



## God's Covenant with Israel Part Four

# The Land Covenant (Dt. 30:1-10)

### Dr. Deane J. Woods

**C**HANCES are you have never heard of *Harry Rodger Webb*, or know that he was born in Lucknow, India on 14th October, 1940. But mention the name "Cliff Richard" (or, "Sir Cliff Richard" since his knighthood in 1996), and the story changes dramatically, doesn't it?

This 'evergreen' British pop singer, musician, performer, actor and philanthropist is also a self-confessed, committed Christian. He came to faith in Christ in the early days of his long-lasting, illustrious, professional career.

Cliff Richard's testimonies at, and association with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association's Crusades in London at the time of his conversion, opened a door for him to star in a film sponsored by that same Organisation with Crusade Choir Conductor, Cliff Barrows. The film was titled *His Land* and its theme song featured by this new, born again believer, had lyrics under the same title. The first stanza reads:

***Yes, it is His land, all of it His  
He stepped it off and marked it there ...  
(stepped it off and marked it there)  
To be His Earthly thoroughfare ...  
(to be His Earthly thoroughfare)  
And He blessed it with His Hand ...  
yes, it's a great land, all of it is  
And as it blooms before our eyes ...  
(as it blooms before our eyes)  
Just like an Eden Paradise ...  
(like an Eden Paradise)  
The world will understand ...  
(world will understand) ... this is His Land***

Predictably, there were two basic reactions from the Christian public to the message portrayed by the film and its theme song. First, those whose theological perspective argued a "no future for Israel" position in God's prophetic plan summarily dismissed the film and the song as "irritating and irrelevant". Secondly, other believers whose view of End Time prophetic events incorporated "a future for national Israel" endorsed the whole

Answers to these questions impinge on the current Middle East debate and the cause for so much contemporary conflict over the land of Israel and her people. Well may people ask: What will be the final outcome, historically? Deuteronomy, chapters 28-30 provide pertinent clues (from God's perspective) as to why the world is witnessing unresolved peace efforts. In particular, chapter 30:1-10 reveals the final answer. As will be seen, this passage (in context), addresses the blessing of Israel finally turning to God, responding in faith and living in the land.

#### **The Setting of the Text**

The book of Deuteronomy (the fifth book of the Pentateuch – the Torah) is essentially a second repetition (reading) of the law purposely given by God, through Moses, to the new generation of Israelites following the forty years wilderness wanderings. Their faithless forefathers had failed the test of trusting God at Kadesh Barnea (Num. 13-14:1-10ff; Heb 3:7-11) thereby surrendering the

privilege of entering the Promised Land. Only faithful Joshua and Caleb would finally enter it.

The immediate context of Chapters 28 to 30 dealt with *prescriptive* "Blessings and Cursings". Obedience would bring God's blessings in all areas – in the home, the city and the field (28:1-14) – and conversely, His temporal disciplines whenever they were disobedient (28:15-68).

Just as Moses had previously warned them to beware of idolatry thereby avoiding the consequences of being "utterly (perished) from the land" (4:26) and being



production. They gratefully acknowledged that the total artistic presentation was biblically accurate, spiritually edifying and theatrically entertaining.

The debate as to Israel and her right to the land continues today. Whose land is it? On what grounds can Israel claim possession of it? Will it be divided with a new Palestinian State established, and East Jerusalem as its capital? Has Israel disenfranchised the "Palestinians"? Is their plea that "the land we have lived in 'for 1,500 years' has now become 'occupied territories'" legitimate?

“scattered) among the peoples” (4:27) rather than “(prolonging their) days in the land which the LORD (would) give them *for all time*” (4:40, emphases added), so here he reinforces God’s requirement for His people to trust Him and obey.

Furthermore, “scattering amongst the nations” would be inevitable, “from one end of the earth to another” (28:64) if they disobeyed God and His revealed word. There they would “find no rest” and He would give them a “trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul” (vs. 65). Indeed, “(their) life shall hang in doubt before (them)” and they would live in fear “day and night, with no assurance of life” (vs. 66).

In Moab, God’s covenant with Israel was renewed (29:1-29). This was “beside the covenant which He made with them in Horeb” (29:1). Interestingly, there is a retrospective, historical emphasis here. The text reads: “The LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes and ears to hear, to this very day” (29:6). Yet in the following chapter, there is an unambiguous *prophetic* promise:

**“And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live”. (Dt. 30:6).**

Something quite miraculous will happen to Israel as the LORD finally gathers His people “from all the nations where He

scattered (them)” and “(brings them) into the land which (their) fathers possessed” (vs. 5a). There, “He will prosper (them) and multiply (them) more than (their) fathers” (vs. 5b).

Thus the “land covenant” referred to in Deuteronomy 30:1-10, is to be interpreted in the wider context of the unconditional Abrahamic covenant revealed in Genesis 12, 15, 17, 22, 26 and 28. Previous articles in this present series have outlined this aspect, as well as showing that the Abrahamic covenant to be the framework of God’s covenant with Israel. Now the “land covenant” (formerly designated “the Palestinian covenant” by Bible Scholars, but which is deliberately avoided today lest its universal “politically correct” connotation be misunderstood and misapplied), is a further explanation of the land aspect of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 15:18; 17:8). This is seen in the accompanying “Covenants” diagram and will be substantiated in the following discussion.

### The Substance of the Text

Deuteronomy 30:1-10 outlined the blessing of Israel turning to God. Set against the backdrop of God’s “Blessings and Cursings” prescribed in the preceding chapters, three salient features become at once apparent:

### I. The Blessing of Restoration through Repentance (vss. 1-5).

Observe the sequential process involved:

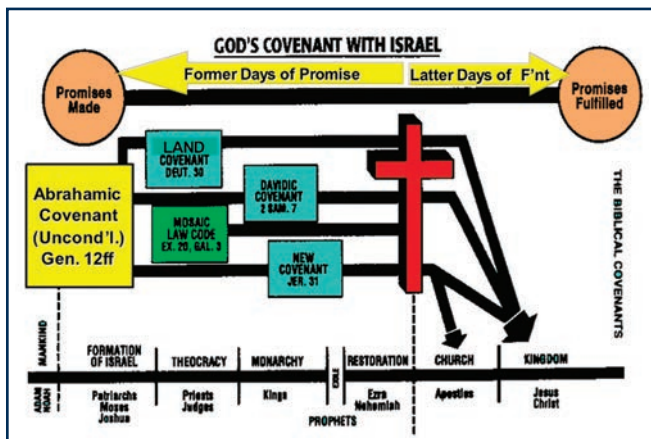
- *Dispersed Israel* must “remember God’s words of warning” in the lands to which they have been scattered. (vs. 1) The emphasis is underscored in the literal translation of the original: “...cause them (the words of God) to return to your heart”!
- *Disobedient Israel* must “return to the LORD” and be willing to obey Him in everything (vs. 2)

- *Delivered Israel* will experience resultant “restoration (to) and blessing (in)” the land (vss. 3-5)

**Question:** *Where is Israel today in this spiritual process?* (Prayerfully meditate on that!)

### II. The Blessing of Renewal and Retribution (vss. 6-7).

Restoration to the land and the experience of the LORD’s blessing is not only the result of Israel’s repentance, but equally dependent on His grace to effect a



This chart has been adapted from that of Paul N. Benware’s original presentation in his book *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1995. Page 50. The source is readily acknowledged by the writer of this present article.



radical change of heart and then to justly recompense all Israel’s enemies (vss. 6-7).

- *Spiritual renewal* of Israel is essential (vs. 6a)
- *Spiritual revival* of Israel is to be enjoyed (vs. 6b)
- *Specific retribution* on Israel’s enemies will be exacted by the LORD (vs. 7)

**Question:** What does this section teach us about human responsibility (here, Israel’s) and divine sovereignty (here, God’s direct intervention to effect His purposes)? If you read Romans 9 and

10, you will see the same balance, but in reverse order (Ch. 9 = “sovereignty” and Ch. 10 = Israel’s responsibility). Chapter 11 gives four “proofs” why God has not finished with Israel as a nation. (Check it out!)

### III. The Blessing of Revival and Rejoicing (vss. 8 -10).

The resultant blessing will involve Israel, the land and God Himself!

- The blessing of Israel being *obedient to God* (vss. 8, 10)



- The blessing of Israel *receiving abundance from God*: vocationally, biologically and materially (vs. 9a-b)
- The blessing of Israel *participating in the rejoicing of God* as He reconciles them to Himself (vs. 9c)

No wonder the challenge which followed (30:11-20) was presented for Israel to choose “life, that (they and their descendants) might live” rather than “death”! The choice was theirs, and if they chose rightly, they would “dwell in the land which the LORD swore to (their) fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give them” (vs. 20).

### Personal Application:

Does this challenge to Israel present a challenge to you, when it comes to eternal issues? (Ponder that carefully!)

“But,” it may be asked, “where does all this fit in with what is currently happening in Israel, and in relation to her avowed enemies whose ultimate goal is to see her destroyed?” Could there be any relevance to the thousands

of Abraham’s physical descendants presently making *aliyah* to the land of their forefathers? Is it not true that many of them are going back in unbelief? Will the land be divided? Is there justification and significance in applying this passage in any way to current events?

We believe there is a justifiable link between the passage being studied and all these related questions. That link is reflected in the following observations.

### The Significance of the Text

At least seven observations may be identified from this overview of Scripture.

First, mention must be made as to why Bible teachers differ regarding the land covenant and its relationship to Israel and *not* the Church (which some designate as ‘spiritual Israel’). Two reasons can be cited as to why Deuteronomy 30:1-10 must refer to a later fulfilment regarding Israel, specifically: (a) The Church has no covenant relationship to the land of Israel, per se. It was given specifically to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 15:8; 17:8). (b) The “blessings and the curses” relate to Israel alone, not the Church because Israel’s later prophets go on to reveal that repentance is needed on Israel’s part for the LORD’s ultimate blessing (Ezek. 37:14; Is. 11:2 and Joel 2:28-29; Cf. Dt. 30:1-10 in this context).

Second, many Jewish people are heading back to the land of their forefathers, but the truth remains that they are (in general) going back in unbelief. Yes, Israel is a modern miracle with the establishment of the modern State on 14th May, 1948 after



2,000 years dispersion. But the prophecy of Ezekiel 37:1-14 has been only partially fulfilled. The “very dry bones” have come together, along with the flesh and sinews, but there is still “no breath in them” (vs. 8). The LORD’s “Holy Spirit” (Heb: ru’ach kodesh) is yet to “blow” on them and fill them. National renewal is not the same as spiritual renewal (See Is. 66:8; Rom. 11:12-16ff, 25-26a; Cf. Dt. 30:6; Ezek. 36:26; Jer. 31:31-34). There will be another “scattering in the future” (Cf. Mt. 24:15) during the “time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7). In the meantime we must pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Ps. 122:6) and share the gospel with Jew and gentile alike (Mt. 28:18-20).

Third, the land covenant is an enlargement of the land aspect of the Abrahamic covenant identified expressly in Genesis 15:18 and 17:8. It reaffirmed God’s commitment to give the land area to Israel, and in the process revealed further important truths relating to the people as we have noted regarding verse 6, in particular. The boundaries of the Promised Land given to Abraham and his descendants were indicated in Num. 34:1-2.

Fourth, since the land covenant is an extension of the Abrahamic covenant, it follows that (like its predecessor), it is *unconditional*. This may appear incongruous – or even inconsistent – at first glance, since there is so much emphasis in the text on the need for Israel’s obedience in order for God’s blessing to bring them back to “possess” the land. However, there are no conditions attached for its

ultimate fulfilment. Disobedience and failure could bring loss of blessing, but never annul the covenant promises. The Old Testament record clearly sets forth Israel's repeated disobedience and sins and the consequent "removal from the land" (e.g., the Exile in Babylon), yet the final fulfilment of God's prophetic promises (including their living in the land) is never in doubt! Israel will be in the land when the Messiah returns!

Fifth, since the land covenant of Deuteronomy 30:1-10 is an extrapolation of the Abrahamic covenant, it must be understood as *everlasting*. In this regard, note Gen. 17:8 and (later in Israel's history) Ezekiel 16:60 and Psalm 105:7-11. Added to this, God is eternal (Gen. 21:33; Dt. 33:27) and what He pledged here must be understood as emphasizing the perpetual endurance and continuance of the land aspect of the covenant.

Sixth, there is a significant difference between "ownership" of the land and actually "enjoying" the blessings of living in it. The land has been entrusted by God to His people, but as their subsequent history revealed, their occupancy of it was (and will be) dependent on their obedience. As we have noted in regard to Deuteronomy 30:6, the LORD will (in grace) effect a "radical spiritual surgery" on Israel to bring about a "changed heart and soul". This equates to the New Covenant between God and His people, Israel, as described in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:26 when finally she repents in the last days (cf. Rom. 11:15-16, 25ff) and their Messiah comes – again!

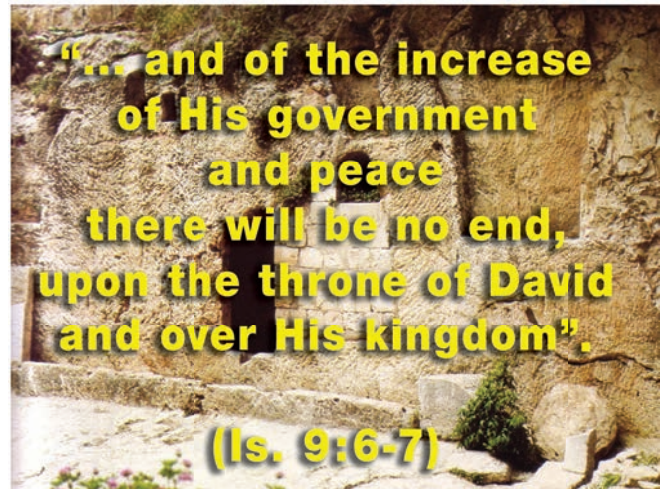
Seventh, despite the claim of amillennialists (that is, "there will be no reign of Jesus on earth and over the earth for 1,000 literal, consecutive years"), to the contrary, the land covenant was *not* fulfilled at any time during the history of the Old Testament. The passages usually identified by such advocates include 1 Kings 4:21-24, Joshua 11:23 and 21:43-45. However, when these are studied in context, the claim that "there will be no final fulfilment in the future for Israel, because the promises have been historically fulfilled" cannot be substantiated. Why? Consider the following facts: (a) The

Joshua passages related to a time when Israel had not come close to possessing the land area that had been promised to Abraham. As Joshua stated in 13:1-7 and 23:4-7, there was still "much land to be possessed". (b) Relative to 1 Kings 4 in the days of King Solomon, Israel did not actually possess or occupy the whole land area given to Abraham, nor was it permanently possessed. (c) The later prophets speak of Israel's future possession of the land. One need only refer to such passages as Is. 11:1-2; 14:1-3; 43:1-8; 49:8-13; 66:20; Jer. 16:14-16; 23:3-8; 31:31-40; 32:37-44; Ezek. 20:42; 4:4-7 and Zech. 8:3-8 to realize that these spokesmen of God did not believe these land promises to Israel had been fulfilled. Looking ahead, and with clarion calls to their sinful people, they proclaimed great hope of restoration and blessing to their compatriots, if only they would hear, believe and obey!

The ramifications of Israel's continued unbelief today explains much of the current Middle East crisis. The search for peace goes on. Shuttle diplomacy between nations is the order of the day. Eventually, the land will be "divided for spoil" in the last days (Dan. 11:24; Joel 3:2), a peace deal will be brokered and later confirmed by a coming world Ruler (Dan. 9:26-27; 7:8; Rev. 13:1ff). However, true, lasting peace will only be established when the Prince of peace (Cf. Is. 9:6-7) comes and Israel is "at home", in the land God promised them and "at home" with their covenant keeping God!

### Conclusion

Are you willing, like Cliff Richard did all those decades ago, to heed the call of God to Israel, whether you have the blood of Abraham flowing through your veins or not, and come in repentance and faith to receive Yeshua (Jesus), the Messiah, as your own Saviour and Lord? His invitation is to YOU ... so come! He alone is the Saviour of all who believe!



Stay tuned ... we will look at God's covenant with Israel relative to "The David Covenant" in the next article.

(to be continued)



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