

Prophets in the Land of Israel

Since Second World War new nations have been born with such frequency that they have been accepted as commonplace. But the birth of one little nation on May 15, 1948, attracted great attention. Israel was that nation. And Christians especially have followed the development of Israel with keen interest.

This is understandable as Israel is the land of the Biblical sites; where Jesus lived, walked and taught. But I am concerned about the uncritical and total commitment of so many evangelical Christians to the state of Israel. An evangelical weekly stated: "There will be no peace in Jerusalem until Israel occupies her God-given land."

The Tenth Latin American Congress of Christian Churches (ALADIC), affiliated with the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC), declared in one of its resolutions: "The Latin American Alliance of Christian Churches, assembled in its 10th Congress in Temuco, Chile, from January 29 to February 4, 1978, has considered:

1. That God gave a national home to Jacob as well as Esau, giving Canaan to Jacob and Edom to Esau.
2. That in the actual dispute over these territories, Israel has both Biblical and historical rights to Canaan; meanwhile the Palestinians, descendants of Esau, have these rights in relation to Edom.
3. That during the divine assignment of these territories the two nations lived in peace for centuries;
4. That we are believers who accept that the Bible is truly the Word of God and that it records the assigning of these territories mentioned above.

We resolve: To make a call to President Carter of the United States, to President Sadat of Egypt and to Prime Minister Begin of Israel to accept the solution given by God and He will help them to obtain lasting peace."

Some years ago an ad appeared in the *New York Times* over the names of the American Board of Missions to the Jews, and supported by 48 churches. It contained this message: "Because the Jewish people are the people of prophecy, they are the people of the land. And we, knowing Him who made the promise, totally support the people and land of Israel in their God-given, God promised, God-ordained right to exist. Any person or group of nations opposed to this right isn't just fighting Israel. But God Himself."

Christian radio broadcasts in the Philippines, imported from North America, often dwell on prophetic themes. You get the impression that the gospel is about the future only. I

have seldom heard a Christian radio program that analyzes the problems of poverty, hunger, superstition, fatalism, the increasing impact of Western secularism and scientism. Yet, the all-embracing Gospel has a healing message for all these issues. Why spend so much time in the Philippines on the great tribulation, the anti-Christ, and what will happen to the state of Israel?

The ardent supporters of the state of Israel dogmatically declare that the predictions in the Old Testament of the Jews' return to the land of Israel must be literally fulfilled. But not all evangelicals think alike on the subject. There has always been a diversity of views. Dr. William Hendriksen, a widely respected evangelical scholar, writes that "the view according to which recent happenings prove that the Lord is fulfilling ancient prophecies regarding the return and restoration of Jews is an error The various predictions of restoration for Israel were fulfilled in the return from the Assyrian-Babylonian exile, in as far as they were intended to be *fulfilled* in a literal sense. It remains true, of course, that the literal fulfillment of these and of similar prophecies of weal does not exhaust their meaning. Ultimately these predictions are fulfilled in Christ, and therefore also in all those, whether Jew or Gentile, who place their trust in him."

Authors on prophecy seem more concerned to see how the events in the Middle East fit into a great historical prophetic scheme than to ask pertinent questions about the actions of those who are involved. News items about the Middle East are used to prove points of prophecy. Many authors on matters of prophecy write as spectators watching all the moves in a great chess game. And only speak to fellow spectators but don't have a word for those playing the game.

Evangelical Christians ought to speak prophetically wherever injustice is witnessed, whether in Palestine or Israel. And the message of the Gospel must be proclaimed to the Arab and the Jew alike. "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23) But also: "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Rom. 10: 11-13)

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