

The Future State of Palestine in Bible Prophecy

[A New Border Proposal for a Palestinian State](#)

After more than fifty years the Israeli-Palestinian conflict still looms as an intractable, world-troubling problem. Ever since Israel took the occupied territories, in 1967, nearly all of the world has focused on solving this land dispute by demanding that the Israelis return the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem to the Palestinians wherein they can establish their own independent, sovereign state. Indeed, this demand concerning the return of lands is contained in UN Resolution 242. But Israel has never fully agreed to it because this resolution does not provide adequate security for Israel, which is also guaranteed in Resolution 242 and therefore is a contradiction. In addition, all of the West Bank and East Jerusalem is the Jews' ancestral land, which is claimed in Israel's Proclamation of Independence. Consequently, continuing to focus on this solution will likely prolong the stalemate indefinitely. There needs to be some other border proposal.

When the Romans expelled Jews from much of their land during the 2nd century, much of the land of Israel afterwards turned to waste and lay desolate for many centuries. Then, in the late 19th century Jews began returning to the land and restoring it to productivity. When Israel became a state, in 1948, it culminated a fulfillment of certain Bible prophecies. For example, Ezekiel prophesied concerning the time just prior to the end of the world, that many Jewish people would have previously returned to their ancestral land, "a land that has recovered from war, whose people were gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate" (Ezekiel 38.8 NIV). From the early 19th century onwards, some Christian Bible scholars had taught from this biblical passage, as well as others, that Jews would return to their ancestral land and reestablish their nation there. In fact, Britain's Balfour Declaration was drafted in 1917 on the basis of this belief, and this brief Declaration contributed significantly to the founding of modern Israel.

This formation of the State of Israel resolved "the Jewish problem," which referred to the Jews' Diaspora after the Romans expelled them from their land. But the creation of modern Israel resulted in "the Palestinian problem," which refers to the Palestinians' similar plight of Israel's occupation of their land and therefore their displacement and dispossession. When U.S. President Bill Clinton's last ditch efforts failed to resolve the problem, he told the Israeli people in early 2001, "there is no choice but for you to divide this land into two states for two people. Whether it happens today or after more bloodshed, it will happen." And in early 2002, U.S. President Bush, and soon afterwards the UN Security Council, announced that there should be a Palestinian state. But where? Just as the Bible predicted the modern reestablishment of Israel, it also predicts the yet future reestablishment of ancient Philistia. About ten prophetic passages in the biblical prophets of the Old Testament indicate that during "the latter days," which immediately precede the end of this present age, a Gentile nation will exist on the west side of Israel in the Mediterranean coastal plain. That is exactly where ancient Philistia existed, lying side-by-side ancient Israel, in what was called "the land of the Philistines." And during the early centuries of Israel's existence, Philistia was its archrival.

Some of these ten biblical prophecies identify this nation as "Philistia," and some of them identify its citizens as "Philistines." Now, the word "Palestine" derives from the word "Philistia," and the word "Palestinian" derives from the word "Philistine." Thus, when reading "Philistia" or "Philistine(s)" in these prophecies, these words should be equated with our modern words "Palestine" and "Palestinian(s)," respectively. It is hermeneutically incorrect to interpret these words metaphorically and therefore not literally, as if they are to be understood as no more than Israel's enemies in a general sense. Instead, this predicted political revival of ancient Philistia can be none other than the future establishment of the State of Palestine.

Many people respond to this interpretation of these biblical prophecies by saying, "But the modern Palestinians are not Philistines." Today's Palestinians are indeed quite a heterogeneous group. But historical research suggests that the Palestinians probably have a stronger genetic link to the ancient Philistines than to any other people group. And this is even more likely for those families that have lived in the Gaza Strip for several generations. For, the present Gaza Strip is located in the very center of "the land of the Philistines." Perhaps future archaeology and/or technological science will be able to determine Palestinian ancestry more precisely. But for Bible-believers, these prophecies are really a matter of faith; when these Hebrew prophets spoke about Philistines living in the Mediterranean coastal plain next to Israel in the latter days, they must have gotten it right because they got it from God.

Unfulfilled biblical prophecies are the most difficult portions of scripture to interpret. To adequately do so, it is essential that certain hermeneutical principles be employed. The two most important are (1) analyzing the

context of the passage and (2) applying the grammatical-historical method to the text. The latter means that words must be accepted as literal, and therefore not allegorical, unless it is absolutely clear that the text demands otherwise. "Philistines" therefore literally mean "Philistines" (=Palestinians), not some allegorical, general reference to the enemies of Israel or of God.

Perhaps the most convincing one of these ten prophecies that portray the Palestinians having their own nation in the Mediterranean coastal plain during the latter days appears in Isaiah 11. Jews and Christians have always unanimously agreed that this portion of scripture is messianic. Jews have always insisted that their Messiah would come as a military conqueror to deliver the nation of Israel from its enemies and establish the promised kingdom of God on earth. Most Christian scholars throughout church history repudiated this belief because they denied that any biblical prophecies predicted the literal reestablishment of the nation of Israel. Rather, they usually interpreted Israel metaphorically in these passages as the church and any named enemies of Israel as enemies, in general, of the church. But the modern reestablishment of the State of Israel proved them wrong. So, appealing to these scholars on how they interpret such passages as Isaiah 11.14 will likely prove unprofitable.

In Isaiah 11, the prophet prophesies that the Spirit of Yahweh will rest on Messiah, that Messiah will judge "with righteousness," "slay the wicked," "stand as a banner for the peoples" (in Israel), and "reclaim the remnant" of Jews still remaining throughout the world. Then, verse fourteen declares concerning Israeli Jews that "they swoop down on the slopes of Philistia to the west." The Hebrew word here translated "swoop" is usually used to depict a bird of prey swooping down upon its victim. Accordingly, from the Judean hill country the Jews will attack a Gentile enemy located to their west. If that enemy was not the nation of Philistia (=Palestine), it seems the prophet should have merely called those slopes by their actual name, which was and is to this day, "the Shephelah." In addition, this prophecy indicates that Israel will at that time possess all of the West Bank because it depicts Israel attacking its immediate neighbors on the west and east, the Philistines and Jordanians respectively. Regardless, the Bible contains many prophecies indicating that Israel will possess all of Judea and Samaria, which very closely comprise today's West Bank, during the latter days.

This war at the time of the end of the world is popularly known as "Armageddon," a word that is taken from Revelation 16.16 in the New Testament. But this identification is a misnomer; rather, this war is properly called "the battle on the great day of God Almighty" (v. 14). On that day God will send his Messiah to lead a divinely empowered Israel into battle (Zechariah 10.3-7; 12.6-8). When this war ends, troop positions will reveal that God will have extended all the borders of the State of Israel (Isaiah 26.15; cf. Micah 7.11). Isaiah says more precisely on behalf of God to those Israeli Jews, "you will spread out to the right and to the left" (Isaiah 54.3). For Israel to extend its border "to the left" requires that a Gentile nation will have then existed on its western side, between it and the Mediterranean Sea. What else could it be but the yet future Palestinian state?

Something will prompt this awesome battle on the great day of God Almighty: the nations' militaries will advance toward the land of Israel and corporately seek to destroy the Jewish nation. The prophet Zechariah provides more information about this invasion and subsequent war than any of the other Hebrew prophets. In Zechariah 9.1-8 the prophet pronounces an omen against several cities that used to be neighbors of ancient Israel. Alexander the Great fulfilled some of this prophecy during the 4th century B.C. However, it appears that verses 5-6 were not fulfilled completely at that time, and certainly none of verses 7-8 have thus far been partially or even remotely fulfilled. These four verses describe a destruction of the ancient Philistine cities of Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gaza. God says through the prophet, "I will cut off the pride of the Philistines.... Those who are left will belong to our God and become leaders in Judah, and Ekron will be like the Jebusites. But I will defend my house against marauding forces. Never again will an oppressor overrun my people [Israel], for now I am keeping watch" (vv. 6-8). This certainly never happened. For one thing, the ancient Philistines never professed faith in Yahweh, the God of Israel; their chief god was Dagon. Furthermore, Philistines never lived among the Jews in any notable numbers, much less came to be regarded by Jews as having a lofty reputation equal to that of a citizen of Jerusalem (=Jebusite). Moreover, when this prophecy comes to pass, Israel will thereafter never be oppressed or attacked again by an enemy because God will forever watch over and therefore protect the nation. Therefore, it must be concluded that Zechariah 9.7-8 applies exclusively to the future blessed days of Messiah's kingdom. Accordingly, just prior to the inauguration of the messianic age, the Palestinians will inhabit the coastal cities of Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gaza, and these will apparently be their most prominent cities, as in days of old. Ashkelon and Ashdod still exist today and are located in Israel between Tel Aviv and the Gaza Strip. This region was a major part of "the land of the Philistines," yet it has always been a part of the modern State of Israel.

These two prophecies by Isaiah and Zechariah therefore require that sometime between now and the latter

days, Israel will either relinquish to the Palestinians through negotiations a very substantial amount of territory contiguous with the Gaza Strip in which to establish their state, and annex the entire West Bank to Israel, or this scenario will occur through war.

Most people think that whenever God predicts events through his prophets, He predetermines that they will come to pass. And this viewpoint often affects whether or not people believe in a biblical prophecy. Oftentimes, God does indeed predict something because He has predetermined it; but not always. God is so-o-o smart and understands human beings so-o-o well that he can figure out what they will do in certain situations, even thousands of years in advance, without any manipulation of historical events on his part. For example, although the Bible predicted the modern return of the Jews to their ancestral land and the subsequent reestablishment of the State of Israel, it never says that God brought this about. (Yet, it repeatedly states that God will gather all of the Jews worldwide to the land of Israel when the victorious Messiah comes.) God foreknew that Palestinian Arabs would be living there and that Jewish immigration would occur and result in the Palestinian problem. And he knew that either human beings would eventually figure out that a Palestinian state in the coastal plain makes the most sense or it would occur through war.

The Bible says that God made the nations (Deuteronomy 26.29; Psalm 86.9). More particularly, God said, "Have I not brought up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir? (Amos 9.7). Thus, God made the nation of Philistia just as much as he made the nation of Israel. Bible prophecy calls the current Palestinians "the Philistines" because the two names are synonymous and the Palestinians probably have a stronger genetic link to the Philistines than any other people group. The Bible also says that God "made from one [man], every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation" (Acts 17.26). Accordingly, the modern Palestinians (=Philistines) should be given their land, the land of the Philistines, and not the West Bank. Surely, now is the time. To do otherwise is to fight against God. For, God established the nation of the Philistines and decided their geographical boundaries. For the Palestinians to return to those boundaries is to return to their land.

Many Americans, including many Christians, have in the past been very cynical about solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They have thought that Israeli Jews and Palestinians will never achieve peace with each other, and some even denigrate the peace process. For Christians, this is shameful! Jesus taught in his Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5.9). There are no guarantees of peace between nations in this world; but that shouldn't deter efforts toward achieving peace.

Someday, there will be permanent world peace. In the age to come, when Messiah Jesus comes to establish his worldwide kingdom, Palestinians and Jews will thereafter live together in peace as brothers and sisters in the Promised Land. The Palestinian people will be full citizens of the new and enlarged State of Israel, and they will be honored like a cherished clan in Jerusalem. And the Jews, God's Chosen People, will have been greatly humbled and thereby prepared to fulfill their divine destiny to be a blessing to the Palestinians as well as all the peoples of the earth because God said to Abraham, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12.3).

(Kermit Zarley's well-researched book on this subject is entitled *Palestine Is Coming: The Revival of Ancient Philistia*. Zarley has been a student and teacher of the Bible for over forty years. He also has established himself as a lucid, cogent author, with books on the life of Jesus and this one on eschatology.)