

Prophetic & Prescriptive Scripture: Finding a place between what God says he will do and what we must do



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ABSTRACT: *Should Christians love and support Israel? Some answer with much more than “yes.” Some assert that Gentiles have a “spiritual debt” to the Jews, which presumably can be paid off by support for the modern state of Israel (Brown 2023). Worse still, many make prosperity promises in exchange for blessing the descendants of Abraham, which can be accomplished by support for the current state of Israel. The answer amongst others has been tragically more than a “no.” Many have said that the physical descendants of Abraham have no more spiritual role to play. Many have gone even further to suggest that the Jewish people continue to exist only to be in perpetual servitude of Christians, the true people of God who have superseded their now obsolete Religion (Kaplan 2019). Like most persistent theological debates, there is enough Scripture and truth on both sides to keep one side from ever finally winning. And as with most of such debates, it becomes the burden of thoughtful believers to attempt to reconcile the two frayed ends, while remaining content that the full knowledge of God’s mysteries only belongs to those who have been called home. The thesis of this present work hopes to unite those two frayed ends. It will do so by drawing an important, and very intuitive distinction between facts of prophecy and commands of prophecy. Or put another way, and to borrow the language of reformed scholars, prescriptive and descriptive prophetic narrative. This paper will first lay out what the author feels are the most unavoidable evidence of Israel’s prophetic role in Scripture. Then it will treat the clearest teaching in the New Testament of full equality between Jews and Gentiles. It will then offer a framework for believing in both truths, such that faithful followers of the Messiah can be righteous and compassionate as they pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and call Muslims and Jews to saving faith in Jesus.*

KEYWORDS: *Israel-Palestine; Covenant Theology; Prophecy.*

The Case for a Future Restoration of Israel

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The case in favour of Christian support for Israel generally centers around Old Testament (OT) prophecy, with a few quotes from the New Testament (NT) used only to affirm what came before. Thomas D. Ice, one of the foremost academic defenders of dispensationalism argues that any literal and historical reading of Zephaniah, Zachariah, and Ezekiel, must lead to the conclusion that Israel will be restored to the land of Palestine.² Michael Brown, perhaps the most well-known contemporary Zionist, compellingly argues that if the NT authors interpret the OT in a way foreign to the original authors then they cannot be true apostles and prophets. They are true apostles and prophets, so the NT cannot teach that Israel will *not* be restored to the land of Canaan.³ Let us look at some of these passages in more detail. Firstly, there is Zephaniah 2:1–2, which follows what Ice calls the most “colourful” description of the day of the Lord.⁴ We read, “Gather together, gather, O shameless nation, before you are driven away like the drifting chaff, before there comes upon you the fierce anger of the Lord, before there comes upon you the day of the Lord’s wrath.”⁵ If one accepts that the day of the Lord is a future event, one must therefore believe that the nation of Israel both continues to exist as a unique entity and will be gathered together for another judgment. This may be convincing to some readers, but more explicit witness comes from the prophets Ezekiel, Amos, and Jeremiah. In Ezekiel 20:34, God says he will “Gather you [Israel] out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out.” An interesting side note here is that in many restoration passages, judgment against nations is mentioned. This applies neatly to the first exile in Babylon since God punishes the Babylonians when he restores Israel. However, how would this apply to 1948? What nations were being judged and in what way? Next in line is possibly the most cited passage in favour of the prophetic restoration of Israel, Ezekiel 36:24–29. It reads:

I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleannesses, and I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you.

Amos 9:14–15 informs us that:

I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land that I have given them, says the LORD your God.

Jeremiah echoes these sentiments in 30:1–3:

² Ice, Thomas D., “Is Modern Israel Fulfilling Prophecy?”, 2009.

³ Brown, Micheal. *The Prophetic and End-Time Significance of the Modern State of Israel* – YouTube. 2023.

⁴ Ice, Thomas D. *The Case for Zionism: Why Christians Should Support Israel*, 2017.

⁵ All Scripture is quoted from the *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you. For the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the LORD, and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their ancestors and they shall take possession of it.

A Few things to note from these passages. Firstly, we should note that God promises to restore Israel, all its ruined cities and all its agricultural lands. This requires the obedient reader of the text to believe that the restoration of Israel was an act of God, and that he is working to restore the cities of Israel and its lands for agricultural use. Much of this has already come to be, many of Israel's cities have become bustling metropolises, and Israel's agricultural innovation and exports have been borrowed even by hostile nations. However, what it does not require is that human beings participate in that restoration. God will restore Israel; he requires no outside help to accomplish it. Secondly, it does not require us to believe that a restored Israel will be righteous, or that its actions will be righteous. In fact, Ezekiel indicates that it is *not* because of Israel's righteousness that they are being restored, but so that God's name will be praised by the nations for their restoration. It is not for Israel's sake that God is restoring it, but for his own. This dovetails smoothly with Daniel's prayer of lamentation wherein he pleads for God to restore Israel even though they are still in sin. This means two important things for what follows: (1) God is the one restoring Israel, not the work of intelligent geopoliticians, or unqualified support from Christians; and (2) it has nothing to do with Israel's actions in the world, which may well include idolatry and the shedding of blood as the passage states. The point of all of this is to say that God's prophecies are not the same as God's commandments, or in other words, just because God says he will restore Israel does not mean Christians should help restore Israel. As we will see in a moment, God's prophetic plans often include acts of wickedness and unrighteousness. For now, what I hope I have established is that the Prophets of the OT predicted a restoration of Israel including its cities and agriculture and that God claims primary responsibility for it.

Prophecies and Promises in 2 Corinthians 1:20

An objection may be raised here about a familiar passage in 2 Corinthians. 2 Corinthians 1:20 teaches us that "in him [Jesus] all of the promises of God find their yes and amen." Many assert that his passage invalidates any future prophetic role for national Israel. The argument could be framed this way:

- (1) All of the promises of God are fulfilled in Jesus;
- (2) the restoration of Israel is a promise of God;
- (3) therefore, it must be fulfilled in Jesus.

This is as valid a syllogism as Aristotle could ask for. If the premises are true, then the conclusion is true. However, I find two faults with this argument that prevent it from discrediting a prophetic restoration of Israel. The first is an equivocation and the second is a truncated conclusion. Firstly, I think the argument unduly equivocates between the promises of God (ἐπαγγελία) and the prophecies of God (ἀποκαλυφθῆ, προφητεία, נְבִיא). Not all of the prophecies of God in the Bible are promises, and not all of the promises are prophecies. Promises are blessings God promises to give his people, sometimes as a reward for obedience and sometimes

as a result of his nature as a good father. Prophecies, on the other hand, are revelations about future events that God gives to certain humans. There are important differences between the two. Firstly, promises of God are often conditional, such as the blessings of the covenant in Deuteronomy. These promises require Israel to observe the Torah and continue in righteousness (Deut. 7:12–15, 28:2–12). Should Israel fail to do so, these promises will not be obtained, and instead, curses will (Deut. 28:15–68). Prophecies by contrast are fixed facts about the future revealed to certain human beings. They must come true in order to be prophecies. This is presented in Deuteronomy, where the test of a false prophet is if his or her prophecies come to fruition (Deut. 18:22). If a prophecy fails to obtain, the prophet is to be stoned. Therefore, the blessings of the curse cannot be in the category of prophecies, otherwise, the possibility that they are unfulfilled (in the event of Israelite disobedience) would disqualify Moses. A second key distinction is that promises are good things that God gives to his people, whereas prophecies are sometimes catastrophes and great evil. The word promise (ἐπαγγελία) in the NT always refers to positive gifts from God (as does the normal use of the English word). Prophecies, by contrast, describe both positive and negative future events. They describe disasters upon Israel (2 Kings 22), as well as the destruction of nations (Nahum 3:8; Isaiah 10:5), and the falling into sin and death of certain rulers (1 Kings 19:22). What Corinthians teaches us, is that all of the promises of God are yes and amen in Jesus, but not that *all* the prophecies are. Surely, the prophecy that King Ahab was enticed into war and killed was not fulfilled in Christ. Therefore, not all prophecies are promises, which brings us to the question at hand: is the restoration of Israel a promise or a prophecy?

Certainly, many aspects of the future restoration of Israel seem like promises. It is in fact a good thing for God's people to be restored to their homeland. Furthermore, a restoration is conditional upon certain actions (Leviticus 28). However, the restoration of Israel discussed in the passages we cited seems to be a prophecy, not merely a promise (it may be both). Firstly, they are not phrases in conditional language. Jeremiah 31 contains the words: "Behold the days are coming says the lord." These are not conditional phrases but are clear descriptions of something that *will* happen. Secondly, Ezekiel and Daniel tell us that God is restoring Israel not because they are righteous but because God's name is being blasphemed. Lastly, the future restoration of Israel is more than a good thing promised to the children of Israel. As Ezekiel 36 teaches us, Israel will be restored because in every nation in which they are scattered, the name of the Lord is being blasphemed. Verse 22 tells us explicitly that the future restoration of Israel is *not* being done for Israel's sake, but for the sake of the Lord's name. Therefore, the restoration of Israel is not *merely* a promise for Israel. It is a prophecy that God says will certainly come to pass for his own Glory among the nations.

Lastly, as it relates to this argument from 2 Corinthians 1:20, the conclusion may not go far enough for the argument to be sound against the Christian Zionist position. If there was no distinction between prophecy and promise, there are still many promises that were not fulfilled in the earthly life of Jesus. Isaiah 2 teaches us that a day is coming when men will no longer teach warfare and that spears will be beaten into plowshares. Yet, the state of Israel itself is a persistent reminder that warfare is still taught (perfected some might say), and there are many weapons that have yet to be turned into plowshares. So when will this promise be fulfilled in the Messiah? Most people would say in the coming kingdom, but many would interpret this as the peace that is brought in the world through the gradual spread of the Gospel and discipleship of the nations. Both of these are wonderful ideas and probably true to some extent. However, a reply similar to this one could be given on behalf of a future restoration of national Israel. If it is possible that some prophecies be fulfilled by and through Jesus *after* his earthly life, why can Israel not be one such prophecy? Could it be Jesus working through history to bring about the

restoration of his people? Could a full restoration of Israel (all of the world's Jewry returning, not just some) happen when Jesus returns? Could it be that Christ's followers working to aid in the restoration of Israel is one way in which Jesus is restoring Israel? If any of this is prohibited by an interpretation of 2 Corinthians, then we will have trouble explaining how a great many OT prophecies were fulfilled by the Messiah.

The Case for One People of God

On the other hand, those who advocate for some form of supersession come from various camps. Firstly are Palestinian liberation theologians who object to a prophetic restoration of Israel on political grounds. The 2009 Kairos Palestine document, signed by pro-Palestinian activists and theologians states that "we do not believe in theology based on injustice."⁶ Seemingly, arguing that any biblical justification for Zionism must be based on misinterpretation because it is politically unacceptable. Some Palestinian theologians (self-described) have offered biblical support for this. One convincing argument, which I myself have made in informal settings, comes from the famous reading of Isaiah by Jesus in Luke. Naeem Ateek has pointed out that this passage in Isaiah is originally a prophecy about the restoration of Israel.⁷ Yet, far from receiving a roar of applause from his Jewish audience, Jesus' application of this passage to gentiles in his exegesis incurs the wrath of the Rabbis and the people of Nazareth. For Ateek, this demonstrates that the restoration of Israel is an event that includes Gentiles and does so in a fashion profoundly unacceptable to Jews hoping for a physical restoration of Israel. Therefore, a physical restoration of Israel exclusively benefiting Jewish people must be in error. This argument is convincing but possibly overstated. It is hard to determine from the hostile reaction of the people of Galilee that everything they believed about Israel's restoration *must* be false, and the truth should be the exact opposite of their opinion. Furthermore, it seems clear from the text that they are reacting to Jesus' refusal to perform miracles in their midst more than an exegesis of Isaiah.

It is not just Palestinians who make the case against Christian Zionism. Perhaps more convincing evidence comes from theologians and scholars without a political agenda. These come mainly from reformed scholarship. These arguments are particularly valuable for our purposes because they are motivated by pure theology. The only goal behind the arguments that follow is an honest treatment of the text, the authors behind them advertise no a priori bias for or against the modern state of Israel. In fact, many of the most powerful arguments against attributing special status to ethnic Jews come from Calvinistic authors who support Israel politically. I should clarify that I am not claiming to be free from theological or political bias. Rather, I am citing *other* theologians whose agenda is theological rather than political, so as to counterbalance the politically motivated theology of the Palestinian theological arguments. Richard Pratt has pointed out that several major hurdles prevent NT Christians from embracing Zionism. Firstly, the idea of two or more "peoples of God" is unheard of in Scripture.⁸ The people of God in the NT are made up of Jews and Gentiles. Secondly, and more pressingly, Hoezee has pointed to the issue of covenants. According to Hoezee, a serious theological problem arises if we assume that the Old and New Covenant are operating simultaneously, which must be the

⁶ Baker, Paul. "Palestinian Contextual Theology: A Pentecostal Prospect?", 2013.

⁷ Cantor, Ron. "Is Palestinian Liberation Theology Biblical? Part 2.", 2023.

⁸ Pratt, Richard. *To The Jew First: A Reformed Perspective*, 2006.

case if Israel and the Jewish people retain special status.⁹ For what status has Israel over any other nation if not their covenants? One should, as the historical Puritans did, pray instead that the Jewish nation joins the new Covenant as believers rather than praying they receive the blessings of the old.¹⁰ Thomas and Nichols argue that Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God excludes a physical kingdom of Israel.¹¹ In particular, Jesus teaching to his disciples at Caesarea Philippi that he is returning with his Father in his Kingdom demonstrates that the Kingdom of Heaven is not of this world and belongs to no nation.

As before, let us examine these passages for ourselves in some detail. For this task, no passage is better suited than Galatians 3:28–29. The well-known passage reads: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” I would apply another important passage to the issue at hand two chapters later. Galatians chapter 6:15 reads: “For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!” Several things are of note here. First, and most plainly, there should be no distinction between believers of Jewish descent and those of other nations. This means that while Christians are certainly called to love and pray for Israel, it cannot be that they are called to love and pray for Israel any more than any other nation. For it is impossible to say in one breath that there is no Jew nor Gentile in the church, and then say the Gentiles must pray for and love Jews more than Jews must love and pray for Gentiles. That would be a distinction between Jew and Gentile. More egregious would be the suggestion that Gentile believers must financially support Israel. This would be equivalent to suggesting that there is no Jew or Gentile in Christ, but the Gentiles must give the Jews *their* money. Furthermore, appeals to God’s eternal promises to Abraham to defend an imbalanced relation between Jewish and Gentile believers is nullified. For, according to this passage, all those who belong to Christ are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise. If they are truly heirs according to the promise, then this promise to Abraham should apply to all Christians, for all are seeds of Abraham. Furthermore, and perhaps most compellingly, is the second passage, “for neither circumcision or uncircumcision is anything (οὔτε τί ἐστίν).” Does the circumcision of the flesh avail modern Jews in the state of Israel of unique love and financial support, over and above what other nations receive? Then it avails them quite a lot. Does it avail them of disproportionate aid and relief compared to their need and relative to their Palestinian neighbours? If so, then it avails them quite a lot. Does it avail them of unconditional support through military conflicts with high-level civilian casualties? If so, then circumcision of the flesh avails quite a lot indeed. If the body of Christ is made up of both Jewish and Palestinian believers, can a faithful reader of these words elevate one above the other? Would that not make null the Word of God? If so, then how can we follow such a pattern of favouritism on a wider national scale?

Nationhood and Ethnicity in the Bible

⁹ Hoezee, Scott. “The Israel Matter.” *The Reformed Journal Blog* (blog). 16 January 2024.

¹⁰ Atkinson, Stephen. “Reformation and Re-Embracement: A Brief History of the Puritan Hope for Israel.” *Christ Over All* (blog), 2024.

¹¹ Thomas, Derek, and Stephen Nichols. “How Does Reformed Theology View the Future of Israel Compared to Dispensationalism?”, 2021.

It may be helpful to take some time at this point and discuss the issue of Jewish ethnicity and Nationhood, as we have thus far been talking about “Israel” and “believers of Jewish descent” somewhat interchangeably. A full discussion of the relationship between ethnicity and nationality in the Bible would comfortably fill a research paper of its own, but a few observations may be helpful. Firstly, it would be inappropriate and eisegetical to apply modern definitions of ethnicity, state, and nation, to the ancient authors, as if they wrote with an understanding of modern anthropology and ethnology in mind. Instead, we should look at how the Bible describes people groups, and with what words. The term in Greek normally translated as “Nation” is of course *ἔθνος*. This word seems to be used to mean “nation” as a sovereign political entity in the NT, such as Matthew 24:7 and Revelation 18:3. This may be closer to what the contemporary English understanding of the word “Nation” (it should be noted that even in English ‘nation’ can, and has, been used to mean something more akin to ethnicity, hence the term ‘nation-state’). However, it is also used seemingly to describe something more like “ethnicity,” which is its etymological descendant, such as Acts 10:22 and 28:19. Another word, *λαός*, may seem like a serviceable alternative that would clarify the meaning of “ethnicity,” but the evidence from the Septuagint would plead otherwise. The word is used to describe the foreign nation Israel, who will be sent into exile in Ezekiel 3:5. Hebrew may offer more clarity with the words *עַם* and *גוֹי* meaning people and nation, and the word *אִמְּוָה* being a helpfully unambiguous word for “nation” complete with an Arabic equivalent *أمة* of the same meaning. There are some exceptions even to these distinctions, but, helpfully for our discussion, all three of these words are used to refer to God’s people Israel. The clearest example of this distinction is also the clearest evidence that Israel is, and should, be both a nation, as seen in Jeremiah 33 23–26. The passage begins by reporting that people are saying “my people (*עַם*) are no longer a nation (*גוֹי*),” and it seems that Israel is still a people in exile but no longer a nation. This seems to indicate that as a people, Israel always exists, but apparently can cease to be a nation. However, the Lord corrects the errant judgment of these onlookers by saying that he will restore the rule of a descendant of David to his people Israel. It seems that having a ruler of their own is not only something God prophecies, but also something that makes a people into a Nation. Therefore, we should consider the above-mentioned prophecies that require a return of the people of Israel also prophecies of the restored nationhood of Israel, otherwise, the Lord would not be refuting the accusations made in these passages. Israel would be a people, but no longer a nation. If more evidence is needed that a restored people of Israel must achieve the status of a nation, let us consider the words of Isaiah that Israel would be restored, “just as she was.” Israel was a nation with sovereignty in the land we now call Palestine “before.”

It may be argued that this distinction, rather than detracting from the restoration of Israel, instead detracts from the interpretation of Galatians three above. These passages, it may be argued, only apply to the Jewish people, not the nation of Israel. Jews and Gentiles have equality in Christ, but Israel and Gentile nations certainly do not. This is flawed for two reasons: first of all, as I argued above, the way we treat a nation inevitably affects our treatment of people. If we treat Israel as more worthy of our support than Palestine, we inevitably treat Israelis differently than Palestinians. If we further choose to identify Israel as the nation correlating with the people of Israel, any difference in the treatment of the nation of Israel will result in a difference in the treatment of the people of Israel, which violates Galatians three. Secondly, Galatians Six, I believe, sidesteps this objection because its teaching is that circumcision avails nothing, or is nothing. If the circumcision of the flesh earns the Jewish people a Nation that has favour, love, and support not enjoyed by other nations, then it earns them quite a lot. If Jewish people by right of circumcision get a State more loved by God and Christians than Palestinian people, then the circumcision of the flesh that marks Jewish people

avails them something Palestinian people do not, and Galatians six teaches falsehood. Therefore, I still maintain that Galatians 6 teaches against unqualified support for Israel.

What Does it Mean to be Righteous?

Thus far I have argued that the fulfillment of divine prophecies can involve both righteous and unrighteous actions on the part of human beings. God foresees both the goodness and wickedness of man and uses both to accomplish his ends. At this point, a clarification may be in order as to what exactly constitutes a righteous act, so that we can better understand how unrighteous acts can be a part of God's plan and prophetic will. For this task, R.C. Sproul's discussion of the wills of God will serve well. Sproul delineated the three wills of God, the "decretive," "prescriptive," and "permissive" will of God.¹² For our purposes, we will focus on the decretive and prescriptive will. The decretive will refers to what God decrees to happen, which includes everything that happens. God sovereignly brings about whatever he pleases, and nothing is brought about unless he wills that it should be. This is a very reformed understanding of God's will, but as we will see, an Arminian view can, and normally does, accommodate this distinction. As Augustine remarked, God is in control of all the events that happen, so there is a sense in which God wills each that happens. God knew that Cain would kill Abel before the former held a rock. Therefore, God either willed or allowed the murder to happen. The Arminian may reject the notion that God positively *wills* murder to happen, but he will nonetheless concede that God *allows* murder to happen in accordance with libertarian free will. When we speak of prophecy and what God foretells will happen, we are speaking of God's prescriptive will. Of course, whether God allows or wills murder does not entail that murder is righteous, or that God wants murder to happen. Both Calvinists and Arminians believe that God allows evil so that good may result. Only open theists believe that evil *genuinely* happens against God's will and outside of his control. Sproul contrasts this with God's prescriptive will, which flows from God's prescriptions, or commandments. God gives humans clear commandments in Scripture, much of it in his Law (the Torah). These express God's will for what humans must do. This covers all imperative commands and regulatory rules in Scripture. God's prescriptive will that we do not lie, that we do not steal, and that we do not commit adultery. According to Deuteronomy 6:25, righteousness is in accordance with God's law. Therefore, when we describe righteous actions, we are describing actions in line with God's prescriptive will. We are describing people who do what God has commanded us to do in Scripture. This includes avoiding sin, helping the poor, executing justice for the widow and fatherless, and loving God with all your heart and soul and strength.

Now we can reframe the thesis of this paper in a way that may be more illuminating. Prophecy in Scripture will always reflect God's decretive will, but it will not always reflect God's prescriptive will. If God prophesied an event, he either wills that it will happen or allows it to happen. But it may not be in line with his commandments for how humans should act. God has prophesied people acting against his commandments in Scripture. God prophesies that all the nations of the earth will be drunk with the adulteries of the whore of Babylon (Rev. 18:3). He prophesies that many, both rich and poor, will take the mark of the beast and be therefore cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 19). These prophecies speak of people grossly violating God's commandments, and therefore his prescriptive will. But they are in accordance with his

¹² Sproul, R.C. *Discerning God's Will: The Three Wills of God*, 1993.

decretive will, he declared (or decreed) that these things would happen long before they did (or will), and they must happen in order for all to be accomplished. The thesis of this paper is that a prophetic restoration of Israel is in accordance with God's decretive will, that which he has prophesied will happen. But it may not be in line with God's prescriptive will, it may, and certainly has, been accomplished through violations of God's commandments.

Thus far it has been argued that Israel is indeed a fulfillment of prophecy, and that God is working to restore her cities and desolate lands. God should be praised for this. It has further been argued that God has ended the difference between Jews and Gentiles in his work on the Cross, rendered null the physical covenant of circumcision and brought equality between all nations before the Cross. God should be praised for this. But if what has preceded is successful, how should Christians respond to the modern state of Israel? And to what God is doing in and through it? The answer is found in the difference between *prophetic* passages in Scripture and *prescriptive* passages. That is, the difference between God describing what *he* will do, and God describing what he wants *us* to do. Scripture has many commandments for the believers, that those who truly love Jesus will follow. Christians are commanded to love one another, to abstain from adultery and covetousness, to make disciples of all nations. However, Scripture also contains prophecies of future events that do not come with any commands attached. That is to say that when God prophesies something will happen, it is *not* always imperative for humans to ensure it will happen. Sometimes God prophesies that humans will sin and be rebellious. This does not mean the people involved *should*, or that the sin is no longer sin because it is a part of prophecy. Rather, it is an example of God working through sinful people and institutions to bring about his ultimate purposes. An example may clarify. God prophesies that his incarnate son will be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. However, this was not a command for Judas to betray Jesus, and the guilt for his betrayal is his to bear. Jesus prophesies that Peter will betray him three times before the rooster crows, but this was not imperative for Peter to betray his lord when the opportunity came. More importantly than all of these, the very crucifixion of our Lord was prophesied in the OT. Was the Sanhedrin commanded therefore to falsely accuse Jesus? Was Pilate acting righteously when he gave into the crowd and turned the only sinless man over to be crucified with criminals? The answer is obviously no. Of course, sometimes prophetic fulfillment requires righteous actions. Mary displayed righteousness and courageous obedience when she allowed the Holy Spirit to bring about the virgin birth. But because some prophecies entail righteous obedience it does not follow that *all* prophecies entail righteous obedience. Just as God was able to use both Moses' righteous obedience to liberate his people as well as Pharaoh's hardness. So the life, ministry, and crucifixion of Jesus, was prophesied and fulfilled both through the righteousness of his disciples and the wickedness of his enemies. There can be no doubt about this. Jesus prophesied point blank that "one of you will betray me." This did nothing to diminish the wickedness of Judas' betrayal; he is still the son of perdition and the only one of Jesus' disciples to be lost. But God foresaw this wickedness, prophesied it, and worked his divine purposes through it. The conclusion from all of this is that God's prophecies and God's commands are not identical. God gives us commands, and prophecies that some of us will break them. Therefore, the prophecies about the restoration of Israel do not *necessarily* entail any command to aid in that restoration. As we will see, many have aided in God's restoration through catastrophic wickedness.

To cement this idea, it may help to look at other examples of prophetic fulfillments that were neither commandments of God nor actions of righteousness. To make this point clearer, let us examine some events connected to the foundation of the modern State of Israel. Many of the events that led to the creation of Israel, and many of the actions taken by human beings that contributed to its restoration, were not in of themselves righteous or God-honouring. For

instance, if it were not for the outbreak of WWI and the decision of the Ottoman Empire to side with the Triple Alliance, then Israel would not be. The British would not have invaded the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East and established the British mandate over the land. Without the Mandate, there would be no Balfour Declaration. Many have said that the Balfour Declaration was a fulfillment of prophecy, but what about the events that led to it? Was the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand an act of righteousness? Will Gabrielle Principe and the Black Hand conspirators be judged by God as sinners? Or will they be rewarded, as many claim supporters of Israel will be? What about Kaiser Wilhelm's decision to invade Belgium first and then France? If he had not, then Britain may not have declared war. Both events were a part of God's sovereign plan to restore Israel, as they caused Israel to fall into British hands. The same hands that would later establish the State of Israel. But were those actions righteous? A far more challenging example has yet to be presented. If one sees the restoration of Israel in 1948 as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy, and we do, then one should say that the holocaust was a part of God's prophetic plan. And it was. Few would dispute that the Holocaust radically altered the world's opinion of the Jewish request for a state in Palestine and sidelined the concerns of the (now-called) Palestinians. That Israel was founded when it was, in the way it was, was a result of the horror of the Nazi genocide. None of this is theologically troubling. God does use wicked men to accomplish his righteous purposes. But surely those who committed that mass slaughter of innocents are guilty of great iniquity. While the great evil was a part of God's prophetic plan, as many others have been, it was not imperative for any human to do them. To be clear, I am not suggesting that supporting Israel is morally equivalent to supporting the holocaust. Nor am I by any means under heaven suggesting that the holocaust was a good thing. It was possibly the most evil thing ever to happen. But everyone who is not an open theist believes that God knew that it was going to happen long before Adolph Eichmann could dream it up. We believe and teach that God is in control even in the midst of the greatest wickedness, and we trust he will use all our suffering for good. This is my diagnosis of the events that led up to the creation of Israel and many that have happened since. What I am further suggesting, is that Israel's part in God's prophetic vision does not entail any moral obligation for Christians, nor are any Christians obligated to aid or accelerate this vision. Many accelerated and aided this restoration through acts of great wickedness. Ours is to be righteous in every good and bad thing that God ordains to happen, so that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Ours is to pray for Israelis, love Israelis, and above all preach the Gospel of Yeshua.

We have established through these examples a biblical framework for understanding that prophetic fulfillment does not entail moral responsibility. Christians are not commanded to *help* Israel rebuild, or *help* Israel win any wars against its enemies; they simply know that God will rebuild Israel and will prevent her from destruction. We are not commanded to help Israel financially, but we know God will provide for it. We are not commanded to justify Israel's actions morally, they are righteous at times and unrighteous at others, we should judge righteously as God has judged, and he will bring all Israel back to himself. Viewed this way, the recreation of Israel is no more a command to the believers than was its destruction two thousand years ago. The Romans were following no command of Christ by raping and pillaging the Holy Land, Titus Flavius Vespasianus was fulfilling now righteousness by tearing down Zerubbabel's sanctified temple until no stone sat atop another. All this fulfilled the prophecy of Jesus, and the early Christians were righteous through it all. So is the command of Christians with regards to modern Israel to be righteous and remain righteous, and trust God with the outcome. It can be righteous to support Israel, and it can be unrighteous. It depends on the

actions of Israel and those of her enemies. Ours is to proclaim biblical justice and mercy, and in all this rest knowing that all Israel will be saved.

If this short article has been convincing to the reader, my hope is that they come away remembering the word “righteous” above all else. I believe that even in bitter conflict we can be righteous. I believe it is righteous to worship God for his work in Israel. But it is also righteous to pray that the Palestinians find peace and freedom in a stable nation, whatever lines are drawn around it. Above all, the Christian remembers and rests in the promise that he is coming soon, and for those who remain righteous, he will build a Kingdom without suffering or violence. Everything we suffer from now until then will pale in comparison to the fulfillment of his final prophecy.

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