

A TRIUNE TRIFECTA

(It's about 'the Land and the Nation'. Ed)

Recent AP photos depict Presbyterians with what can only be called rapture on their faces. Not because of The Rapture, but because their church voted to divest from Israel (in their view, moral high ground). They're a little confused, but nothing that an actual acquaintance with Scripture couldn't fix. Really, just the Old Testament.

No surprise, the Presbyterian panties were in a wad because of the West Bank, specifically the supposed 'apartheid' that it represents and the oppression of the Palestinian people that, in their view, is an ongoing policy by the Israeli nation.

We'll just ignore (like 99% of the world's media) the oppression and human rights violations that all of Israel's neighbours are guilty of, an ongoing basis. Because ultimately, who's worse than who is not really the point. The point is who the land really belongs to. And who He gave it to who and for how long. Which is pretty much what the Old Testament deals with.

Here's the back story: God gave the land to Israel as part of the covenant He made with Abraham, recorded in Genesis 15:

"the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates- (the land of) the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites." (Genesis 15:18-21 NKJV)

Notice that God was not apologetic about giving Israel the land that had formerly been possessed by other peoples. (I'm just sayin'.) God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways not our ways. He has a plan to redeem all mankind (those

who are willing to trust Him), and He made the land. I guess He can give

it to whoever He wants. In fact, He gave Abraham much more land than Israel currently possesses now. The land promised in the covenant ran all the way from the Nile to the Euphrates.

Funny. If you read through the historical books in the Old Testament, you'll find that the areas that are a major thorn in the side to Israel now (Gaza, Jebron, the Golan Heights, etc) are the very areas that Joshua left unconquered.

But I digress. God gave Israel the land in His covenant with Abraham, and Abraham and his sons moved to Canaan. But we all know they didn't really own it right away. They all ended up in Egypt, and it was centuries before they were finally delivered by the power of God through the hand of Moses. They wandered through the desert for forty years. Finally, however, God entered into another covenant with the descendants of Abraham. One that they had to personally participate in, at Mt. Sinai, when God gave them the Torah:

And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. 8 Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." (Exodus 19: 3-8)

The people, as one, promised to serve and obey God.

But I think we all know that didn't last long. Israel

worshiped the gods that their neighbours worshipped, and generally

ignored God's repeated pleas with His chosen people to return to fellowship with Him.

One passage that always struck me as especially poignant:

"Yet hear now, O Jacob My servant, and Israel whom I have chosen. Thus says the Lord who made you and formed you from the womb... 'Fear not, O Jacob My servant; and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring; (Isaiah 44:1-3)

Remember these, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are My servant; I have formed you, you are My servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me! I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins. (Isaiah 44:21-22)

God pleaded with Abraham's descendants to; "return to Me, for I have redeemed you."

But they didn't. So God removed His protection. First, Israel was conquered by Assyria, then Judah by Babylon.

No response.

Then Persia, then Greece. No response.

Then Rome, and God sent the promised Redeemer. His Son. But Israel didn't even recognize their Messiah, even though He rode into Jerusalem (on that first Palm Sunday) on the very date prophesied by Daniel and exactly as they had been promised (lowly, riding on a donkey). Jesus makes sure we don't miss this because He looks out at Jerusalem and promises that the city will be destroyed after His death because they "did not know the time of their visitation" (Luke 19:44).

In fact, the city was destroyed about forty years later,

driving the Jews that God had begged to return to Him into every corner of the world. Daniel records that sequence of events in Daniel 9, saying that when Messiah comes he shall then be, "cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary." (Daniel 9:26)

That's exactly what happened in 70 AD. And the verse goes on to say that "desolations are determined' until the end. The word desolations in that verse is actually a word that means to be stunned, appalled, stupefied, deserted. Daniel is attempting to describe events horrible beyond human ability to predict or understand.

A prophecy which was fulfilled in astonishing detail in Israel's exile from the land, in Spanish plazas where God's chosen people were burned at the stake, in the Pogroms of Eastern Europe, and in the concentration camps and crematoriums of the Third Reich. Wiped off the map for nearly 2000 years and its people nearly obliterated from the face of the earth, Israel, the nation God chose for His own possession was seemingly down for the count. But here's the thing. God allowed Israel to be conquered and the book of Hosea tells us that God removed his protection for a reason. Jesus, after his rejection by Israel (prophetically recorded) says:

"I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me." (Hosea 5:15)

And though He allowed His wayward people to be conquered, He did not allow them to be destroyed:

"If his sons forsake My law And do not walk in My judgments, If they break My statutes And do not keep My commandments, Then I will punish their transgression with the rod, And their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, Nor allow My faithfulness to fail.

My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: His seed shall endure forever, And his throne as the sun before Me; It shall be established forever like the moon, Even like the faithful witness in the sky." (Psalm 89:30-37)

Forever. That's how long God promised to be on Israel's side. And when you call to mind all those empires that God allowed Israel to be ruled or persecuted by? (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persian, Greece, Rome, Byzantium, the Crusader's Kingdom, the Spanish Empire, and the Third Reich?). They're all gone.

But Israel? A nation who enjoyed dominion over their small strip of land for only the blink of an eye? A nation exiled for nearly two thousand years, driven from place to place, unwelcome intruders in every corner of the world? Against all odds, in 1948 reviled Israel again possessed to nation they thought lost. Hebrew is again the native tongue of millions. (The only ancient language in history to revived as a common language) In fulfilment of ancient prophecies, the towns have been rebuilt, the barren fields again bear fruit, and the people prosper.

What could explain the anomaly of Israel, a country just sixty years old, in the thick of global headlines? What made this country, barely fifty miles wide and a hundred and fifty miles long, the focus of world events today?

Mark Twain once pondered, "The Greeks and Romans ...are gone; other people have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out... the Jews saw them all, survived them all...all other forces passed, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?"

What could explain the fact that Israel alone has regained its ancestral land after 2000 years of displacement, that its people, despite being scattered throughout the world and a

target of ethnic cleansing in almost every place they lived, can still be demonstrated (in stark contrast to other conquered peoples) to be genetically identifiable as a people group?

Fortunately, the Bible tells us, "Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you..." (Deut 14:2)

And as we have seen, He chose them forever. Only one thing explains the singularity that is Israel: A God who keeps His promises. And He has promised this:

"For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, And for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, Until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, And her salvation as a lamp that burns....You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, Nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; But you shall be called Hephzibah "my delight is in her" and your land (wed) For the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. (Isaiah 62:1-2, 4)

Someday soon there will be His remnant, declaring together that, "He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations." (I Chronicles 16:14-15)

Jesus warned that in that day, after events on earth have run their course and He finally takes the throne, that the Gentiles will be judged on their treatment of the Jews. Matthew 25:31-40

You'd think it would be clear which horse to put money on. And there's no safer bet.

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