



Understanding recent events in Israel

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NEW FROM Israel this year has been dominated by suicide bombings and the response by Israel to these bombings. To date, around 120 people have been killed by terrorist suicide bombs in 2002, compared with approximately eighty such deaths for the whole of 2001. The bombings have been traumatic, but the incursions of the Israelis into areas in the West Bank, such as the refugee camp in Jenin, have led to an international outcry. In this article we try to make sense of these recent events.

Firstly, we will consider how the Jews are being providentially hunted down in order to be in the location foretold by prophecy when Christ returns to the land. Secondly, we will use the example of Samson to try and understand the role of the suicide bomber. Thirdly, we will think about the significance of these events for ourselves, as the bride of Christ awaiting the return of the bridegroom.

Fishing and hunting

In Genesis 48 Jacob says: "the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth" (v. 16). In the AV margin the alternative rendering for "grow" is "as fishes do increase". *Strong's Concordance* also provides some support for this sense of 'fish' lying behind the word 'grow'. The miraculous appearance of "the multitude of fishes" (Jno. 21:6) after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus was typical of the multitude of Israel.

The gathering of men and women into the commonwealth of Israel is likened to the gathering of fish by the Lord Jesus, for he said to Peter and Andrew: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt. 4:19). When the gospel is preached today, and men and women respond to its call, this is also like fishes being fished from the sea.

In Jeremiah 16 the analogy of fishing is used of the gathering of the Jews. However, the gathering

is not only described as fishing, but also by the more violent analogy of hunting:

"Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD [Yahweh], that it shall no more be said, The LORD [Yahweh] liveth, That brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The LORD [Yahweh] liveth, That brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither He had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers. Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the LORD [Yahweh], and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks" (vv. 14-16).

In the context of the whole passage, the fishing and hunting could be taken as applying to the hunting down of the children of Israel as they hid in the land in the hope of avoiding captivity. However, the passage also seems to relate to the Jews being fished and hunted from the lands in which they had been scattered. This being the case, there is a two-stage process to the gathering: first fishing, then hunting. Whilst the ultimate gathering of the Jews will not be accomplished until Christ returns, these words in Jeremiah 16 aptly describe the events of the last century.

As the Zionist movement encouraged Jews to return, the Jews were providentially being 'fished'. However, this was not sufficient to achieve the establishment of the State of Israel. It took the violent 'hunting' of the Holocaust to force Jews to return in sufficient numbers, and with the necessary motivation, to achieve statehood.¹

1. See the recording of the address, "Israel: focal point of the judgement of the nations", by Brother Stephen Palmer, given at Prophecy Day 2002, Rugby, 2 February, where Jeremiah 16:16 and other verses were discussed in this regard.

The foregoing helps us to understand what has been happening in Israel in recent months. The consequence of the suicide attacks has been that the Jews have entered in force into the mountains of the West Bank in an effort to root out the terrorists who have been carrying out these attacks. We know from Bible prophecy that the mountains of Israel will be occupied by Jews when Gog invades (Ezek. 38:8). Many Jews are, however, quite content to live away from the mountains in the lower areas of Israel. A more specific hunting needs to take place. The Jews have to be brought in significant numbers to the mountains of Israel. The short-term effect of the suicide bombings has been to, as it were, hunt down the Jews and direct their attention to this region of Israel.

Like Samson

Suicide bombers are able to destroy buildings, killing many people in their death. In Scripture a man who was able to do this was Samson: "And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life" (Judg. 16:30).

Samson was able to do this because of the great strength which God had given him. The intention of the suicide bomber is to slay many people as they themselves die. They do not have the strength of Samson, but they are able to destroy buildings and kill many through the use of explosives. Even a weak person can achieve this. Commentators attempt to explain the thinking of the suicide bombers by making reference to their religious beliefs concerning the supposed heavenly rewards of martyrdom, and by talking about the fanatical training they receive. Whilst these points are obviously relevant, surely one of the overriding feelings suicide bombers have as they prepare to detonate their bomb is that of the power to destroy and kill the helpless people around them. They are weak, but they are able to carry out a Samson-like act. Perhaps these well-known words from Joel help explain the thinking of the suicide bomber: "let the weak say, I am strong" (3:10).

Behold he cometh

When we look at the events on the mountains of Israel, what do we see? If we look with the eye of faith we should see the signs of the return of the

Lord Jesus Christ. We should see the angels at work under the command of Christ. In the Song of Solomon we read about this: "The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills" (2:8).

The beloved is the Lord Jesus Christ, and, as we read Scripture and see the signs in the earth, we should be able to speak and apply the words of this verse to ourselves with confidence. Mountains and hills can represent nations in general in Scripture. As events unfold in the world we see the signs that Christ, through the angels, is leaping and skipping above the nations as the purpose of God unfolds. However, when we look at the mountains of Israel in particular, we see that truly the angels are at work there as well.

Yet, as watchmen we must also look at ourselves. The bridegroom himself is looking at us: "My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice" (v. 9). What does he see? Are we preparing for the return of the bridegroom? We see the signs on the mountains and hills, but does this move us in any way? When Christ returns, the call to judgment will go forth:

"My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; the fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away" (vv. 10-13).

Winter is past, and soon "the Sun of righteousness [will] arise with healing in his wings" (Mal. 4:2). We think we have learnt the parable of the fig tree (Mk. 13:28), but, when we see the fig tree of Israel developing, does this encourage us to separate ourselves from the ways of the world? In the verses quoted above there are two calls to come away. Perhaps the first call applies now; we must come away from the ways of the world so that, when we are actually physically gathered away to the judgement we do not, like Lot's wife, look back longingly at the things we leave behind. As we see events unfolding in the world, and in particular on the mountains of Israel, which show that the return of Christ is near, let us with renewed enthusiasm, say: "The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills".