

# THE KEY

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# MIDDLE EAST

*Discovering the Future  
of Israel in  
Biblical Prophecy*

DEREK PRINCE



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## PREFACE

Since the end of World War II, the focus of world politics has shifted from Europe and North America to the Middle East. Today's news media devote more attention to the Middle East than to any other area on earth. Here are centered the issues and conflicts that could, overnight, spark off the next worldwide conflagration—perhaps to be known as World War III.

Two main factors have contributed to this dramatic increase in the importance of the Middle East: *oil* and *Israel*. Almost all the developed nations of the world today are dependent, in varying degrees, upon a continuing supply of oil from sources in the Arab states of the Middle East. Thus oil has become an international political weapon. Through its use, the Arab nations command a measure of influence worldwide that they could never have achieved otherwise.

Even more significant is the emergence of Israel as a sovereign Jewish state. Unceasingly opposed and assailed from its birth until now, this tiny state has consistently confounded the experts and radically changed the political and military balance of the Middle East. Any valid assessment of the overall situation there must first come to grips with the unique role Israel has played and continues to play.

In this book, I offer what I believe to be the key to interpreting the role of Israel and, therefore, the key to a realistic projection of future events in the Middle East. This key was placed in my hand through circumstances not of my own choosing: five years of service during World War II with the British Army in Egypt, Libya, the Sudan and, finally, Palestine. This was followed by two more years of residence in Palestine as a civilian. During these years, I witnessed and participated in the tumultuous events out of which the present situation in the Middle East has emerged.

Since that time, I have maintained ongoing contact with people and events in Israel and the surrounding countries.

Derek Prince  
Jerusalem

# PART I

## *Historical Perspective*







# 1

## WHERE HISTORY AND PROPHECY MEET

On a fine night in April 1946, I stood on a saddle of land uniting Mount Scopus on the north with the Mount of Olives on the south. Before me to the west, the gold Dome of the Rock and the silver dome of the Mosque of Al Aksa glistened in the moonlight. Around and behind them, the Old City of Jerusalem, with its serrated walls and towers and its variegated rooftops, seemed to sleep peacefully, awaiting the predawn call of the Muslim muezzin from the mosque.

Yet I knew that the peaceful appearance was deceptive. Beneath the surface lay forces already at work that would inevitably erupt in violence and bloodshed.

Behind me stood the massive stone buildings and the square tower of the Augusta Victoria Hospice. Built originally as a hospice for pilgrims from Europe, it had been taken over by the British authorities in World War II for use as a military hospital. Within its walls, I had completed my service as a

hospital attendant and was now ready to be discharged from the Army.

I found myself at a watershed in my life. I had just married Lydia Christensen, a former schoolteacher from Denmark, whom I had met in Jerusalem. Lydia was “mother” to a small children’s home located in Ramallah, an Arab town ten miles north of Jerusalem. Through my marriage to her, I had become “father” to the eight girls then in her home, ranging in age from four to eighteen. Of these eight girls, six were Jewish, one was Arab and the youngest was English.

Since Lydia and I planned to go on making our home in Ramallah, I had arranged to take my discharge from the Army in Jerusalem.

“What Lies Ahead?”

As I lingered there on the mountain, savoring the beauty of Jerusalem, I found myself asking, “What lies ahead?” I was thinking not merely of Lydia and myself and our girls, but also of all the people of that land, with their unique intermingling of races, cultures and religions.

The future of the whole area was in the melting pot. Different racial and political groups were advancing claims to both territory and sovereignty that could not be reconciled with each other. The British government had come forward with a series of proposed “solutions” to the apparent impasse. Invariably, however, solutions that were acceptable to one group were rejected outright by the others. Was there any other source from which to seek a solution? I had come to believe that there was.

In the course of nearly six years in the Army, I had become a dedicated student of the Bible. Throughout three weary years in the sandy wastes of North Africa, my Bible had been my constant companion, my unfailing source of comfort and strength. At one point, I had been hospitalized for a full year with a skin condition that did not yield to any medical treatment available

in that situation. I had regained my health only when I dared to forgo further medication and trust simply in the Bible's clear promises of physical healing.

In this and many other ways, I had proved to my own satisfaction that the teachings of the Bible, when acted on in faith, are still as valid and vital as when they were first written.

In 1944, however, when the Army transferred me to Palestine, I found myself confronted with Bible truth in a totally new dimension. Up to that time, I had read the Bible as though it had been written in a vacuum. I wholeheartedly embraced the spiritual truths it contained, but they were detached from any context in space or time.

Now I came to see the Bible in a specific geographical setting. I realized that the events recorded in it took place within an area that had its lateral axis in the Mediterranean, with Italy as its western limit and Persia as its eastern limit. By far the greatest part of them took place within a much smaller area about the size of New Jersey, known variously as the land of Canaan, the land of Israel, Palestine or the Holy Land.

In the time of the patriarchs, I learned, this area was known as Canaan. After its conquest by the Israelites under Moses and Joshua, it became the land of Israel. This name is still used in the New Testament (see Matthew 2:20), even though the area was by then a province of the Roman Empire.

The name *Palestine* means "land of the Philistines." It was first used by the Greeks, then by the Romans and other subsequent Gentile rulers, including the British. The title "the Holy Land" has been used by Christians from about the fifth century onward. Following the termination of the British Mandate in 1948 and the subsequent Arab/Israeli conflict, the land was divided between the two states of Israel and Jordan. (Subsequent to the Oslo Peace Accord of 1993, the area has been gradually redefined as Israeli and Palestinian territories.)

When I viewed the events described in the Bible in this geographical context, they became real and vivid for me in an altogether new way. Zechariah, for example, had described the

very spot on which I stood in his graphic prophecy of the Lord's return to the earth:

On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. . . . On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter.

Zechariah 14:4, 8

Before me, I could almost visualize the events he described. Our hospital building—the Augusta Victoria Hospice—was situated just where the earthquake was due to take place. About twenty years previously, the building's square tower had been cracked by an earth tremor, which had rendered the tower permanently unsafe to climb. History had confirmed that the area was subject to earthquakes.

To the west, across the Kidron Valley, various geological surveys had discovered indications of underground reservoirs of water beneath the city of Jerusalem. Geologically, the stage was set for the events predicted by Zechariah.

So exactly did the prophet's words fit the scene before me that I could picture the water released by the earthquake welling up from the Temple area and flowing out toward me through the east-west valley that would be created—just about where my feet were then planted.

I recalled a parallel passage in Ezekiel, which likewise pictures water flowing from Jerusalem eastward toward the Dead Sea:

The man brought me back to the entrance of the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar. He then brought me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the outer gate facing east, and the water was flowing from the south side.

As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through water that was ankle-deep. He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee-deep. He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to the waist. He measured off another thousand, but now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in—a river that no one could cross. . . .

He said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Sea. When it empties into the Sea, the water there becomes fresh. Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live. . . .

Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.”

Ezekiel 47:1–5, 8–9, 12

With this picture still in mind, I turned and walked a few hundred yards to the eastern slope of the mountain. In the distance, the Dead Sea gleamed in the moonlight like a jewel set in the folds of the hills. The high chemical content of its waters gave them a unique luster. In the foreground, the barren, bony ridges of the Judean hills descended to the area Ezekiel called the “Arabah.” Beyond doubt, this area needed the miracle-working transformation provided by the living waters that Ezekiel saw in his vision!

While living there on the Mount of Olives, I had learned that *Arabah* is the Hebrew name for the Jordan Valley, as it extends from the place where the Jordan River enters the Dead Sea southward to the Gulf of Aqaba. From the Temple Mount on the west to the Dead Sea and the Arabah on the east, every detail in the descriptions of both Zechariah and Ezekiel was exact and vivid. The descriptions fit perfectly with the entire terrain. Detached from this geographical context, however, they were meaningless.

The same principle, I realized, would apply to countless other Bible passages, both historical and prophetic.

## A People and Their History

Later that night, as I lay in bed, my mind was still busy with the impressions of the past two years. At the same time I had been introduced to the land of the Bible, I had also been introduced to the people whose history is the Bible's central theme. I had come to see that geography and history are in fact interwoven.

Geographically, the Bible is set in the land of Israel; historically, its theme is the people of Israel. I marveled that, in all my Bible reading, I had overlooked a fact so simple and so obvious. Yet once I grasped this fact, it gave a new clarity and cohesiveness to the whole Bible.

The first eleven chapters of the Bible, I realized, serve as an introduction. They fill in the background and set the stage for all that is to follow. From then on, the Bible is essentially the history of Abraham and the nation descended from him through Isaac and Jacob—that is to say, Israel.

There was, I discovered, a distinction to be made between the words *Israel* and *Israelite* and the words *Jew* and *Jewish*. Linguistically, *Jew* is derived directly from *Judah*, the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. From the time of the Babylonian captivity, however, all the Israelites who returned to the land of Israel were called Jews, irrespective of their tribal background. This usage is carried over into the New Testament. Paul, for example, was from the tribe of Benjamin; yet he called himself a Jew (see Acts 21:39).

In contemporary usage, these four words are not fully interchangeable. *Israel* and *Israelite* focus primarily on national origin and background. *Jew* and *Jewish* focus more on religion, culture and later history. Since the birth of the state of Israel in 1948, the word *Israeli* has been added, referring to any citizen of the state, whether of Jewish, Arab or Druse descent.

One unique feature of the history of Israel, as recorded in the Bible, is that part of it was written after the events, as normal history is, while the remainder was written in advance of the events, as prophecy. Taken together, the historical and prophetic portions of the Bible constitute a complete history of the people of Israel.

Though large sections of this history are given only in outline, other sections contain vivid and detailed descriptions. The prophetic writings are most intriguing, since in many cases they were written centuries before the events they describe. Yet they still combine a degree of accuracy and vividness that could not have been excelled by an eyewitness.

My evaluation of the Bible as essentially a history of Israel, embracing both the past and the future, did not altogether surprise me, so long as I applied it only to the Old Testament. But as a Christian, I came to the New Testament from the unconscious perspective of centuries of Christian tradition. It was hard to evaluate the facts objectively.

It seemed logical to begin with the identity of Jesus Himself. Without any question, He is the one supremely important person in the New Testament. Apart from Him, indeed, the New Testament would never have been written. It is equally beyond question that during His earthly life, Jesus was, by every possible standard, an Israelite.

The New Testament makes it clear, however, that the identity of Jesus as an Israelite did not cease with the end of His earthly life. In Revelation 5:5—a passage written more than fifty years after His death and resurrection—Jesus is still described in heaven as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David.”

This does not refer to some temporary feature of His brief 33 years on earth. This is His identity after His death and resurrection, throughout all eternity. He is forever “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David.” He is forever identified with the family of David, the tribe of Judah, the people of Israel. He is forever an Israelite.

Next, I turned my attention to the character and contents of the four gospels. These constitute the historical basis for all the

fundamental tenets of the Christian faith (as they are stated, for example, in the great creeds of the Church).

Once again, the facts spoke for themselves. Except for a brief visit to Egypt by Joseph and Mary and the infant Jesus, *all* the events described in *all* the gospels took place within the borders of the land of Israel.

Furthermore, well over 90 percent of the people portrayed in the gospels are Israelites. The only exceptions are a tiny handful of non-Jewish persons, such as the Magi from the east and the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, as well as a sprinkling of Roman officials and military personnel. Essentially, the gospels are a record of Israelites, set in the land of Israel.

Next, I considered the authorship of the New Testament. The picture that emerged was no different. Every one of its 27 books was authored by an Israelite. A question could be raised concerning Luke, the author of the gospel named after him and also of the book of Acts, since it is generally accepted that Luke was of Gentile origin. But because he was a proselyte to Judaism, he, too, became identified with Israel.

It is true, of course, that after the Day of Pentecost, the message of the Gospel was rapidly spread abroad throughout the civilized world. Multitudes of Gentiles acknowledged Jesus as their Savior and were added to the Church.

When I began to ask, however, who the main human instruments, recorded as spreading the Gospel and establishing churches, were in the New Testament, I had to acknowledge that almost without exception they were Jewish. All the twelve apostles were Jewish. Paul, who became the great apostle of the Gentiles, was likewise Jewish. Most of Paul's co-workers, such as Barnabas and Silas, were Jewish. Even Timothy, by virtue of his Jewish mother, was legally reckoned to be Jewish and, therefore, needed to be circumcised (see Acts 16:1–3).

I tried to think of a Gentile Christian who played a major role in the New Testament record. At first no name came to me. Eventually, I decided that Titus may have had the best claim. He was a trusted co-worker of Paul, and at least a book



of the New Testament was named after him. No one could claim, however, that Titus was one of the major figures of the New Testament.

It remained for me to consider the prophetic sections of the New Testament. Was their emphasis in some way different from that of the historical sections? What kind of picture of the future did they paint? So far as I could see, their emphasis on the unique role of Israel is in no way diminished.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that the ultimate goal of all true believers is “the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10). In Revelation 21, this city is described for us. On its gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. On its foundations are the names of the twelve apostles of Jesus. Every name inscribed in the new Jerusalem is an Israelite name.

In summary, then, we may state the following:

- All 39 books of the Old Testament were written by Jewish authors.
- Jesus was born a Jew, died a Jew and will return as a Jew.
- All the events of the gospels (except the flight to Egypt) took place in Israel.
- Over 90 percent of the people portrayed in the gospels are Israelites.
- Every one of the 27 books of the New Testament has Jewish authorship. (Luke might be regarded as a possible exception, but he was a proselyte to Judaism.)
- The main instruments for establishing churches and spreading the gospel were Jewish.
- All twelve apostles were Jewish.
- The future city in Revelation is inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.
- The city’s foundations carry the names of the twelve apostles of Jesus.

Surely, I reflected, no one with anti-Semitic prejudice could ever feel comfortable there!

Combining my survey of the New Testament with that of the Old, I came to a clear and simple conclusion: The Bible is essentially a record of Israel written by Israelites, partly in the form of history and partly in the form of prophecy.

## Exile—and Return

Why, then, did it seem strange—in fact, almost unthinkable—to associate the Jewish people with the New Testament? As I pondered this question, I saw that toward the end of the first century, there had been a very significant break in the continuum of history. Moreover, this break had been passed over in almost total silence by the versions of history I had studied in Britain.

There were two aspects to this break: First, the people of Israel had been separated from their land. Second, at just about the same time, they had been separated from their role as leaders in disseminating the Gospel and building the Church.

This double break determined their role in history for the next eighteen centuries. They had become a nation of exiles. Physically, they were exiled from the only land where they had ever known nationhood. Spiritually, they were exiled from the very religion of which they themselves were the founders.

Over the past two years, I had witnessed part of the process of healing the first of these two breaks—that between the people of Israel and their land. Did the logic of history indicate that this would be a prelude to the healing of the second break—that between the people of Israel and the Christian Church?

Many people, I knew, would dismiss this suggestion as inconceivable. And yet, a century earlier, just as many people would have dismissed as inconceivable the suggestion that the people of Israel would ever be restored to their land. I was living in the midst of a land and a people whose entire history was full of events that would have been dismissed by most people as inconceivable.

As I searched for a way to express the significance of the events I had been witnessing, I formed a mental picture of an old grandfather clock. For many years, I imagined, it had stood in the corner of an antique store. The hands never moved; no sound came from it. Everyone assumed that the mechanism was out of order. Then one day, without a human hand touching it, the clock began again to tick, and the hands began to move. Now the clock was no longer just an interesting relic from the past. Once again, it was telling the time.

Israel was God's prophetic clock. By restoring the people to the land, God had set the clock once again in motion. After long centuries of silence, it was now telling the time. If I was interpreting the message of its hands rightly, they were marking off the closing hours of an age of history that had lasted something like nineteen centuries.

## Survivors of the Holocaust

My introduction to the people of Israel coincided with one of the most tragic and critical periods in their long and often tragic history. The unutterable horror of the Holocaust was just beginning to make its full impact upon the Jewish community around the world, but nowhere to a greater degree than in the land of Israel.

In spite of a blockade imposed by the British Army and Navy, a trickle of Jewish survivors from Europe was making its way by various routes to Palestine. I found myself, almost against my will, listening to accounts of suffering and cruelty that I had never believed possible. From time to time, I witnessed the reunion of family members who had been separated from each other in Europe but who had somehow survived and escaped, to meet again in Israel.

My exposure to Israel's geography had already given a new direction to my study of the Bible. Now my firsthand exposure to this aspect of Israel's history was even more revolutionary in its impact upon me. I began to discover countless passages in

almost all the Old Testament prophets predicting that, before the present age comes to its close, there is to be a great ingathering of Jewish people from all over the world to the land of Israel. Nor were these predictions confined to the Old Testament. I discovered corresponding passages in the teaching of Jesus in the New Testament, which indicate that the closing drama of the present age will be enacted in the land of Israel.

Up to this time, I had viewed such passages as vague, almost Utopian pictures that somehow inspired hope of a better age to come. Now, however, I saw that they were precise, specific predictions that were being fulfilled before my eyes. In many of these predictions, certain salient features were singled out for mention, just as if the writer had himself been an eyewitness.

I found many examples of this in the prophet Jeremiah. One passage became particularly vivid for me:

“Return, faithless people,” declares the LORD, “for I am your husband. I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion. . . . In those days the house of Judah will join the house of Israel, and together they will come from a northern land to the land I gave your forefathers as an inheritance.”

Jeremiah 3:14, 18

This passage emphasizes the return of the Israelites from “a northern land” to the land God had given to their forefathers. Indisputably, the latter is the land of Israel. “A northern land” would include Russia, Poland, Germany and other countries in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. In 1946, that was precisely the area from which the majority of Jewish refugees were making their way to Israel.

What particularly impressed me was the detail “one from a town and two from a clan.” This corresponded exactly with what I was hearing from Jewish people around me. Many times a survivor’s story would go like this: “I’m the only one in our family from Berlin who has survived. But I’ve met just one other member of the family who has also survived—my uncle from Hannover.”

In each story, the name of the town might differ. The country might be Poland or Austria rather than Germany. Rather than an uncle, it might be a married sister, or a cousin or a nephew. But the essential feature of Jeremiah's prophecy remained the same: "One from a town and two from a clan."

In most cases, I felt sure, these Jewish people had no idea they were quoting the words of one of their own prophets, who predicted—2,500 years beforehand—the very events they had lived through.

## God Watches Over His Word

I began to see history in a new light—not as the random interplay of unpredictable forces, whether political or military or economic, but as the outworking of divine purposes unfolded in advance through the prophetic Word of God. Nowhere was this principle illustrated more clearly than in the call of Jeremiah to the prophetic ministry, as he himself recounts it:

The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
before you were born I set you apart;  
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

"Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child."

But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.

Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

Jeremiah 1:4–10

There is a remarkable paradox implicit in this account. On the one hand, a position of tremendous authority is promised to Jeremiah, “over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”

On the other hand, Jeremiah considered himself to be “only a child.” Furthermore, there was little outward evidence in his subsequent career of this authority God had promised him. He was rejected consistently by most of his own people; frequently misrepresented and mishandled; confined for a while in a dungeon; almost allowed to die in a well shaft.

Wherein, then, lay Jeremiah’s authority, and how was it exercised? I concluded that the answer was to be found in the act by which God set Jeremiah in his prophetic office: “Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, ‘Now, I have put my words in your mouth.’”

The authority was not in Jeremiah as a person; it was in God’s words put into Jeremiah’s mouth. These words, as he spoke them forth, determined the destinies of all the nations and kingdoms concerning which he prophesied. Rulers and peoples would reject Jeremiah as a person, but they could not annul the prophetic words he spoke concerning them. When Jeremiah died, the prophetic words he had spoken lived on, shaping the ongoing destinies of those peoples.

Though later generations either forgot or ignored Jeremiah’s words, God did neither. For He had assured Jeremiah, “I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled” (verse 12). The words of God through Jeremiah centered primarily on his own people, Israel, but they also extended to a much wider circle. Jeremiah, as a “prophet to the nations,” predicted the destinies of many other countries beside Israel, including all the nations that make up the area we know today as the Middle East.

Furthermore, God not only assured Jeremiah that He would watch over Jeremiah’s words to see that they were fulfilled; He also made specific provision that Jeremiah’s words would be preserved until the time came for their final outworking:

“This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you. The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess,’ says the LORD.”

Jeremiah 30:2–3

Clearly God was looking forward through the centuries to the time when He would regather Israel in the land He had appointed for them. He foresaw that, at that time, His people would enter into a fuller understanding of all that had been predicted for them in the words of Jeremiah.

With a sense of awe and excitement, I realized that I had been privileged to become an eyewitness of the events Jeremiah had predicted.

Here, then, was the answer to the question I had been asking myself earlier that evening: What lies ahead? The Word of God, spoken many centuries previously through His prophets, was still shaping the ongoing destinies not only of Israel, but also of the other nations round about. His Word provided the only reliable key to interpreting the situation that was developing in the Middle East.

Before I finally fell asleep, however, I concluded that I was not yet ready to apply this key to the present and the future. First, I needed a clearer understanding of the past. With this, I would be better able to interpret the new factors in world history that had precipitated the radical changes now taking place in the Middle East.