact that they merited God's favor by their righteousness. As a matter of fact, they were called by God a "stiff necked people".

God's covenant with Israel is unalterable and unchangeable because it was confirmed by oath. God cannot break His oath (Rom. 11:29). God's covenant is confirmed to David: "*my covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David*" (Ps. 11:29).

At the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary the Archangel Gabriel confirmed the Davidic covenant: "*Behold, thou shall conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call His name Jesus. He shall be called great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end*" (Luke 1:31f).

We need to remember that Abraham's seed and the promised land are necessarily associated with one another. It was God's sovereign decision. We must be cautious against giving the "land of promise" a purely spiritual meaning. In the eternal sense it refers to Heaven, but the heavenly state will be preceded by God's fulfilling of His promise for the earthly land of Canaan. "*Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates*" (Gen. 15:18f).

Consequently, the call of Abraham and the land cannot be disassociated. The gathering of the Jews to the promised land that is already coming to pass is a stirring confirmation of the perpetuation of national Israel. The Abrahamic covenant includes the natural seed and subsequently in Jesus Christ the spiritual seed (Gentile believers), also. "*Unto thy seed will I give this land*" (Gen. 12:7). Paul explains: "*Now unto Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seed, as of many, but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ*" (Gal. 3:16).

The Baffling Fact of Jewish Survival

Doesn't it stagger the human mind when you consider the preservation of the Jews? This fact alone indicates that God is not through with Israel as a nation. The Jews, though scattered throughout the world, kept their ethnic and religious identity. They have defied the law of assimilation for at least 3000 years. As a people, they are indestructible. They have passed through massacre after massacre. Yet they have survived. Not even the unparalleled holocaust

of 6 million Jews under Hitler could annihilate their ethnic identity.

There is only one explanation: God's will. His plan for the Jewish people is just beginning to enter into a truly dramatic and final stage. The divine promises must be fulfilled. God cannot go back on His word (Num. 23:19).

The Jewish people will be back home in Israel in preparation to behold the second coming of Jesus in glory – without their even being conscious of it. What is startling is that they are wholly unaware. They do not even realize that God Himself is drawing them back home because He desires that Jesus make His first appearance before them. *“They shall look upon me whom they have pierced” (Zac. 12:10).*

God's Forgiveness at the Cross

During His dying moments on the Cross Jesus asked nothing from the Father for Himself. Jesus asked one favor: *“Forgive them for they know not what they do”*. His love for the house of Israel was not any less as he hung nailed to the Cross than what it was when He healed the sick and raised the dead. The love of Jesus was unconditional. It actually peaked on the Cross of Calvary.

Christ prayed at one time to His Father: *“I thank thee that you have heard me and I know that you hear me always”*. It is unthinkable to believe God would not answer His Son's final request in His dying hour.

How can you and I love the Jew any less than Jesus does? Those who know Jesus in faith and obedience know His heart and have His mind. As the Father is pouring out His Holy Spirit upon the whole world in these last days, He is raising up a banner against the enemy that is coming in like a flood. The Holy Spirit in the hearts of a growing number of believers is glorifying Jesus as never before and is giving Him the preeminence in all things. It is the same Holy Spirit that is instilling a new love in them for the Jew. It is a supernatu-

ral work of Heaven.

Pilate unwittingly was declaring an eternal truth when he placed over the Cross the superscription *“This is Jesus the King of the Jews”*. God was behind this act. The Lord's will was being affirmed when Pilate refused the request of the objecting Jews who wanted it changed: *“What I have written I have written”*. The Jews refused to have Jesus rule over them as King. Remember when they shouted to Pilate: *“We have no king but Caesar!”* The nations will not have Jesus reign over them. **But the Father said to the Son: “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion”. Jesus shall come the second time as King.**



You need not wonder why the Church Fathers and the earlier generation of Christian believers did not exemplify this warmth and love that an increasing number of believers express today for the Jew and for the restoration of Israel in Palestine. They could not be expected to show all the sympathy that we show the Jew today. They had to contend with outright hostility on the part of the Jews. Back then the only calling they knew of was the evangelization and conversion of the Gentile nations to the Gospel. The Gentile challenge was all-absorbing to the early Church. It was an age of persecution. Later, the Islamic threat consumed the attention of the Church. The “Times of the Gentiles” were not yet fulfilled. It was God's will for the Jews to be scattered among the Gentile nations.

Approaching the Final Hour

The Holy Spirit has shed more light in the Church in this last hour as we stand at the Parousia. Part of the apocalyptic falling away (apostasia) in the historic churches today is the failure to respond to the new move of God, not only for the renewal and restoration of the church, but also of Israel. It is impressive to attest the love for Israel that the Lord inspires into the hearts of those who are baptized in the Holy Spirit. It has to be of God. There is no other explanation.

To think that it was only because of a Jew, Saul of Tarsus, that the Greeks today are not praying to stones. If any people had a moral obligation to show gratitude for Israel it was the nation of Greece. The Orthodox Greeks should have been the example to the rest of the Christian world of love for the Jews in a day when God is leading them back to their home land. They should have been the first to recognize the finger of God at work in this remarkable event. They should have led the Christian nations, in proclaiming to the world: *“Jesus is coming soon, because He is regathering His people and setting the stage for that second appearance!”*

We are living in the last days. It is time for all Orthodox people to stop playing church. When will the business-as-usual attitude of our church stop. It is time to warn our people of the impending judgement! Let the message of the Gospel get out to the people in every possible way and at all costs! It is getting people saved that matters and not who does it and how it is done. Come to Jesus today on your knees. He loves you. He desires to fill you with His Holy Spirit and prepare you for His second coming. The day of the Lord is at hand! *“He which testifies these things says, Surely I come quickly” (Rev. 22:20).*

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