

## **ISRAEL: FROM GAZA TO ETERNITY**

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### **Israeli Views**

**The Sharon position.** The most dramatic recent event in the development of modern Israel was the Gaza withdrawal, in which thousands of Jewish settlers were forcibly evacuated from their homes in the Gaza area and resettled elsewhere in Israel. The images that were seen on our TVs over several days are burned on our minds of Jews being removed by Israeli soldiers from their homes and synagogues, with considerable resistance. The Gaza withdrawal was ordered by the Ariel Sharon government and backed by the Bush administration, as part of the Roadmap to Peace program in establishing a peaceful Palestinian state alongside the Israeli state.

Israel is greatly divided over this issue, with those for and against the Gaza withdrawal split about 50/50. What was Sharon trying to do with such drastic measures? How could he justify the program? Much of the following information was obtained in an interview I had with well known Messianic Jewish author and lecturer, Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, shortly before the withdrawal. Security and demographics are the primary reasons. The West Bank Arab population is increasing at 6 children per family, while the Israeli Jewish population is having 2 children per family. In a few years the Arab population will outstrip the Jewish population in the area between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. The Sharon government has concluded that the best protection that the Jews can have includes the finishing of the construction of the fence or wall to keep the Arab terrorists out. This fence that becomes a wall in the populated areas is one of the few innovations that have actually worked in protecting Israel from the suicide/homicide bombers. By pulling the Jewish settlers out of Gaza, the Israeli government was able to get them out of harms way and behind defensible barriers, and to leave them there was to continue a serious drain on the Israeli military. The plan further intends to construct a road between the "West Bank" and Gaza with no exits, to allow the Arabs to pass between the two Palestinian segments without creating problems for the Israelis. The Israelis, on the other hand, will have an overpass that would allow them to go from Tel Aviv south to the Negev and Eilat without molestation.

**The opposition position.** That being the Sharon position, what is the position of the opposition that so vigorously disputed the Gaza withdrawal? They believe in the inexorable expansion of the Jewish occupation of the Land, and have a Biblical basis for their position. God has given the Jewish people the Land, all of the Land, and they intend to claim it settlement by settlement. To give up an even an inch of the territory they have settled is craven appeasement to terrorism, and shows a lack of faith in God and the destiny of Israel.

The opposition is committed to an aggressive show of force against the terrorist leaders in order to provide security for the Israelis. They believe that the settlers themselves and the Israeli army can provide all the protection that is needed. Furthermore, the opposition is generally opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state, which would be a formal surrender of a considerable part of the Land to the Arabs. They feel that is unnecessary militarily, unwise politically and wrong theologically.

## **Evangelical Christian responses.**

**Support of Israeli opposition and belief that recent major disasters are the judgment of God upon America for forcing Gaza withdrawal.** Among Evangelical Christians there is considerable support for Israel, but on this issue there is about as much a split as there is among the Israelis themselves. There is a vocal group of Evangelicals who strongly support the opposition in Israel who believe that it is appeasement for Israel to give up the Gaza settlements or any other settlements, and will only embolden the terrorists to do more damage. Furthermore, they believe that ever since the US forced Israel to conduct the evacuation of Jews from Gaza, the United States has suffered enormous judgments from God, including Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, during which there were eerily similar forced evacuations of thousands from their homes. Thus they argue that all these calamities have fallen on America because our government has acted against Israel in the Gaza withdrawal. It is a fulfillment of the curse upon those who curse Israel.

**Recognition of ebb and flow of Jewish occupation of the Land until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Christ** . There are other Evangelical Christians who are just as strongly in support of Israel, but see reasonableness in the Sharon plan to provide maximum security to the Jewish people under these difficult circumstances. The Israelis are living in close proximity to Arabs, many of whom want nothing more than to kill them and destroy Israel, and the Jews have been fighting them for more than 100 years. The Biblical solution would appear to be the resettlement of the Palestinian Arabs in their Promised Land, Saudi Arabia, which is wealthy with oil. It would take a miracle from the Lord to accomplish this, but He has not brought about that miracle yet. Rather, it seems that the fence or wall is working where little else has worked all during the long bitter confrontation. Maybe it will continue to work or maybe not, but at least for the present, the terrorist attacks have subsided, partly because of the fence.

This fence is somewhat reminiscent of the broken walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's time. Some 90 years after the Jewish people had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon to rebuild the Temple, the city remained defenseless with the numerous breaches in the walls. There were enemies all around Jerusalem who wanted to attack the city. Nehemiah was determined to repair the walls, though with great difficulty, so that the Jewish people would be protected and defended from their vicious neighbors.

Also, many Evangelicals realize that the Jewish occupation of Israel will have an ebb and flow from now through the Tribulation until Christ returns to redeem His people Israel. In fact, the largest evacuation of the time will be one that the Lord Himself commanded in Matthew 24 and is indicated in Revelation 12. He declares that when the Abomination of Desolation is committed by the Antichrist, Jews in Judea should immediately run from their houses into the wilderness to "the place provided for" them, possibly the natural fortress city Petra in ancient Edom. There the Lord will provide protection for His people Israel during the Great Tribulation. Thus we cannot Scripturally contend that Jewish occupation of the Land will continue to expand unabated until the Lord returns, as much as we would desire that to be the case.

Job's friends argued that the calamities he suffered came because of his sins, while the Scriptures say that God was testing Job to demonstrate his servant's faithfulness. All Job was told, however, was that he was in no position to question the actions of the Creator of the universe. Ultimately Job was vindicated and was blessed greatly by the Lord.

Also, the Lord told His disciples not to think that the falling of the tower of Siloam and subsequent death of several people was an act of special divine judgment. Thus not all calamities are the result of divine discipline. It is not clear that the disasters that have struck America were the result of the actions taken by our country in the Gaza withdrawal, but we must always be cautious about any policy actions we take that have a negative effect on Israel. Thus the Gaza withdrawal is a great dilemma is for both the Jewish people and evangelical Christians. However, the Gaza withdrawal is symptomatic of the perplexing developments that are listed to come about as we move toward Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming.

### **From Gaza to Gog & Magog**

How do we get from the Gaza situation to the next prophetic event on Israel's schedule, Gog and Magog? Some have speculated that Gaza withdrawal may well result in Palestinian statehood. If so, it is unlikely that the terrorist groups will give up their dream of eradicating Israel, even if the Palestinians have a state. This might well lead the terrorists to continue attacks on Israel in spite of the fence or wall. Such attacks could be considered by Israel to be acts of war by the Palestinian State, and Israel could well retaliate with devastating results against the new nation. This could well escalate into a response from the Muslim supporters of the Palestinians and include nations like Persia, Ethiopia and Lybia along with their supporting nation Russia. Such a response is the nexus of the nations involved in the prophetic Gog and Magog War. We cannot be certain that events will move in that direction, but it is certainly a plausible scenario.

Following is a synopsis of Biblical prophetic events between the current conditions we face now and eternity:

1. Rapture of the Church – Imminent return of Christ in the atmosphere to resurrect the saints of the Church age. He could come at any moment, and no prophecy must be fulfilled before the Rapture. The resurrected saints will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ for rewards and participate in the Wedding of the Lamb in Heaven
2. Gog and Magog War – Although we cannot be dogmatic about the timing of this war, it will happen and I believe this war described in Ezekiel 38-39 will occur between the Rapture and the beginning of the Tribulation. Russia and militant Islam [with Persia (Iran), Ethiopia and Lybia participating] attack Israel and are totally defeated. Out of this chaos the Antichrist arises.
3. Antichrist signs treaty – Somehow out of the earthly turmoil of the Rapture of the Church and the Gog and Magog war, the Antichrist is thrust into prominence and is able to forge a covenant or treaty with Israel, which marks the beginning of the Tribulation. We are not told the content of this treaty, but it will probably promise Israel's territorial integrity, security and the opportunity to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple.

4. Abomination of Desolation – Halfway through the 7-year Tribulation, the Antichrist desecrates the Tribulation Temple by sitting down in the Holy Place and claiming to be God. His false prophet will set up a miraculous image of the Antichrist to be worshipped by everyone in the world.
5. Evacuation of majority of Israelis – The blasphemy committed by the Antichrist will so enrage the Jewish people they will revolt against him. This in turn will enrage the Antichrist who will threaten to crack down on the Israelis. Many Israelis will then flee into the wilderness to the place the Lord has prepared for them (Petra?).
6. Armageddon – In response to all of the devastating divine judgments falling down upon the world throughout the Tribulation, and to the revolt of Israelis against the Antichrist, the Antichrist will gather the armies of all nations against Israel and the Lord. This is the essence of the War of Armageddon.
7. 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Christ – The War of Armageddon will be terminated by the return of Christ Himself, which includes several elements:
  - a. All remaining Israelites saved
  - b. Angelic army & Cavalry of saints accompany Christ
  - c. Transformation of Israeli army into David & power of God
  - d. Confusion, decimation and defeat of enemy army
8. Resurrection of Old Testament and Tribulation saints who will serve the Lord in the Millennial Kingdom. They will have important responsibilities. It is suggested that King David himself will rule over Messianic Israel under the King of Kings, the Lord Jesus Christ.
9. Judgment of Gentiles – sheep and goats, with sheep (mortal Gentiles) entering the Kingdom with saved Israel. The basis of the judgment is how the Gentiles treated the Jewish people, especially the 144,000 Jewish Christian evangelists, during the Tribulation.
10. Messianic Kingdom – Jerusalem will be the capital of the world and Israel will be the head of the nations. The world will be restored to Edenic conditions and righteousness will cover the earth. Inhabitants will be Christ, the resurrected Church, the resurrected Old Testament and Tribulation saints, mortal saved Israelites and Gentiles will be participating in the blessings of the Messianic Empire.
11. Final Gog and Magog – At the end of the Millennium Satan is loosed from the Abyss, is able to deceive many mortals, organize a general revolt against the Lord and the Holy City, and Satan's army defeated by the Lord.
12. Great White Throne Judgment - all who are not in Lamb's Book of Life are cast in to the Lake of Fire. Works are judged to determine punishment there. Believers may be called on to testify.

12. New Heaven, New Earth, New Jerusalem – the eternal abode of the saints
  - a. New Jerusalem on base 1500 miles square and 1500 miles high
  - b. Israel memorialized in the gates through the 12 tribes
  - c. The Church memorialized in the foundation through the 12 apostles
13. Closing thoughts
  - a. The Spirit and the Bride say to the lost, “Come”
  - b. Even so, come Lord Jesus