

Israel, Ethics and Eschatology:
A Response to Michael Rydelnik's Paper
"Is the Modern State of Israel a Fulfillment of Prophecy?"
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I write the final draft of this paper sitting in a café in the Jerusalem Shuk shaking my head in disbelief and wondering as to why we must still answer this question. On one corner there is a giant coffee cup spinning on a poll with the words "Aroma Café" written in Hebrew (which I can easily read) and a placard on the other corner with an inscription in Hebrew from the Nevi'im (which I am embarrassed to confess I cannot as easily read). There are signs of Jewish life everywhere. And yet here we are today pondering the question of whether or not the modern State of Israel is a fluke of history or an act of divine providence.

I need to begin by expressing my thanks to Dr. Rydelnik for this excellent paper. And I must confess from the outset that there is essentially nothing in this paper with which I disagree. Dr. Rydelnick presents a concise but powerful summary of biblical evidence used to support the claim that the modern State of Israel is indeed the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. He then examines some alternative approaches, which he dismisses fairly quickly and concludes that the modern State of Israel does indeed seem to be "a dramatic work of God in fulfillment of the Bible's predictions of a Jewish return to the land of Israel."

In the interest of full disclosure I should say that this paper (or more accurately, the book from which it is drawn) is assigned reading next semester in a class I am teaching at The King's College.¹ So then, in light of such an enthusiastic endorsement, what response can I give other than to simply end this paper with a hearty "amen"?

The truth be told, if the discussion is to move forward and if we are to advance the case for Israel, I believe that there is great deal more that can and should be said. Is the modern State of Israel the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy?

¹ Michael Rydelnik, *Understanding the Arab-Israeli Conflict: What the Headlines Haven't Told You*, rev. and updated (Chicago: Moody Press, 2007), 125-138.

Unfortunately, as we have all come to expect, the answer to that question depends on whom you ask. And as troubling as that fact is, what alarms me most is how those who reject the legitimacy of the reconstitution of the people of Israel and claim the moral high ground in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict succeed only by brewing a sweet but tainted mixture of ethics and eschatology (Israel's covenant failure has invalidated all eschatological hopes) and inviting others to drink it. And drink it they have in ever increasing numbers.

In the United States alone, the popular support Israel once enjoyed has largely disappeared. We now live during a time in which many evangelical scholars and many evangelical pastors have developed a decidedly anti-Israel bias and they are influencing a new generation of Christians to do the same. Millennials stress the importance of social justice over doctrinal truth. We now live during a time when Anti-Semitism masquerading as anti-Zionism has become socially acceptable.

Consequently, I do not believe the eschatological evidence alone will satisfy those who deny that the modern State of Israel is the fulfillment of prophecy, or, for that matter, that any future reconstitution of the Jewish people will be the fulfillment of prophecy. For these individuals, Israel's national sin—Israel's covenant failure, in the past **and** in the present, is just too great. They attach no significance to the modern State of Israel as an act of divine providence. The arguments of biblical scholars like Rydelnick who claim that the Prophets anticipate the future restoration of Israel are dismissed as the product of a misguided and naïve dispensational hermeneutic.

Of course, the fact that the biblical evidence does not satisfy the critics does not invalidate the evidence but it does raise the question of why we cannot move the discussion forward. In my opinion, Rydelnick's exegesis is entirely accurate: 1) The Bible predicts Israel will return to the land in unbelief; 2) the Bible predicts Israel will return to the land in stages; 3) the Bible predicts Israel will return to the land through persecution; and 4) the Bible predicts Israel will return to the land before the Day of the Lord.

And yet I believe there are still important pieces of the puzzle missing from this discussion. I alluded to this earlier when I suggested that those who deny

Israel's legitimacy do so by stressing that Israel's ethical failure in the past as well as the present invalidates any eschatological claims. The theological presuppositions undergirding such claims are erroneous. But before we smugly dismiss such claims, I think it important to note that we have opened the door for them because of our own theological shortcomings. We focus on the Israel of the past and we focus on the Israel of the future, but rarely do we focus on the prophetic significance of the Israel of the present: the Jewish people living today in the land of Israel. As a result, we ironically fail to make the very connections supersessionists make regarding the people of Israel in the land of Israel. N. T. Wright, Steven Sizer, and Gary Burge are relentless in their critique of the modern State of Israel's ethical failures, which they link to the nation's covenant disobedience and invoke when they deny its geo-political future.² In other words, Christian Anti-Zionists are quick to connect ethics and eschatology. But they do so in ways that distort, contradict, and even deny the very essence of that connection. Those who deny that the modern State of Israel is the fulfillment of prophecy have perhaps done us a service by pointing us to some underdeveloped aspects of our own theology as well as theirs.

So then let me state the matter plainly. The question of whether the modern State of Israel is the fulfillment of prophecy, and for that matter, the question of whether the Prophets envision the nation's future restoration can only be addressed if we have clarity and coherency in three areas. Although these points have not traditionally been placed at the forefront of the discussion, I believe that time has now arrived.

1. Ethics and eschatology are inseparable components of biblical prophecy.

Reydelnik is surely correct. The Hebrew Bible does indicate that Israel will return in unbelief (Ezek 20, 36), that Israel will return in stages (Ezek 37), that

² N.T. Wright, *The Way of the Lord: Christian Pilgrimage in the Holy Land and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 119-130; idem, "Jerusalem in the New Testament" in *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*, 2nd ed., ed. Peter W. L. Walker (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 69-75; Gary M. Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise?: What Christians are not Being Told about Israel and the Palestinians* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003), idem, "Why I'm Not a Christian Zionist, Academically Speaking" <http://www.christianzionism.org/Article/Burge02.pdf>. Accessed, May, 2010; Stephen Sizer, "Where is the Promise Land?," in *The Land Cries Out: Theology of the Land in the Israeli-Palestinian Context*, eds. Salim J. Manayer and Lisa Loden (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 305-315; idem, *Christian Zionism: Roadmap to Armageddon?* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004);

Israel will return through persecution (Jer 16), and that Israel will return before the Day of the Lord (Dan 9:27; Zeph 2). This eschatological hope however does not exist in isolation from the themes of covenant obedience and Torah faithfulness in either the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament. Ethics and eschatology are in fact inseparable components of Biblical prophecy. The promise of blessing and the threat of judgment in the Age to Come serves as motivation for righteous behavior in the present age (Duet 30:1-5; Ps 37:27-28; Isa 61:8-9; Jer 32:18-19). This is certainly the case in the Gospels where Israel's eschatological restoration is contingent on faith in Jesus that is manifested in righteous behavior (Matt 5-7; 13:24-43; 19:16-30; 24-25).

Critics of the modern State of Israel rush to point out that the nation looks nothing like the messianic kingdom of peace and justice envisioned by the prophets of ancient Israel. If these are the times of eschatological fulfillment, where is the internal transformation that is supposed to accompany that restoration? One does not need to look far beyond the New York Times or *Haaretz* for a catalog of vices against the Likud government of Benjamin Netanyahu.

Thus Steven Sizer, a vocal critic of Zionism, writes, "Christian Zionists detach the promises and warnings made to the Jewish people from their covenantal basis as well as their immediate historical context, imposing an artificial futurist interpretation."³ The theological inaccuracies that lie behind this statement are legion, but the limitations of space dictate that I address only one issue here and it is simply this: the fact that there are prophetic texts that link the future restoration of Israel with an ethical mandate does not contradict the fact that there are also prophetic texts like Ezekiel 36 which reveal a temporal sequence to that restoration. Sizer gives the impression that there is an irreconcilable disconnect between the prophetic picture Rydelnik paints and the prophetic picture we actually find in the Bible, but this is simply not the case.

I would argue that this truth is confirmed by New Testament evidence. The New Testament has much to say about the certainty of Israel's eschatological

³ Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 204.

restoration in the Age to Come. At the same time, the New Testament also has much to say about the ethical expectations God has for the people of Israel in the present age as well as the next. Paul makes it clear in Romans 11:25-29 that, because of His irrevocable covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God has established a definite timetable for Israel's future restoration.⁴ Even in their present state of unbelief, the apostle asserts that the people of Israel remain beloved for the sake of the Patriarchs (v.28). At the same time, Paul's citation of Isaiah 59:20-21 makes it equally clear that repentance and spiritual renewal are the catalysts that bring about the nation's future redemption. The repentance and spiritual renewal to which Paul alludes is, of course, the product of confessing Jesus to be the Messiah of Israel (Rom 10:9-10). Israel's spiritual renewal results in its ethical transformation, which then culminates in its eschatological redemption. Indeed, this is the very pattern Paul encourages the Roman church to see in regard to its own spiritual journey.

We see a similar emphasis on Israel's future restoration working in concert with this ethical-eschatological tension in the Gospels as well. In Matthew 19:28, Jesus reveals to the Twelve that they will govern the reconstituted twelve-tribe kingdom in the messianic age.⁵ But that statement falls within a larger literary context in which Matthew demonstrates that eschatological reward is contingent upon following Jesus and conforming one's life to the righteous demands of the Torah (Matt 19: 16-30). Similarly, the eschatological timetable of Matthew 24 makes it clear that God has preserved an elect remnant and that Jesus will return at the end of the age to gather the Jewish people from the ends of the earth and reign over a redeemed twelve-tribe kingdom (vv. 29-31). Matthew 24 is apocalyptic in nature, which means its primary purpose is to encourage the elect and reassure them that history will unfold just as God has decreed it will unfold. Yet in the very next chapter, we encounter a series of parables that warn us of the

⁴ See H. Wayne House, "The Future of National Israel" *BibSac*166 (2009): 463-481; see also Harold W. Hoehner, "Israel in Romans 9-11," in *Israel: The Land and the People* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 145-167.

⁵ See Scot McKnight, "Jesus and the Twelve," *BBR* 11(2001): 226-28; idem, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in National Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 82-83. See also Dale C. Allison, Jr., *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 186.

eschatological judgment awaiting those who fail to anticipate the Messiah's return and conduct their lives accordingly. Righteousness and justice and compassion are not options for the people of Israel; they are requirements. The failure to live such a circumspect life is down right frightening: "For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt 25: 29-30).

Once again, I say all this to reaffirm that the Bible's emphasis on ethics and eschatology in no way contradicts Rydelnik's four observations concerning God's program for Israel and the certainty of that nation's future redemption. The Bible is filled with many such tensions and this is hardly the biggest one of them. But lest I am guilty of my own critique, let us remember that our focus here is the modern State of Israel. How does the Bible's link between ethics and eschatology affirm that the modern State of Israel is the fulfillment of prophecy? How does this information impact the Jewish people now?

My answer is that, as long as there are *ANY* Jewish people living *anywhere* in the world, the ethical imperatives of the Covenant are active and in force as a present reality. And if this is the case, this means that the eschatological promises of the Bible (both judgment and blessing) are operative as well. Therefore, to ask whether the modern State of Israel is the fulfillment of prophecy is an incoherent question unless one presumes two things: 1) Because of covenant failure (manifested ultimately in its rejection of Jesus), the Bible does not extend any eschatological blessings whatsoever to the nation of Israel, either now or in the future; and 2) the Jewish people of the modern State of Israel aren't really the Jewish people of the Bible or covenant promise. Rydelnik's reasoned arguments from the prophets are lost on any person who subscribes to these foundational presuppositions.

2. Cartridge Theology employs a double standard to invalidate God's Promise.

It is no secret that many scholars in the United States and Europe maintain that the Bible does not extend any eschatological blessings to Israel,

either now or in the future. A growing contingent of Arab Christian scholars have joined forces with these individuals in citing acts of social injustice taking place within Israel as examples of covenant failure and proof positive that the Israel of today is not the fulfillment of prophecy. They point out that the Jewish people of Israel have not accepted Jesus as Messiah and insist that the nation continues to act with indifference and malice toward the plight of the Palestinian people. Pay careful attention to the link made here between ethics and eschatology.

These individuals engage in what I call “Cartridge Theology.” I realize that moniker may not stick but you know what I mean if you ever owned a VCR or if you have ever had to change the ink cartridge in the copier. In theory they slide in and out with just one click and fit perfectly. Everything, of course, works perfectly in theory. Cartridge Theology uses an interchangeable “ethics and eschatology” double standard to invalidate God’s promise to restore Israel and to deny the nation its eschatological reward for covenant obedience. Biblical interpreters critical of modern Israel are thus able to make their case against the nation and deny the Jewish people living in the Land any present or future blessing.

In the introduction of his important study, *Ezekiel and The Ethics of Exile*, Andrew Mein makes a distinction between descriptive ethics and normative ethics and points out that most people fail to distinguish between the two. Descriptive ethics “seeks to uncover the moral norms and principals in biblical texts and their relationship to the culture of ancient Judah and Israel.”⁶ Practically speaking, the focus here is on historical Israel’s covenant obedience, which resulted in blessing and security in the land versus historical Israel’s covenant disobedience, which resulted in cursing and exile from the land. Normative ethics “is also concerned with the ethical content of the Hebrew Bible, but it is driven by the fundamental question: ‘How do we use the Bible as a source for moral guidance today?’”⁷ Normative ethics, in other words, has to do with the moral principles we derive from the Bible about “Christian living.” This is the stuff Sunday school classes and Christian self-help books are made of - when we

⁶ Andrew Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6.

⁷ Ibid.

obey God he blesses us whereas when we disobey God he withholds his blessing from us. Christian anti-Zionist scholars use these two approaches interchangeably to invalidate the Jewish people's present and future possession of the land and to delegitimize the modern State of Israel.

The Descriptive Ethic cartridge is inserted and the evidence presented against the modern State of Israel is unrelenting. Alex Awad draws attention to three texts in particular that stress the conditional nature of the covenant: 1) Leviticus 18:28: "And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you."; 2) Leviticus 20:22: "Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out."; and 3) Genesis 17:1: "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.'"

Awad then reminds us that most within the nation are non-religious and that most of the nation's founders were atheists. He then adds, "The trail of violence and injustice in Israel in the last sixty years is *clear evidence* that the State of Israel today is ***not the Israel of the Bible or the Israel of the covenant*** (emphasis mine)."⁸

Citing the work of Walter Brueggemann, Salim Munayer identifies "care for others" as one of three "foundational guidelines" for upholding the Torah that God gives to the children of Israel.⁹ "The third clause in God's covenant with Israel is supremely important in that it relates to the treatment of the poor, the oppressed, and minorities."¹⁰ He then provides an exhaustive list of passages which adumbrate his claim that the Jewish nation had a moral covenantal obligation to provide for the poor and show justice to all its residents, whether they are a native or a foreigner. These include such passages as Exodus 23:6 ("Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits."); Deuteronomy 15:11 ("I

⁸ Alex Awad, "A Palestinian Theology of the Land," in *The Land Cries Out: Theology of the Land in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 203.

⁹ Salim Munayer, "Theology of the Land: From a Land of Strife to a Land of Reconciliation," in *The Land Cries Out: Theology of the Land in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 237.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 238.

command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.”); and Deuteronomy 24:14 (“Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns.”).

Toward the end of his essay, Munayer concludes, “Because of the ethnonational character of the Zionist movement, it has also actively pursued a policy of excluding non-Jews from the national, social, and political life in Israel, **a clear violation of the biblical command to treat foreigners with respect** (emphasis mine).¹¹

Similarly, Gary Burge draws upon these very same passages and reminds us that Israel’s presence in the land was and is contingent upon covenant faithfulness and holy living. He writes:

Both Leviticus and Deuteronomy warn Israel in stark terms about the conditional nature of this promise. Leviticus 18.24-30 warns about defilement with the culture of the Canaanites. If Israel embraces such unrighteousness, “the land will vomit you out for defiling it as it vomited out the nation the was before you.” Leviticus 20.22-26 connects this theme to ritual holiness in the same way, “You shall keep all my statutes and all of my ordinances, and observe them, so that the land to which I bring you to settle in may not vomit you out.” The impression given is that the land itself can suffer abuse and be defiled. As sinners were ejected from the camp of Israel, so too, Israel, can be ejected from land of God.¹²

Burge also cites Walter Brueggemann in his critique of Jewish territorialism, both past and present. Stunningly, he appeals to the prayer of messianic reversal uttered by Jesus’ mother in Luke 1:51-55—a prayer that expresses confidence in God who has “helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, **according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants**” (emphasis God), to suggest that land of Israel actually belongs to another (i.e. the Palestinian people). “In these verses we find a theological inversion which brings land-loss to land grabbers and land receipt to those who bear promises but lack power.”¹³

¹¹ Ibid., 259.

¹² Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to “Holy Land” Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 4.

¹³ Ibid., 41-42.

Burge once again invokes the link between ethics and eschatology as the moral authority to reject the State of Israel's legitimacy:

Christian Zionists who champion the prophetic fulfillments of modern Israel must likewise be ready to apply the prophetic ethical demands of these same writers.

... I would also mention the lofty national vision held up in the Old Testament for Israel's national life – a commitment to justice and fairness that has been echoed for the last two thousand years in Judaism's rich history. The alien and sojourner is protected because Israel was an alien and sojourner in Egypt.

If Christian Zionists want to make a biblical claim for Israel's territorial promise, they need to call Israel to live by biblical standards of life.¹⁴

And so it goes. I do not need to exhaust you with further examples of this indictment made against the modern State of Israel vis-à-vis the biblical covenants. Christian opponents of Zionism repeatedly employ a descriptive ethic to critique and delegitimize the nation in both its present and future forms.

But what happens when we point to the growing number of Jewish believers and messianic congregations in the modern State of Israel? And what happens when we point to the fact that some of nation's harshest critics are its own citizens? What happens when we point to Israeli believers in Jesus like Calev Meyer who tirelessly defends the rights of both Jews and Arabs? And what happens when we point to all of Israel's humanitarian projects, projects that are so disproportionate to its size in comparison to the rest of the world? What happens when the most powerful army in the Middle East avoids killing women and children and is willing to live in peace with its enemies? What happens when Jewish people living in the land of Israel show signs of spiritual life and strive in admittedly imperfect ways to obey the covenant? The cartridge gets ejected.

Faced with the crisis of potential covenant obedience, Israel's critics insert the Normative Ethic cartridge. If the Descriptive Ethic cartridge is left in the machine, we risk the unintended consequence of actually triggering the blessing of covenant obedience, namely security in the land that God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I jest here, of course, but my point is absolutely serious. Invoking a descriptive ethic paradigm indicates that there is an actual and direct

¹⁴ Ibid., 124.

correlation between Israel's actions and the blessings or curses it experiences. Invoking a normative ethic severs that direct link and the history of Israel simply provides the church with normative principles of ethical behavior that should govern our lives.

Practically speaking, this means that even if the Jewish people accept Jesus as Messiah and behave in accordance with Leviticus 18:28 and Leviticus 20:22 and Genesis 17:1 and Exodus 23:6 and Deuteronomy 15:11 and Deuteronomy 24:14 and Leviticus 18:24-30 and Leviticus 20:22-26, there is no active covenant between God and the Jewish people. Their status as the Chosen People has been voided and they have no unique claim to the Promised Land. There is no longer any direct correlation between their ethical behavior and their eschatological future in the Land.

If Israel suddenly lives up to the biblical standards Burge refers to, would Burge then agree that the Jewish people are the legitimate heirs of the Promised Land? He would not. In his exegesis of key New Testament passages in *Jesus and the Land*, Burge contends that neither Jesus nor any of the New Testament writers held any interest in the geo-political reconstitution of Israel.¹⁵ Prophetic promises of a physical restoration have been either canceled or transformed to encompass the whole church.

Sizer, who is relentless in his demand that Israel fulfill its covenantal obligations or be held accountable, states point blank, "The Jewish people today are not the inheritors of the land promises made to Abraham."¹⁶ He is equally as clear when he states that the land promises are fulfilled in the church: "From Pentecost onwards, Old Testament language concerning the land is invested with new meaning and applied to the church."¹⁷ "As the apostles were scattered, exiled from the land, ambassadors to the whole world, the land itself became irrelevant to God's ongoing redemptive purposes."¹⁸ The ethical demands of the Torah remain concrete, binding, and punitive while the Torah's promise of

¹⁵ Ibid., 126.

¹⁶ Steven Sizer, "Where is the Promised Land?: A Covenantal Perspective," in *The Land Cries Out: Theology of the Land in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 305.

¹⁷ Ibid., 313.

¹⁸ Ibid., 315.

eschatological restoration has been detached from the nation and transformed into a cosmic reality of which the church alone is heir.

Likewise, Awad, who is very clear that the modern State of Israel is not the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy because of its ethical and moral failures, is equally clear that the nation has no eschatological hope because of its rejection of Jesus. “Thus Israel as a nation annulled its privilege as God’s chosen nation by rejecting God’s ultimate plan for the redemption of humanity in Jesus Christ.”¹⁹ Consequently, God created a new entity called the Church, which has become heir to the New Covenant. With this change of covenant, argues Awad, “there was no longer any need for a specific land or territory to ‘house’ the new covenant.”²⁰ And as we might predict, he concludes, “For this reason the concept of a Promised Land was modified in the new covenant to a new reality, a reality that Jesus and his followers called the kingdom of God.”²¹

So it seems that Israel is damned if it does, and damned if it doesn’t. God will reward Israel for ethical behavior in exactly the same way he will reward Uruguay for ethical behavior, no more no less. At least in theory, that is. Technically speaking, Israel is still doing “hard time” for covenant failure and its rejection of Jesus. Ethical behavior will only take you so far when you have a criminal record.

Granted, the term “Cartridge Theology” may never catch on, but the point still stands. Critics of Zionism cannot continue to debate the future of Israel using two very different ethical constructs that they switch in and out at will like an old VCR. It is a double standard. And as long as we permit others to employ a double standard to interpret the Bible, we permit them to also dismiss Rydelnik’s four important observations concerning the question of whether or not the modern State of Israel is the fulfillment of prophecy.

3. The denial of Jewish Peoplehood is unacceptable.

¹⁹ Awad, “A Palestinian Theology of the Land,” 206.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

I regret that I am not an articulate enough writer to communicate how deeply this last category troubles me. In many ways, this is my most important point, but space dictates that it be my briefest. The Jewish people are not a theological abstraction to be contemplated, mulled over, or discussed. The verdict is not out on the question of whether we actually exist. And Jewish people living once again in the land of Israel are an existential reality. And yet today and tomorrow and the next day we will debate over and over again this question of whether Jewish people *as a people* have a legitimate right to be there.²² Evangelical Christians today are more willing to believe *with conviction* that a banana is indigenous to North America (which it is not) than they are willing to believe with conviction that the Jewish people are indigenous to a small land bridge linking the continents of Africa, Asia Minor and Europe (which for the record, they are).

Those who champion the cause of Palestine have created a new narrative in which Zionists are portrayed as white European colonialists who invaded the land of Palestine and drove out its indigenous inhabitants. That, alas, is the subject of another paper.²³ But what I can say here is that this conviction has been fueled by Christian scholars who reject Zionism and undercut the legitimacy of the modern Jewish state. March states it plainly: “Israel is not biblical Israel, and any rights held by biblical Israel do not belong to modern Israel... When we read the Bible, we must be quite clear that its Israel is not modern Israel.”²⁴

I have never read a paper that debates whether modern Egypt is any way related to biblical Egypt or if the people of Iran are in any way related to the people of ancient Persia. Even if there are significant ethnic differences between

²² For a detailed discussion on the problem of supersessionism and the denial of Jewish peoplehood, see Tommy Givens, *We the People: Israel and the Catholicity of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

²³ For a full discussion of the subject, see Ephraim Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Ephraim Karsh and Inari Karsh, *Empires of the Sand: The Struggle for Mastery in the Middle East 1789-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); David Meir-Levi, *History Upside Down: The Roots of Palestinian Fascism and the Myth of Israeli Aggression* (New York: Encounter Books, 2007); and Caroline B. Glick, *The Israel Solution: A One-State Plan for Peace in the Middle East* (New York: Crown, 2014).

²⁴ W. Eugene March, *Israel and the Politics of the Land: A Theological Case Study* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 67.

the modern nation state and its biblical antecedent, I doubt any scholar would completely divorce the two and sever their connection. And yet the modern State of Israel is treated as absolutely and entirely “other,” a colonial fiction designed to legitimate an illegal land grab.

If modern Israel has nothing whatsoever to do with ancient Israel, then modern Jews really have nothing whatsoever to do with ancient Israel either. In other words, the peoplehood of the Jews is a fiction. If those who oppose the right of the Jewish people to return to the land of Israel were deeply and truly intellectually honest with themselves and others, I believe they would be forced to acknowledge that they believe the Jewish people to be an artificial construct, which the rest of the world simply humors.

Who are the Jewish people that will return in unbelief? Who are the Jewish people who will return in stages? Who are the Jewish people who will return through persecution? Who are the Jewish people who will return before the Day of the Lord? If the “real” descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob no longer exist, the answer is obvious: no one. I believe that Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, and several centuries of Jewish believers in Jesus would beg to differ.

Conclusion

Once again, I wish to commend Dr. Rydelnik for an excellent paper. For those who share the conviction that God will fulfill His covenant with Israel and for those who believe that a bright future lies ahead for the Jewish people, it is important that we do more than memorize a few random verses and have some vague notion of what is coming next.

Dr. Rydelnik had provided us with an important map of Israel’s eschatological future which we can use to locate the modern State of Israel in prophecy: The Jewish people will return in unbelief; they will return in stages; they will return through persecution; they will return before the Day of the Lord. I have memorized these points and I guarantee you my students will memorize them as well next semester.

At the same time, I believe there are several other issues that need to be addressed if these points are to be taken seriously. First, we must recognize that

ethics and eschatology are inseparable components of biblical prophecy.

Secondly, we must not tolerate the use of an ethics/eschatology double standard (“Cartridge Theology”) to invalidate God’s promise to restore Israel and deny the nation its eschatological reward for covenant obedience And thirdly, we must resist any attempt to invalidate the peoplehood of the Jewish nation.