

The Judgment of Nations

Taken from "The Promised Land" by Derek Prince

*F*rom the many passages of Scripture we have examined in chapters four through eight, God's plan for the close of this age has emerged with great clarity. Through His prophetic Word, God has declared to all nations that He intends to regather Israel in their own land and restore them to His favor. He has also made it clear that He will intervene in judgment against those nations who oppress Israel or resist God's purposes for them.

The issues that thus confront all nations are set forth clearly in Joel:

In those days and at that time when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

(Joel 3:1–2)

Here, like two sides of a coin, the prophet sets forth the two opposite aspects of God's dealings with the nations at the close of this age: mercy and restoration for Israel, but judgment for all those nations who oppose and oppress Israel and claim jurisdiction over Israel's land.

The place ordained for judgment is called "the Valley of Jehoshaphat." This is an actual location, but the name also carries symbolic meaning, since Jehoshaphat means "the Lord judges."

In this same chapter of Joel, God makes two further references to this valley of judgment:

Let the nations be roused; let them advance
into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there
I will sit to judge all the nations on every
side. (verse 12)

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of de-
cision! For the day of the Lord is near in the
valley of decision. (verse 14)

The Valley of Decision

We see, then, that “the valley of the Lord’s judgment” is also “the valley of decision.” What are we to understand by this latter phrase? For me, it depicts a valley that God, through the pressure of world events, will compel all nations to enter. Once they have entered it, they will not be able to leave until they have made a decision. A decision will be the only way out.

The decision required of all nations will be simple. They must either submit to God's Word or reject it. Submission will entail aligning themselves with God's revealed purposes for Israel. Opposing God's purposes for Israel will constitute rejection of His Word and will inevitably bring the judgment He forewarns.

Many other prophetic passages of Scripture likewise indicate that, at the close of this age, God will judge the nations on the basis of their attitude toward the regathering of Israel and the accompanying restoration of their land and of the city of Jerusalem.

There is a whole series of related verses in Isaiah 60:

Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. (verse 4)

Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you. (verse 10)

For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined. (verse 12)

The sons of your oppressors will come bowing before you; all who despise you will bow down at your feet and will call you The City of the Lord, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

Although you have been forsaken and hated, with no one traveling through, I will make you the everlasting pride and the joy of all generations. (verses 14–15)

First, we need to establish the historical context of this prophecy. Verse 4 uses language similar to many other pictures of the regathering of scattered Israel in their own land. Then,

in verse 14, the prophet uses the specific title Zion. In the same verse, the phrase the sons of your oppressors describes the descendants of those nations that have persecuted Israel.

Again in verse 15, the statement you have been forsaken and hated, with no one traveling through clearly describes Israel and the city of Jerusalem during the period of their desolation.

All the above verses leave no doubt that this prophetic passage is addressed to Zion—a title referring primarily to the city of Jerusalem and, by extension, to the land and people of Israel.

With this in mind, we can now examine the verses at the heart of the passage quoted above—verses 10 and 12. Each shows the attitude and response that God requires from all rulers and nations to the restoration of Is-

rael and of Jerusalem. Verse 10 presents this from a positive aspect: “Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you.” Verse 12 presents this same truth from a negative aspect: “For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined.”

Thus Israel is the “watershed,” the line of separation between nations. Rulers and nations will determine their own destiny by how they respond to what God does for Israel.

In a measure, this has already proven true many times in history. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, for example, Spain was the dominant nation of Europe, with a high level of culture, a powerful army and navy, and an empire that spanned both hemispheres. Within a century of expelling all Jews from her territories, Spain declined to a struggling, second-rate power.

In my personal memory and experience, much the same happened to my own motherland, Britain. Britain emerged victorious from two world wars, retaining intact an empire that was perhaps the most extensive in human history. But in 1947–48, as the mandatory power over Palestine, Britain opposed and attempted to thwart the rebirth of Israel as a sovereign nation.

From that very moment in history, Britain's empire underwent a process of decline and disintegration so rapid and total that it cannot be accounted for by merely the relevant political, military or economic factors. Today, less than a generation later, Britain—like Spain—has lost her world supremacy.

On a more recent note, one of the largest and cruelest empires of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union, took an active stand against Israel and prevented Soviet Jews from immi-

grating to Israel. Countless believers around the world interceded for the ingathering of the Jews from the “land of the north” (Jeremiah 16:14–15; Isaiah 43:5–6). The Lord intervened and brought the total disintegration of this once-mighty empire and the release of almost a million Soviet Jews.

God’s dealings with the nations over the issue of Israel illustrate a basic principle that underlies His dealings with mankind as a whole. When God deals with man, He does not step down from His throne and confront each individual in His own Person. Rather, He confronts man indirectly through His Word. In this way, our response to God’s Word becomes our response to God Himself—even though we ourselves may not recognize it.

This has been true from the very outset of human history. When God placed Adam in the garden, He did not remain there continu-

ously present in person, supervising his conduct. Rather, from that point onward, God was represented by the word that He left with Adam: “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:16–17).

When Adam disobeyed this word from God, the consequences were just the same as if He had disobeyed God to His face. Rejecting God’s word was equivalent to rejecting God in person.

The same principle recurs many times in God’s dealings with Israel. At one point, for example, God spoke to King Saul through the prophet Samuel, charging him to execute His judgment on the Amalekites. When Saul failed to carry out the whole charge, Samuel told him: “Because you have rejected the

word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king” (1 Samuel 15:23).

For Saul to reject God’s word through His prophet Samuel was precisely the same as if he had rejected God Himself. It cost him his throne and, ultimately, his life.

When God thus confronts a man or nation through His Word, He Himself chooses the issue on which He focuses. With Adam, it was the fruit of a tree. With Saul, it was executing judgment on the Amalekites. Whatever the issue, behind it lies God’s ultimate requirement of submission and obedience to His Word.

So it is with the judgment of the nations. God Himself has chosen the issue: the restoration of Israel. It would seem that, in focusing on Israel, God has deliberately chosen a people who are apparently weak and who have been

persistently rejected by other nations. In this way, the decision each nation makes concerning Israel is not likely to be clouded by possible considerations of expedience or material self-interest.

Thus there remains only one unchanging and sufficient reason for nations to align themselves with Israel: God has revealed clearly in His Word that He intends to restore Israel and that He requires all other nations to cooperate with His purpose. Any nation that rejects this revelation of God's Word has, in effect, rejected God Himself and must suffer the consequences.

The Sheep and the Goats

The principle of judging the nations that is unfolded here is not confined to the Old Testament. In the New Testament, Jesus Himself

reveals that when He returns in glory as King to set up His Kingdom, He will judge the nations by the same principle.

In Matthew 25, He depicts vividly the judgment that will take place at that time. In this parable—which is, more accurately, a prophecy—Jesus employs the simile of a shepherd separating his sheep from his goats. The question to be settled at this judgment is: Which nations will be counted worthy to take their place in the Kingdom that Jesus is setting up, and which nations will be excluded from it?

Jesus sets the “sheep” nations on His right hand and welcomes them into His Kingdom with the words, “Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you” (verse 34, kjv). On His left He sets the “goat” nations, excluding them from the Kingdom with the words, “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire” (verse 41). The principle

by which the “sheep” are separated from the “goats” is simple: it is the way they have treated the brothers of Jesus. The “sheep” nations have shown them mercy wherever they have encountered them in situations of need—whether hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick or imprisoned. In similar situations, conversely, the “goat” nations have failed to show them mercy.

In each case, Jesus declares that the way these nations have treated His brothers is reckoned as the way they have treated Jesus Himself. Mercy shown to them is mercy shown to Him, and mercy withheld from them is mercy withheld from Him. It follows, therefore, that nations determine their own destiny by the way they treat the brothers of Jesus.

The New Testament reveals that the brothers of Jesus fall into two categories: those related to Him through flesh and blood; and those

related to Him as committed disciples. At a certain point in His ministry, He looked at the disciples seated around Him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:34). Thus, Jesus includes all true disciples as members of His family.

He was not excluding, however, those related to Him by flesh and blood. As I pointed out in chapter one, Jesus continues throughout eternity to be “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (Revelation 5:5). He is forever identified with the family of David and the tribe of Judah, and still retains the special identification this gives Him with the Jewish people.

Thus, the brothers of Jesus referred to in the picture of the sheep and goats may be taken to include both Christians and Jews. Understood in this way, the principle of separation

between sheep and goats applies directly to the period in which we now live. All the elements of the situation Jesus depicted are already present in contemporary world politics.

Two aspects of that situation are particularly significant. First, the single most controversial and divisive issue in world politics today is the state of Israel. Opposition to Israel is headed by a bloc of Muslim nations that have not only refused to recognize Israel's existence, but are actually committed to its destruction.

These nations carry more influence than they normally would because they control a major share of the world's supply of oil, upon which all modern nations are dependent.

While the extreme control of the communists in the former Soviet Union has been broken, virulent anti-Semitism is still widespread in that region. These enemies of Israel are so ag-

gressive in the pressures they exert that it is increasingly difficult for other nations to follow policies favorable to Israel or even maintain an attitude of neutrality.

More and more, those nations that continue to support Israel will do so not on the basis of material self-interest, but on that of moral and religious conviction. This will be one important aspect of conduct required to qualify them, as nations, for a place in Christ's Kingdom on earth.

A second critical element in contemporary world politics is that the ideologies of Islam and communism, which head the opposition to Israel, are also the two most powerful spiritual forces that oppose Christianity in today's world. As an ideology, each is committed by its basic doctrine to achieve ultimate world domination. If either were to succeed in this—and it would not matter which group

it was—it would spell the end of Christianity.

A third force on the rise which is already opposing Israel is secular humanism. This force is more subtle because it speaks of unity and peace, but opposes God's sovereignty and purposes as stated in the prophetic Scriptures for Israel. This power increasingly influences the Western nations, as well as Israel itself, and has set the stage for increased pressure on Israel to give up the land promised Israel by God in His covenant to Abraham in exchange for "peace" with its Arab neighbors.

Most Christians are aware, to some degree, of the anti-Christian nature of atheistic communism. Many have little or no idea, however, of the true attitude of Islam toward Christianity. In the last resort, the spirit and goals of Islam are opposed more intractably to Christianity than even those of atheistic communism.

In nations once controlled by communism, it is still possible today to find some Christian churches that are actually flourishing. But in nations dominated by Islam, a flourishing Christian church can scarcely be found.

In the midst of these anti-Christian pressures, however, the prophetic Word of God continues to shape the course of history. Even as Islamic and communist ideologies strive against God's Word, they are, without knowing it, instruments to bring it to fulfillment. Like a vast pair of pincers, they are at work throughout the world, forcing Christians and Jews together. In this way, they are helping to put an end to the centuries-old separation between "the brothers of Jesus"—those born according to the Spirit and those born according to the flesh.

Confronted by these powerful common enemies, Christians and Jews are being com-

pelled to reevaluate their attitudes toward one another. Rather than focusing on the points that have kept them apart for so long, they are beginning to emphasize the many elements of their common spiritual heritage.

The powerful spiritual renewal affecting the Christian Church worldwide has caused Christians from all backgrounds to return to their basic biblical origins. They have thus discovered, often to their surprise, that in Old and New Testament alike, these origins are Jewish.

The state of Israel, on the other hand, confronted with the defection of many of its former political allies, is beginning to realize—with at least equal surprise—that its firmest and most influential friends today are found among Bible-believing Christians worldwide.

In this way, the lines are being drawn for the

final conflict destined to usher in God's Kingdom on earth. The divinely appointed representatives of that Kingdom, both Christian and Jewish, find themselves standing side by side. All the forces that oppose God's Kingdom are lining up against them.

The conflict spans two realms—the natural and the spiritual. Christians are called to play their part primarily in the spiritual realm. (Recall, in chapter eight, the four spiritual responsibilities of Christians: praise, proclamation, prayer and comfort.) In the natural realm, the conflict focuses mainly on the land and the people of Israel.

The Stage Is Set

On the stage of human history, the final phases of the conflict are described in the three closing chapters of Zechariah. In the first of

these three chapters, Zechariah 12, the Lord introduces Himself in all His omnipotence and omniscience:

This is the word of the Lord concerning Israel. The Lord, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares... (verse 1)

Here the Lord gives two reasons why He can both control and predict the course of history. First, He is the Creator of heaven and earth, who continues to control all He has created. Second, He forms the spirit of man within him; He knows the thoughts and intentions of all men. No individual or nation can form any plan that is hidden from the Lord.

The New Testament likewise declares God's omniscience, presenting it as a function of His Word:

The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

(Hebrews 4:12–13)

The writer pictures God's Word as a kind of spiritual x-ray, discerning all that is inside man. It is reasonable, then, that the same Word of God that uncovers man's innermost thoughts can also predict how he will behave in any given situation.

Returning now to Zechariah 12, we see God setting the stage for the final conflict:

I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling.

Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem.
(verse 2)

The central issue around which the conflict ultimately revolves, according to the prophet, is the city of Jerusalem—which corresponds with the present situation in world politics. In 1947, when the United Nations voted to partition Palestine, they proposed that Jerusalem be declared an international city. In the ensuing fighting, however, the Jews retained control over the western section of the city, while Jordan annexed the eastern section, including the Old City and the Temple area.

Then, in the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel gained control of the entire city and, subsequently, declared Jerusalem to be “the eternal capital” of the state of Israel. Anyone familiar with the innermost convictions of the Jewish people can vouch for one certainty: Israel will never voluntarily yield up control of Jerusalem.

Zechariah goes on to describe the reaction of “all the surrounding peoples.” These are, of course, all the Muslim nations of the Middle East. For them, Jerusalem under Jewish control has become “a cup that sends them reeling.”

The Jerusalem Bible renders this phrase “an intoxicating cup”—a drink that is so intoxicating that the nations who taste it no longer retain full control of their actions. They can no longer act rationally, but are like people who are either drunk or drugged.

This intoxicating ingredient is already at work among the Muslim peoples. It could perhaps be defined as “demonic fanaticism.” It has called forth attitudes and utterances so extreme and hateful that they cannot be considered fully rational.

The ingredient has provoked a call by vari-

ous Muslim leaders and nations for a united jihad—or holy war—to recover Jerusalem from the Jewish people. So far, however, the endless rivalries of the Muslim peoples have kept them from uniting effectively to carry out their purpose.

In Zechariah's picture, the conflict concerning Jerusalem is set in the context of a siege: "Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem."

When I was in Jerusalem in 1947–48, I witnessed what I felt to be an initial fulfillment of this prediction. Both the Jewish section of Jerusalem and the Jewish community (that is to say, Judah) were, for a time, besieged by the surrounding Arabs. Although I was left with the impression that this was not the final fulfillment of Zechariah's prediction, God used it to make me realize just how close that fulfillment could be.

The Conflict Extended

In Zechariah 12:3, the prophet goes on to describe an extension of the conflict:

On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves.

In verse 2 the prophet spoke only of “all the surrounding peoples”—that is, the Arab states of the Middle East. To them, Jerusalem is “an intoxicating cup.” Here in verse 3, Zechariah goes further by including “all the nations of the earth.” To them, Jerusalem will be “an immovable rock,” and any that attempt to move it will injure themselves.

In 1947–48 I watched the British mandatory government try to move this rock, but—just

as Zechariah predicted—they injured themselves. Eventually they laid this “immovable rock” at the feet of the United Nations. Any other Gentile power that seeks to move this rock will suffer the same fate. Jerusalem is “the city of the Great King” (Matthew 5:35). The King alone can resolve the problems of His city and grant it true and lasting peace.

In light of the current world situation, it is not difficult to write a scenario climaxing with “all the nations of the earth gathered against Jerusalem.” In fact, it takes no more than three scenes.

Scene 1: The Muslim bloc in the United Nations, with their allies, revives the proposal to make Jerusalem an international city. It is quite probable that the hierarchies of the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Churches—perhaps also the Anglican Church—would support this proposal.

Scene 2: The United Nations Assembly endorses the proposal and agrees to use military force, if necessary, to bring it about. Israel rejects the proposal.

Scene 3: The United Nations raises a representative military force, advances against Israel from one of the neighboring Arab territories and lays siege to Jerusalem. In this way, “all the nations of the earth” would, representatively, be “gathered against Jerusalem.”

In the present state of world politics, the first “scene” outlined above could be enacted within a few days. Thereafter, it would take only a few weeks for the two subsequent “scenes” to become an accomplished historical fact. I am not necessarily suggesting that history will follow exactly the course I have outlined. My intention is merely to point out that we may already be at or near the threshold of the events predicted here by Zechariah.

The Bible's total picture of the close of the present age may be compared to a vast jigsaw puzzle. To make the complete picture, many pieces have to be assembled from a multitude of different prophetic passages. Many of the pieces from this passage in Zechariah are already on hand. There are probably pieces from other prophetic passages, however, which are required to complete the picture, that have yet to be assembled.

I question whether any human mind is capable, in advance, of putting together all the pieces in their correct places. In many cases, we can understand the full outworking of Bible prophecy only after it has actually taken place. Then, like Peter on the Day of Pentecost, we can say, "This is what was spoken by the prophet" (Acts 2:16).

At present, these prophecies of Zechariah—and many similar prophecies from various

parts of the Bible—fulfill three important functions. First, they show us very clearly the general direction in which world events are moving. Second, they enable us to align ourselves with the outworking of God's predetermined purposes. Third, they warn us that the climax of the age could well be close at hand.

The Climax

For the final, dramatic climax of Zechariah's predictions concerning Israel and Jerusalem, we must turn to chapter 14:

I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city.

Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.... Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. (verses 2–5)

In all probability, this passage depicts the final outcome of the gathering of all nations against Jerusalem, which was referred to first in Zechariah 12:3. It also seems reasonable to set these events in the period described by Jeremiah:

How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it.

(Jeremiah 30:7)

It is not my purpose to examine all the details that are depicted so vividly here. Suffice it to say that the climax comes with the direct, personal intervention of the Lord Himself.

Anticipation of this glorious climax continues among God's people in the New Testament. In 2 Thessalonians, for example, Paul looks forward to this same event:

This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels... on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. (2 Thessalonians 1:7, 10)

In Revelation 22:13, Jesus declares Himself to be “the Alpha and the Omega” of all history. As the Alpha, He set history in motion. Thereafter, other persons and agents have played their various parts. But when the end

comes, it will again be Jesus who reappears as the Omega and brings history to its divinely ordained consummation.

In this consummation, the severed strands of history are reunited. The invisible becomes visible; the spiritual blends with the natural. Prophecy becomes history. The written word of Scripture merges into the personal Word—the Lord made manifest. Their merging accomplishes the full and final outworking of the last word on the Middle East.

In this closing scene, all the actors in the drama of establishing God's Kingdom on earth are brought together on stage. It is the same stage on which every previous crisis of the same drama has been enacted: Jerusalem and the mountains that surround it. Angelic hosts, glorified saints and the preserved remnant of Israel take their respective places.

But the central figure, outshining all the rest and drawing them together around Himself, is that of Messiah, the King.

Thus heaven will vindicate the confession that every orthodox Jew has maintained through the long centuries—even on his way to the stake or to the gas chamber:

I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah; and even if he tarries, still I will wait every day for him to come.

Thus, too, will heaven answer the prayer of the aged apostle John on the isle of Patmos—the prayer echoed by every true Christian as he closes his New Testament:

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.