

January 6, 2006

Dear Partners,

President Bush and most of the United Nations are supporting what has become known as the *Roadmap to Peace*. Basically that is a plan to give the Palestinians their own sovereign state in the land neighboring Israel. Israel will have to give up control of some of its present territory, but more importantly as far as Christians are concerned, Jews will own less of the land which God promised to Abraham and his descendants. Some influential Christians have withdrawn their support from President Bush because of his promotion of this Roadmap to Peace.

Christians who are against the Roadmap to Peace are primarily against it because they believe the land which God promised to Abraham belongs to present-day Jews and Jews must take ownership of that land before the end of the world. Their eschatology says that Jews from all over the world will migrate back to the Promised Land before the end-times. Typically, Ezekiel 36 and 37 are used to support this view.

I do not believe that God will ever give the natural descendants of Abraham sole possession of the Promised Land. I support the Roadmap to Peace. I believe that Roadmap is evidence of God moving powerfully in our time to fulfill His purposes. Please allow me to explain.

When I study Scripture I come to the conclusion that God still has one promise to fulfill for the natural descendants of Abraham. Paul explained that the Jews were partially hardened for a time so that they would not recognize Jesus as the Messiah (Rom.11:7-10, 25). However, a day will come in the future, when God will remove their blinders. In that day there will be an awakening among the Jews as they embrace Jesus as Messiah. That promise remains to be fulfilled.

However, the promise which God gave to Abraham concerning ownership of the Land is never going to be fulfilled for the Jews only. Rather the Land promised to Abraham will be given to all who put their faith in Jesus Christ—Jews and Gentiles who are Christians.

Paul made this clear when he wrote,

Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is Jesus Christ.

(Gal. 3:17)

God did *not* say the promises were for Abraham's natural descendants. They were given by God to Abraham and his descendant—Jesus Christ. Paul further explained how all who put their faith in Jesus will inherit the blessings promised to Abraham.

Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham...There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

(Gal. 3:6-29)

To whom does the Promised Land belong? Who are the heirs? All who put their faith in Jesus Christ. God is not giving exclusively to the Jews the land which He promised to Abraham. He is giving it to His children.

What I am saying here will be hard to accept for Christians who are waiting for God to cause the Jews to migrate back to Israel and take ownership of that land. I believe those Christians are waiting for something which will never happen. In truth, the largest population of Jews in the world today is not in Israel. It is in New York City and those Jews have no intentions of moving to Israel.

Furthermore, we need to be true the Scriptural promise that God made to Abraham. Let's

go back and read it:

*On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying,
"To your descendants I have given this land,
From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates."*

(Gen. 15:18)

If we are going to be true to the actual promise that God made to Abraham, then we need to realize that it is not for only the land which is today known as Israel. God actually promised all of the land "from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, to the river Euphrates." That land includes parts of present-day Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, and Syria, along with all of Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon. Those who believe that the land promised to Abraham must be possessed by the Jews, need to be faithful to the Scriptures and say that the Jews will own that entire region before the end of the world.

As I already explained, I do not believe God will ever give the Jews ownership of that land. In other Bible passages God told us what is going to happen to that region before the end of the world. Isaiah prophesied, saying,

Thus the Lord will make Himself known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day.... In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyrians will come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth. Whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance."

(Is. 19:21-25)

This passage tells us that a day will come when the people of Egypt, Assyria, and Israel will worship the true God. They will even be traveling from one region to another, for the purpose of worshipping together.

Isaiah's prophecy sounds almost too good to be true. The people groups he mentioned have battled with each other for generations. Egypt and Assyria (which includes present-day Syria, Jordan, and Iraq) are at the foundations of the Arab world and a large percentage of Arabs are Muslims. Isaiah promised that even Arabs and Jews will be worshipping the true God together.

Isaiah's prophecy also reveals God's heart for Egypt and Assyria, for God called Egypt "My people" and Assyria "the work of My hands." To hear God speak like this can be difficult for Christians (and Jews) who think of only the Jews as God's chosen ones. Of course, God did choose the Jewish people in Old Testament times, but it was never to make them the only humans to receive His favor. Rather they were chosen as a light to the nations. With the same love that God dealt with the Jews, He always has desired to deal with every people group. He loves the world. The Jews were not the only ones chosen, but they were as the first-fruits of the earth to reveal God's heart to all people. Since the foundations of the world, God has always wanted to redeem all of humanity.

Earlier I mentioned how Christians who are looking for God to give the Promised Land back to the Jews typically use Ezekiel 36 and 37 to support their belief. The two verses most often used to promote that way of thinking read as follows:

"For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land."

(Ez. 36:24)

"You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God."

(Ez. 36:28)

Indeed, if we take these two verses by themselves we may conclude that God will cause the Jews to migrate back and take ownership of the Promised Land. However, if we read the context

of these verses we will see that God is not speaking to the Jews, but to all who enter into the New Covenant. In fact, we can read the verses sandwiched between these two verses and see that God is speaking to New Covenant people:

"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean...Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you...I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances."

(Ez. 36:25-27)

According to the writer of Hebrews—and other New Testament writers—these verses were fulfilled as the New Covenant was established through Jesus Christ (i.e., Heb. 8:8-12). The same people who receive a new heart and a new spirit are the same people who will inherit the land promised to Abraham.

Jesus Himself talked about gathering people together from every nation of the world. As He did this, He even used some of the same terminology used in Ezekiel 36 and 37:

"I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd."

(John 10:16)

It is Jesus who is gathering people from all nations. He is the fulfillment of the promise of Ezekiel 36-37. Jesus is the One Shepherd referred to in Ezekiel 38:24. Jesus promised to gather together His sheep from all nations of the world. Under Jesus there will be one flock.

Some Christians may read the things I am writing here and become upset with me, accusing me of teaching "Replacement Theology." That accusation would be wrong, because Replacement Theology claims that Christians have replaced the Jews, and hence, God will fulfill all of the Jewish promises in the lives of Christians. I do not believe Christians have replaced the Jews. I believe the Jews have a unique place in God's heart and they have a promise which remains to be fulfilled. As I mentioned earlier, God has promised to open their eyes, and hence, there will be a Jewish awakening before the end of the world. Replacement Theology has implications which seem to me to be too negative, too harsh, too complete. God has not completely rejected the Jews (Rom. 11:1-5). Paul explained how Christians must continue to honor the Jews for the sake of their forefathers (Rom. 11:18).

Rather than holding to Replacement Theology, I believe in "One New Man." Christians have not replaced Jews, but the wall between Jews and Gentiles has been abolished. Jesus Christ "is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall...so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man..." (Eph. 2:14-15). There is neither Jew nor Gentile (Gal. 3:28). Christians have been grafted into the lineage of Abraham. God does not have two groups of people, but one. There is One Shepherd and one flock.

That one flock will inherit the Promised Land. Of course, the meek will inherit the whole earth, but God is going to take the most tumultuous region of the world—the Middle East—and cause different people groups to become one flock with Jesus Christ as their Shepherd. That region shall be the most visible place in the earth where various people groups will come together under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

God is fulfilling His promises today. In the midst of a war in the Middle East, there are amazing reports coming in about revival in Iraq and the surrounding regions. Just like the communist wall fell in our lifetime so that we were freed to preach the gospel in those formerly closed countries, now the walls are falling over the 10/40 window so that we may preach the gospel to all peoples.

And the Palestinians are coming to Christ. When Christians today think of the Palestinians, they typically envision rough, angry Muslims, or even terrorists. In reality, most of them are not Muslim; 63% of Palestinians today claim to be Christian. (In contrast, less than 2% of the Jews living in Israel are Christians.) In light of this, we need to consider who are our

brothers and sisters. We believe there will be a Jewish awakening in the future, but we must not let that belief blind us to the present sufferings of all of our brothers and sisters.

Palestinians need to own their own land. Not only because most are Christians, but because we are to love all people and owning land is a step toward civilizing a people and establishing peace.

Democracy is another step toward peace. At the foundation of democracy is a belief that people have dignity and the right to govern themselves. Democracy stems from the Christian belief that all people are created in the image of God. Democracy is a step toward Christianity and Christianity is a step toward democracy.

Furthermore, land ownership is a step toward peace. Jobs, education, and secure homes all build families. God has structured the earth around the family unit. When the family unit is secure then people's lives are oriented toward peace.

Christians who are determined to help Jews migrate back and take ownership of the Middle East have a serious misunderstanding of how God's promises will be fulfilled. They have been side-tracked away from the ministry of reconciling all people to God. When Christians pray for the peace of Jerusalem, they need to envision the only possible roadmap to peace, which is the acceptance of Jesus Christ by Jews and Gentiles. Then and only then will all people in the Middle East experience an outpouring of God's Spirit so mightily that they will be of one heart and one mind. Then there will be one new man, one flock, with one Shepherd.

Your Brother,
Harold

PS. I still need your help to support our students in Africa. \$320 pays the tuition and food for nine months of training. Our students are arriving at our Bible Colleges this month. Please consider sponsoring one. If you let us know we will send you the name of your student so you can contact and communicate directly with him or her. Your \$32 per month can send one more worker into a village of Africa. If you want we can deduct the amount from your credit card. Just write or telephone us: 1-509-248-5837

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Worldcast Ministries
PO Box 10653
Yakima, WA 98909-1653
509-248-5837
www.worldcastministries.com