

THE
DESTINY
OF
ISRAEL
AND THE
CHURCH
DEREK PRINCE



WHITAKER
HOUSE

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THE DESTINY OF ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

One unique feature of the Bible is its predictive prophecies. No sacred book of any other world religion offers anything comparable to the Bible in this respect. Its prophets consistently predicted events of history—with amazing accuracy and descriptive detail—many centuries before they took place. This is one major testimony to the supernatural inspiration of the Bible.

In Isaiah 46:9–10, the God of the Bible says of Himself:

I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. (NIV)

The ability to predict history with such accuracy necessarily implies the ability to control history. For this reason, God can say with absolute confidence, “*My purpose will stand.*”

One of the major themes of biblical prophecy is the destiny of Israel. From the birth of Israel as a nation to the final consummation of her destiny, every major stage has been predicted by her own prophets. At least 80 percent of all these prophecies have already been accurately fulfilled. It is therefore altogether reasonable to expect that the remaining 20 percent will be fulfilled with equal accuracy.

Interwoven with the history of Israel is the destiny of another people: the church of Jesus Christ. The church had its origin within Israel, but over the centuries the destinies of these two groups have diverged widely. Yet there has been continuous interaction between them.

The church, like Israel, had its prophets. The greatest of these was its founder and reigning Head, Jesus of Nazareth. Through Jesus and His apostles, the main outlines of church history were prophetically unfolded in advance. These, too, are being progressively fulfilled.

One vital function of prophecy is to provide God's people with a clear vision of their divinely appointed destiny. Without such a vision, they will inevitably stumble and fall. This applies equally to Israel and the church. This is why Solomon says in Proverbs 29:18 that people will perish without a prophetic vision.

The lack of such a vision brought about the downfall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. After the city had been totally destroyed by the armies of Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah said of her,

She did not consider her destiny; therefore her collapse was awesome. (Lamentations 1:9)

About six hundred years later, Jesus Himself spoke in similar terms to the same city:

If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation. (Luke 19:42–44)

Jerusalem, however, is but one outstanding historical example of the tragic consequences that follow when God's people fail to understand their destiny. The same principles apply both to Israel as a people and to the church. In each of these groups, a failure to understand their destiny will result in tragedy.

But this need not happen! Through the prophetic Scriptures, God has provided—for both Israel and the church—all they need to understand and fulfill their destiny. May it not be said of one or the other that failure and disaster came “*because you did not know the time of your visitation.*”

One of the most exciting features of the period in which we live is that the destinies of Israel and the church are once again converging. Their convergence will produce the most dramatic and significant developments of all human history.

My own contact with Jerusalem and the land of Israel goes back to the year 1942, when I was serving with the British forces in the Middle East. In the fifty years that have passed since then, I have witnessed the fulfillment of many significant biblical prophecies. In 1948 I was an eyewitness to the events that climaxed in the birth of the state of Israel, and I have continued to follow the subsequent development of the state. I currently reside in Jerusalem.

The progressive fulfillment of biblical prophecy during this whole period has had the effect of focusing the attention of both Jews and Christians on one future event of unique importance to both: the coming of the Messiah.

My sincere desire and prayer are that this book will give a clearly outlined picture of the awesome developments that lie ahead, both for Israel and for the church.

—*Derek Prince*
Jerusalem, Israel, 1992

THE DESTINY OF ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

WHY ISRAEL THE FOCUS OF WORLD ATTENTION

Why is Israel the focus of attention in the world's media? Why do pragmatic and statesmanlike world leaders erupt with emotional outbursts when Israel is discussed? Why does the United Nations devote 30 percent of its time and one-third of its resolutions to Israel—a tiny country with a population of only five million?¹

There is only one source for a clear and authoritative answer: the Bible. Although it was completely written almost two thousand years before the current problems in the Middle East arose, the Bible provides a supernaturally inspired analysis of both the issues and the forces that are involved.

1. Currently, about eight million.

Israel occupies a unique place in the current controversies, because the place that Israel occupies in God's purposes is likewise unique. God's prophetic Word reveals that this present age will culminate with the restoration and redemption of Israel. The nearer we come to the close of the age, therefore, the more intense will be the pressures surrounding Israel.

These events that center on Israel will also determine the destiny of Satan, the age-old adversary of God and man. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Satan is called "*the god of this age.*" He is well aware that when Israel's redemption is completed and this age closes, he will no longer be able to pose as a god. He will be stripped of his power to deceive and manipulate humanity and will be subject to the judgment of God. Consequently, he is at this time deploying all his deceptive strategy and exercising all his evil power to resist the process that will lead to Israel's restoration and ultimate redemption.

Here, then, are the two main spiritual forces that meet in conflict over the Middle East: on the one hand, the grace of God working toward Israel's restoration; and on the other hand, the deceitful strategies of Satan, who is opposing this process by every means in his power. This is the real but invisible reason for the struggles and tensions that Israel is currently experiencing.

A major part of Satan's strategy against Israel has been to obscure the truth as revealed in the Bible. It is amazing that so much confusion has existed, and still exists, in the church today concerning God's purposes for Israel. The battle for Israel is, in fact, the battle for truth. There are two vital areas of truth that we will consider in this book: Israel's identity and Israel's destiny. After we have examined these, we must consider whether the destiny of Israel also sheds light on the destiny of the church.

Finally, we will discuss the responsibility of the church toward Israel in this hour of crisis.

WHO IS ISRAEL?

Almost limitless misunderstanding, ignorance, and distortion have pervaded the church for many centuries concerning the identity of Israel. This seems extraordinary to me because the statements of the Bible regarding Israel are so clear. Nevertheless, the minds of multitudes of Christians seem to be clouded in regard to the application of the name *Israel*.

In a later section of this book, we will consider a parallel topic: the way the word *church* is used in the New Testament. (See chapter 3.) There, too, we shall discover that the identity of the true church, like that of Israel, has been clouded in a confusion that obscures the real purposes of God.

The origin of the confusion concerning Israel may be traced back to the early church fathers, who developed a doctrine that the church had replaced Israel in the purposes of God and was to be known as the “new Israel.” This kind of teaching was promulgated about AD 150 by Justin Martyr and was later adopted and amplified by such celebrated figures as Irenaeus, Origen, and Augustine. More and more, the Old Testament was interpreted in an “allegorical” way, which no longer did justice to the plain meaning of many texts.

Significantly, at about the same period, the doctrine of the church as a whole was being progressively corrupted from the purity and simplicity of the apostolic revelation contained in the New Testament. The eventual outcome of this process was the church of the Dark Ages, which was, for the most part, spiritually, morally, and doctrinally corrupt.

From about AD 400, the name *Israel* has regularly been used by Bible teachers, commentators, and even translators as a synonym for the church. For instance, a certain edition of the King James Version (from which I preached for thirty-five years) has the following headings at the top of the pages in the latter chapters of Isaiah.

Chapter 43 opens with the words, “*But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not....*” But the heading at the top of the page reads, “*God Comforteth the Church with His Promises*” (emphasis added). Chapter 44 opens with the words, “*Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen....*” But the heading at the top of the page reads, “*The Church Comforted*” (emphasis added).

Headings such as these, inserted in the text, produce an effect that is subliminal—that is, below the threshold of conscious awareness. Nevertheless, their cumulative impact over the centuries is beyond our power to calculate. Many generations of Christians have unconsciously assumed that the headings are part of the original text. But they are not! Supplied by editors many centuries later, they misrepresent what Isaiah is actually saying, applying to the church words that are specifically addressed by name to Israel.

Essential truth is usually simple. And the truth is, Israel is Israel, and the church is the church.

To recover the truth about the identity of Israel, it is necessary to go back to the actual text of the New Testament and see how the apostles used the term *Israel*. This is the only legitimate basis for a scripturally accurate use of this term. Ever since the canon of Scripture was closed, no subsequent writer or preacher has been authorized to change the usage established by the

apostolic writers of the New Testament. Any writer or preacher who introduces a different application of the term *Israel* forfeits the right to claim scriptural authority for what he or she has to say about Israel.

I have discovered seventy-nine instances in the New Testament where the words *Israel* or *Israelite(s)* occur.² After examining them all, I conclude that the apostles never used *Israel* as a *synonym* for the church.

Nor does the phrase “the new Israel” occur anywhere in the New Testament. Preachers who use that phrase should take care to define their use of it. They should also state that it is not found in the Bible.

Some years ago, while I was addressing a group in Israel, I happened to remark that *Israel* is never used in Scripture as a synonym for the church. The people in the group were mature believers, dedicated to seeing God’s plan for the Jewish people fulfilled. Yet one of them—a longtime friend—told me afterward, “That’s the first time I ever heard anyone say that Israel is not a synonym for the church.” This remark helped me to see how widespread this misinterpretation is.

Israel is, on the other hand, often used as a *type* of the church. Concerning the experiences of Israel in the exodus, Paul says,

Now all these things happened to them as examples [or types], and they were written for our admonition.

(1 Corinthians 10:11)

To portray Israel as a type of the church, however, is altogether different from identifying the church as Israel.

2. The reader would do well to read carefully through the complete list given in Appendix A.

Consider, by way of illustration, that Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya, could be described as “the George Washington of his people” in the same way that George Washington is considered the national father of the United States. In other words, much that applies to George Washington in regard to the United States applies to Jomo Kenyatta in regard to Kenya. But this is not to say that Jomo Kenyatta actually *was* George Washington. It is just as incorrect to say that the church *is* Israel.

Unfortunately, the church has been strongly influenced by a “Christian” principle of interpretation that is seldom stated explicitly: All the blessings apply to the church, and all the curses apply to Israel. Behind this principle of interpretation lies the assertion (in which there is much truth) that Israel had her chance but was unfaithful to God. This line of reasoning continued with the belief that God has changed His mind and reapplied His promises, once reserved for Israel, to the church. Such a conclusion, however, clearly impugns the faithfulness of God.

Paul expresses his reaction to such a suggestion in Romans 3:3–4. Analyzing the consequences of Israel’s unfaithfulness, he says,

For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar.

As previously stated, the only legitimate way to ascertain the correct use of words such as *Jew* or *Israel* is to examine the actual passages in the New Testament where they occur.

WHO IS A JEW?

To begin with, let us look at the word *Jew*, which occurs in the New Testament nearly two hundred times. Out of all these occurrences, the only passage in which *Jew* is clearly used in a way different from the accepted norm is Romans 2:28–29.

These verses come at the end of a chapter in which Paul has been explaining—with particular reference to the Jewish people—that knowledge of God’s will through the law justifies no one. A person is not righteous simply because he knows what is right. On the contrary, Paul says, knowledge merely increases human responsibility. He goes on to apply this specifically to the Jewish people of his day.

Before using this statement against the Jewish people today, however, we need to bear in mind that nineteen centuries have elapsed. In Paul’s day, it was primarily the Jewish people who had the knowledge of God. Today, it is we Christians who claim to have the full knowledge of the revealed will of God, because we believe the whole Bible. Paul’s warning to the Jews of his day is probably needed equally by the church of our day. The fact that we know the will of God and what is right does not make us righteous. On the contrary, it only increases our responsibility.

After pointing out that the Jews of his day had, in many cases, fallen short of God’s will and substituted a legalistic form of religion for the real purpose of God in the Scriptures, Paul closes the chapter with these words:

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

(Romans 2:28–29)

When Paul says, “...whose praise is not from men,” he is playing on the Hebrew meaning of the word *Jew*, which is taken from the name of the tribe of Judah, meaning “praise” or “thanksgiving.” When Leah gave birth to her fourth son, she called him *Judah* (in Hebrew, *Yehuda*), saying, “I will praise the LORD” (Genesis 29:35). The meaning of Judah (*Yehuda*) or *Jew*, then, is “praise.” So Paul says if you are a real Jew, your praise should come from God and not from men. In a certain sense, he is restricting the use of the word *Jew* here. He is saying it is not enough to be a Jew outwardly. A true Jew, in addition to being a Jew by birth, or conversion, must have the inner condition of heart that earns him or her the praise of God. It is important to understand here that Paul is not extending the use of the term *Jew*. On the contrary, he is restricting it.

Some years ago, I read an article in a British magazine in which the writer heaped criticism upon Israel and derived from this passage in Romans the theory that we are all Jews! That is far out of line with the teaching of the New Testament. It must surely confuse Jewish people to be told that when we are in Christ, “there is neither Jew nor Greek [Gentile]” (see Galatians 3:28 NIV), only to hear later, “But we are all Jews.”

Nor is that what Paul is contemplating. He is saying that to be a real Jew, it is not enough that a person have all the outward marks. He or she must also have the inward spiritual condition that gives praise to God and earns praise from Him.

Put the same idea in a Christian context. We might say to someone, “If you are a real Christian, when somebody strikes you on one cheek, you will turn the other.” But we would not mean to imply that those who do not turn the other cheek are not entitled to be called Christians. The special use of *Christian*

in this context obviously would not replace the normal, accepted use of the word.

In addition to the passage in Romans 2, there are two verses—Revelation 2:9 and 3:9—where the Lord speaks of “*those who say they are Jews and are not.*” There are various possible ways to interpret these verses. They could perhaps refer to the same kind of people Paul describes in Romans 2—those who have the outward marks of being Jewish but lack the inward spiritual requirement.

Suppose, however, we accept these two verses in Revelation, together with the passage in Romans, as examples of a special use of the term *Jew*, which restricts the term to Jews who fulfill certain spiritual requirements. The fact remains that out of nearly two hundred passages in the New Testament, there are only three examples in which *Jew* refers to the restricted meaning. In those three examples, *Jew* refers to those who are related to God through faith in the Messiah. To interpret a verse using this restricted meaning of the word, it must be clearly required by the context. The extended application of the term *Jew* (that Jews are all those who are rightly related to God through Jesus Christ) is not found in the New Testament and could never replace the normal meaning of the word *Jew*.

STUDY QUESTIONS

(Please refer to the Answer Key at the back of the book.)

1. What is the only source for a clear and authoritative answer to the current problems in the Middle East?

2. According to God's prophetic Word, this present age will culminate with the _____ and _____ of Israel.

3. What are the two main spiritual forces in conflict over the Middle East?

4. The events of the close of the age that center on Israel also determine whose destiny?

5. To resist the process that will lead to Israel's end-time destiny, "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4) is deploying all of his _____ and exercising all of his _____ against Israel.

6. What are the two vital truths that Satan is trying to obscure?

7. What doctrine developed by the early church fathers brought confusion concerning Israel?

8. (a) In how many instances in the New Testament are the words *Israel* or *Israelite(s)* used?

(b) In these instances, how many times is *Israel* used as a synonym for the church?

9. (a) Where does the word *Jew* come from?

(b) What is the root meaning of this name?

10. Except for the three special uses of the term *Jew*, to whom do the nearly two hundred other occurrences of the word in the New Testament refer?