

ISRAELI FLAG IN CHURCH- GOD'S PLAN?

Take to some channel browsing of the popular religious networks and you see some strange doctrines, elaborate backdrops and lots of talk about giving, prospering, needing jet planes and prophecy that always involves conjecture about Israel. What you never see are baptisms or the Lords' supper, the two ordinances of the church. You have seen claims of special revelations and predictions of current events and the coming of Christ that, of course, never come true bringing derision and embarrassment to all Christianity.

To many of these program settings, you see the flag of the nation of Israel, sometimes mixed with an American and Christian flag. Why would a Christian group want to hang a flag of this middle Eastern country in their auditorium? Those familiar with the Dispensational eschatology schemes of many of these preachers know the answer. They believe Israel is still somehow connected to God's plan and the end times and they talk persistently of what they see as facts of the future.

Historians note that these ideas originated in the mid-19th century particularly with John Nelson Darby considered the father of Dispensationalism, then popularized with the publication of the Schofield Bible and it's notes and taken up by today's televangelists especially after the formation of a modern nation called Israel in 1948.

As these ideas developed by the followers today, they place Israel as having a special place in future events controlled by God. There have been many great books and lessons addressing the problems with this idea. Because it eventually takes you to a physical kingdom of Israel, stating that the church is not Christ's kingdom but a stop-gap measure and that there is a great "pause" or parenthesis in God's prophetic plan as we wait for the real fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in a future literal political kingdom. This denies the very nature of Christ's work on the cross, and the new covenant of which both Jew and Gentile are brought together as one and Christians are God's chosen people. Jesus said His kingdom is not of this world. This is the teaching of the New Testament and the church through the ages. His kingdom is the church, with the followers who have named Him Lord of their life.

This change by Dispensational belief claims Old Testament prophecies directed to the Hebrew children in exile by the prophets have yet to be fulfilled causes so many issues that true Biblical scholars see it as dangerous and misleading. We do not hear much preaching against it, and even have Restoration churches hosting so-called *Prophecy Seminars* and prominent preachers of the brotherhood believing there is still a place for Israel in God's plan.

Which is my question- Who and Where is this Israel -and Why? The modern nation was formed following World War II, in reaction to the terrible Holocaust, but the idea of a Jewish homeland began with the British Balfour agreement following WW I when Britain was given the whole area of the mid-East as a "mandate." They would decide the fate and structure of government for the people of that region. Allowing people of Jewish blood to come settle in Arab territory was opposed by many, but the United States and President Truman quickly recognized the nation. As we know, it created a series of wars and struggles that continue to this day. In the beginning Jerusalem was to be a United Nations controlled city, since it was seen as the home of three religions. Today it and other areas of what was the ancient Holy Land are battlegrounds of disagreement, disaster and death.

Can this modern nation be the Israel that is a fulfillment of some Bible prophecy? About 80 percent of the people inhabiting that land have Jewish heritage, with the rest as Muslim, Christians and others. Of that 80 percent, 40 percent considered themselves 'secular' meaning they may cling to some tradition of Judaism but are not believers waiting on the Messiah or active in any synagogue. In fact, only 60% of the population, according to polls and the Jerusalem Center of Public Affairs, believe in

God, about 25 % fewer than the United States. There are more practicing Jews in New York City than in the confines of modern Israel.

We know from Old Testament history, that due to their disobedience, God allowed the Northern Kingdom, ten tribes, to be taken into Assyrian captivity in 722 B. C. They intermarried and were spread among the nations and never returned. Judah, the southern kingdom, was later conquered by Babylon with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. They were in Babylonian exile for seventy years but allowed to return by King Cyrus of Persia. They rebuilt the city and the temple as the Old Testament prophets foretold. Then, however, fulfilling Jesus' words, all of Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and desecrated in A.D. 70 by the Roman legions and the people of Judah slaughtered.

There are no doubt millions in this world who still have Jewish blood, but who can know from what tribe they originated? So, it is immensely illogical and defies common sense that the modern country of Israel can possibly have any relationship to a restored Israeli kingdom of the Bible. Do they ever stop to consider this in promoting so hard that this mixed, agnostic, and secular nation is the beginning formation of the Biblical Israel?

So again , I ask ..where and who is this Israel the modern prophets and preachers believe must welcome back Jesus and build a new earthly kingdom, a temple and throne? This brings us to the other question, Why?

Why would any Christian want to believe God must want to restore temple worship, animal sacrifices and have an earthly kingdom of Jews? These false teachers believe in the church is a "stop gap" " a pause in God's plan, which contradicts the very nature of Jesus' work, His church and the purpose of His first and second coming. Why would we believe that Old Testament prophecies were not all fulfilled in the One God had planned, Jesus Christ, the Anointed One? Of what value to the exiles were the prophet's words if the intent was that the fulfillment would not come until centuries later?

We also hear repeatedly from this televangelist crowd that we must support Israel. We must bless Israel so we can be blessed, a statement made to Abraham they take out of context and make a command. We are encouraged to give money to help their poor, stand with them against the Palestinians and support increasing their territory. United States citizens have no problem welcoming a democratic and prosperous nation as an ally. But politics aside, we as Christians certainly want all Jewish people, as well as those of European, African, Asian heritage, all nations, to hear the gospel. That is our commission. But must we stand shoulder to shoulder with people who don't believe in the Savior, Jesus Christ, even though they have heard the preaching of the gospel? A gospel that many of their ancestors accepted to form the first church and then spread it to the Gentile world. A lot of dispensational preachers proclaim assuredly that Israel (again whoever they are) will have a second chance at salvation. So we must assume if one has a certain percentage of Jewish blood you may get the privilege again to confess and repent, not afforded the Gentile world.

John says in his epistles that anyone who does not believe in Jesus is the spirit of the anti-Christ that he says was in the world then and certainly is now. He goes on to say in III John that those who don't bring the teaching that Jesus is the Messiah should not be welcome even into our homes. Not only is modern Israel not the regathering of Jacob's tribes, we have no compelling reason to fly their flag and certainly not believe they are in the process of fulfilling the plan of God. May we wake up and rise up against this confusing and unbiblical movement where the church is not given its rightful place.

Many books and articles by Bible scholars have outlined the problems, contradictions and misinterpretations of those who preach and prophecy what amounts to a complicated plan of several appearances of Jesus, judgements, and resurrections. One cannot use literal interpretations of obvious apocalyptic and figurative language in Scripture. We know there is liberty of opinion on many matters but these schemes overlook clear New Testament passages about Christians being the people of God,

a holy nation and the work of people of the Law and Gentiles being brought together as one under Christ and the New Covenant. Thus Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled. Jesus said in John 17:3-4 he had completed all the work the Father had sent him to do. On the cross he cried out "It is Finished" and the veil of the temple was torn in two indicating the end of the era. No longer would the Spirit dwell in a Holy place but the body of the believer became the temple of the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant.

Dispensationalism has been called a 'seriously dangerous false doctrine' of our time by great scholars such as Jack Cottrell (*page 486- The Faith Once for All.*)

Most Christian church writers conclude the same. One has to defy logic in regard to the Who, Where, Why questions of Israel, the very words of Jesus, and many Scriptures to believe otherwise. (Hebrews 1:1-4; 8: 1-13 9:11-15 I Peter 2:9-10 Galatians 3:26-29 Ephesians 2:12-18 and many more.) (Two other recommended comprehensive works- *Our Reigning King and Returning Lord* by George Stewart and *Nobody Left Behind* by David Vaughn Elliott)

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