

THE LAND COVENANT

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I. Introduction

- A. [Turn in your bibles to Genesis 12, Genesis 29.]
- B. Continuing a series of messages on Biblical Covenants.
- C. Last Sunday – the Mosaic Covenant.
- D. Today – the Land Covenant concerning the “Promised Land.”
- E. Our purpose today is to understand...
 - 1. ... the promise of a land.
 - 2. ... the unconditional nature of *ownership* of the land.
 - 3. ... the conditional nature of *possession* of the land.
 - 4. ... the historic scattering and gathering of Israel.

II. Is The Modern Nation Of Israel Biblically Significant?

- A. A question every Christian must answer:
Is the recreation of the nation of Israel in 1948, after more than 1500 years without a homeland, and the ongoing crisis over the land and status of Jerusalem . . .
 - 1. . . . an historic coincidence? A distraction unrelated to the pages of the bible? Has the church replaced Israel as the “people of God” since the rejection of Jesus by the Jews leaving the nation of Israel without the benefits of God's promised and any significant role in God's plans?

OR

 - 2. . . . a significant indicator that God is working even in our day to bring His promises regarding Israel to fulfillment . . . promises which remain valid to the nation of Israel and which will not find fulfillment in the church?
- B. Christian Views of the Promised Land
 - 1. The theme of land is displayed by the person of Jesus Christ. The promised land is understood merely as a symbol of redeemed society in time and eternity.¹

1

According to W. D. Davies (Gospel and the Land), the theme of land is displaced in Christianity by the person of Jesus Christ. The New Testament “personalizes ‘holy space’ in Christ, who, as a figure of History, is rooted in the land ... but as Living Lord ... is also free to move wherever he wills”. The promise of land continues to play a role in New Testament thought, but it takes on an eschatological dimension. It becomes a symbol of the eschatological society in time and eternity. Bromiley, Geoffrey W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001, c1979-1988), p. 376.

- a) The specifics of the promise (e.g., land with specific borders) are unimportant.
 - b) The promise of a land is not to be taken literally, but is intended to fuel hope in a future fulfillment of God's general blessings to those who are saved.
2. The land is to be understood figuratively of a spiritual land.²
- a) A so-called "heavenly Canaan."³
 - (1) Crossing the Jordon becomes representative of death.
 - (2) A transition to a "land of milk and honey" often considered to be heaven.
 - (3) Analogy breaks down in places (e.g., Canaan was full of godless nations which Israel had to fight after crossing the Jordon).
- C. Numerous plain promises of God in the Old Testament are conveniently disposed of by a purely symbolic or 'mystical' interpretation.
1. Remember our first week, Introduction to the Biblical Covenants, where we considered the nature of biblical promises?
 2. The sufficiency of language.
 3. The understanding of the recipients of the promises.
 4. Concerning the Promised Land, consider the specific descriptions given by God.
 - a) Identified by sight:
And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are-northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever." (Ge 13:14-15 NKJV)
 - b) Identified by location:
 - (1) Then He said to him, "I [am] the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it." And he said, "Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?" (Ge 15:7-8 NKJV)
 - (2) "Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you." (Ge 13:17 NKJV)

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"By the land of promise he is merely signifying the spiritual land of which this was a figure." Geneva Bible on Eze. 47:15.

³ "Thus the heavenly Canaan is sure to all the seed, because it is what *God, who cannot lie, has promised.*" Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991), Eze. 47:13.

- c) Identified by specific borders and residents:
On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates- "the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, "the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, "the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites." (Ge 15:18-21 NKJV)
- 5. The nature of progressive revelation:
An OT type or promise may be *extended* or *applied* to a situation or group in the NT, but this does not retroactively change its factual meaning, as understood by the original recipients, in the OT.
 - a) The very character of God and sufficiency of Scripture is at stake.

III. The Promise Of A Land⁴

- A. Ownership vs. Possession
 - 1. Ownership is based on the original promise given to Abram and the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic Covenant.
 - a) Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you." . . . So they came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites [were] then in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him (Ge 12:1-7 NKJV).
 - 2. Conditions for possession require the obedience of the nation, which are elaborated within the blessings and curses associated with the Mosaic Covenant.
 - a) 5th Commandment
"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you." (Ex 20:12 NKJV)
 - b) "Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land. And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea, Philistia, and from the desert to the River. For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you." (Ex 23:30-31 NKJV)
 - 3. "The Abrahamic Covenant gives the *ownership* of the Land, unconditionally, to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This ownership is irrevocable and forever, as long as this earth stands. Israel does not have to do anything to obtain *ownership* of the Land. They already have it. However, *ownership* of the Land is different from

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Ge 15:7; Ge 15:18; Ge 26:4; Ge 35:12; Ex 3:8; Ex 3:17; Ex 6:4; Ex 12:25; Ex 13:5; Ex 13:11; Ex 32:13; Ex 33:1; Eze 37:14; De 1:8; De 29:1; De 29:9; De 29:12; De 29:1; De 32:52; Jos 21:43; Jos 23:5; 1Ch 16:18; 1Ch 17:9; Ps 105:11; Isa 60:21; Jer 11:5; Jer 16:15; Am 9:15; Ac 7:5. Concerning the reasons why the inhabitants are being driven from the land, see Deu. 18:9-14.

possession of the Land. The Mosaic Covenant spells out how Israel can *earn* the right to *possess* the Land which they already *own* by divine grant."⁵

IV. The Land Covenant – Deuteronomy 29:1-30:20

- A. Deuteronomy – the 'second law.'
- B. The parents who left Egypt at the parting of the Red Sea refused to enter the promised land.
- C. They were judged by being unable to enter the land and wandered in the wilderness until a new generation came into place.
- D. Moses now reviews the Mosaic Covenant, the law, with the new generation (the 'second' time), especially within the context of the refusal to enter the land and the present opportunity to cross the Jordan and possess the land.
- E. The law included elements setting forth conditions for possession of the land.
 - 1. "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you." (De 4:1 NKJV)
 - 2. "For if you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do-to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him- then the LORD will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the River Euphrates, even to the Western Sea, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand against you; the LORD your God will put the dread of you and the fear of you upon all the land where you tread, just as He has said to you." (De 11:22-25 NKJV)
 - 3. Ownership is Unquestioned

5

Thomas S. McCall, "Who Owns the Land?" in Mal O. Couch, ed., *The Conservative Theological Journal* (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Theological Seminary, n.d.), Vol. 8 No. 24 August 2004, 156-164, p. 162. "What is unconditional is that God will fulfill the covenants to Israel. On the other hand, not every last Jew, ethnically speaking, will receive the benefits of those promises. Individual blessing under the promises is always conditioned upon obedience to the God who made the covenant. So, the particular Jews who experience the blessings of Israel's promises are those who form the believing remnant of Jews throughout history. Unconditional promises guarantee that some Jews will experience covenanted blessings; through their obedience *we* learn who is of that believing remnant." John S. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," *Continuity And Discontinuity* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), pp. 79-80.

- a) At this point, the nation of Israel has demonstrated years of repeated failure and rebellion against God. Even Moses has been barred from entering the promised land.
- b) Yet, for all that, God is restating Israel's right to the land. Here again, we see that *ownership* is not forfeited by disobedience, only *possession*.
- c) God reminds the nation that the land has not been granted because of Israel's righteousness, but because of the wickedness of the nations which are to be driven out of the land (Deu. 9:4-6).

F. Relationship to the Mosaic Covenant.

1. "These [are] the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb." (De 29:1 NKJV)⁶

6

See also: Deu. 29:9, 12, 14, 21. Although "some see this verse as an introduction to the fourth address of Moses beginning in verse 2, but probably it concludes the covenant renewal ceremony in Moab. This preference is reflected in the Hebrew text which numbers this verse as 28:69 rather than 29:1." John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*, 1:313 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985).

- a) Hebrew word from a root meaning 'something separated.'
 - b) Almost like a renewal, but considered a separate covenant with the children – more of an extension or addition.⁷
 - c) Emphasis is upon possession of the land partly because the new generation is just about to cross into the promised land.
- G. Even the Koran records the land as being promised to Israel – Sura 5:20:
"Remember Moses said to his people: 'O my People! Call in remembrance the favour Of Allah unto you, when He Produced prophets among you, Made you kings, and gave You what He had not given To any other among the peoples. O my people! enter The holy land which Allah hath assigned unto you, And turn not back Ignominiously, for then Will ye be overthrown, To your own ruin.'"

V. Promises Of Scattering Due To Disobedience

- A. "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong [your] days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess." (De 30:15-18 NKJV)
- B. Deu 29:23-28 — cast into another land due to disobedience.
- C. Deu 28:49–50, 63-67 — plucked off land and scattered worldwide, no rest while scattered.
- D. 1K. 9:6-9 — disobedient Israel to be a proverb and byword among all peoples.
 - 1. The legend of the Wandering Jew.⁸ Name also refers to the spiderwort plant.
- E. The dispersion of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria (722 B.C.)
- F. The dispersion of the Southern Kingdom to Babylon (605 B.C.)
- G. Other dispersions—Jews in the Diaspora.
 - 1. Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
 - 2. The crusades.
 - 3. The Spanish Inquisition.
 - 4. Russian and European pogroms.
 - 5. The Holocaust.

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⁸ Translated "in addition too" (HCSB, NET, Tanakh).

"The Wandering Jew is a figure from medieval Christian folklore whose legend began to spread in Europe in the thirteenth century and became a fixture of Christian mythology, and, later, of Romanticism. The original legend concerns a Jew who taunted Jesus on the way to the Crucifixion and was then cursed to walk the earth until the Second Coming." <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wandering_Jew, accessed 20080313>

VI. Promises Of Gathering

A. Two stages:

1. First stage is while in disobedience, as a political movement characterized by unbelief.
2. Second stage is in obedience, after a national conversion to belief.
3. Predictions made from scriptural observations:
 - a) Walter Scott (1796-1861)
 "'The great tribulation' is yet future. It pre-supposes the Jewish nation restored to Palestine in unbelief, to serve Gentile political ends, and brought there by the active intervention of a great maritime power (Isa 18)."⁹
 - b) John Thomas (1849)
 "The truth is, there are two stages in the restoration of the Jews, the first is before the battle of Armageddon; and the second, after it; but both pre-millennial. . . . The pre-advantual colonisation of Palestine will be on purely political principles; and the Jewish colonists will return in unbelief of the messiahship of Jesus, and of the truth as it is in him."¹⁰
 - c) J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)
 "I believe that the Jews shall ultimately be gathered again as a separate nation, restored to their own land, and converted to the faith of Christ, after going through great tribulation (Jer. 30:10-11; Jer. 31:10; Rom. 11:25-26; Dan. 12:1; Zec. 13:8-9)."¹¹
 - d) Philadelphia Prophetic Conference of 1918
 "...in 1918 [before the establishment of the state of Israel], the Philadelphia Prophetic Conference adopted a statement of prophetic faith. The fifth article read: We believe that there will be a gathering of Israel to her land in unbelief, and she will be afterward converted by the appearing of Christ on her behalf."¹²

B. Stage 1: Gathered in disobedience leading to judgment.

1. Eze. 20:33-36 – assimilation with gentile nations not allowed, gathered in unbelief, rebels purged.
2. Eze. 36:20-28 – when out of the land, God's name is considered to be profaned, gathered and then regenerated (part of fulfillment of the New Covenant – spiritual regeneration of the nation).
3. Eze. 38:8; 39:7 – Gog comes against gathered and unbelieving Israel in the land.

9

Walter Scott (1796-1861) commenting on Re 7:14. Walter Scott, *Overcoming the World Missions Crisis* (London, England: Pickering and Inglis, n.d.), p. 163

Written by John Thomas wrote in his book (entitled *Elpis Israel—The Hope of Israel*) in 1849.

10 <http://bibleinthenews.com/home/view_art.php?id_pag=22, accessed 20080312>

11 J. C. Ryle (1816-1900), "Ryle, John Charles," Mal Couch, ed., *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996), p. 384.

12 Ice, Thomas and Demy, Timothy. *When the Trumpet Sounds*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995., p. 23.

4. Jer. 30:3-11 – gathered, time of Jacob’s trouble, none like it, he shall be saved.
 - a) Zec. 12 – nations come against Judah and Jerusalem (must be gathered for this to occur).
 5. Eze. 37:1-8 – valley of the dry bones: reassembled bones and flesh representing the nation, but without breath.
- C. Stage 2: Gathering In obedience in preparation for millennial blessing.
1. Deu. 30:1-6 – passage concerning the land covenant, Jews scattered worldwide remember promises and curses, obey, are gathered and regenerated.
 2. Isa. 11:1-12,15 – millennial context, gathered a second time, from all nations.
 3. Eze. 37:1-14,21-23 – the nation regenerated and placed in their own land
- D. Between Gatherings – judgment and national acknowledgment of guilt
1. Limit to judgment upon acceptance of guilt.
 '[But] if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, and that they also have walked contrary to Me, and [that] I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt- then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; I will remember the land.' (Lev. 26:40-42 NKJV)
 2. Mat. 23:36-39 – Jesus sets forth similar conditions.
 Jerusalem will not see him again until she says, "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord."
 3. Zec. 12:9-10 – the repentance for slain Messiah (cf. Rev. 1:7)

VII. Was The Promise Of A Land Fulfilled In The Past?

- A. Some passages appear to imply fulfillment:
 1. Jos. 21:43-45 – apparent fulfillment by Joshua (1400 B.C.)?
 2. 1K. 4:21 – apparent fulfillment by Solomon (1000 B.C.)?
 3. Fulfilled in return from Babylonian Captivity (539 B.C.)?
- B. Indicators that the promise of land has not been fulfilled¹³
 1. Prophecies given hundreds of years after the time of Joshua and Solomon.

13

"If. . . promises regarding the land were fulfilled in Joshua's time or in Solomon's, why do the Scriptures which were written later still appeal to the hope of future possession of the land? Practically every one of the Major and Minor prophets mention in some form the hope of future possession of the land. All of them were written after Solomon's day. . . The original promises of the land involved (1) possession of the land, (2) permanent possession, (3) and occupying the land. Even in Solomon's day at the height of his kingdom the land was not all possessed. At best it was placed under tribute as. . . [1Ki 4:21] indicates. Certainly all must agree that possession was not permanent. Further at no time was all the land actually occupied by Israel." John Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), pp. 178-179.

- a) Amos 9:8-15 (760 B.C.)
2. Prophecies continue after return from Babylon (539 B.C.).
 - a) Zechariah (520-470 B.C.)¹⁴
3. Throughout the prophets predictions are associated with events which are yet future (the tribulation and millennial kingdom).
 - a) Zec. 12; 14 – God defeats all the nations who attack Israel/Jerusalem (presupposes Israel is in the land).
4. Prophecies state permanent possession brought about in an unconditional way sovereignly by God.
 - a) Amos 9:8-15 (760 B.C.) – no longer shall they be pulled up from the land.
5. Prophecies state unconditional regeneration of Israel by God – which brings obedience resulting in restoration to the land.
 - a) Jer. 31:33-34 – God will convert Israel such that they will all know Him. There will no longer be any need to teach about knowing the Lord.
 - b) Eze. 37:11-14 – When Israel is convinced she is cut off, then God will reassemble and regenerate the nation and place it in the promised land.
 - c) Rom. 11:25-26 – Israel presently suffers blindness in part, but eventually all Israel shall be saved. It is God Himself Who will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

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Zec 8:7-8 – saved from east and west, brought to Jerusalem. Zec 10:6-10 – whistle and gather them.

VIII. Owned By God

- A. Lev. 25:23 – land not to be sold, land is “Mine”
- B. Ps. 83:12 – referred to as the “pastures of God”
- C. Joel 1:6; 3:2 – called “My Land”
- D. A future judgment of the nations for tampering with God's Land and scattering Israel
 - 1. Joel 3:2 (NKJV) I will also gather all nations, And bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; And I will enter into judgment with them there On account of My people, My heritage Israel, Whom they have scattered among the nations; They have also divided up My land.
 - 2. Fulfilled portion:
'As Jehoshaphat overthrew the confederate foes of Judah, namely, Ammon, Moab, &c. (Ps 83:6–8), in this valley, so God was to overthrow the Tyrians, Zidonians, Philistines, Edom, and Egypt, with a similar utter overthrow (Joe 3:4, 19). This has been long ago fulfilled; . . . '
 - 3. Unfulfilled portion:
' . . . but the ultimate event shadowed forth herein is still future, when God shall specially interpose to destroy Jerusalem's last foes, of whom Tyre, Zidon, Edom, Egypt, and Philistia are the types. As “Jehoshaphat” means “the judgment of Jehovah,” the valley of Jehoshaphat may be used as a general term for the theater of God's final judgments on Israel's foes, with an allusion to the judgment inflicted on them by Jehoshaphat. The definite mention of the Mount of Olives in Zec 14:4, and the fact that this was the scene of the ascension, makes it likely the same shall be the scene of Christ's coming again: compare “this same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” (Ac 1:11).¹⁵

15

Jamieson, Robert, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset et al.. A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary., Joe 3:2. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997. “The judgment threatened here probably was fulfilled, at least in part, in the fourth century B.C. Allen explains, “The people of Sidon were sold into slavery by Antiochus III in 345 B.C., while the citizens of Tyre and Gaza were enslaved by Alexander in 332 B.C.” (*The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p. 114). Perhaps Jews were involved in some of the transactions. In the context (cf. Joel 3:1) the passage also carries an eschatological significance which any historical fulfillment merely prefigures. From the eschatological perspective Philistia and Phoenicia represent all of Israel's enemies (much as do Moab in Isa. 25:10-12 and Edom in the Book of Obad.). At that time God's people will gain ascendancy over their enemies (cf. Isa. 41:11-12; Amos 9:12; Obad. 15-21; Micah 7:16-17; Zeph. 2:6-7).” John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*, 1:1422 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985). “There are elements in Joel's prophecy which modern scholars believe firmly refer to events that lie in our own future.” Larry Richards and Lawrence O. Richards, *The Teacher's Commentary*, Includes index., 459 (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1987).

IX. Summary - Relevance Of The Land Covenant Today

- A. A literal promise with a literal fulfillment.
The land promise was understood by its original recipients to be literal and will be fulfilled literally in a geographic piece of real-estate on the earth.
- B. History is playing out Scriptural predictions.
 - 1. The scattering of the Jews, as witnessed by history, is not a surprise to the student of history armed with the Scriptures – it is copiously predicted.
 - 2. The gathering of Israel and occupancy of the land is as sure as her dispossession and scattering—for God has predicted it.
 - a) A preliminary gathering to the land in unbelief can be seen as a precondition for the fulfillment of numerous events on the prophetic horizon.
 - b) The recreation of the nation of Israel in the middle east is perhaps the most significant prophetic event to transpire in our time.
- C. Ownership is unquestioned, but possession requires obedience.
 - 1. The land is owned ultimately by God, was given to Israel, *but final possession is conditional upon her spiritual regeneration.*
 - 2. We should not be dismayed nor let our faith be shaken if Israel today were to give up more land—after all the nation is, as a whole, in disobedience.¹⁶
 - a) Over 40% of the population is secular and does not follow the Torah.
 - b) Less than 20% is orthodox, which continue to reject Jesus as Messiah.
 - c) Complete possession will only come after national regeneration connected with the second coming of Jesus Christ.
- D. Christians who oppose Israel's right to the land and to Jerusalem as its sole capital may find themselves unwittingly opposing God's work in history:
 - 1. How sure are they that God is through with Israel as a nation?
 - 2. What if the restoration of the nation in 1948 and subsequent struggles are part of God's design setting the stage for events He has predicted will come to pass? Numerous students of Scripture writing in advance of these events concluded them to be part of God's purpose revealed in advance for those who would take note.
- E. Clarence Larkin writing in 1920:
 - 1. Prior to the Holocaust and 28 years before Israel was reestablished as a nation.
 - 2. "From these scriptures we see that the Jews have not been supplanted by either the Gentiles or the Church, and when the time comes they will again become a nation. We

16

In terms of religiosity, among Israeli Jews aged 20 and over, 44 percent defined themselves as secular; 27 percent defined themselves as traditional; 12 percent as traditionally observant; 9 percent as Orthodox; and 8 percent as ultra-Orthodox. <<http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/csrpl/RINVol9No2/insert/secular%20jewish%20israeli%20identity.htm>, accessed 20080312>

indulge in no idle and profitless speculations when we attempt to forecast the future of the Jewish People. All we have to do is to gather together and place in their logical order what the Holy Spirit through the Prophets, has foretold. The method is as simple as the result is sure."¹⁷

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Clarence Larkin, *Rightly Dividing the Word*, (New York, NY: Cosimo Classics, 2005), p. 33.