

THE ISRAELI ELECTIONS

by Thomas Ice

May 17, 1999 Israel had a major national election in which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was defeated by Labor's Ehud Barak. Barak will be forming a coalition government that is due to assume governance around the first of July. The other story in the Israeli elections that most do not realize is that while the more conservative Netanyahu lost the top spot to the more left-leaning Barak, the religious parties made significant gains in the number of seats they control in the Knesset. This makes for an interesting coalition mix since Barak has to include some of the conservatives and orthodox parties to form a government of at least the 61 seats required for the thinnest majority. How are these recent developments fitting into God's prophetic plan?

PREPARATION FOR A COVENANT

Stage-Setting

The present church age is not a time in which Bible prophecy is being fulfilled. Bible prophecy relates to a time after the rapture (the seven-year tribulation period). However, this does not mean that God is not preparing the world for that future time during the present church age—in fact, He is. But this is not “fulfillment” of Bible prophecy. So while prophecy is not being fulfilled in our day, it does not follow that we cannot track “general trends” in current preparation for the coming tribulation, especially since it immediately follows the rapture. We call this approach “stage-setting.” Just as many people set their clothes out the night before they wear them the following day, so in the same sense is God preparing the world for the certain fulfillment of prophecy in a future time.

Dr. John Walvoord explains:

But if there are no signs for the Rapture itself, what are the legitimate grounds for believing that the Rapture could be especially near of this generation?

The answer is not found in any prophetic events predicted before the Rapture but in understanding the events that will follow the Rapture. Just as history was prepared for Christ's first coming, in a similar way history is preparing for the events leading up to His Second Coming. . . . If this is the case, it leads to the inevitable conclusion that the Rapture may be excitingly near.¹

The Bible provides detailed prophecy about the seven-year tribulation. In fact, Revelation 4—19 gives a detailed, sequential outline of the major players and events. Using Revelation as a framework, a Bible student is able to harmonize the hundreds of other biblical passages that speak of the seven-year tribulation into a clear model of the next time period for planet earth. With such a template to guide us, we can see that already God is preparing or setting the stage of the world in which the great drama of the tribulation will unfold. In this way this future time casts shadows of expectation in our own day so that current events provide discernible signs of the times.

Israel

Believers today live during the church age, which will end with the rapture of the church. Prophetic signs relating to Israel are not being fulfilled in our day. In our own day, God is prophetically preparing the world for the time when He will resume His plan relating to Israel. One major indicator that we are likely near the beginning of the tribulation is the clear fact that national Israel has been reconstituted after almost 2,000 year. Such a rebirth of the nation of Israel is required for prophesied events of the tribulation to transpire. Hundreds of biblical prophecies presuppose Israel as a nation and in control of Jerusalem with a rebuilt, functioning Temple.

The tribulation begins with the signing of a covenant between Israel and the antichrist (Isa. 28:15-18; Dan. 9:26-27), who will begin his short-lived rise to world-wide control. The important point to be made is that the antichrist begins the tribulation with a covenant that promises to protect Israel and in essence solve the Middle East Crisis. Bible believing Christians know that there will not be peace in the Middle East until the second coming of Christ at the end of the tribulation. Thus, whatever happens before the signing of the covenant that begins the tribulation, we know that it is God's hand preparing the world by setting the stage for these post-Rapture events. This is what we are witnessing through current events in Israel.

ISRAEL'S GROWING SECULAR/RELIGIOUS SPLIT

One of the under reported issues by the American press in the wake of Israel's election is the role being played by the growing strength of the religious orthodox community and their different vision for the future of the nation than that of Israel's secular founders. The *Stratror Intelligence Update* of May 24, 1999 offers an interesting analysis of the recent election and what it means for Israel's future. Contrary to common belief, Stratror contends that "for the first time in fifty years, national security was not at stake in the election. National identity was." Yet most believe that the central issue leading to the election of Barak was the Peace Process. Stratror explains:

The central issue in the election was the relationship between secularists and religionists. Israel, like many countries in the world, is divided into two general factions. There are those who see Israel as the homeland for ethnic Jews, understood as all those who could make a genealogical claim to Jewish descent. Beyond that, the secularists saw the State of Israel, like other Western states, as being essentially neutral on matters of religion. To be somewhat more precise, it was understood that one could be Jewish without practicing Jewish ritual law or even believing in the Jewish God. The state was seen as the guardian of rights and freedoms, and in some vague sense as the heir to some Jewish tradition, but a fundamental distinction was drawn between Israeli citizenship and Jewish religiosity.

. . . The revolt against Likud had much less to do with the West Bank than with the sense that Likud had written a blank check to the religious parties on domestic policy and the feeling that the religious parties had become corrupt with unearned power.

. . . This means that anyone expecting Ehud Barak to make serious compromises on national defense issues are going to be disappointed.

. . . What is going on in Israel is, in the long run, far more important than where the Palestinian flag flies. The social fabric is torn apart by utterly incompatible visions of what Israel as a society should look like.

. . . So Barak is going to be focusing on domestic issues when a huge and urgent blast from Washington is going to descend on him. Misreading the election as a sea change in Israeli views of Oslo, the administration will find Barak both preoccupied and with a very different agenda than the one Washington would prefer to see implemented. Clinton will feel himself betrayed by Barak, whom he clearly favored in the election and who used his good relations with Washington as a reason to favor him over Netanyahu. Barak, with much less room for maneuver than Clinton will believe, will first cooperate and then resist as Clinton pushes him beyond where the former Chief of Staff of the IDF will want to go and where Israeli politics will permit him to go. Barak is bound to disappoint a lot of people, since his primary mission is to please a large segment of the Israeli public on an issue having nothing whatever to do with foreign policy. Far less has changed in Israel than would appear at first glance.

Israel's religious community has been steadily growing. Orthodox Jews were by-and-large opposed to the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948. They believed the coming of Messiah would accomplish the deed. However, over the last fifty years of the nation many have immigrated to Israel and warmed to the idea that Jews in Israel should currently press to implement the Torah as the means of governance in the modern state. Religious Jews appear to be making steady gains in Israel, which explains why we see an increasing tension over whether Israel should be governed according to secular or religious law. The average Orthodox family has 10 to 12 children, while the average secular family does well to average two children. Some experts on Israel see the religious reaching parity with the secular at some point during the next ten to fifteen years. What could this mean for Bible prophecy?

INCREASING ROLE FOR RELIGION

Orthodox Jews want an Israel that is run according to Mosaic and Rabbinic religious law. This cannot be done without a rebuilt Temple. Much of Israel's law revolves around the Temple and the priesthood. Absent a Temple, Israel cannot really function as a religious nation. I believe that pressure will continue to mount within Israeli society for the Third Temple. How might this relate to preparation for tribulation events?

In our book *Ready to Rebuild*, Randall Price and I speculated that although Israel's next Temple could be rebuilt at any time, we think it most likely will be included as an element of the covenant between antichrist and Israel that will start the tribulation. Remember, the Tribulation Temple does not have to be functioning until the mid-point of the seven-year tribulation. The greatest obstacle currently to rebuilding the Temple is the political roadblock. A majority of Israelis are not yet willing to endure World War III

over an issue like rebuilding their ancient Temple since they do not currently value even their own religious heritage. Modern Israel does not yet possess the national will which will one day be required to reconstruct a new Temple. With the current trend of the Orthodox gaining political clout in Israel, it is not hard to conceive that part of a future deal to “settle” the Mid-East crisis would include the concession to rebuild Israel’s Third Temple. This would certainly be an enticement for the religious to go along with the deal.

The biggest obstacle to implementing the Oslo peace deal has to do with the “final status” of Jerusalem. Israel’s new Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, has indicated that he is no more willing to divide Jerusalem and permit the Palestinians to make East Jerusalem their capital than his predecessors. The final status of Jerusalem is now being negotiated by the new Israeli government and the Palestinians. Bible believing Christians know the final status of Jerusalem is destined to be under the reign of Jesus Himself after His return to planet earth at the end of the tribulation. And not before. Guess What? The Palestinians will have no role to play in it at all. However, in the mean time, Scripture tells us that during the tribulation the Lord is “going to make Jerusalem a cup that causes reeling to all the peoples around; . . . And it will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured. And all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it” (Zech. 12:2,3).

As Believers, we can take comfort in the fact that even though we see the chaos created by the efforts of fallen humanity to solve global problems, we know that there really is and will be a genuine solution one day. We also need to remember that until that day comes we are to serve and obey our Lord, preach the gospel to every creature, while at the same time keeping an eye out for the any-moment return of our Lord. Maranatha!

¹John F. Walvoord, *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis*, revised (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), p. 217.