

### **356 The Owner's gift in perpetuity**

In view of the perpetual turbulence in the Bible lands of the Middle East we are seeking to understand afresh from God's Word the role of Israel and the Jews, if any, in all that is going on. If, as some Christians believe, God really has finally "washed His hands of them" because of their continuing refusal to accept Jesus as their Messiah, then the nation of Israel is now "nothing special" in God's sight and must simply muddle along among its hostile neighbours.

But as we considered in last week's Reflection, such a view is hard to sustain in the light of both Scripture and the facts on the ground. In Genesis Chapters 12-15 we are told of God's call of Abram and of the various bountiful promises God made to him concerning his seed, the land and the covenant (egs., 12.1-3, 6-7 / 13.14-17 / 15.4-7, 17-18).

Now in such a covenant, while there are two parties involved, the covenant is actually made by only one party, the Lord Himself: He initiates it and keeps to it, and the fulfilment of such a covenant depends entirely on the Lord and not at all on the conduct of the other party, in this case, the Jews.

Later, in Deuteronomy 30.1-10, the Lord through His servant Moses emphasises the covenant once more, and speaks of that cycle or recurring "motif" we came across last week: the people's obedience leads to divine blessing, and vice versa; and fellowship is restored from a state of sinfulness when the people return to the Lord in repentance.

God's establishment of the Jewish people from the seed of Abraham was no mere whim, but had clear divine purpose. They upheld the truth that there is but one God; they were the human authors and guardians of God's written Word to mankind; they were the people from whom would come - and has come - the "Saviour who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2.11); and, through their possession of the divine law, they were to demonstrate how life should be lived in the light of our fallen, sinful state and our accountability to Almighty God our Creator.

Now none of God's covenantal promises regarding His chosen people the Jews has been revoked. Instead we have many Scriptures showing that God will keep to them "come what may" (egs, Isaiah 11.11 / Jeremiah 23.1-8, 30.3, 31.7-14 and 31-37 / and many more). In such prophetic passages we see the common scriptural pattern of short-term, partial fulfilment, followed in the longer-term by major and complete

fulfilment. Surely the return of the Jews to their land after nearly 2000 years is a strong pointer to the imminence of complete fulfilment of such wonderful promises! The Lord's words come to mind about the fig tree: when the branch is tender and the leaves are put forth, then "summer is nigh" (Matthew 24.32-33).

Two crucial, familiar New Testament passages regarding the Jews are also relevant here. In Luke 21.24 Jesus tells us that "Jerusalem shall be trodden of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled"; and in Romans Chapters 9 – 11 the Holy Spirit gives us through Paul a very detailed account of the situation concerning the Jews and the Gentiles. In Chapter 11 we read of the two olive trees, and in 11.25 – "that blindness in part has happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in".

These two passages state that a time will come when both the "times of the Gentiles" will end and the "fulness of the Gentiles" will be complete. After the removal of the believing Church in "the rapture" (see I Corinthians 15.51-52 and I Thessalonians 4.13-18), the scene will thus be set for God's dealings with the Jews to proceed on their long-promised course: a turning from their present unbelief particularly during the 7-year Tribulation, the visible return of their Messiah, the gathering of the Jewish elect, and the establishment of the millennial kingdom under the Lordship of Christ (egs., Jeremiah 30.4-7 / Daniel 12.1 / Zechariah 12.9-10, 13.9, 14.1-11 / Matthew 24.21-22, 27-31).

So in the current Middle East situation we know from the Scriptures that the Jews possess the legal right to their land because it was given to them in perpetuity by the Owner of the land, the Lord Himself (egs., Psalm 24.1 (and I Corinthians 10.26) / Exodus 9.29b / Deuteronomy 10.14). It is surely due to the Lord God, and not to any man-inspired programme such as Zionism, that Israel now exists once more as a nation, a highly significant fact whenever "peace plans" are being discussed.

We know also that, though the Jews continue largely in stiff-necked unbelief, God keeps His covenants and promises. They remain "the apple of God's eye", and that is why our Christian privilege and duty is still to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem", with all that that completed and fulfilled messianic peace, praise God, will involve (Psalm 122).