

Understanding Prophetic Boundaries

Do biblical prophecies apply to everyone in the World? Should everyone be concerned about the outcome of prophecies contained in the Bible? What is the viewpoint of the Bible when it comes to world affairs and the fulfillment of biblical prophecy?

Abram came from the ancient Sumerian city of Ur in the region of Chaldea. His journey to Canaan was the result of a command from God, for Abram was found to be obedient to God's law and to the will of God.

What is peculiar about this part of the biblical story is that God promised to give Abram (Abraham), and his descendants the land of Canaan, and lands beyond the Middle East. This meant the eventual establishment of what we would call a political organization—a State with peoples, a government and internationally acknowledged national boundaries.

Bringing us to consider how such a promise would naturally result in future conflicts with other nations, because it was expected—from a biblical perspective—that the sons of Jacob would eventually form interdependent and independent nations from their early tribal beginnings. We also ought to think about how the promises given to Abraham were not always known to all peoples of other tribes, city-states and territorial-states of the Middle East, and for that matter to the rest of the world. We could say then that the promises given to Abraham and his descendants became a part of their national development

and character, and an important influence on how they would function as a nation among nations, but the promises had no direct relevancy to other nations.

Consequently, to the nations that existed beyond the people of Israel, Israel's eventual conquest of the Promised Land and political development had no more spiritual significance than their own conquests of lands and peoples in the known world.

However, there was one other matter that was significant to the issue of the promises given to Abraham.

That is to say the promises given to Abraham were prophetic. Such is the basic nature of the promises given to Abraham as he himself was not an inheritor of those lands promised to Israel, which means that God would have a direct role in the tribal territorial claims of the land of Canaan for the children of Israel—and lands beyond the Middle East.

Thus, we could reasonably say that the promises given to Abraham would certainly influence Israel's national character, but the world as a whole would have no real expectation that the promises of Abraham would have any meaning to national development or fulfillment, especially in today's international arena.

Now, historically, these promises came to have a more tangible and comprehensive realization for all the sons of Jacob in the time of King David. Including the promises given to two of Abraham's great-great

grandchildren—Ephraim and Manasseh—whose descendants would form independent nations of their own. They too would eventually become established as sovereign States, having their own governments, lands and established boundaries among the nations.

Yet, all this seemed to change with the conquests of the Assyrians and Babylonians.

In the period of the kings of Israel and Judah, following the time of David and Solomon, we find that prophets were sent to the leaders of the commonwealth to warn them of dire consequences for their disobedience to God. Those consequences eventually befell them when they were broken as a commonwealth by the Assyrians and then by the Babylonians who removed the throne of King David to Babylon. (The stipulations of the covenant—the Ten Commandments—were legally bound to the promises, which allowed for the inheritance to be revoked if Israel disobeyed the law of God (not the Mosaic Law).)

However, according to the promises, these events would not interfere with the geographic establishment of these sovereign States according to the promises given to Abraham.

Leading us to conclude that according to the nature of the promises we should have tangible evidence of the existence of the tribes of Israel today, having formed their own States and having their own governments and recognized international boundaries, even though they were removed as a commonwealth from the area referred to as the Promised Land.

This would, of course, include the nation-states that would represent the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh.

In other words, if these two countries exist today as nation-states—as promised—then it is a most unusual phenomenon, because many other nations and countries of the world have generally formed their boundaries through conflict, strife and hardship, without any sense of divine providence that allowed them to become a State. Therefore, those countries outside of Israel's boundaries would have little reason to conclude that the boundaries established for the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh are anymore legitimate than their own national boundaries, even though history shows that some peoples have invoked God in their cause to form their own country. (We have to remember that national boundaries are established today by recognition of those States that typically form boundaries around a country claiming statehood, such is the difficulty with the State of Israel today.)

Now, the result of God's promises to Abraham tells us the descendants of the tribes of Israel were to inherit lands and eventually become sovereign States with significant influence in the world. This sets the boundaries and perspectives of biblical prophecy related to Israel. It is from this vantage point that we should view prophecies found in Scripture regarding Jacob and his descendants, and not from the viewpoint of the interpretations produced by the church of God, or Christianity, or the political views of other countries of the world.

Realizing this helps us understand the scope of many prophecies in the Bible.

Now, when we think of boundaries, we often think about the conditional and sometimes transitory lines drawn on maps that separate State from State, but there are other important boundaries that have no real definitive lines, which give us a better look into why certain prophecies will inevitably come to pass regarding the people of Israel. This means more than knowing the bounds of the nations, because prophetic boundaries have the ability to influence and change the entire political climate of the world.

Consequently, we can see by looking at world geography from the perspective of certain kinds of boundaries that it gives us some assistance in understanding biblical prophecy.

One of the important boundaries that we must consider, in terms of prophetic understanding, is population. It is not just the size of the population that has prophetic implications, but sometimes it is the location of a particular population.

We can take an example from China, whose population has long since exceeded one billion people, and it is still growing at a rate of several million people annually. This is an intimidating factor for all peoples in the world. China's leadership knows these things, and they are also aware that such a population means they are not as vulnerable to attack, even from nuclear weapons. Also consider how the Chinese have promised to fight a "100-Year" war in the event of an attack from Russia, which means that the Chinese certainly know how to count the cost. (China has formed for itself an economic powerhouse, not just in terms of GDP, but in the reality of having pulled so many millions of people out of poverty.)

Sometimes a specific location of a population greatly influences the political climate of the world. India, for example, has also exceeded a population of one billion people. The neighboring nation to the West is Pakistan, carved from India in 1947 it formed a separate Muslim State. Hostile toward India, its population of more than 200 million, is sandwiched into a country the size of Texas and Ohio combined, which poses a real threat to neighboring countries as it is—like India—a nuclear weapon State.

Notably, though, in this part of the world, we have to consider the implications of defensible and non-defensible borders, which means that the population boundary certainly exceeds that of the national border in regard to political influence.

Other countries influenced by population boundaries include the United States, and those countries that border the former Soviet Union on the West. One of the initial fears of Western Europe that resulted from the end of the Cold War was the threat that those who had lived under Communism in Eastern Europe would now want to migrate West into Europe in search of a better life. Showing us that population boundaries can change abruptly due to many different circumstances.

War in the former Yugoslavia between ethnic Serbs and Albanians, for example, forced the populations to migrate, creating a terrible refugee problem for some parts of Europe. The same has proven true for those States in North Africa as well, particularly for Somalia and Libya.

Then think about this in the context of a future prophecy found in Revelation. "And the number of the army of the horsemen were

two hundred thousand thousand” (Rev. 9:16; see also Dan. 11:44).

That is a staggering population of 200 million people related to an “army of the horsemen.”

Keeping in mind the perspective of prophecy, and given the timeframe of the text, and using the knowledge of population statistics, we would have to say that such a number of people was unthinkable in the time that the Apostle John recorded this prophecy regarding end-time events. Even if we consider the size of the various militaries respective to nation-states today, we see depicted in this prophecy a large mass of humanity that far exceeds any combined military that currently exists, even in all of Asia. Of the approximately 2.2 million active members of China’s army, it has been for many decades a peasant army, noting that only in the last two decades has China become an intimidating modern military force—perhaps now the largest in the world.

However, prophetically speaking, no nation, or group of nations, could support financially, or even feed, a standing conventional army of 200 million strong as we read about in the book of Revelation.

Bringing us to ask a question.

Who are all these people in John’s prophecy?

First of all, the understanding of population boundaries makes us realize that it was not something that would have taken place in the time of John, and second such a population would lead us to believe that it is only possible in our time. But there is no singular military force, or group of forces, that would ever reach the number of 200 million today.

Meaning that our understanding of population boundaries plays a role in how we understand prophetic boundaries. Realizing also that the nature of this prophecy is related to war, and the threat of war, starvation and disease, and peoples’ deception about these events, which leads us to surmise that we are talking about a number of people willing to involve themselves in conflict.

In other words, these millions of peoples form a portion of the world’s population that is ready to fight and defend their own national boundaries, but they do not necessarily reflect the combined members of a conscripted or non-conscripted army.

Another type of boundary that is worth thinking about is the boundary of religion.

Noting that within national borders today many different religions can and do exist, some in harmony and some in conflict.

On a larger scale, religion has been the great divider within nations and among the nations.

The boundaries of the different religions crash up against each other continually like tectonic plates, sometimes mixing together in small pockets, but usually causing significant eruptions and earthquakes politically. For example, one of the reasons for the conflict between India and Pakistan is because of the religious tensions between Hindu and Muslim. China considers itself to be mostly atheist, which is a religion of sorts, but it certainly brings it into conflict with Christianity and Islam. (The greatest number of fatalities due to war in predominantly Muslim countries is not because of wars between Israel and the Arab States, or between Western Europe and the Muslim

World, but rather it is because of the conflicts between professing Muslim States. Keeping in mind many Muslim groups have also suffered attack from Muslim Jihadists.)

Russia, which is often thought to be atheist, has actually maintained its strong Orthodox religious foundation, despite all of its purges and uprisings, and today it receives support from the government of Russia. (It is well worth keeping in mind that a majority of Russians have close religious ties to the Russian Orthodox Church, now more than 1000 years old.)

Interestingly, one of Russia's great writers, Dostoyevsky, felt that the people of Russia had a mission to be the "bearer of God." He once wrote that "the calling of all Russia is Orthodoxy, the light from the East—a light that shall flow toward the people of the West, the people who have lost Christ," which is a statement that brings us to a major event in the modern history of Christianity. That is the establishment of a mixture of militarism and patriotism with Orthodox Christianity represented by the building of the architectural wonder that is the Orthodox Cathedral of the Armed Forces. Consecrated by both the Patriarchs of Jerusalem and Moscow, its significance in influencing religious boundaries cannot be overstated.

Sometimes people think that a new or one-world religion is prophetically in the future, or a uniting of all religions under a great religious leader, particularly Christianity. This view is largely derived from a misinterpretation of Scripture regarding the events mapped out in the book of Revelation. Nonetheless, people have used a few verses in Scripture which they think alludes to such a situation. For example, we read in the book

of Revelation: "And I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet colored beast... and upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth" (Rev. 17:3, 5).

By this verse some have assumed incorrectly that this is speaking of a great false Christian church that will chart the course of many nations in the future, leading to an end of the world.

However, if the future is like history, no such thing will take place regarding a false church, because we have no reason from a biblical perspective to associate this "woman" of biblical prophecy with a false world-dominating Christianity.

Again, keeping in mind the perspective of prophetic boundaries, we know by the religious geography of the world that millions of people have never heard of Christ or Christianity. This prophecy, therefore, has its own limited prophetic geography, and the woman is defined in those same terms.

Thus, we read that "the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth" (Rev. 17:18).

Of course, this city is not in actuality, Babylon. We know that ancient Babylon once existed in the area known as Iraq today. The remains of this former empire are with us even to this day. Therefore, it is a figurative term in this prophecy recorded by the Apostle John.

Consequently, it is not a question of a one-world religion, but a matter of defining the geography of such a city related to this prophecy, which means that the biblical

perspective sets bounds and limitations for its fulfillment. Otherwise, we are unable to explain the actions of different peoples and nations noted in prophecy, which are not dominated by this political structure and series of events. What we can conclude then is that a political shift occurs for part of the world, but not all, and this city's location, and the inherent religious boundaries that can affect it, bring about a situation that leads to much destruction in the future.

So, let's look at another type of boundary that can affect our understanding of prophecies recorded in the Bible.

There also exists on earth the geography and boundaries of world energy supplies, meaning the type of resources that fuel the world's industry and commerce and military might.

After World War II, petroleum became the main energy source of the developed nations. Today, the consumption of petroleum worldwide is more than 35 billion barrels per year, with several billion barrels being used by the United States alone. The projections are that petroleum will not run out until a few decades into the 21st Century.

This presents two problems because we are now living in the 21st Century.

The first is that the greater portion of the world's oil cannot—at present—be profitably extracted. The second is that eventually new oil finds will begin to decline, before the oil runs out. Crude oil reserves will then begin to also decline, making the knowledge of energy boundaries most important. Noting also that some of the largest consumers of crude oil are North America, Europe, Germany, China, Japan, India and Russia.

Whereas the largest known extractable reserves are in the Middle East.

Here we find a diverse situation where some countries must import nearly all of their food but have a wealth of oil reserves. Europe, for all its resources, is linked precariously to the Middle East for its oil needs, and now with the new Nordstream projects it has growing energy ties with Russia. Russia, with abundant oil, lacks the modern transportation systems to make good use of its reserves for the moment, but that is fast changing with China's Belt and Road initiative and Russia's continual upgrading of its own oil distribution.

Boundaries of the world's energy supplies are also intrinsically linked to agriculture and the ecology of the world. Unlike population and religious boundaries—which can swell and collide—energy, agriculture and ecology boundaries can shrink and decline, making them unstable and unpredictable—creating additional problems of deforestation and maldistribution of food.

Consider then how such problems in the world could be used to provoke war, and influence the outcome of some prophecies in the Bible (Dan. 11:40-42).

Then there are ethnic and cultural boundaries.

The world is diverse in terms of the many different peoples that inhabit the planet. This has also been a source of conflict and war. Even in recent times, we still experience the tragedy of "ethnic cleansing," which is a phrase that is misleading in regard to the real nature of such actions.

Adding to these things, we know that nearly all peoples want to have their own living-space—lebensraum was a popular term for this that was used or misused by Germany during World War II. There are also segregated peoples today that are not a country, meaning they do not have a fully sovereign land in which to form their own State. Examples of this are the Palestinian Arabs, Sikhs and the Kurds. They know that what you have becomes your heritage, and this leads to conflict that leaves little room for political resolution.

Thus, we could say that ethnicity and cultural boundaries, along with language, can prevent a cohesiveness among nations that affects the way nations function among each other, and this also has an influence out the outcome of prophecies that also limit or shape prophetic boundaries. They can affect the way people perceive the messages contained in the Bible and the way people see the application of prophecies to their own lives.

Allowing us to conclude that biblical prophecies have boundaries of their own, and these boundaries are affected by the geographic, political, religious and social boundaries that influence the world on many levels.

Meaning that when we think of biblical prophecies, we might assume that it is talking about everyone in the world, when it is not. The language at times seems all encompassing, when it is in reality only focusing on a limited perspective, and in some cases the Bible tells us that only the “wise” will understand them. For example, the “all” in some prophecies is limited to the entirety of the perspective rather than to the world as a whole. We see this in the writings

of Matthew, who recorded a prophecy of Jesus regarding the gospel, when he said; “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Mt. 24:14).

Thus, such a prophecy of Jesus has boundaries that influence the scope of the gospel message about the kingdom of God.

We understand that this prophecy about the gospel does not mean every individual in the world will hear it, but the message will be preached in the world—and among the nations—in a manner that becomes a witness to the nations. This gives us a prophetic and geographic perspective within Scripture regarding the gospel message that Jesus brought regarding the coming kingdom of God. It demonstrates the existence of limitations and boundaries in prophecy regarding the people of Israel, and the scope of the work of Christianity. (Many Christians have incorrectly believed that those who do not hear the gospel are “lost” or not saved, which contradicts the actual purpose of Jesus’ earthly ministry who was sent to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.”)

In a sense then, we might call these boundaries related to prophecy a sort of geography by which we can understand their scope and application today. Leading us to say that from a biblical perspective the prophecies of the Bible have boundaries, centered on the promises given to Abraham and his descendants that would form several influential nation-states, and by understanding the limits and scope of biblical prophecies it helps us understand their place in our world today. 