Fulfilled Prophecies

Isaiah 11:11: Was This Prophecy Fulfilled In 1948 Or 1967?

By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Isaiah 11:11 is sometimes presented as a can't-fail proof text that the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948, or Israel's capture of Jerusalem in 1967, fulfilled biblical prophecy.

† The problem is that Isaiah 11:11 doesn't mention 1948, 1967, or a modern political state. The interpretation must come from the biblical context, not from starting with a twentieth-century event and then reading that event back into Isaiah.

† Isaiah identifies where the remnant was scattered, but the

chapter also identifies the One through whom the gathering takes place. The central figure of Isaiah 11 isn't a twentieth-century nation. It is the Messiah, the root of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1, 10).
† Isaiah 11 must also be read alongside the New Testament writers who applied Isaiah's prophecy to Jesus Christ and the gathering of Jews and Gentiles into one people (Romans 15:8-12; Ephesians 2:13-18).
† When Scripture interprets Scripture, Isaiah 11:11 isn't waiting for 1948 or 1967. Its fulfillment belongs to the messianic work of Christ and the first-century gathering of God's remnant.

Isaiah 11:1-2
Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
† Isaiah begins the chapter with Jesse, the father of David. Before we ever reach verse 11, the prophecy has already established its messianic foundation.
† The promised Branch is Jesus Christ. The New Testament presents Jesus as the promised descendant of David and the One upon whom the Spirit rested (Matthew 1:1; 3:16-17; Luke 4:16-21).
† This means verse 11 can't be separated from verses 1 and 2 and treated as an independent prediction about a modern political nation. The entire chapter develops from the coming and reign of the Messiah.

Isaiah 11:10
Then on that day The nations will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal flag for the peoples; And His resting place will be glorious.
† Isaiah tells us that the nations would seek the root of Jesse. This is bigger than ethnic Israel returning to geographical territory.

† Paul directly quoted this verse while explaining Christ's ministry to Israel and the inclusion of the Gentiles (Romans 15:8-12). Paul didn't point his readers toward a twentieth-century restoration. He pointed them to Christ.
† This is one of the strongest controls on how Isaiah 11 should be interpreted. An inspired apostle placed Isaiah 11 within the messianic gathering already taking place through the gospel.
† The prophecy concerns one Messiah drawing people from Israel and the nations to Himself, not two unrelated fulfillments separated by thousands of years.

Isaiah 11:11
Then it will happen on that day that the Lord Will again recover with His hand the second time The remnant of His people who will remain, From Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, And from the islands of the sea.
† This is the verse often treated as the decisive argument for 1948 or 1967, but notice the opening words, in that day. Verse 11 belongs to the same messianic setting described immediately before it.
† Isaiah doesn't suddenly jump from the Messiah in verse 10 to the twentieth century in verse 11 and then return to the same prophetic theme afterward. The gathering of the remnant occurs in the day of the root of Jesse.
† The places named in this verse identify the widespread locations from which the remnant would be recovered. The geographical list demonstrates dispersion. It doesn't establish 1948 or 1967 as the date of fulfillment.
† The key word is remnant. Isaiah doesn't say that every physical descendant of Israel would return to Palestine. God promised to recover His remnant.
† Paul later used Isaiah's remnant language when explaining what God was doing among Israel in his own generation. He wrote that although Israel's number might be like the sand of the sea, it was the remnant that would be saved (Romans 9:27).
† Paul then made the timing unmistakable when he said, in his own first-century present, that there was a remnant according to

God's gracious choice (Romans 11:5).
† Isaiah 11:11 therefore fits the New Testament's first-century remnant theology. God's faithful remnant was being gathered to the Messiah while the gospel was also going to the Gentiles.

Isaiah 11:12
And He will lift up a flag for the nations And assemble the banished ones of Israel, And will gather the dispersed of Judah From the four corners of the earth.
† Verse 12 continues the same thought. The ensign isn't raised for Israel alone. It is raised for the nations.
† Isaiah combines the gathering of Israel with God's purpose among the nations. This is exactly what Paul saw fulfilled through Christ as Jews and Gentiles were brought together in Him (Romans 15:8-12).
† The New Testament describes Christ creating one people from Jew and Gentile, reconciling both to God in one body (Ephesians 2:13-18).
† This gathering isn't defined by possession of national borders. It is defined by belonging to the Messiah.

Romans 15:8-12
For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision in behalf of the truth of God, to confirm the promises given to the fathers, and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written:
"Therefore I will give praise to You among the Gentiles, And I will sing praises to Your name." Again he says, "Rejoice, you Gentiles, with His people." And again, "Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, And let all the peoples praise Him." Again Isaiah says, "There shall come the root of Jesse, And He who arises to rule over the Gentiles, In Him will the Gentiles hope."
† Paul's inspired interpretation is extremely important. He quoted Isaiah 11:10 and identified the root of Jesse with Christ.
† Paul wasn't discussing the creation of a political State of Israel. He was explaining how God's promises were being confirmed through Christ and how the Gentiles were being

brought into God's redemptive purpose.
† Isaiah 11:10 and Isaiah 11:11 can't reasonably be torn apart when Isaiah himself connected them with in that day. Paul's use of verse 10 establishes the messianic setting surrounding verse 11.
† The gathering Isaiah foresaw had arrived in Christ. Israel's remnant and believing Gentiles were coming under the reign of the root of Jesse.

Romans 11:5-7
In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, since otherwise grace is no longer grace. What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;
† Paul didn't tell his readers that Israel's promised remnant would appear nearly two thousand years later. He said, at this present time, there is a remnant.
† That statement gives us an inspired first-century framework for Isaiah's language about the remnant. God's promises hadn't failed because not every Israelite believed. The elect remnant had received what Israel as a whole hadn't obtained.
† The gathering wasn't determined by ethnicity alone, national citizenship, military control of Jerusalem, or geographical residence. It was according to God's grace through Christ.
† This is why using Isaiah 11:11 as an automatic proof of 1948 or 1967 overlooks Paul's explanation of the remnant in his own generation.

Ephesians 2:13-18
But now in Christ Jesus you who previously were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the hostility, which is the Law composed of commandments expressed in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the

two one new person, in this way establishing peace; and that He might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the hostility. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

† Isaiah's vision of the root of Jesse drawing the nations finds its covenant reality in Christ. Those who were far off and those who were near were brought together.

† Paul doesn't describe two separate peoples of God with two separate prophetic destinations. Christ made both one.

† The great biblical gathering isn't centered on returning people to a piece of land. It is centered on reconciling people to God through Christ.

† This is the greater restoration promised by the prophets, access to the Father through the Messiah.

Historical References

† Josephus described Jewish communities spread far beyond Judea in the first century. In the preface to The Wars of the Jews, he referred to Jews among the Parthians, Babylonians, Arabians, those beyond the Euphrates, and the Adiabeni or Assyrians. The Jewish dispersion was already a first-century reality.

† Josephus also recorded the catastrophic destruction surrounding Jerusalem and the Jewish-Roman War. His history shows that AD 70 wasn't the beginning of a modern national restoration, but the devastating end of the old Jerusalem-centered order.

† Eusebius later recorded that the believers in Jerusalem left the city and went to Pella before Jerusalem's destruction. His account preserves the early Christian understanding that Christ's warnings concerning Jerusalem had direct first-century consequences.

† These historical witnesses don't establish the meaning of Scripture, Scripture does that. They do, however, confirm the first-century historical world in which the New Testament's

remnant, dispersion, gathering, and judgment language operated.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We shouldn't begin with 1948 or 1967 and then search the Old Testament for verses that can be attached to those dates. We should begin with Scripture and allow the apostles to explain how the prophets were fulfilled.

† Isaiah 11 points us to Jesus Christ. The root of Jesse is the center of the chapter, the nations come to Him, and the remnant is gathered in His day.

† Modern political events can be historically important without being the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Historical importance and prophetic fulfillment aren't the same thing.

† Our hope isn't in another geographical gathering, another temple, another national restoration, or another prophetic timetable. Our hope is in the Messiah who accomplished what the prophets promised.

† The question Isaiah 11 ultimately places before us isn't whether someone lives inside particular national borders. The question is whether that person belongs to the root of Jesse, Jesus Christ.

† God's people aren't waiting for Isaiah 11 to begin. Christ came, the gospel went to Israel and the nations, the remnant was gathered, and Jew and Gentile were made one in Him.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Doesn't Isaiah 11:11 plainly say that God would gather Israel again?

A: Yes, but the question is when and through whom. The surrounding verses place that gathering in the day of the root of Jesse, and Paul identifies the root of Jesse as Christ (Isaiah 11:10-11; Romans 15:8-12).

Q: Doesn't the list of countries prove this must be a worldwide modern return to the land?

A: No. The list tells us where the scattered remnant was found.

It doesn't give the date 1948 or 1967. Isaiah's own context connects the gathering with the Messiah and the nations coming to Him (Isaiah 11:10-12).

Q: What does remnant mean in the New Testament?
A: Paul tells us directly that there was a remnant according to God's gracious choice in his own present time (Romans 11:5-7). He also quoted Isaiah when explaining that the remnant would be saved (Romans 9:27).

Q: Did Paul expect Isaiah 11 to wait for a modern State of Israel?
A: Paul quoted Isaiah 11:10 and applied the prophecy to Christ and the Gentiles coming to hope in Him (Romans 15:8-12). His application is messianic and first-century, not twentieth-century.

Q: Does rejecting 1948 or 1967 as the fulfillment of Isaiah 11 mean denying that those events happened?
A: No. Those are historical events. The issue is whether Scripture identifies them as the fulfillment of Isaiah 11. Isaiah points to the Messiah, and the New Testament applies that prophecy to Christ, the remnant, and the gathering of Jews and Gentiles into God's people (Romans 11:5-7; Romans 15:8-12; Ephesians 2:13-18).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† Isaiah 11:1-2, 10-12; Romans 15:8-12; Romans 11:5-7; Ephesians 2:13-18
† Josephus, The Wars of the Jews; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History

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