

ISRAELOLOGY
Part 5 of 6
by Arnold Fruchtenbaum

ISRAEL FUTURE
(Part Two)

The Basis for the Messianic Kingdom

Many like to charge that Dispensationalism's belief in a Millennium relies entirely on one passage, Revelation 20. Since that book does contain many symbols, critics claim that it is foolish to take the *one thousand years* literally. Though valid against Covenant Premillennialism,¹ the charge is not true of Dispensational Premillennialism. First, although the Book of Revelation uses many symbols, it (and other Scriptures) explains each symbol. Second, never does this book use years in a symbolic way. If they are symbolic, John leaves the symbolism unexplained. The mention of 1,260 days, 42 months, and 3½ years are all literal and not symbolic. Hence, no basis exists for taking the *one thousand years* as anything but a literal *one thousand years*. Those who desire to spiritualize Scripture assume the burden of proof. Likewise, without objective proof spiritualizing yields a subjective interpretation. The phrase *one thousand years* only appears in Revelation 20; however, John uses this phrase six times within this one chapter, emphasizing

¹ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries), 316–17, observes, “It is here that Covenant Premillennialism differs most from its two sisters in Covenant Theology. Its belief in a national salvation of Israel separates it from Covenant Amillennialism. Its belief in a national restoration of Israel separates it from Covenant Postmillennialism. However, its strong reluctance to base it on the prophecies of the Old Testament is very problematic. This requires a great deal of allegorizing of the prophecies of the Old Testament. . . . To base a theology of Israel's future only on Revelation 20 and a few scattered New Testament references leaves a lot to be desired. Ignoring such a wealth of Old Testament information leads to a shallow Eschatology in general, and a shallow Israelology in particular.”

the literal nature of the *one thousand years*. Although Revelation 20 is the only passage of Scripture specifying the Millennium's length, it is not foundational for the Dispensationalist's belief in the Messianic Age.² Two foundations exist.

The first foundation consists of the numerous Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah coming to reign on David's throne over a peaceful kingdom. A literal interpretation of the many Old Testament passages concerning the Messianic Kingdom leads to Dispensational Premillennialism. Israel, in the period of the Messianic Kingdom, is a major theme of the Old Testament prophets and the high point of their prophecy.³ To spiritualize and allegorize away huge portions of Scripture confuses the whole science of interpretation. No more justification exists for spiritualizing any of these prophecies than for doing so to those prophecies dealing with Christ's first coming: the virgin birth, that it would be in Bethlehem, His death, or His physical resurrection.

The second foundation for the belief in a coming kingdom rests on the unfulfilled provisions of the four unconditional covenants God made with Israel. If taken literally, these covenants not only rely solely on God for their fulfillment, but also require fulfillment within the framework of a Messianic Age or a Millennial Kingdom. Extensive prophetic writings as well as the unfulfilled portions of the unconditional covenants form the foundation for the Dispensationalist's belief in the future Messianic Kingdom. Ultimately, each of the four primary facets of Israel's final restoration (Regeneration, Regathering,

² Revelation's only distinct contribution (to the knowledge of the kingdom) is that it specifies that the Messianic Kingdom will last *one thousand years*. The term "Millennium" means *one thousand years*. Thus, the term Millennium comes from Revelation 20, not the Old Testament. However, the basis for the Messianic Kingdom is the Old Testament, not Revelation 20.

³ Every writing prophet (other than Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Malachi) had something to say about it.

Possession of the Land, and Re-establishment of the Davidic Throne, finds its basis in a specific covenant.

New Covenant: Israel's Regeneration

The basis of Israel's final regeneration is Jeremiah 31:31–34's announcement of the New Covenant. It declares that God will make a covenant with both houses of Israel (31:31). This New Covenant will sharply contrast with the older Mosaic Covenant (31:32).⁴ That conditional covenant showed the standard of righteousness demanded by the law, but could never impart to the Jew the power to keep it. However, the New Covenant will rectify that problem (31:33) through regeneration, giving the internal power necessary to meet and to keep God's righteous standards. The New Covenant will provide for Israel's total national regeneration (31:34). Every Jew will know the Lord, from the least to the greatest. God will forgive and forget Israel's sins. The New Covenant is the basis for the first facet of Israel's restoration, Israel's regeneration. Other prophets also speak of this.⁵

Land Covenant: Israel's Regathering

The second facet of Israel's final restoration is the regathering of Israel from all over the world based upon the Land Covenant (Deuteronomy 29:1–30:20). The eternal and unconditional Land Covenant is distinct and different from the temporal and conditional Mosaic Covenant (29:1). Moses

⁴ Of the five Jewish covenants, the Mosaic was the only conditional one. Although God had been faithful in keeping His terms of the covenant, Israel was unfaithful, resulting in the Mosaic Covenant being broken.

⁵ See Arnold Fruchtenbaum, "Israelology" *CTS Journal*, 6 (January–March 2000), 56 for passages already receiving discussion under Israel's national salvation. Others include: Isaiah 29:22–24; 30:18–22; 44:1–5, 21–23; 45:17; Jeremiah 24:7; 50:19–20; Ezekiel 11:19–20; 36:25–27; Hosea 1:10–2:1; 14:4–8; Joel 2:28–32; Micah 7:18–20; Zephaniah 3:9–13; and Romans 11:25–27.

summarizes the forty years of wilderness experience preparing the nation to enter into the Promised Land (29:2–9). However, before entrance can occur, another covenant is necessary, warning them of things to come (29:10–13). They must guard against turning away from the Lord (29:14–21). The passage then states that Israel will turn away, resulting in the dispersion from the land into the Gentile nations to endure many persecutions (29:22–29). This dispersion from the land is not permanent, because eventually God will regather them (Deuteronomy 30:1–10).

After the long period of persecution, Israel will ultimately be regenerated as the people return to the Lord (30:1–2). Then God will regather them from all over the world and the uttermost parts of the heavens (30:3–4) to return them to the Promised Land (30:5). This regathering will occur only after Israel's regeneration (30:6). Then the Gentiles will receive the punishments previously applied to Israel (30:7). Although curses may fall on Gentiles, Israel will only experience blessing (30:8–9) because her people will totally return to the Lord (30:10). The Land Covenant ends with some further admonitions, warnings, and promises (30:11–20). The regathering of regenerate Israel is another high point of prophetic revelation found in many of the prophets.⁶

Abrahamic Covenant: Possessing the Land

The third facet of Israel's final restoration, possessing the land, has two aspects: its total boundaries and its productivity. The Abrahamic Covenant as found in the Book of Genesis is the basis for this facet. At the covenant's inception (Genesis 12:1–3), God simply told Abram to leave for a land that He would show

⁶ Cf. Isaiah 11:11–12:6; 27:12–13; 43:5–7; Jeremiah 16:14–15; 23:3–8; 31:7–10; Ezekiel 11:14–18; Amos 9:14–15; Zephaniah 3:18–20; Zechariah 10:8–12; Matthew 24:31; and, Mark 13:27.

him. God again revealed Himself to Abram upon his arrival in the land (Genesis 12:7). Although this verse only mentions that Abram's seed would possess the land, Genesis 13:14-17 indicates that Abram would too. Even though the area of grazing was then divided between Abram and Lot, the passage stipulates that Abram ultimately would possess all the land that he could see (13:14-15). The promise is clear that both Abram and his seed would possess the land. Since Abram's seed is to possess the land as well, the population of Israel will greatly increase at that time (13:16). Abram was then directed to walk throughout the land in order to get to know the land which he will one day possess (13:17).

Although Abram would possess all the land which he could possibly see, God did not stipulate exact boundaries then. Later, in Genesis 15:12-21, He confirmed the covenant and gave its exact boundaries. God also spelled out Abram's seed's future history to their initial possession of the land (15:12-16), when signing and sealing the covenant (v. 17). He also declared the land's boundaries (15:18-21). They extend from the Euphrates River in the north to the River of Egypt in the south. Abram died never having possessed any part of the land except for a few wells and a burial cave (which he purchased). In order for God to fulfill His promise to Abram, two things need to occur: He must resurrect Abram and restore the land to Israel. The Abrahamic Covenant provides the third facet of Israel's final restoration. Fulfillment requires that Israel possess the land. Both the law and the prophets develop this concept.⁷

⁷ As far as the Law is concerned, the Abrahamic Covenant appears in Leviticus 26:40-45. Both the Major and Minor Prophets developed this facet even further: Isaiah 27:12; 30:23-26; 35:1-2; 65:21-24; Jeremiah 31:1-14; Ezekiel 20:42-44; 28:25-26; 34:25-31; Joel 2:18-27; 3:18; and, Amos 9:13.

Davidic Covenant: Re-Establishing David's Throne

The Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7:11b–16 and 1 Chronicles 17:10b–14) is the basis for fourth facet of Israel's final restoration, the re-establishment of David's throne. In essence, this covenant promised four eternal things: an eternal dynasty, an eternal kingdom, an eternal throne, and an eternal person. The eternal nature of the dynasty, kingdom, and throne are guaranteed only because the Seed of David culminated in the Person who is Himself eternal. Christ holds three offices: prophet, priest, and king. However, He does not function in all these offices simultaneously, but sequentially. During His First Advent, Christ functioned as a prophet. Since His death and resurrection, and until He returns, Christ functions as a priest. Jesus has never yet functioned as a king. For Him to reign as king requires the re-establishment of the Davidic throne. Starting at the Second Coming, Christ will sit upon this throne to rule as king over Israel and king of the world.⁸

Other Characteristics of Israel's Final Restoration

Besides the various features mentioned in the passages dealing with the covenants and their prophetic developments, other passages develop additional characteristics. These may or may not necessarily link with a specific covenant.

Reunited as a Nation

One of the other major features of the final restoration is the reuniting of Israel as a nation, never to be divided into separate kingdoms again. Jeremiah 3:18 mentions this:⁹

⁸ Prophetic development occurs in Psalm 89; Isaiah 9:6–7; 16:5; Jeremiah 23:5–6; 33:14–26; Amos 9:11–12; and, Luke 1:32–35.

⁹ Unless otherwise noted all Scripture references are from the *American Standard Version (ASV)*, 1901.

In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I gave for an inheritance unto your fathers.

The vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1–23) is the key passage for this characteristic. Ezekiel first receives the command to prophesy over the dry bones scattered all over the valley (37:1–6). At the command, they all come together with sinews and skin. When the bones receive the breath of life, they become alive again (37: 7–10). God interprets the vision (37:11–17). These bones represent the whole House of Israel, which has become spiritually dead and dispersed (37:11). God will regather them, and they will again possess the land (37:12–13). Then, the Spirit of God will bring about a living and right relationship by regenerating Israel (37:14). Then Ezekiel 37:15–23 commands the prophet to take two sticks and to write *Judah* on one stick and *Joseph* on the other. When he put the two sticks together in his hand, they became one stick (37:15–17). Thus, someday God will reunite the Northern and Southern kingdoms into one nation (37:18–20). When God regathers Israel (37:21), He will not regather them into two nations, but into one kingdom under one king (37:22). Then, they will be thoroughly cleansed of their sins, the root cause of the original division (37:23).

The Center of Gentile Attention

A second major characteristic of Israel's final restoration is that they will become the center of Gentile attention. A number of passages speak of this: Isaiah 14:1–2; 49:22–23; 60:1–3; 61:4–9; Micah 7:14–17; Zephaniah 3:20; Zechariah 8:23.

Israel over the Gentiles

Third, Israel will become the head of the Gentiles, fulfilling God's promises to Israel in Deuteronomy (15:6; 28:13). The leadership over the Gentiles was to be (and one day will be) part of Israel's reward for obedience according to Deuteronomy 28:1.

Such obedience and headship awaits Israel's national regeneration. According to Isaiah 14:1–2, the Gentiles will not only conduct the Jews back to their promised land of Israel, but Israel will possess them as servants. Compare Isaiah 49:22–23 and 61:6–7.

Righteousness, Holiness, Peace, Security, Joy and Gladness

Israel's final restoration combines the various characteristics of righteousness, holiness, peace, security, joy and gladness: Isaiah 32:16–20; 35:5–10; 51:3; 55:12–13; and, 61:10–11.

The Millennial Mountain of Jehovah's House

At the time of Christ's second coming the land will undergo tremendous geographical and topographical changes. One will be the rise of a mountain, which will become the world's highest mountain. The Millennial Temple and the Millennial Jerusalem will stand atop this mountain. Several passages speak of this Millennial Mountain of Jehovah's House: Isaiah 2:2–4; 27:13; 56:6–8; 66:20; and Micah 4:1–2. These passages point out that this mountain will become the center of both Jewish and Gentile attention and world worship.

Ezekiel received the most extensive revelation about the Mountain of Jehovah's House (Ezekiel 17:22–24; 20:40–41; 40:1–4; 45:1–8; and 48:8–22). This holy mountain, referred to as the holy oblation, will have a fifty-mile square plateau on top, which will have three subsections. The northern section will be twenty miles by fifty miles, having in its center the Millennial Temple, which will be one mile square in size. The rest of the northern section will be reserved for certain priests, the descendants of Zadok.¹⁰ They will officiate the sacrificial system. The central section will also measure twenty miles by fifty miles.

¹⁰ That segment of the Tribe of Levi remained faithful while the rest went astray.

It will be reserved for other Levites, the non-Zadoikites, who will be the Temple's caretakers. Jerusalem (which will measure ten miles by ten miles) will be in the very center of the ten-mile by fifty-mile southern section. The two remaining portions of the southern section, east and west of Jerusalem (each measuring ten miles by twenty miles) will grow food for the city's inhabitants. Jerusalem will not belong to any particular tribe, but members of all Israel's twelve tribes will inhabit it.

The Millennial Temple - Ezekiel 40:5–43:27

Ezekiel 40:5–43:27 describes the Millennial Temple as the largest and most beautiful temple given to Israel. The detail is as extensive and exacting as that given for constructing the Tabernacle and the First Temple. Is it possible to make any sense of this passage through allegory? Certainly the historical books become meaningless, if one does not take the details literally. The same thing has to be said about this prophetic passage. To allegorize the details is to render the whole passage meaningless.

Millennial Priesthood and Sacrifice - Ezekiel 44:1–46:24

These three chapters of Ezekiel discuss the various laws regulating the millennial priesthood and sacrificial system. Although, the millennial sacrificial system will have some features similar to the Mosaic system, it will not reinstitute the Mosaic system: It will incorporate some things old and some things new for an entirely different purpose.

Those who argue against taking these verses literally frequently ask why such a system would be necessary. If Christ's death was the final sacrifice for sin, how could animal sacrifices provide an expiation for sin in the Millennial Kingdom? Thus, some say, these chapters of Ezekiel cannot be literal. Not so! For if it were not literal, much detail would suddenly become meaningless. Furthermore, if all that detail is merely symbolic, the symbols are never explained, forcing the non-literalist to speculate. The literal approach is the safest method to understand these passages without allegorical guesswork.

What will be the purpose of these sacrifices in light of Christ's death? To begin with, one must remember that the Mosaic sacrificial system did not remove sins (Hebrews 10:4), but only covered them (the meaning of *atonement* in Hebrew). It served as a physical and visual picture of what the Messiah would do (Isaiah 53:10–12). The Bible commands the Church to keep the Lord's Supper as a physical and visual picture of Christ's work on the cross. In the Millennial Kingdom God will provide for Israel a physical and visual picture of Messiah's accomplishment on the cross. For Israel, however, it will be a sacrificial system instead of communion with bread and wine. The purpose of the sacrificial system in the kingdom will be the same as the purpose of communion: *in remembrance of me*.

The Millennial River - Ezekiel 47:1–12

Ezekiel 47:1-12 is one of three passages that speak about the Millennial River. It depicts the river as beginning in the Temple area and eventually flowing south to the Dead Sea.¹¹ According to Ezekiel, the Millennial River will gush out from the front part of the Temple, by the threshold of the door and the right side of the altar which will stand in front of the Temple. It will first head

¹¹ Joel 3:18 summarizes the entire Ezekiel passage. According to Joel, the Millennial River will originate in the Temple area.

east until the eastern gate before going south to the Dead Sea. Zechariah 14:8 says that it will divide into two branches at Jerusalem. The west branch will flow into the Mediterranean Sea, while the eastern branch will flow to the Dead Sea. They will water the fields to Jerusalem's east and west. The eastern branch will also transform the Dead Sea, which will swarm with life (Ezekiel 47:8–10).

The Millennial Israel

For the first time in Israel's history, the Jews will possess and settle all of the Promised Land (Ezekiel 47:13–48:29). Ezekiel states that the division of the entire Promised Land will be the final fulfillment of God's covenant promises (Ezekiel 47:13–14). The northern boundary will extend from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River (47:15–17), incorporating much of modern Lebanon and Syria. The eastern border will move south from the Euphrates River, incorporating the Golan Heights and portions of Syria almost up to Damascus, and continue south to where the Jordan River leaves the Sea of Galilee. The river will be the eastern border to the Dead Sea's southern end (47:18). From there the southern border will go westward, incorporating the Negev and parts of Sinai all the way along the Brook of Egypt (the modern Wadi-el-Arish) to the point where it reaches the Mediterranean Sea (47:19), the western border (47: 20).

Although the land will have twelve tribal divisions, these subdivisions will differ from those in the Book of Joshua. Ezekiel 48:1–7 describes the northern subdivisions for seven of the twelve tribes. From north to south they will be: Dan (v. 1), Asher (v. 2), Naphtali (48:3), Manasseh (48:4), Ephraim (48:5), Reuben (48:6) and Judah (48:7). Ezekiel 48:8–22 describes the holy mountain.¹² It will be south of Judah and north of Benjamin, separating the northern and the southern tribes. Ezekiel 48:23–29

¹² See pages 38–39 in this article.

describes the subdivisions of the remaining five tribes in the south. From north to south, they will be: Benjamin (48:23), Simeon (48:24), Issachar (48:25), Zebulun (48:26) and Gad (48:27) next to the southern border (48:28–29).

The Millennial Jerusalem - Ezekiel 48:30–35

Ezekiel's description of Millennial Jerusalem adds details not found elsewhere. He describes the city's four sides, along with the gates and their names (after Jacob's twelve sons). The north side (Ezekiel 48:30–31) will measure ten miles (48:30); its three gates will be: Reuben, Judah, and Levi (48:31). The eastern side (48:32) will measure ten miles (48:32a); its gates will be Joseph, Benjamin, and Dan (48:32b). The southern side (48:33) will measure ten miles (48:33a) having Simeon, Issachar, and Zebulun as its gates (48:33b). Finally, the western side (48:34) will also measure ten miles (48:34a) with its gates named after Gad, Asher, and Naphtali (48:34b). This ten-mile square city's name will not be Jerusalem (48:35a), but *Jehovah Shammah*, meaning "Jehovah is there" (48:35b). Since the Messiah will personally reign from this city, not only will it fulfill its prior name's meaning (city of peace) but also its new name, *Jehovah Shammah* (Jehovah is there). For this same reason the city will also be called *Jehovah Our Righteousness*, according to Jeremiah 33:16.¹³

¹³ Other passages give further descriptions of this Millennial Jerusalem: Psalm 48:1–10; 87:1–7; 122:1–9; 147:1–20; Isaiah 1:26–27; 4:3–6; 14:32; 33:20–24; 52:1–10; 60:10–14; 62:1–12; 65:18–19; 66:10–14; Jeremiah 3:17; 31:6, 38–40; 33:9–11; Joel 3:17; Micah 4:6–8; Zephaniah 3:14–17; Zechariah 1:14–17; 2:1–5, 10–12; 8:1–8, 20–22; 14:9–11, 20–21.

The Remnant of Israel

Everything said in the preceding section about Israel and the kingdom will be true of the Remnant Israel. However, certain verses do emphasize the remnant motif in the Messianic Kingdom. Concerning the regathering of Israel, Isaiah 11:11, 16 and Zechariah 8:6–7 picture it as gathering the remnant. Micah 4:7 emphasizes the Remnant's salvation. Micah 7:18–20 speaks of forgiving the Remnant's sins. Micah 5:7–8 says that the Remnant will spread God's Word among Gentile nations. The Remnant will also possess the land (Zephaniah 2:7, 9; and Zechariah 8:12). They will be sinless in the land and live in security (Zephaniah 3:13).

Israel and the Eternal Order

Even in the Eternal State, the Jewish distinctive will exist (in some form), though Scripture does not specify a continued functional difference. Hebrews 12:22–24's description of Heavenly Jerusalem's various residents distinguishes *the general assembly and church of the firstborn* (Church saints) from *the spirits of just men made perfect* (Old Testament saints). They were *just* in their day because of justification by faith (i.e., Genesis 15:6), but they were *made perfect* at Messiah's death. Israel's twelve tribes provide the names for twelve gates of the eternal New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:12–13), an eternal reminder of these Jewish names. Furthermore, through these gates righteous Gentiles will bring their glory into the city (Revelation 21:25–26). Verse 24 also mentions the Gentiles, showing that the Jewish and Gentile distinction will exist for all eternity.

Conclusion

Although much criticism has been levelled against Dispensationalism's belief in a literal 1000 year Messianic

Kingdom, the criticism totally misses the mark. Again, though Revelation 20 is helpful in determining the length of the coming kingdom, the Old Testament covenants are the basis of the Millennial Kingdom. The Abrahamic Covenant promised an eternal seed developing into a nation that will possess the Promised Land with definite borders. While that nation (the Jews) continues to exist, never in Jewish history has it possessed all of the Promised Land. Fulfillment of this promise requires a future kingdom. Furthermore, God did not merely promise possession of the land to Abraham's seed, but He also promised it to Abraham personally: *To thee will I give it and to thy seed forever*. Therefore, for God to fulfill His promise to Abraham (as well as to Isaac and Jacob), requires a future kingdom and resurrection.

Second, the Land Covenant promises a worldwide regathering of the dispersed Jews to possess the land again. While the historic dispersion is still in effect today, the regathering and repossession of the land still awaits fulfillment in the future kingdom.

Third, the Davidic Covenant promised four eternal things: an eternal house (dynasty), an eternal throne, an eternal kingdom, and an eternal person. The dynasty is eternal because it culminates in a Person who is Himself eternal: Jesus the Messiah. Thus, the throne and kingdom will be eternal as well. Jesus has yet to sit upon the Throne of David ruling over a kingdom of Israel. The re-establishment of the Davidic throne and Christ's rule over the kingdom awaits a future fulfillment in a future kingdom.

The last of these covenants, the New Covenant, promises Israel's national regeneration and salvation encompassing each individual Jewish member of that nation. This, too, awaits its final fulfillment and requires a future kingdom.

As if the unfulfilled provisions of the four unconditional covenants are not enough, Dispensationalist's belief in a literal 1000 year Messianic Kingdom has yet another foundation. Huge portions of the Old Testament, foretell the Messiah coming to reign on David's throne over a peaceful kingdom. A literal interpretation of these passages concerning the Messianic Kingdom requires a literal kingdom. Again, Israel during the period of the Messianic Kingdom is a major theme of the Old Testament prophets and the high point of their prophecy. Why spiritualize any of these prophecies? If so, why not spiritualize the prophecies dealing with the first coming of Christ, such as the virgin birth, His birth in Bethlehem, His death, or His physical resurrection?

Dispensational theology derives from a *consistently* literal interpretation of passages predicting both First and Second Comings of Christ, as well as the passages anticipating the Messianic Kingdom. The operative word is *consistently*.

—**To be continued**—

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