

Reflections Concerning Israel, the Restored Homeland of the Jews

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This presentation is in the nature of a report on the tour to the Holy Land, which the writer enjoyed as a gift* from his past and present Seminary students. The theme will be treated under three subdivisions: Reflections concerning the establishment of the state of Israel; Reflections regarding our visit to the re-established state of Israel; Reflections regarding the light which Scripture can be said to cast on this state of Israel.

I. Reflections Concerning the Establishment of the State of Israel

In chapter 28 of Deuteronomy the Lord prophesies dire judgments which are to befall His chosen people in the event that they would defiantly reject His covenant, despise the great mission entrusted to them as His chosen people, and fail to reverence His glorious and fearful name as the Lord, as the God of free and faithful grace. We read in verse 64: "And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other." In subsequent verses of the chapter we read the following statements: "Among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind, and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life."

In the history of the past 1900 years we find abundant evidence that these prophecies have gone into fulfillment for God's unfaithful chosen people. Some of the details were again literally fulfilled in the great massacre of the Jews under the Nazi regime. It is quite evident, however, that these prophecies are of a nature that all of the details do not need to be constantly in evidence. The fulfillment of these promises does not exclude all rest for the Jewish people as in the past and in the present they have been scattered among the nations. For the same reason these prophecies do not mean that none of the Jews could remain in their homeland.

It is a fact that at least in the city of Jerusalem there have always been some Jews, with the exception probably of two occasions, once after the suppression of the rising against the Romans, and once on the morrow after the massacre of the Jews by the Crusaders as they took over Jerusalem in 1099. During the days of the Byzantine Empire (until 638), during the Arab rule extending to the Seljuk Conquest (1072), in the course of the Crusaders' dominion (1099–1291), under the Mameluke Turks, and throughout the Ottoman Empire (1517–1917), yes, during all these periods a considerable group of Jews continued to have a permanent foothold in the city. At times they attained prosperity and produced works of cultural significance.

Early in the nineteenth century the community of Jews in Jerusalem had become the largest single congregation there. By 1878 the Jews were an overall majority at Jerusalem. In that same year a small group of them ventured even further a field to found the first modern Jewish farm village in the coastal plain. In 1882 Jewish immigrants from Russia established another agricultural hamlet. At that time Jewish pioneers also settled in Galilee.

It was in 1897, at the call of Theodore Herzl, that the World Zionist organization was founded at the first Zionist Congress at Basle. Herzl was an Austrian Jew, a newspaperman, who espoused the cause of the European Jews suffering persecution and discrimination. He was particularly troubled by the discrimination

* In acknowledgment of the writer's twenty-five years on the Faculty of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, his students generously enrolled him in the Seventh Seminar on the Lands of the Bible, conducted in the summer of 1970 by Professor Menahem Mansoor of the Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies, University of Wisconsin.

appearing in the administration of justice. He directed his interest upon finding a homeland for the Jewish race. In his own thinking he found it possible to envision such a homeland anywhere on the globe where a suitable country might be found available. The first Jewish Congress, however, made it quiet clear that for the Jews there could be only one homeland that would be acceptable to them, namely, the Promised Land of Canaan. The astute chemist, Chaim Weizmann, another great leader in the Zionist Movement, who later became Israel's first president, was adamant in the conviction that this homeland had to be Palestine.

As a result, Zionism, the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, aimed at the attainment of a publicly recognized, legally secure home for Jewry as a haven from persecution and as a center for the further development of the Jewish nation and spirit. The movement received a great deal of support from international Jewry, particularly its wealthy members. At the same time a great deal of support came also from Christian circles. This was due to a mistaken interpretation of certain Scripture passages, which induced these Christian proponents of Zionism to entertain a hope of an ultimate conversion of the Jews as a part of their millennialistic thinking. We shall have more to say of this in the final portion of this paper.

Heads and leaders of western nations also lent support to Zionism from time to time, often in part out of the ulterior motive of getting rid of a vexing Jewish problem.

Fired by the aims of Zionism, thousands of Jews began to go to the Holy Land to cultivate the soil, to establish industries, and to build towns and villages. The Jews of the European ghettos had not been farmers, but peddlers and shopkeepers. Those more fortunate had been active in money lending. Hence they were not very adept at establishing farms in the impoverished soil of Palestine. During the decadent Ottoman Empire's control of Palestine, the ancient systems of water conservation and of proper drainage had been completely neglected. Thus the most fertile regions, the Philistine Plain and the Plain of Sharon along the Mediterranean Coast flanking Judea and Samaria, also the Valley of Esdraelon between Samaria and Galilee, had degenerated into malarial swamps, which were largely uninhabited. It was land in these regions which the absentee Turkish landowners were quite ready to sell to the Jews, if, as they thought, the Jews were foolish enough to buy such worthless land. As a result, many Jews perished before the land was properly drained and converted from desert regions and dangerous malarial swamps into the prosperous orchards of citrus fruit, banana plantations, cotton lands, and grain fields which are presently found in these regions.

At the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 the Jewish community in Palestine numbered some 85,000. On November 2, 1917, the British foreign secretary came out with the famous Balfour Declaration of Sympathy with the Jewish Zionist aspirations, pledging support for the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people. The Allied governments were parties to the antecedent negotiations and approved this declaration. So did the Arab national leadership at that time. It must be remembered, however, that the British had at the same time made far-reaching commitments to the Arabs on the basis of Colonel Lawrence's work of unifying the Arabs against the Turks. Later on this confronted the British with the dilemma of not being able to redeem mutually exclusive commitments. Nevertheless, the League of Nations in 1922 entrusted Great Britain with the mandate over Palestine, which incorporated the Balfour Declaration, explicitly stating that recognition was given to the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine.

The interval between the two World Wars was a period of active Jewish immigration, especially from war-ravaged Europe, strongly aided by Jewry in the more prosperous countries. By 1948 the thriving Jewish community in Palestine numbered 650,000 Jews. The Jewish immigration and its financial support also involved great efforts at internal organization and economic and cultural up building. Immigration went hand in hand with a successful renaissance of the Hebrew language.

In view of all these developments Arabs in great numbers from the neighboring countries were attracted by the rise in the standard of living and by the employment opportunities, and crossed the borders in great numbers, frequently in an illegal manner. As a result, also the Arab population in Palestine almost doubled during the period between the two World Wars.

Gradually it became the conviction of the Jewish population that the British administration had really discarded the basic aim of the mandate to give Jewry a homeland, that instead it had turned the mandate into a colonial regime, which gave much attention to satisfying the oil-rich neighboring Arab states.

In 1947 Great Britain brought the Palestine question before the United Nations. This body then arranged for a plan of partition by which Palestine was to be divided into independent Jewish and Arab states linked in an economic union.

On May 14, 1948, a provisional Jewish government issued a proclamation of independence, which was to go into effect the moment that the British mandate would end, namely, at midnight on the Sabbath of the 15th day of May 1948. This declaration of independence stated: the state of Israel would open to Jewish immigration and to the ingathering of exiles; it would devote itself to develop the land for the good of all of its inhabitants; it would maintain complete equality of social and political rights of all its citizens without distinction of creed, race, or sex. It would guarantee freedom of religion and conscience, of language, of education, and of culture. It would safeguard the holy places of all religions. In this declaration the sons of the Arab people dwelling in Israel were also urged to keep the peace and to play their part in building the state on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all of its institutions.

The newly established state of Israel was immediately invaded by the neighboring Arab states of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, and also by Saudi-Arabian contingents. The strong intervention of the United States and of Russia and the support of the United Nations, whose declarations at that time still carried considerable weight and prestige, rescued the new state from extinction. After months of intermittent fighting, the Arab governments signed an armistice agreement in 1949. By this time Egypt had, however, occupied the Gaza Strip, and Jordan had annexed Judea, Samaria, and the old city of Jerusalem. The armistice was to be a transition to permanent regional peace and to the recognition of Israel. Neither came about. Israel was incessantly threatened and assailed by the Arab states. In the meantime Russia shifted its support from Israel to Egypt and the other Arab states. In June of 1967 under the leadership of Egypt these Arab nations went over to open war with the intention of wiping out Israel as a nation. Asserting her right under the charter of the United Nations to guard herself against aggression, Israel struck back desperately, decisively. In less than a week, the so-called Six Day War, Arab air and ground strength had been pulverized, and Israel had won one of the most remarkable victories in recorded warfare. As a result of this victory Israel took over all of the Jordanic holdings west of the Jordan, the Egyptian territory of the Sinaitic Peninsula, and occupied the Golan Heights east of Galilee, former Syrian territory. Peace has not yet been established, and Israel has not yet gained recognition from the neighboring Arab nations as a sovereign state.

II. Reflections Concerning Our Visit to the Re-Established State of Israel

Our last summer's visit to Israel was made while President Nasser of Egypt was still continuing his threat of driving Israel into the sea. During our eighteen-day stay in Israel we however experienced very little in the way of hostilities. Occasionally we noticed a warplane flying overhead. Contacts with soldiers going to and from the areas of military danger were likewise a reminder that there was a war going on. Yet our tour leader, Dr. Mansoor, kept us away from the immediate Jordan region between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee, where the Fedayeen were even then quite active.

In a way, it seemed a good time to visit Israel. In our Old Testament studies, and on the basis of Scripture's own assertions, we do think of the Holy Land as a land flowing with milk and honey. This is probably more readily grasped by a present-day visit than by one of several decades ago. The regions principally occupied and developed by the Israeli, such as the coastal plains, the Valley of Esdraelon, and the drained region of former Lake Huleh give clear evidence of their fertility. They have been converted from desert land and sour malaria swamps into citrus orchards, banana groves, cotton fields, and productive grain farms. The fertility of Palestine is much better understood by a Californian than by a Wisconsinite. The fertility of the Palestinian soil is there even as it is present in much of the soil of California and Arizona, but it can come to its own only through the presence of needed water. If water is made available, not only one but often several annual crops can be grown. During Biblical times, especially in the golden age of David and Solomon, Israel had developed elaborate systems of water storage and irrigation, also proper arrangements of drainage for the winter streams to avoid seasonal souring of the soil. By careful stewardship of every available water supply

through modern methods, Israel has again made the desert to bloom. Though the population of Palestine since the establishment of the state of Israel, exclusive of the population in the newly administered areas, has more than tripled, Israel has become 67 per cent self-sufficient in producing its own food.

Israel has even succeeded to develop the Negev, the arid Southland, with Beersheba as its capital. It has done so by making use of subterranean waters available locally and by extending the national water carrier down to the Negev. This water carrier is the huge pipeline that makes the water of the Sea of Galilee, fed by the snow of the Lebanon Mountains, available for irrigation not only in the coastal plains but also in the regions of the Negev. As one travels through the rugged and arid land of the Negev, the Bedouin sheep, goats and camels appear to graze on nothing but stone and sand; suddenly, however, you may come upon a luxurious peach grove, made possible through irrigation supplied by the national water carrier.

At the same time, Israel has made use of the mineral resources of the Negev and those of the Dead Sea to develop thriving industries whereby Beersheba has become an important city. Twenty years ago it was merely a Bedouin trading center, with a population of less than 2,000; since, it has been turned into a thriving city of 92,000, with a university of its own and with fine hotels equipped with swimming pools and air conditioning.

It has been a basic principle of the state of Israel ever since its establishment to open its door to all Jews who wish to immigrate as well as to other exiles who wish to come. Hence Israel has been carrying on a tremendous building program to provide the necessary housing. Even during the present state of war, it has not given up this basic objective. Upon inquiring how the Israeli were able to continue their building program while waging a war of survival, we were given the answer: "Probably we cannot afford all this building, but we can afford even less not to continue it." Though the housing is sturdy and serviceable, offering modern conveniences, it is quite understandable that much of it is not particularly imaginative and strikes one as somewhat drab. The attention to esthetics in housing will admittedly have to come a little later, though in some of the newer government buildings and cultural centers, which have been endowed by the wealth of foreign Jewish benefactors, there is also attention given to esthetics.

When, on the other hand, the present-day visitor travels through the central highland ridge of Judea and Samaria, the Jordanian lands now supervised by Israel, he will still get a rich taste of the age-old Biblical customs and habits of living. During our Sunday at Jerusalem we made a visit to nearby Gibeon, the city where the Lord had appeared to Solomon in a dream upon his enthronement. It was once one of the Hivite cities with which Joshua had made a treaty after the fall of Jericho. Here at Gibeon we visited the Pool, where the forces of Joab and Abner had met in combat. And it seemed as though we had suddenly been taken back to Biblical times. We saw threshing floors where beasts were still used to tread out the grain; we saw Arab farmers wielding the winnowing shovel, throwing the threshed grain up into the air so that the wind might blow the chaff aside for burning, and so that the cleansed wheat might fall upon a treasured heap. It meant witnessing threshing just as the Lord depicts it in His prophecy of Judgment Day. We also saw women at the spring below the Pool of Gibeon filling their water pots with water, striving with one another to get first access to the treasured water. We saw young Arab girls carrying baskets of apples on their heads. We saw pomegranates and figs ripening for the harvest.

As we traveled from Jerusalem to Jericho, we could easily visualize the predicament of the Jew in Christ's parable who had met up with thieves on this deserted road, and could understand what it would mean for him to be passed up by priest and Levite and to be befriended by the Samaritan. The inn that was pointed out to us as the Inn of the Good Samaritan could well have served him in carrying out his true love to the neighbor.

As we traveled through the hilly region from Jerusalem to Shechem, terraced vineyards and olive orchards, surrounded with their stone walls as depicted in Scripture, were much in evidence. In their present appearance of neglect they pointed to earlier periods when they had received full care and attention. When we reached Dothan, near the region of the mountain passes which lead into the Valley of Esdraelon, we saw Bedouins from the south watering their flocks of sheep and goats at a cistern. These Bedouins were still following the pattern of the sons of Jacob, who had led their fathers' flocks fifty-five miles northward from Hebron in a similar manner during the dry season. It was at such a well near Dothan that Joseph, far away from

home, was sold into slavery to the Ishmaelites who happened to come along through the mountain passes to proceed along the Via Maris to Egypt.

On our trip from Beersheba through the rugged, arid Negev to Masada we saw numerous Bedouin tents, which reminded us of the patriarchs. In much the same manner Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had tented in the western Negev, likewise surrounded by their flocks, herds, and camels. It was on this trip that we felt the full impact of the Bible's figurative use of water as standing for life and salvation, and of the absence of water as standing for death and destruction. Water is much too available to us in our environment to let us fully appreciate the full force of this figurative language. Yet while in the Negev we knew that if we would leave our busses we would soon experience what Bishop Pike experienced very recently, and what long ago Hagar and Ishmael had feared when they lost their way after having been east out from Abraham's household.

Churches and shrines have covered the most prominent holy places at Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Gethsemane, Bethany, and Nazareth. This makes it more difficult for the visitor to visualize the pertinent Biblical scenes and happenings. Our particular guide through these places, Father Roget, a French Catholic priest from Beersheba, was, however, very helpful. He generally had someone in the group read the pertinent Bible account to bring before our minds the actual happenings that we above all wanted to bring to our remembrance. At some of the sites in Jerusalem we were taken down to the excavations that have been carried on beneath these shrines, excavations by which such sites as the house of Caiaphas and the Pool of Bethesda have been quite reasonably established. One must keep in mind that the many conquests to which Jerusalem has been exposed since Christ's time have through the constant process of razing, leveling, and rebuilding, raised the street level more than twenty feet. At Shechem, the present-day Nablus, Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal were very much in evidence. It was not difficult to imagine how the Israelites under Joshua had been assembled here, half of the tribes on each mount; and how they had spoken their "Amen" to the blessings and curses of the Law, as the Levitical Priesthood read them in the valley between.

As far as Jacob's Well itself was concerned, our guide, Father Roget, readily convinced us that there could be little doubt about the fact that it was the well at which Jacob had watered his flocks, the well at which Jesus had spoken His gracious and comforting words to the Samaritan woman. In Palestine, where a community often grew up at a spot and continued there just because subterranean water had been found, you would expect only one well. And a well with a 90-foot shaft is not something that can be readily moved. Father Roget's own example gave us the courage to drink from the refreshing water that he drew up from its depth. One could go on for some time in pointing out how a visit to the Holy Land can help you visualize more readily the Biblical accounts as they occurred in the framework of Palestinian life and geography.

Israel, apart from the new regions occupied since 1967, had a population of 2.8 million at the beginning of 1969. Of these 2.4 million were Jews, 300,000 Moslems, 72,000 Christians, and 33,000 Druses (a separate Moslem sect). The Jewish population has almost quadrupled since the establishment of the state. Two thirds of the increase is due to immigration. Tel Aviv on the coast is approaching a population of 400,000, Jerusalem 300,000; Haifa on Mt. Carmel has more than 200,000 people.

The Jewish population is intensely patriotic. The Israeli believe in their government, in their army, in their schools and universities and in their industries. Each Israeli youth is proud to serve his four years in the army, and each girl her two years. Marriage puts the girls into the reserves, and children exempt them from further military service altogether. Soldiers are everywhere treated with respect. Busses with an empty seat would always pick up a soldier traveling on the highway and take him along free of charge. Upon our inquiry whether there were conscientious objectors in Israel, we were given the answer: "We have no room for this concept in Israel, because no Israelite would be safe without our army, and no-one can in principle expect somebody else to save his life."

The Israeli know that as a nation they are struggling for their existence. This undoubtedly accounts for their intense loyalty toward all their institutions. The Israeli know that only by supporting their government and by devoting themselves wholeheartedly to labor, to education, and to military defense, can they maintain the objectives of their country and all that it holds out to them. Nevertheless, this loyalty expresses itself within the

democratic process, which leaves room for different viewpoints and for much fiery debate. The democracy of Israel is that of a welfare state and is essentially socialistic.

The backbone of the agricultural development of the country is the kibbutzim, agricultural communities. There are 235 of them, with populations ranging from 60 - 2,000. The oldest kibbutz was founded in 1909. In these kibbutzim all property is collectively owned. All the members, men and women, render the labor for which they are individually fitted. In return, all their needs are supplied. The only reward for special diligence and effort is greater responsibility. The secret underlying the kibbutzim is a twofold dedication to Zionism and socialism. Even the training of the children is a communal affair, though the parent-child relation is preserved. The kibbutzniks will claim that in their communal life they probably spend more hours each day with their children than do parents in a capitalistic setup. It is to the kibbutzim that Israel owes the pioneer work in its agricultural development of new regions and of regions of great military danger. Membership in the kibbutzim is voluntary and remains voluntary. But reception into a kibbutz is by vote of the entire kibbutz membership and takes place after a period of probation.

Since most of the kibbutzim offer lodging and restaurant facilities for tourists as a secondary endeavor and cater a great deal to tourism, we came into contact with quite a number of kibbutzim. A meal at any one of them was usually followed by a lecture on its ideals and objectives. They vary considerably in their activities. Only a few of them are religiously of orthodox persuasion.

The latter fact is representative of the nation in general. The present population of Israel involves only a relatively small percentage of orthodox Jews, who would feel fully bound in their conscience to all the precepts of the Old Testament as a divinely inspired revelation. The present Israeli government, led by a coalition party, has, however, made great outward concessions to the smaller orthodox parties to obtain their votes. Hence, Sabbath laws and orthodox Jewish dietary laws are in force in all public institutions. Emotionally the Israeli seem to find it quite easy to make these concessions to Jewish ways. For 90 per cent of the population it is, however, not a matter of conscience but rather of Jewish custom. Everybody gladly rests on the Sabbath day, but only a small percentage attends the synagogue services.

We were told that there is full religious freedom for the Moslem and for the Christian in Israel, but not for the Jew. Up to the present time Israel has retained the principle of personal status, which was obtained under the Ottoman Empire. Actually this principle is much older, going back to the Persian Period. By this principle every religious community took care of the personal matters pertaining to family, marriage, divorce, and death. Thus the Christians and Moslems and all other non-Jews can handle these matters according to their religious convictions unhampered by Israeli law.

Matters pertaining to personal status are for the Jews, however, by present law and regulation in the hands of the orthodox Rabbinate. Thus, for example, a Jew by the name of Cohen cannot gain permission to marry a divorced person, because the Rabbinate considers him to be of priestly family, and Mosaic Law forbade a priest to marry a divorced woman. Still, Israel does not consider Judaism to be the established religion of Israel. The present power of the orthodox Rabbinate is simply a product of the present political setup and is subject to change in the future.

III. Reflections Regarding the Light Which Scripture Can be Said to Cast on This State of Israel

It has already been pointed out that much of the support of Zionism from Christian circles has been stimulated by the belief that Scripture teaches an ultimate return of the Jews to the Promised Land and a subsequent universal conversion of the Jews before Judgment Day. It has likewise already been said that this is a feature that is usually incorporated in the teaching of a millennium. There are, however, also Christian teachers advocating this belief who are not millennialists. All these people presume to find their support for such a belief in the many prophetic passages that speak of a restoration of God's chosen people. These passages are, however, fully satisfied by the fulfillment which they experienced through Israel's return from the Babylonian Captivity and by its preservation as a nation until the Savior came forth from its midst.

The main *sedes doctrinae* for the teaching of a universal conversion of the Jews before the final end is supposed to be found in verses 25–27 of the 11th chapter of Romans.

The Authorized Version translates the passage as follows: “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.”

The very heart of the supposed proof of this teaching are the words “blindness in part happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in, and so all Israel shall be saved.” A superficial reading of these words, particularly if the context of the entire chapter is disregarded, might leave the impression that an ultimate conversion of the Jews is to be awaited before Judgment Day. A careful study of the text and its context will, however, make it very evident that this is not the import of these inspired words of Paul. Sound Lutheran teachers have pointed especially to three things that clearly testify against this false understanding.

The first thing is the concept of “all Israel,” when properly understood. If the term “Israel” were to be referred to Israel in the flesh, as Zionism contends, then all Israel would have to include every descendant of Abraham through Jacob, certainly every Jew living at the supposed fulfillment of this prophecy. Strictly speaking, it should also include every Israelite after the flesh that has ever existed. For only thus could all Israel be saved in the sense of all Israel after the flesh. A few of those who understand Israel in the physical sense have therefore also with consistency taught just that, taught a resurrection of all Jews and their conversion before Judgment Day.

Most of those who teach a universal conversion of the Jews and for this reason are interested in the Zionistic movement as a sign of the last things are, however, not willing to go that far. They not only restrict themselves to the Jews living at the supposed time of the fulfillment of this prophecy, but also make a further restriction in that they understand all Israel to mean the Jews in great numbers, a vast representative number of Jews. They contend that there are other instances in Scripture where “all” is used in a synecdochic sense. We readily acknowledge such a usage of “all” in Scripture. We find it in St. Mark 1:5, where in connection with John’s preaching in the wilderness we read: “And there went out to him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him ...” Yet such a synecdochic use of “all” is ruled out in this passage by the context. The statement: “So all Israel shall be saved” stands in clear contrast to the assertion of the previous verse that until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, Israel has in part fallen under the judgment of blindness. When “all” stands in contrast to “in part,” “all” itself cannot be employed in the synecdochic sense, as a part for the whole.

When in chapter 9, verse 6, of this epistle Paul states: “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel,” and when in the fifth verse of the 11th chapter he says: “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace,” he makes it quite clear what he means with “all Israel.” “All Israel” does not refer here to Israel according to the flesh but to the true Israel, the elect remnant, God’s chosen believers from the Jews as well as from the Gentiles. In Galatians 6:16 Paul also uses Israel in this sense when he says: “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.”

The second point that speaks against the misinterpretation of the pertinent section from Romans 11 is the misunderstanding of the two phrases: (1) “until” in the statement “until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in”; and (2) of the “and so” in the following statement, “and so all Israel shall be saved.”

Those who try to draw a universal conversion of the Jews before the final end out of these statements take the “until” in the exclusive sense whereby they take the ingathering of the fullness of the Gentiles, that is, the ingathering of the full number of the Gentiles who shall be brought into God’s kingdom as first of all coming to an end and then of being followed by a subsequent period in which all Israel shall be saved. When Scripture otherwise speaks of the period during which the Gentiles shall be brought to faith and salvation, this period, however, always extends to Judgment Day itself.

Let us also note that here Paul does not say “and then all Israel shall be saved.” He does say “and so all Israel shall be saved,” for by this translation the Authorized Version correctly translates the *καὶ οὕτως*. “And

so” means “and in this manner.” What Paul is saying is this: Don’t misunderstand God’s judgment upon His chosen people who crucified their Savior. A judgment of blindness, of obduracy, has indeed fallen upon His people; yet only in part. This partial judgment of blindness will continue until the time of the ingathering of the Gentiles has come to an end. Yet it is only blindness in part. All the while that God through the Gospel is gathering in His elect from the Gentiles, He is also still gathering in His elect from His chosen people, the Jews. So, when the full number of the Gentiles will have been gathered in, then all of His elect from among the Gentiles and from among the Jews will have been led to salvation. In this manner all Israel, the true Israel of God, the communion of saints, will be saved.

This is the only understanding of the pertinent verses that fits into the context. In Romans 10:19–21 Paul had spoken of the rejection of Israel as a nation. He had revealed his deep sorrow over this just judgment of God. In the 11th chapter Paul, however, addresses himself to a misunderstanding that seemed to have arisen in the minds of some of the Gentile Christians concerning this judgment. At the very beginning of the chapter Paul raises the question: “Hath God cast away his people?” He immediately answers: “God forbid,” and then points to himself as an Israelite of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin, as contrary evidence. He follows this up with a generalization: “God hath not cast away his people whom he foreknew.” That it might seem as if the Jewish people were all rejecting the Gospel, was, of course, an impression that Gentile Christians might readily gain. Paul reminds them, though, of Elijah’s wrong conclusion that he was the only believer left in Israel, when actually God was still preserving His 7,000 even in the northern kingdom. St. Paul therefore repeats: “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.”

The mystery that Paul then unfolds in verses 25 and 26 is the inspired disclosure that such an ingathering of an elect remnant from among the Jewish nation would continue until Judgment Day, during all the time that the Gentiles would be gathered in.

The third testimony against misinterpreting verses 25 to 27 of Romans 11 as teaching a universal conversion of all Jews before Judgment Day is found in the Old Testament passages which Paul adduces in support of his assertion: “And so all Israel shall be saved.” He states: “As it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.” Paul is quoting from Isaiah 59:10 and Jeremiah 31:31. The Isaiah passage is a general prophecy of the first advent of the Messiah. There is not a word in this passage that could be interpreted as prophesying a special visitation of grace for God’s people immediately before Judgment Day. The Jeremiah passage is just as clearly a general prophecy of the New Testament covenant of grace established through the completed work of the coming Savior.

By adducing these passages from the Old Testament, Paul could only establish what we have seen that he actually is saying when he states: “And so shall all Israel be saved.” He is saying that until the end of time the Lord will continue to bring His elect from Jews and Gentiles to salvation through His faith-engendering Gospel, even as Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesied. The blindness of Israel will only be a partial one until the end of time.

We will have to say that there is nothing to support the aims and hopes of Zionism in Romans 11:25–27. There is no prophecy here of a universal conversion of the Jews just before Judgment Day. Someone may, however, still ask: Aren’t there passages that promise Canaan to Abraham’s seed forever? How about Genesis 13:15? It states “For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed forever.” This is a passage that is frequently quoted by fundamentalist sects, especially also on the radio. It is quoted in support of seeing a sign of the last days in the return of the Jews to the Land of Promise. Lutherans, who show no interest in the Zionist Movement are at times faulted by such preachers for not taking God at His word. This charge requires us to take the Hebrew phrase translated “forever” into careful consideration. It is the term עַד-עוֹלָם from the verb root עָלַם, to be hidden. It refers to the hidden, unlimited, uncircumscribed future. This can mean that the limits of the future time under discussion have not yet been revealed. It can also mean that there are no limits to this future. The context must decide. When the context shows that you are dealing with a future that has no limits, then עַד-עוֹלָם indeed does mean forever, that is, eternally.

In many other contexts, however, עַד־עוֹלָם or לְעוֹלָם mean “for an indefinite period,” because its limits have not been made known. Thus it is said of the Israelite servant who voluntarily remained in bondage to a master, and who had this established as a voluntary matter before witnesses by having his ear pierced with an awl, that he should now serve his master לְעוֹלָם (Exodus 21:6). This meant that he was to serve his master as long as that master lived. No Israelite could be passed on from a master to his heirs as a bondsman. This was only possible concerning bondservants, that is, slaves from other nations (Leviticus 25:45,46). Yet a master’s lifetime could last one day; it could also extend even beyond the lifetime of his voluntary bondsman. This is why this bondsman was told that he was obligated to serve his master לְעוֹלָם.

Even so, God promised Canaan to Abraham’s seed עַד־עוֹלָם. We know from the entire Old and New Testaments that Israel’s entire mission and function as God’s chosen people should last until the promised Savior would come from its midst and carry out His work of salvation. With Christ’s cross, with the completion of His work of redemption, the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles was broken down, as Paul states in Ephesians 2:14. Ever since, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus,” as Paul says in Galatians 3:28. Yes, Paul also says: “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Thus also the promise of the land to Abraham’s seed came to an end with the whole purpose, mission, and function of Israel as God’s special chosen nation. Just when that time of fulfillment would chronologically take place, God did not reveal to Abraham. That is why עַד־עוֹלָם was very much in place.

On the basis of Scripture it can, of course, also be said, as we see from Hebrews 11:9, 13–16, that the earthly Canaan was but a type of the heavenly Canaan. In that sense we can say that Abraham’s seed has a promise. The true spiritual seed of Abraham has the promise of the heavenly Canaan. This promise extended and still extends to all eternity. When applied in this sense, the promise does not pertain to the physical Israel, however, but again to the Israel of God, to Abraham’s believing seed from Jew and Gentile, to all the elect of God.

Would the physical descendants of Abraham have been dispossessed of Palestine after the fullness of time, after the completion of God’s salvation through the promised Savior, if they had not rejected their Messiah? This is a question that we cannot answer definitely by either a “yes” or a “no,” simply because Scripture does not answer it for us. It would seem most natural to assume, however, that they would have continued to dwell there as long as they would have been minded to do so. Yet this would have taken place on the basis of no specific promise of God. God would have dealt with them as He deals with all other nations in His world government, following the principle set forth in Proverbs 14:34: “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.”

What shall we then say concerning the phenomenon of this state of Israel as a re-established homeland for the Jews? On the basis of the passages examined, we will have to say: The establishment of Israel is not based on a special revealed promise or prophecy of God. We must also say: It is not the beginning of the fulfillment of a universal conversion of Jews before the final end, for there is no such prophecy.

On the other hand, we will have to envision this re-established state within those predictions of God’s Word which we have noted at the very opening of this presentation, namely, the announcement of dire judgment upon Israel if it would despise its unique mission as God’s chosen people, despise the covenant that God had made with Israel in the interest of His plan of salvation, despise the very Savior and the free gift of salvation which was to be the very heart of God’s special covenant with Israel. We will have to say that the woes, which God in His Word pronounces upon His unfaithful people as a judgment of its unfaithfulness, will not come to an end with the re-establishment of the nation of Israel.

On the other hand, God has not bidden man to offer himself as God’s ready instrument in carrying out His curse. God will carry it out in His own way and choose His own instruments, employing even the wickedness of men to do so. And at His time He will in turn judge such wickedness likewise. We have already said that God’s pronouncements of judgment do not exclude periods of peace and contentment for smaller or larger segments of Abraham’s physical seed. Hence we cannot determine what God in His world government

has in mind for the state of Israel, even as we do not know what He has in mind for our own nation. Let us not forget that in our own metropolis of New York there are probably still as many Jews living together in relative peace and prosperity, as there is presently living in the state of Israel.

Even on the basis of what we can observe in the state of Israel, it is difficult to say to what extent it will retain its character as the homeland of the Jews, if it should really gain recognition from all of its neighboring states. Even at present, the Supreme Court of the state of Israel is laboring with the question: Who is a Jew? Until the present time, the official answer has been: Anyone born of a Jewish mother. But this definition is being contested. Moreover, the constitution of Israel accords full citizenship to Christians and Arabs living in the land who desire such citizenship. They are not in principle treated as second-rate citizens. Thus the complexion of Israel might change if it is permitted to exist and to expand as a recognized country. There is also a tendency that hopes, once they are realized, lose some of their glamour. If all the Jews who desire to migrate to Canaan have done so, they may even in this land lose the intense consciousness of their identification as Jews, as this has happened in many other lands in the past during periods of freedom. All this could lead to a situation by which Israel, which is even now a mixed people, could become more and more like any other country.

There are several pertinent statements of God's Word that we dare not forget, however. With reference to the Jews, the Lord has said, "Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled" (Luke 22:32). The state of Israel is right now a fulfillment of that Word. We are not always fully conscious of the uniqueness of the preservation of the Jewish people. Yet there are no other ancient people, and certainly no other ancient people of the size of the Jewish race, that has kept its identity to the present day.

Finally, we do not want to forget what has been impressed upon us anew through our study of Romans 11:25-27, that which Paul called a mystery in speaking to his Roman readers. God has promised that until the end of time He will continue to gather His elect also from the seed of Abraham, from Israel according to the flesh. Probably the Lord may even use the state of Israel for this purpose. At least we ought ever to be mindful of God's promise that until the end of time He purposes to gather His elect through the Gospel also from this people. We need to continue to see the Jews as an object of our mission proclamation.

After a lecture from the head of the Tourist Bureau at Jerusalem, the present writer asked the question: What is the attitude of the government of Israel toward mission work? The question was suggested by the speaker's emphasis that religious freedom was guaranteed constitutionally by the state of Israel to its citizens. It had also been stated that Judaism was not the state religion of Israel, even though the majority of its citizens probably professed some type of adherence to Judaism.

The speaker by his own admission had some difficulty with this question. He said that in principle there was really nothing that ruled out mission work. Yet he admitted that emotionally the country would hardly be very receptive to missionary activity, just because it was thought of as a homeland for Jews, a homeland where Jewish culture and Jewish faith would have free opportunity to unfold itself. He granted, however, that no exception could really be taken to mission work that was carried on in a quiet manner without unduly stirring up the emotions of the Jewish population.

As short-term visitors in Israel, we gleaned the impression that the vast majority of the Jews in Israel lack very definite religious convictions. As has already been said, the present hold that orthodox Judaism has gained in imposing such things as its dietary laws, its sabbath regulations, and its control of family and marriage matters, is largely a result of the present political pattern. This great influence of orthodox Judaism does not grow out of the religious convictions of the bulk of the population. We have to await developments in all matters in which God has not spoken specifically in His Word. We can discern His ways only after they have been carried through; we cannot predict them.