

THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

The doctrine of the restoration of Israel has a long and revered place in this history of Protestant theology. Its roots go back to the Puritans, and then to the Lutheran Pietists in Germany and Scandinavia, and then to the British and American Christianity. By the mid 19th Century it was the consensus doctrine of British and American Christianity. I summarize this history in my book **Passion for Israel**.

The basic doctrine of the restoration of Israel teaches the following points: first that the Jewish people are still God's elect people and will be preserved as a distinct people forever; second that they will be returned to their historic homeland in the Middle East; third that they, as a nation will finally accept Yeshua, Jesus, and be submitted to his Kingship over Israel. Some taught that the return to the Land would take place after the embrace of Yeshua. But by the mid 19th century, the return to the Land, at least in part was seen as preceding that restoration. In addition, many, but not all believed that Israel's salvation would lead to the Millennial Age where Israel would be the chief of the nations and would rule with the resurrected or translated Body of the Messiah.

So convinced that where the British Anglicans and German Lutheran Church leaders that they agreed to cooperate on establishing an Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem to receive the returning Jewish people that they might accept Yeshua. Anglican Christ Church still stands in the same location as a testimony to the planting of the Church by Jewish Bishop Solomon Alexander. The project of Christ Church was endorsed by Queen Victoria and the British Parliament. At this point, it looked like replacement theology was waning and being.

In the mid 20th century this doctrine was used as part of effective evangelism in the Jesus movement. One of the most important books was the popularization by Hal Lindsay, the Late Great Planet Earth. Though I disagree with some of his dispensational scheme, his presentation of the return to the Jewish people to the Land is solid enough. A copy of his book can be found on the desk of Prime Minister David Ben Gurion in the Kibbutz Sde Boker residence of his last years. The doctrine was also used effectively in launching the modern Messianic Jewish Movement. The greatest example of this was in the evangelistic pioneering work of Manny Brotman in his **Jewish Bible Approach** and in the presentation of John Fischer in his book, **His Ambassadors to God's People**.

The average person reading Scripture will quite easily see what the text says, and can conclude that the Bible is a supernatural book. So the anti-restoration people give up a most powerful evidence for believing in the Bible as God's word.

I argue that our doctrine of restoration is solidly based on a natural reading of the Bible in its original context and the meaning of a text is first of all its original context. We quote only a few of these important texts.

Amos 1:15

I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them., says the LORD your God.

Does this verse speak to the ethnic-national people or a metaphorical future people from all nations who will inherit the eternal Kingdom which is metaphorically the Land? Would this interpretation be a comfort to faithful ancient Israelites?

Joel 3:20

Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem through all generations. Their bloodguilt, which I have not pardoned, I will pardon. The LORD dwells in Zion.

This passage comes after the description of a severe world judgment of the nations which are described as invading Israel. It is hard to see how this is the Church. This has not yet happened.

Isaiah 49:6

Is it too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.

There is no legitimate way to confuse the meaning here. The promise is to Israel and includes the salvation of the nations. A new Israel of Jew and Gentile replacing Israel cannot be the interpretation.

Isaiah 49:15-23

Can a mother forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the child she has borne. Though she may forget, I will not forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me. Your sons hasten back and those who laid you waste depart from you. Lift up your eyes and look around; all your sons gather and come to you. . . Though you were ruined and laid waste, now you will be too small for your people, and those who devoured you will be far away. The children born during your bereavement will yet say in your hearing, This place is too small for us; give us more space to live in. . .

Can this be the situation after the first return after Babylonian captivity? No, for this glorious turning of the nations to favor Israel to this extent has not yet happened. Indeed, first return was a small minority. The Jews of the first century were a minority, less than 1/3 of Jewry. Israel remained under foreign domination except for one brief and corrupt period.

Isaiah 60 selections

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; . . . Foreigners will rebuild your walls and kings will serve you. Though in anger I struck you, in favor I will show you compassion. Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night, so that men may bring you the wealth of the nations, their kings led in triumphal procession. For the nation that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined. . . No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise. . . the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end. Then will all your people be righteous, and they will possess the land forever. They are the shoot I have planted, the work of my hands, the for the display of my splendor.

It is a comfort to know the future glory of Jerusalem that has been destroyed. The glory predicted here has never been fulfilled.

Jeremiah 23:7,8

So then, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when people will no longer say, As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt, but they will say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the descendants of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them. Then they will live in their own land.

Can this be the Church? No, the Church was not banished. Can this be the return from Babylon? No, this was a small remnant that return and 500 years later was still a minority of the Jewish people, perhaps less than a third. There was never such a mighty and great return such that this language was used, that is until today. There is still more to come from this verse. This return is to yet make the Exodus pale by comparison. This has to be a prophetic word about the literal national ethnic people.

Ezekiel 36: 24-29

For I will take you out of the nations, I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my

Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees, and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I give your forefathers, and you will be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness."

In this passage on the New Covenant, parallel to Jeremiah 31, we have an amazing promise to the ethnic/national people that has not yet been fulfilled. The meaning is plain. The promise of being born again is connected to the return to the Land, and there is a national conversion. Certainly Paul had many passages in mind when he wrote looking forward to this national conversion in Romans 11. Note this and the wars that are described at the end, including in Joel 3, Zechariah 12, 14, and Ezekiel 38, 39 would not fit if the return to the Land was only after the Jewish people embrace Yeshua.

So in all these ways, the doctrine of the Restoration of Israel has the most firm foundation and is solid indeed. When Romans 11:28 and 29 tell us that the gifts and call of God to Israel is irrevocable, we clearly are to understand the fulfillment of all God's promises to Israel in their Land!!