

ISRAEL – GOD’S AMAZING ENDTIME TIME PIECE

I read about a young boy some years ago who was extremely eager to get a watch. He talked so much about it, and pestered his parents about it so much that they finally said that he shouldn’t even mention the word “watch” any more, or else he would risk ever getting this coveted object. Shortly after this prohibition on the use of the word, the family was reading in their devotions about the prophecies concerning Christ’s Second Coming, and the importance of being ready. The boy saw his opportunity, and piped up, “I like what Jesus said in Mark 13:37: ‘What I say to you, I say to everyone: Watch’.”

Well, though not in the way the little boy meant it, the word “watch” is a very significant word for every Christian in relation to the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, as I trust we will realize afresh during our time together this weekend.

As we begin our Prophetic Conference I feel that it is very important that we understand that there are two aspects to what is called the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. These two aspects are **The Rapture** and **The Revelation**.

If you will look at the chart which we’ve provided, you will see that—technically—the Second Coming of Christ to earth occurs at the Revelation. Christ does first come for the Church, that is for all those who have been born again from throughout history as well as all believers now living, but at that time—the Rapture— He does not actually come back to earth, just to the air.

There are no signs which need to be fulfilled before the Rapture. In fact, even the writers of Scripture believed that it could occur at any moment. All of the prophetic indicators which we will be considering during our Conference relate to The Revelation, not the Rapture. However, it is very important to realize that if

there is good reason to feel that if these signs indicate that we must be coming near to the time of the Revelation, we must be that much closer to the Rapture, since it precedes the Revelation by some seven years.

All of that to say that, as we see the apparent fulfillment of the things that the Bible indicates are signs of the Revelation, we should be ever more watchful, living in the light of the fact that the Rapture could occur at any moment.

As I understand the prophetic scriptures, I believe that the next great event will be the Rapture when Christ comes back to the air to snatch away the Church—those who have died in Christ through the ages and those believers who are still living. We read of this in I Thessalonians 4:16-17.

The Rapture will be followed, in heaven, by the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Meanwhile, here on earth there will be the Great Tribulation under the diabolical rule of the Antichrist. This unbelievably horrific period of seven years will end when Christ, in His Revelation, returns to earth with the armies of heaven and the saints to defeat and bind Satan, the Antichrist and the false prophet for a thousand years. He will then reign throughout the millennium.

I believe that, in addition to many other indicators, there are six major reasons to feel that we must be coming very near to the Revelation, and thus, of course, even nearer to the Rapture. These major reasons are:

1. The existence of the nation Israel
2. The apparent preparations for the prophesied invasion of Israel
3. The setting of the stage for the rule of the Antichrist
4. The foreshadowings of earth's final human empire

5. The emergence of the endtime counterfeit global church, &
6. The appearance of 10 endtime birthpang signs that Jesus predicted

Tonight I would like to focus on the first, and in my opinion, the most significant sign of the coming Revelation—the nation Israel: God’s amazing endtime ‘time piece’.

Let me state emphatically at the outset that I completely reject the unbiblical Replacement Theology theory—the view that the Church has replaced Israel, so that God no longer deals with, or will deal with, the nation of Israel

A full discussion of the fact that this theory is unbiblical could occupy an entire message in itself, but let me very briefly indicate why Israel and the Church are two distinct entities. To interpret the future of Israel as anything other than a unique, distinct wonderful future for God’s special people would be to make God a liar and a covenant breaker.

You see, God entered into an irrevocable eternal covenant with Abraham, as recorded in Genesis 12, 13, 15, 17 & 22, promising to make of him a great **nation**. God promised that nation—Israel—a land, according to Genesis 12-17, and God also promised unconditionally to establish forever the kingdom, house and throne of Israel’s greatest king, David—forever—as we learn from II Samuel 7, 12 & 16.

In light of these facts we need to understand that Israel has never yet possessed all of the land that God promised them; that God foretold that Israel would be scattered among the nations; that in the endtime He would return them to their land and reunite them as a nation, and that Israel will serve the Lord under the Messiah in the promised land during the Millennium.

And what God has promised, He will do. God does not change His mind, and God keeps His word.

None of the promises to, or covenants with, Israel can possibly apply to the Church. The Church is not a nation which could be scattered or reunited in its own land. The Church doesn't have a homeland. It is true that Israel has been temporarily set aside in God's dealings with mankind, but never replaced by the Church, as Romans 10 makes abundantly clear.

It is a source of astonishment to me how anyone who claims to believe that the Bible is God's infallible Word can possibly believe in Replacement Theology.

So, Israel. She is the chronic "hot spot" in the world, and the primary reason behind the war between fanatical Islam and the west. This ongoing centuries-old conflict is out of all proportion to the size of Israel, a tiny piece of real estate in the Middle East, with a small population of about 8 million, of whom just over 6 million are Jews.

Israel is a miracle nation. She is miraculous in her birth, preservation, nationhood, survival and prosperity. Let's consider why this is so.

I THE MIRACLE OF ISRAEL'S BIRTH

Israel as a nation has an amazing and unique history, dating back some 6,000 years. The Bible describes how, in the beginning, God chose Abraham and promised to make of him a great nation. Genesis 12:1-4. *I will make you a great nation. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you.* As we've already noted, God

also promised to give Abraham's descendents a land for their home – a land whose boundaries are clearly described in Deuteronomy 30. (By the way, it's exactly where we find the modern-day nation of Israel, though currently they do not yet possess all that God has promised to them).

The birth of Abraham's son Isaac, at a time when Abraham was 100 years old and his wife Sarah was 90, was miraculous. They were long past their child-bearing years & besides Sarah was barren. But God kept His word: Isaac was born.

Later, in Egypt, where Abraham's descendants had gone to escape widespread famine, the family of Israel grew and became a nation. Subsequently, under Moses, they escaped what had become cruel bondage, and finally, under General Joshua, conquered Canaan, which became their home—the land that God had promised to them.

Along the way, they were given the Word of God and the divine moral code in the Pentateuch and the Ten Commandments. God made it very clear to them, through Moses, that if they obeyed that Word, His blessing would be theirs. If they disobeyed, the judgments of the Almighty would be visited upon them. The nation actually entered into such a contract with God at Mounts Ebal and Gerizim—a contract which you can read for yourself in Deuteronomy 28.

But history records the tragic story. National and personal disobedience to God's laws, followed by His promised judgments, followed by repentance and God's deliverance, followed once again by disobedience, *ad nauseam*, became a continuous cycle. The nation, from its peak of glory and power under the kings David and Solomon, went steadily downhill, spiritually and in every other way, as they experienced what God said they would experience if they disobeyed Him.

Finally, the chosen people were divided into two nations—the 10 tribes of Israel to the north and the two tribes of Judah in the south. These two nations lived side by side for 200 years, often engaging in war against each other, as well as with nations around them.

Meanwhile, their national disregard for God, worse in the northern tribes of Israel, continued and became so great that finally divine judgment permitted Israel's complete destruction as a nation, with her people carried away into a captivity from which they would not return for centuries. Exactly what God, through His prophets, had repeatedly warned would happen.

Judah, the southern kingdom—although periodically ruled by godly kings and occasionally experiencing revival—also, several hundred years later, came under God's promised judgment for her sin and disobedience. Consequently, Judah was conquered by a succession of enemies, though a remnant was allowed to live in the land.

Later, under the Macabees, an independent Jewish state did exist for a brief time about 140 B.C. until the armies of Rome conquered all of the then-known world, including Judah.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ, who lived and was crucified under Roman domination, prophesied that the Jews “*will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.*” Luke 21:24.

That prophecy was literally fulfilled, when in A.D. 70, as a so-called final solution to the “Jewish problem”, the Roman general Titus brutally put down a

rebellion, crucified hundreds of thousands of Jews, sold multiplied thousands more into slavery in other lands, totally destroyed Jerusalem and razed the Temple by fire.

A band of about 1,000 Jewish soldiers, women and children did hold out against the might of Rome for months in the desert stronghold of Masada, but when that heroic community finally fell in 100 A.D. the nation of Israel seemed to have literally ceased to exist.

Her surviving people were dispersed among the nations. Her national homeland, in ruins and desolate, was under the control of others, just as God had warned. You can read the sad story in the history books. But, in the light of these facts, consider...

II THE MIRACLE OF ISRAEL'S PRESERVATION

It's a fact that when a people are deprived of a national homeland and are dispersed among various nations for any length of time, they usually soon lose their national identity. It happens even when the dispersal is voluntary, as the "melting pot" which is North America graphically illustrates.

But consider the Jews! Deprived of self-government for some 2,500 years and without a national homeland for nearly 20 centuries, the Jews have still maintained their national identity. This phenomenon is little short of miraculous, particularly when they are compared to other nationalities which were their ancient contemporaries, and which (in most cases) were far more numerous than they. Where are the Babylonians, Hittites or Amalekites today? Mark Twain, not a

religious man, remarked on this miracle, asking “What is the secret of the Jew’s immortality?”

The secret is that God has spoken concerning Israel, and He is keeping His Word. Check out Jeremiah 31:35-37 for God’s guarantee to Israel of her continued existence as a nation. This miracle of the preservation of the Jewish identity leads to another miracle...

III THE MIRACLE OF ISRAEL’S MODERN DAY NATIONHOOD

More than just retaining his national identity, miraculous as that is, the Jew has regained and is living in his original homeland—all against unbelievable odds.

After the Jews were dispersed, a succession of nations controlled the land: Rome, Persia, the Islamic armies of Saladin, (who constructed the Muslim Dome of the Rock), followed by the Crusaders, then the Muslims again, and then the Ottoman Turks, who ruled Palestine from 1291 to 1917, until the British captured Jerusalem during World War I, and governed Palestine.

Meanwhile, the brutal massacres and violent pogroms suffered by the Jews throughout history led finally to the founding of the nationalist movement known as Zionism, which had as its goal the re-establishment of a Jewish national homeland. Consequently, increasing numbers of Jewish pioneers began to return to the land, founding and living in settlements called kibbutzes.

Inevitably, tensions increased, and in 1947 Jewish immigration was forbidden and the governing power, Britain, withdrew from the area. Hostilities between Arabs and Jews immediately flared. The United Nations tried to partition the country, but shortly after, the Jewish National Council and General Zionist

Council proclaimed the establishment of the sovereign State of Israel. Both the U.S. and (surprisingly) Russia recognized the new nation, which—after much debate—was accepted into the United Nations as a member state.

And so, 65 years ago next May, on May 14, 1948, Israel became once again a sovereign nation with her own homeland, government and national flag. Miraculous! Out of the trauma of the pogroms and the ashes of the horrific Holocaust, and despite the fierce resistance of the Muslim world, Israel was reborn as a nation. Miraculous indeed! That miracle led to still another great miracle...

IV THE MIRACLE OF ISRAEL'S SURVIVAL

Immediately after Israel's declaration of independence and statehood, the small, weak, newly-formed nation of less than three-quarters of a million people was plunged into a life-and-death struggle for its very survival. The neighboring Arab states, with populations in the hundreds of millions and large well-developed armies, were not willing (and in most cases have not since been willing) to acknowledge Israel as a sovereign state with a right to the land. They attacked Israel militarily. It should have been no contest. In the natural, Israel didn't have a hope, for the odds against her were overwhelming.

In fact, the leaders of the Muslim invasion were so confident of their victory that they told the Arabs living in the newly declared state to leave, so that the Jews could be destroyed, after which (they said) these forerunners of what is now the "Palestinian refugees" could return and occupy what had belonged to the Jews.

Nevertheless, when the War of Independence ended on January 7, 1949, Israel had not only *not* been annihilated, but had substantially increased her

possession of key areas of the country. The United Nations came in to create a “no man’s land” buffer zone between the Jews and the Arabs.

It is certainly not too strong to call Israel’s survival a miracle. Suffice it to say that Israel has been an island of a few million immigrants (now numbering about 8 million, of whom 6 million are Jews) in a sea of over 300 million enemies, almost all of whom are committed to her annihilation, and frequently aided in that desire by the world power Russia.

Israel is essentially without a friend in the world, other than Canada. As you know from the frequent reports in the media, many Islamic leaders openly call for the annihilation of Israel. The former President of Iran many times declared publicly that Israel should be totally destroyed, and predicted that it would happen soon. The Obama administration in U.S. has basically turned against Israel, and the so-called Arab Spring has given rise to groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, whose charter calls for the complete destruction of Israel.

And yet, Israel has survived decades of this kind of irrational hatred. Against enormous odds she has proven victorious, not only in the 1948 War of Independence, but in the 1956 Suez Crisis, the War of 1967, the 1968-70 War of Attrition, the Yom Kippur War of 1973, and the Lebanon war of 1982, while also saving the world from an Iraqi nuclear bomb when Israeli pilots took out the Osirik reactor in 1981.

I wish there was time to describe the miracle of the Yom Kippur War, when even the Israelis feared that they might lose. By all normal standards, they should have, but they miraculously survived—I believe only through God’s intervention. The fact that Israel has survived these many attacks and is in existence today gives rise to another miracle, perhaps not so dramatic in some ways as her survival, but a miracle, nonetheless.

V THE MIRACLE OF ISRAEL’S PRODUCTIVITY

As an introduction to this miracle, consider first these prophecies of warning from Leviticus and Ezekiel:

If you continue to be hostile toward Me... I will lay waste to the land... I will scatter you among the nations... Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins (Leviticus 26:32-33)

This is what the Sovereign Lord says to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys, to the desolate ruins and deserted towns that have been plundered and ridiculed by the nations around you (Ezekiel 36:4)

For hundreds and hundreds of years Palestine truly was desolate, just as these prophecies described. In 1870 Mark Twain wrote of its “forbidding desolation.” Erosion, deteriorating terrains, malarial swamps, ongoing drought, with little vegetation to be found anywhere, and very few inhabitants in the land—that was Palestine for centuries: exactly as prophesied.

But there were other prophecies. Listen to Ezekiel 36:8, 9, 11, 34-35:

But you, O mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for My people Israel, for they will come home.

I will increase the number of men and animals upon you, and they will be fruitful and become numerous. I will settle people on you as in the past and will make you prosper more than before.

I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the fields...the desolate land will be cultivated... They will say, 'This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited.'

For centuries that would have been considered to be a most unlikely prophecy! A prophecy that the land would become inhabited and fruitful, like the garden of Eden! Unbelievable!

But consider what has happened since Israel declared her independence, at which time the country's entire population, Arabs and Jews, stood at 806,000. Now, as of the end of 2012, there are over 8 million people living in Israel. The ancient ruins of Israelite cities such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Jericho, Hebron, Caesarea and Tiberias have been rebuilt into modern centers, with vast new construction to house the influx of immigrants.

If this were not enough, the deserts of Israel are blooming as never before, after centuries of neglect, filling the Holy Land with fruit, vegetables and flowers—just as the prophet foretold. A related development, which has been

described as a miracle, even in the secular press, is the fact that rainfall in the country, which for centuries has been so low as to produce desert conditions, began to steadily increase some decades ago, so that (in spite of a recent drought period) it is at record levels.

Consequently, such rainfall, coupled with state-of-the-art irrigation methods, has had dramatic results. The export of Jaffa oranges is over a billion-dollars-a-year business; Israeli agricultural exports have increased more than 4000 percent, and in a recent report, are 20 percent of a \$3.3 billion annual business in Israel. Cotton, melons, oranges, potatoes, flowers—40 percent of them grown in areas which were formerly desert—are just part of the fruitful conditions.

And recently, Israel has discovered vast natural gas reserves, while there is great optimism about the prospect of significant oil discoveries. Add to that the fact that Israel is a world leader in computer and technological expertise—second only to the U.S., and actually ahead of her in some regards.

Inhabited, fruitful – and also fortified. The Israeli Defense Force is renowned for their prowess: it's the fourth most powerful military in the world, and this in a very tiny nation.

Unquestionably, the prophetic Scriptures are being fulfilled in Israel.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

The point of all of this is that, in a very special way, a regathered, prosperous nation of Israel is THE most significant sign of prophecy's impending fulfilment.

In Luke 21 Jesus told a parable about the fig tree and all the trees. In Scripture trees are frequently used as symbols of nations, and in particular the fig tree is a symbol of Israel, according to Scriptures such as Hosea 9:10 and Joel 1:7. Here is the parable Jesus told:

He told them this parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.” (Luke 21:29-33)

Jesus told this parable as part of His answer to the disciples’ threefold question: “When will this (the destruction of the Temple) happen; what will be the sign of Your coming, and what will be the sign of the end of the world?”

In the first part of His answer to these questions Jesus described a number of world conditions which He said would be like ‘birth pangs’—a most significant prophecy which we’ll consider in some detail in our final message on Sunday afternoon.

Then, as a major part of His response, Jesus spoke of Israel, and said that the generation which saw Israel reborn “*will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.*” So the miracle of Israel’s rebirth has occurred. We are the generation that has seen it happen. And, in spite of all the odds against it, Israel exists, and will continue to do so, supernaturally, notwithstanding all of the dire threats to annihilate her. I remind you of God’s guarantee concerning Israel’s secure future, in Jeremiah 31:35-36.

Quite obviously, God's endtime timepiece is ticking loud and clear. Which brings us to a vital question for each one of us:

SO WHAT?

If indeed, the prophetic scriptures which describe the end times are being literally fulfilled before our eyes, how should we live? If the Rapture, when Christ comes for His own, could occur at any moment, what effect should this have on us?

Well, the first thing we need to be very certain about is that we have been born again, and that we are a part of the Body of Christ. If there is anyone here who is not absolutely sure that you are a child of God, through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, for you there is no decision in your entire life which is as important as the decision to come to the Lord for salvation. You can do so by repenting of your sin—your failure to live up to God's holy standard—and by receiving the gift of eternal life that Christ purchased by His sacrifice on Calvary.

To have heard the good news of salvation, and to have rejected it, will mean (I believe) that after the Rapture there is NO hope of salvation for you. Second Thessalonians 2:1-10 and many other portions of Scripture clearly indicate that people who have heard the truth, and have rejected it, have that decision confirmed by God, so the it is fixed.

So, if you have not yet repented and trusted Christ for salvation, I urge you not to delay. Not only would the Rapture seal your fate, but besides that, you have no guarantee of how long you will live. None of us has any assurance that we will be here tomorrow. Thus, the language of the Bible concerning salvation is always

“Today! Decide today! Today is the day of salvation!”

But what about those of us who have been born again, through the mercy and grace of God, and because of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary? What should the promise and possibility of Christ’s imminent return for us mean in our lives?

I recall that when we were here a year ago last summer I shared a personal experience which I feel illustrates how we ought to live in the light of our Lord’s imminent return. I would like to repeat that account.

I grew up on a very small farm in North Red Deer, in an area which is now inside the city. The income from the farm was inadequate to provide for our family and so my Dad worked in town, in addition to farming. I had my regular chores around the farm, and quite often before he left for town, Dad would assign me some extra responsibility, usually seasonal.

Now, if I had done my chores, and if I had cared for whatever extra was assigned, I was quite happy to see my Dad come home at night. But, if I had goofed off, if I had fooled around, if I had failed to do what I had been told to do, I was not at all excited to see my Dad come up the lane.

I think that it may be something like that in terms of the Rapture, only far more significant. Remember that after the Rapture, and before the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, there’ll be The Judgment Seat of Christ.

If we have wasted our lives through self-centered carnal living;

if we have failed to love Christ by failing to obey His commands;

if we have allowed petty issues to separate us from fellow Christians;

if we have broken relationships with spouse, or children, or parents or siblings or brothers and sisters in Christ;

if we have become materialistic and have not laid up treasures in heaven;

if we allow lust or avarice or covetousness or any other sin to control us;

if any of these things, and a host more, are true of us at the moment when

Christ snatches away His Bride, I fear that we won't be the joy that there should be at His coming for us. The solution is to deal now with any sin, by confessing and forsaking it, and then to live as our Lord intended in the power of His Spirit.

We learn from Titus 2 that the grace of God teaches us that we are to live Spirit-controlled, righteous, godly lives in anticipation of the return of Christ. That means that we should live as God's Word indicates we should—in relationship to ourselves, to others around us, and to God.

May we allow that grace of God, in Christ, to rule our lives and our behavior as we anticipate the sound of the trumpet.