



The controversy of Zion

Nigel Bernard

IN ISAIAH 34 God says the following to the nations: "Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. For the indignation of the LORD [Yahweh] is upon all nations, and His fury upon all their armies: He hath utterly destroyed them, He hath delivered them to the slaughter" (vv. 1,2).

The focal point of the indignation that God has with the nations is Zion. This is spoken of in verse 8: "For it is the day of the LORD'S [Yahweh's] vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion". The Hebrew word translated 'controversy' is found on several occasions in the Old Testament. It is first used in Genesis 13:7 (translated 'strife'): "And there was a *strife* between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land". This strife was resolved, but the land is now witnessing a much greater controversy, which is defying solution.

In Deuteronomy 17 God gave instruction as to how controversies should be dealt with that were too hard for the people themselves to resolve: "If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of *controversy* within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the LORD [Yahweh] thy God shall choose; and thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment" (vv. 8,9). The principles in these words also apply to the controversy of Zion. It is a controversy that is "too hard" for the nations to solve. Indeed, the controversy is one that is not ultimately between, for example, Jews and Palestinians, but is rather between God and man.

The current crisis in Israel and the occupied territories is a symptom of the controversy that

is building up around Zion. However, it is also having the effect of gathering nations, willingly or otherwise, towards Israel.

Interestingly, this is precisely what the Palestinians desire. Ewen MacAskill, the diplomatic editor of *The Guardian*, a British newspaper, in writing about a plan being drawn up by the US to send international observers to monitor trouble-spots in Israel and the occupied territories, says the following: "The Palestinians have campaigned for the observer force partly because they claim it will help provide them with protection against Israeli excesses and partly because they want to internationalise the Israeli-Palestinian dispute".¹

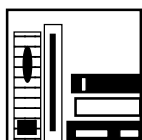
As the current crisis in Israel continues we are increasingly able to gain some sort of perspective as to the role it is playing in the development of the nations prior to Armageddon. The nations have to "come near" to Zion, and the crisis is proving something that is inevitably drawing the attention of the nations to the area. It is significant that one of the parties in the dispute is seeking to "internationalise" the dispute. This is what we would expect from Bible prophecy.

The controversy of Zion is one that the nations cannot avoid. The current manoeuvrings are only a prelude to the main issue to be addressed when Christ returns. Nevertheless, even now nations are finding they cannot ignore Jerusalem and Israel. In the US the Bush Administration has sought to detach itself from Israel. As Ewen MacAskill further writes in another article in the same issue: "The US, with its traditional support for Israel and with its financial interest in Arab oil, cannot entirely walk away but at no time in the past four decades has it been as detached as at present".² That the US cannot fully

1. Ewen MacAskill, "Secret plan to send observers to Israel", *The Guardian*, 3 Aug. 2001, p. 1.
2. Ewen MacAskill, "It's our turn to help", *The Guardian*, 3 Aug. 2001, p. 19.

“walk away” is indicative of the hold which the Middle East has on the nations of the world. The article goes on to write of how the European Union has been involved and how (in MacAskill’s opinion) there is scope for more involvement in the crisis. The Catholic Church is also increasingly becoming involved in the crisis. On 2 August 2001 a meeting took place between Pope

John Paul II and the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. As events continue to develop in the Middle East we should exhort one another as we see the day approaching (Heb. 10:25). Let us remain faithful so that we might be with Christ as he marches through Bozrah (Isa. 34:6) and moves to Israel to carry out the “recompences for the controversy of Zion” (v. 8).



Reviews

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Some things that concordances do not tell you

John Carder

IN ENGLISH the tense of a verb shows its relation to time, that is, past tense, present tense or future tense. English is a very time-orientated language, with distinct tenses. The Hebrew of the Bible is completely different. It has no tenses in the strict sense. Instead it has two ‘formations’, one related to completed actions and the other to actions regarded as continuing over time.

The formation denoting completion is called the *avar* in Hebrew or the perfect in English, while the other is called the *atiyd* in Hebrew and continuous or imperfect in English. It is best to use those terms, and not to use the term ‘tenses’ at all. Both formations can refer to past, present or future actions or states, a feature which English-speakers find hard to visualise. There are subtle clues as to which is meant.

Centuries after the Bible was completed, changes were made in Hebrew grammar to denote past, present and future more distinctly. Modern Hebrew grammar is in this respect more in line with English and other European languages.

The basic form of Hebrew verbs is the third person singular masculine in the *avar* (perfect), as in the form ‘[he] said’. That is the form under which Hebrew verbs are listed in most concordances and dictionaries. It is a point which those sources assume you know without being told.

That form is often referred to as the stem or root of the verb.

From that basic and most simple form, usually consisting of just three Hebrew letters, all other parts of each Hebrew verb are derived. That is done by adding letters in front of the root letters (prefixes), in between them (infixes) and/or behind them (suffixes), and by modifying the vowels.

In Hebrew, both Biblical and modern, nouns are either masculine or feminine, whatever they refer to. There is no neuter. So there are four forms that Hebrew nouns may take: masculine singular or plural, or feminine singular or plural. Hebrew verbs have similar but more complex features, but their form is such that there is no mistaking whether masculine or feminine, singular or plural is meant.

Thus the first verb in Genesis 1, ‘created’, is clearly masculine singular. The first verb in Genesis 1:2, “And the earth was without form”, is clearly feminine singular—in Hebrew the earth is grammatically feminine.

Now, with the above in mind, we will look at the most frequently used reference books about Biblical Hebrew.

Gesenius

Wilhelm Gesenius, 1786-1842, was Professor of Oriental Languages at the University of Halle,