

Israel's National Repentance: Ushering in the Kingdom

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Introduction

Dispensationalism has always maintained that Scripture predicts a national future for Israel, long before modern Israel became a nation (May 14, 1948). It is helpful to visit pre- and post-1948 statements advocating a future for national Israel.

Lewis Sperry Chafer's *Systematic Theology* was published in 1948, the year of Israel's modern statehood. However, his words. Therefore, Chafer penned the following words prior to the beginning of the modern Jewish state. Chafer took seriously unconditional Old Testament promises that Israel has a national future. Note that he did not think any part of the regathering would occur before the rapture:

The present dispersion [of Israel] exceeds the other two in point of duration and in the manner in which Israel is now scattered among all the nations of the earth. Beginning with the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D., the final scattering continues to the present hour and is a major characteristic of the present age, which characteristic must continue until the Church be removed from the world.¹

In reflecting upon Chafer's thinking, he would have recognized that Daniel 9:27 required a national status for Israel at the start of the tribulation. Specifically, Israel will sign a treaty, which will be broken at the mid-point of the seven years. National status is requisite to a treaty. However, the question arises: What precludes Israel from possessing a national government during the Church Age?

The answer is: Nothing. Chafer made an assumption; not an unreasonable one,² but still an assumption. The 1948 founding of the Jewish state has caused dispensationalists to rethink its assumptions about the sequence of events. Specifically, nothing in Scripture precludes the idea that Israel could regain national status prior to the rapture.

Another related issue is whether Israel is permanently in the land, or whether it might experience a series of evictions and regatherings. Arnold Fruchtenbaum answers that definitively. He makes a case from Isaiah for Israel having exactly two stages in its regathering. The first phase, a partial regathering in unbelief, began no later than³ the 1948 founding of Israel. The nation has welcomed the Diaspora to come home ever since.

Isaiah 11:11–12:6 is speaking of the final worldwide gathering [of national Israel] in faith in preparation for blessing. It might appear to be irrelevant to our topic, but it *is* relevant because of the way Isaiah numbers the final worldwide gathering in faith in preparation for the messianic kingdom. In verse 11 he [Isaiah] labels it [the second gathering] as *the second one*. If the last one is the second one, how many can take place before that? Only one [the partial gathering in unbelief that started in 1948].⁴

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 7:125.

Since 1948, dispensational writers have been careful to mention that Israel's final regathering starts in unbelief, but that the Messiah Himself will regather then all Jews into the land in belief. Many dispensationals (including the present writer) would identify the first stage with the establishment of the modern Jewish state.

² The fact that the Church was a mystery, not revealed at all in the OT, might underlie the assumption. However, if Israel needed to be a national entity by the start of the tribulation (the signing of the covenant), it would suggest that it might be a nation prior to the rapture (as is the case).

³ Prior to 1948 Jews did migrate to the British Mandate, so I am not emphatic about 1948 being the starting point. However, it marks the point that serious numbers began migrating to Israel.

⁴ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, "Israel in Prophecy," in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2004), 155-56.

Now, of course, the Daniel-9:27-signing of the covenant that starts the tribulation requires Israel to be a national entity. Chafer did not anticipate that it would become a national state prior to the rapture, but fully recognized its national status during the Tribulation and Millennium.

God has, indeed, promised a national future for Israel, starting with the four unconditional covenants with Israel: the Abrahamic, Land, Davidic, and New Covenants.

Abrahamic Covenant		
	Genesis 12ff	
<i>Land</i>	<i>Seed</i>	<i>Blessing</i>

Land Covenant Deuteronomy 28-30 <i>Land</i>	Davidic Covenant 2 Samuel 7 <i>Seed</i>	New Covenant Jeremiah 31 <i>Blessing</i>
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Recognition of God’s unconditional promise of a future for Israel does not tell us what will be Israel’s role in triggering the fulfillment of God’s promises to it. This paper will consider a feature of the Land Covenant that is often ignored: The national repentance of Israel. Two significant errors accrue from the failure to link repentance with Israel’s national restoration:

1. Eschatological errors
2. Soteriological errors.

We will first focus upon the requirement of national repentance before the second stage of Israel’s regathering. Then we will consider issues related to the message of life.

Eschatology: National Regathering Requires National Repentance

We will consider this in stages:

1. The Land Covenant requires national repentance for national regathering.
2. John the Baptist’s national message.
3. The start of Jesus’ ministry.
4. Acts 1 and Kingdom issues.
5. Acts 3 and Kingdom issues.

The Land Covenant (Deut 28–30) Requires National Repentance

The Land Covenant specifies the conditions under which the nation would enjoy the land of Israel, to which it unconditionally holds the title deed (based on the Abrahamic Covenant). When the nation conformed to the Land Covenant provisions, God would bless them.

Whenever they rebelled, God would curse them, even evicting them from the land that they unconditionally owned.

Deuteronomy 30 sets national repentance as the prerequisite for regathering the nation when it was dispersed among the nations for rebellion against the Land Covenant.

John the Baptist's National Message

John 3:36 makes it clear that John did have a message for individual unbelievers. However, we are concerned here about his message for the nation. Matthew 3:2 characterizes that message as, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The Start of Jesus' Ministry

Matthew 4:12: **John the Baptist imprisoned**; Jesus went to Galilee

John 3:24: **John the Baptist had not yet been thrown into prison**

John 4:3 Jesus left Judea and departed again to Galilee (so **John was in prison**)

Mark 1:14-15/Matthew 4:17: From that time Jesus began to preach and to say

Acts 1 and Kingdom Issues

"Lord, will You at this time [*chronos*] restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)
(This was after Luke 24:45, when He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures)

"It is not for you to know times [*chronos*] or seasons [*kairos*] which the Father has put in His own authority." (Acts 1:7)

He would not tell them the exact date, but told them more than Luke has recorded here.
(We will prove this in the next section)

Acts 3:19-21 and Kingdom Issues⁵

Repent [National or individual?]

Sins may be be blotted out [National or individual?]

Times [*kairos*] of refreshing

Heaven must receive Jesus until the times [*chronos*] of the restoration of all things

⁵ See my article, "Acts 1:8 Reconsidered," *JOTGES* 24 (Autumn 2011): 49-63.
<https://faithalone.org/journal/2011ii/Niemela.pdf>

Conclusion on National Repentance and Regathering of Israel

Soteriology: Unbelievers Receive Everlasting Life by Faith Alone, Not Faith Plus Repentance

John's Gospel (in the *Majority Text* uses *pisteuō* (*believe*) 100 times.

1:7, 12, 50; 2:11, 22-24; 3:12ab, 15f, 18abc, 36; 4:21, 39, 41f, 48, 50, 53; 5:24, 38, 44, 46ab, 47ab; 6:29f, 35f, 40, 47, 64ab, 69; 7:5, 31, 38f, 48; 8:24, 30f, 45f; 9:18, 35f, 38; 10:25f, 37, 38abcM, 42; 11:15, 25, 26ab, 27, 40, 42, 45, 48; 12:11, 36-39, 42, 44ab, 46, 47M; 13:19; 14:1ab, 10, 11ab, 12, 29; 16:9, 27, 30f; 17:8, 20f; 19:35; 20:8, 25, 29ab, 31ab. [underlining followed by M = in Majority Text, not in Nestle-Aland]

John's Gospel never uses repent/repentance.

New⁶ Argument: Jesus' ministry did not begin by preaching repentance (cf. p. 3 of this paper)

Matthew 4:17 is when He began preaching repentance (for Israel to receive the kingdom)

John 1–3 occurred prior to Matthew 4:17, so MacArthur's suggestion that repentance was implicit in His John 1–3 message flies in the face of Matthew 4:17. John MacArthur, *The Vanishing Conscience*, 121, says,

“He was urging Nicodemus to repent. And He was calling Nicodemus to believe in Him as the Savior who would be lifted up so that whoever believes might be saved.

In other words, ‘Repent and believe in the Gospel’ (Mk. 1:15) was Jesus’ appeal to Nicodemus.”

Conclusion on the Faith-Along Message of Life

CONCLUSION

⁶ Not brand new, but newly expanded and emphasized. Zane Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*, 25, laid a foundation.