

How Shall I Sing That Majesty?

John Mason (1646?–1694)

How shall I sing that Majesty
which angels do admire?
Let dust in dust and silence lie;
sing, sing, ye heavenly choir.
Thousands of thousands stand around
thy throne, O God most high;
ten thousand times ten thousand sound
thy praise; but who am I?

Thy brightness unto them appears,
whilst I thy footsteps trace;
a sound of God comes to my ears;
but they behold thy face.
They sing because thou art their Sun:
Lord, send a beam on me;
for where heaven is but once begun,
there alleluias be.

How great a being Lord, is thine,
which doth all beings keep!
Thy knowledge is the only line
to sound so vast a deep.
Thou art a sea without a shore,
a sun without a sphere;
thy time is now and evermore,
thy place is everywhere.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

How To Think About Israel

Kevin T. Bauder

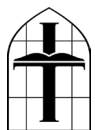
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The state of Israel is in the news at least weekly, sometimes daily. The United States is still the greatest supporter of Israel, but public perception is that the Obama administration's backing is less than enthusiastic. In spite of this assessment, the Obama administration was the first to sell bunker-buster bombs to Israel, and it vetoed down a UN resolution that would have declared Israeli settlements illegal on the West Bank.

Given all the controversy, Christians sometimes wonder how they should think about Israel. The problem is especially acute for dispensationalists, who believe that national Israel is still a chosen people of God and will someday be restored to God's favor. Several observations might help Christian people to adopt a correct attitude toward Israel.

First, the modern state of Israel is not equivalent to the national Israel of the Bible. Most of the world's Jewish population is still scattered in the Diaspora. In fact, about as many Jewish people live in the United States as live in the state of Israel (perhaps more—getting a count of the Jewish population in America has been controversial). Israel was not regathered to the land (in any prophetic sense) in 1948 or at any time since. Furthermore, about a quarter of the Israeli population is not Jewish.

Second, as a corollary of the foregoing, the modern state of Israel is not in a position to claim promises made to the biblical nation of Israel. It is not in any sense inheriting the "land" provisions of the Abrahamic covenant. In fact, no part of biblical, national Israel can claim those promises at this moment. The apostle Paul depicts biblical Israel as presently experiencing a dual relationship with God during the present age. Concerning the gospel, God has permitted national Israel to fall into a position of enmity for the sake of the church. Concerning their election, however, God still loves national Israel for the sake of the patriarchs (Rom. 11:28). While occupying the status of "beloved enemy," biblical Israel is temporarily under the judgment and not the blessing of God. The modern state of Israel can certainly point to its territory as a historic homeland, but it has no right to claim the land by divine title.



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Third, no aspect of biblical prophecy depends for its fulfillment upon the existence of the state of Israel. Specifically, the Rapture is not contingent upon Israel being in the land. If the Arabs were to succeed in pushing Israel into the Mediterranean, not one biblical prophecy would be altered. Those who believe in a pretribulational Rapture could still believe in a pretribulational Rapture, complete with a doctrine of imminency.

Fourth, while the modern state of Israel is not identical with the biblical nation of Israel, those Jews who are presently in the land do constitute a part of national Israel as it exists today. Furthermore, even though national Israel is presently and temporarily under God's judgment (the Diaspora has not been revoked), God cares about His people while they are being judged. In the Old Testament, God used Gentile nations to judge Israel, but He held those nations accountable for what they did. As instruments of judgment, they had a choice about how they would treat Jewish people. God blessed those who treated Jewish people well, and He visited calamity upon those who persecuted Israel. In other words, Gentiles will always find it in their interest to treat Jewish people with respect and to provide protection when they come under attack. This respect and protection should have been extended to the Jewish population of Europe during the 1930s and 1940s. It should be extended to the Jewish population of the United States and other countries today. And it certainly could be extended to the state of Israel.

Fifth, the modern state of Israel was not imposed by the aggression of one nation against another. Rather, it was carved out of a decaying section of a disintegrating Ottoman Empire by powers that had defeated the Ottomans in just war. It was created to provide a home for a displaced and decimated people, only a fragment of whom survived Hitler's death camps. Those who survived had endured the confiscation of their homes and their wealth. Many were interred in refugee camps. No wonder they flocked to Israel when the opportunity presented itself. The state of Israel has every right to exist and every right to survive.

Sixth, modern Israel is a sovereign state with the rights and privileges of any present-day nation. These rights and privileges include self-determination and self-protection. They also include the right to form alliances or treaties, and modern Israel has chosen to do just that with the United States. As a purely pragmatic matter, Israel is the only reliable ally that the United States has in the Middle East. The interest of America is served at multiple levels by helping to secure the peace and prosperity of Israel.

Seventh, Arabs, including those who consider themselves Palestinian, also have rights. Furthermore, God has a future for other Middle Eastern nations besides Israel. A day is coming when both Egypt and Iraq will stand beside Israel as peoples of God (Isa. 19:19ff). Christians must not allow their genuine respect for Jewish people or their loyalty to the state of Israel to blind

them to the real rights of the surrounding nations—or of the Arab population within Israel.

Eighth, no nation is without fault, including the state of Israel. Neither Christians nor Americans are obligated to defend every choice and every action taken by the Israelis. The United States has sometimes been wrong in its own policies—so has Israel. The United States has sometimes blundered and committed evil deeds—so has Israel. Both Israelis and Americans ought to work to correct past wrongs and to prevent future ones. Deciding what those wrongs are, however, and determining how they are best corrected requires mature and responsible deliberation, not political grandstanding or visceral reactions. Such decisions cannot be made justly or effectively at gunpoint.

The Christian attitude toward modern Israel ought to be one of committed but tempered support. Under all circumstances, Christians ought to be found blessing the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—never cursing them. Realism requires us to recognize that Israel will commit injustices, but occasional injustices should not lead us to abandon our closest ally in the Middle East.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
