

Christ in Prophecy

Israel 15: “The Revival of the Hebrew Language”

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: Many end time Bible prophecies concerning Israel were either fulfilled in the 20th Century, or else their fulfillment was initiated in that century. One of the most remarkable has to do with the revival of the Hebrew language from the dead. Stay tuned for this fascinating story.

Part 1

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Blessed Hope, and welcome to Christ in Prophecy!

As I said at the beginning of this program, one of the things that excites me the most about Bible prophecy is that we are living in a time when we can see many of the end time prophecies fulfilled before our very eyes.

In the 20th Century, seven of the end time prophecies related to Israel were either fulfilled or were in the process of being fulfilled. They were: The Re-gathering of the Jewish People from the four corners of the world. Second- The Re-establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948. Third- The Reclamation of the Land of Israel from a barren wasteland to an agricultural land of abundance. Fourth- The Revival of the Hebrew Language from the dead. Fifth- The Re-occupation of the City of Jerusalem on June 7, 1967. And number 6 The Resurgence of Israeli Military Power. And finally number 7 the Re-focusing of World Politics on the nation of Israel. All of these events represent the fulfillment in whole or in part of very specific end time prophecies that can be found in the Hebrew Scriptures. In this program, we are going to take a look at the prophecy whose fulfillment began before the 20th Century but which was completely fulfilled during the 20th Century. It is one of the most amazing of all the prophecies. What I have in mind is the revival of the Hebrew language from the dead. For that remarkable story, let's go to Ben Yehuda Street in New Jerusalem.

Part 2

Dr. Reagan: Welcome to Israel and to the New City of Jerusalem. And when I say new what I am talking about is the fact that this is the new part of Jerusalem as compared to the Old City of Jerusalem that is surrounded by the walls. We are sitting here on a street called Ben Yehuda Street and it is sort of the heartthrob of the New Jerusalem. It is very busy here, this is at noon on a day when people are coming to eat lunch, but it is really busy at night. Come down here at the night time and particularly after the Sabbath ends on Saturday about 9 o'clock at night people come from all over Jerusalem and they have fellowship, they eat ice cream. You have street vendors of all kind, people playing violins and guitars, and break dancers, tattoo artists, you name it you'll find it here on Ben Yehuda Street.

Now in Israel almost every city has a street named Ben Yehuda Street. Who was Ben Yehuda what is this all about? First let me read you a Scripture. In the Hebrew Scriptures in Zephaniah 3:9 it says speaking of the End Times, "In those days I will restore the peoples of pure language that they may call on the name of the Lord to serve Him with one accord." Throughout the centuries Christians as well as Jews have believed that this was a prophecy that in the End Times the Biblical language, Biblical Hebrew would be revived.

Eliezer Ben Yehuda was the man who fulfilled that prophecy. He was born in Lithuania in 1858 in an Orthodox Jewish family. He began studying, reading when he was 3 years old. He was absolutely a genius, he excelled in all languages. He learned Hebrew very quickly. By the age of 12 he was already fluent in many languages, like French, and German and Russian. He was a spectacular language specialist.

His family wanted him to be a Rabbi but that never was something that he seemed to be interested in. Instead he decided to move to Paris and to study medicine, and he was there four years studying medicine. While he was there the spirit of nationalism began to sweep across Europe; the idea of one nation for every people. The Balkans every group of people there was wanting their own nation. And that spirit of nationalism touched his heart and his soul and he decided, "You know we really need a land for the nation of the Jews." And this was before Herzl came on the scene; in fact a number of years before Herzl who is considered the founder of modern day Israel came on the scene. He had this vision of let's go back to our homeland, and let's start speaking Biblical Hebrew once again because he believed it was essential if the Jewish people were really going to be a nation for them to have their own special language.

Now to truly understand what this was all about you have to understand that when the Jews were scattered by the Romans all over the world after 70 AD that the Jewish people stopped speaking Hebrew. Those who went into the European area took Hebrew and they mixed it with German and came up with a new language called Yiddish. And the Jews who were scattered into the Mediterranean Basin they took Hebrew and they mixed it with Spanish and came up with a language called Ladino. Jews continued to read Hebrew, Biblical Hebrew in the synagogue for example, or when they were reading the Talmud or various religious papers, but they stopped speaking Hebrew as an everyday language. They were speaking either Yiddish, Ladino, or the language of whatever country they happened to live in. So Hebrew over the 2,000 years following the dispersion of the Jews all over the world became essential a dead language as far as being spoken by people on an everyday basis.

In 1881 at the age of 23 Ben Yehuda was diagnosed with tuberculosis and he was told that he only had a very short time to live. So he decided that he was going to do was he was going to move to the land of his people, to his homeland. And if he was going to die young he was going to die there. Well folks that was about the worst decision you could make in 1881 because he moved to this land to the City of Jerusalem. And Jerusalem at that time was an incubator of disease. Just about every disease you could imagine was rampant in the city people were dying of tuberculosis and cholera, and yellow fever, plague, you name it, but that is where he came. And God supernaturally extended this man's life even with TB for many, many years thereafter. When he arrived here he became obsessed with the revival of the Hebrew language. He would work 12-18 hours a day trying to revive the Hebrew language from the dead so it would become a daily spoken language of the people. Let me try to give you an example of what we are talking about here. What if I were to tell you that God had spoken to me and said He was fed up with modern English and He wants us to go back to the pure English that existed in the time of Chaucer when he wrote the "*Canterbury Tales*." Now folks that's English only 600 years ago.

This man was going back 2,000 years and trying to revive a language. But here's what English sounded like when Chaucer wrote, "Whan that Aprile with his shoures soote. The droughte of March hath perced to the roote. And bathed every veyne en swich licour. Of which vertu engendred is the flour." If I told you that God had told me that we've got to go back and revive that language and bring it up to date, I suspect you would be calling the guys with the butterfly nets and having me put away as incurably insane. Well let me tell you there were many people who felt that way about Eliezer Ben Yehuda. He had people attacking him from both sides.

For example the men who later became the major political leaders of Israel in its early years were all Socialists and they were men who were mainly Agnostics some were Atheists. They didn't want to speak a Biblical language they wanted a modern language. On the other hand the ultra-orthodox were also opposed to Ben Yehuda because they believed that Hebrew was a biblical language that should never be spoken on the street. So he had both sides attacking him all the time. And yet this man was so obsessed and so determined that he succeeded.

Ben Yehuda was very systematic in the way that he went about reviving the Hebrew language as a spoken language. His first step- Hebrew at home. He began to tell all of his friends and associates we will never revive this language unless we commit to speak only Biblical Hebrew at home. And I'll tell you he was a radical about this. He gave strict instructions to his wife that they were to only speak Biblical Hebrew. In 1882 shortly after they arrived here their first child was born, a son, who was name Ben-Avi and he said this is going to be the first true Modern Hebrew speaking person. He said, "We are not going to allow anybody in his presence for 12 years unless they can speak Biblical Hebrew." Well folks nobody spoke biblical Hebrew except a small group of people. So the young boy had no playmates. If they had somebody over he would take him and put him in an isolated room because he was afraid the people might speak Russian or some other language and he didn't want the boy to hear anything but Biblical Hebrew. He was so obsessed that later when he had two daughters he would not let them marry until their suitors could pass an exam in Biblical Hebrew, neither one got married until they were in their 30's. So this was a man who was really determined in what he was doing and his first step was Hebrew in the home.

His second step was Hebrew in the schools. He thought the only way we can really revive this language is to get the young people to speak it. So he went to all the Jewish schools in Jerusalem and he tried to talk the headmasters into introducing Biblical Hebrew. Well one of the problems with that most of them were willing to do it but one of the problems was they didn't have any written materials for the kids. They didn't have teachers. So he began to develop a small group of followers and would teach them how to teach Hebrew, he did it himself. And so these teachers began to spread out in the schools of Jerusalem to teach the young people the Hebrew words.

You know I might just pause here and say that when he was reviving this language he had to invent many, many words folks. Over 2,000 years there were many concepts, many ideas, many inventions that there were no Hebrew words for. And being a purist he wouldn't take a word like television or radio and just transliterate it. It had to be a pure Hebrew word, with a pure Hebrew root. And he and his followers would often argue hours over a particular word as he would create word, after word, after word that he had to create.

So first was Hebrew in the home. Second was Hebrew in the schools. And the third step he took was to establish a newspaper in 1884 and this was his way of getting Hebrew to adults. He established a newspaper, he virtually became the editor of the newspaper. And it was a daily newspaper with news of Palestine as it was called in that time and news of the world. And he

was constantly having to create new words. He was constantly publishing new vocabularies of words, testing words on people. And this was the way that he began to get the adults to read Biblical Hebrew as it was being modernized. So we have Hebrew in the home. Hebrew in the schools. And Hebrew in the newspaper for the adults.

His fourth step was to compile a dictionary of the Hebrew language and this was really what he spent most of his life doing. He would travel to England, he would travel any place where someone found a lost Hebrew word, he was just obsessed with these. And he put together an incredible dictionary, 17 volumes entitled, "Ancient and Modern Hebrew." When he died he had not completed the dictionary he only had 17 of what I think came to 20 odd some volumes. But his wife, his second wife, his first wife died of TB his second wife was able to complete that incredible dictionary.

The fifth step in reviving the language was the creation of a language council. He did this in 1890, he put together a group of friends who had been studying with him and working with him and they became the official council to determine issues of grammar, issues of punctuation, new words, which words would actually be adopted and used. And you know I was doing some research on this and you just can't begin to imagine all the words that had to be created. You know we mainly think of scientific words of new inventions. But for example there were no words in Biblical Hebrew for doll, ice cream, jelly, omelet, handkerchief, towel, bicycle, and hundreds of more of just daily words of that nature. Or for example there were no words for newspaper, editor, telegram, subscriber, soldier, fashion, on and on it went. All of these words had to be created. And again being a purist he wanted to create them from Biblical Hebrew root words so it was a major effort.

Within a generation a biblical generation of 40 years from 1881 to 1921 he and his friends were able to revive the Hebrew language from the dead as a spoken language. They were so successful that in 1922 Biblical Hebrew was adopted as one of the official languages of Palestine. At that time the British were in charge of this land and they declared three languages to be the official languages of this land; Biblical Hebrew, English, and Arabic. One month later after that declaration in November of 1922 Ben Yehuda died at that age of 64.

Some language experts in Hebrew or language experts in general have argued in recent years that Hebrew never was really a dead language that people even at the time of Ben Yehuda they estimate that 50% of the men could read Biblical Hebrew, going to the synagogue and reading the Scriptures. And that probably 20% of them could have read a book written in Hebrew, but they didn't speak it, and they couldn't speak it because there weren't enough words to be used in speaking it. One expert on language put it this way, he said, "Before Ben Yehuda Jews could speak Hebrew. After him they did." And that's true, he is the one who revived it as a spoken language.

Here is something that was found in his diary before he died. In fact I think this was published in his newspaper, yes it was, it was published in his newspaper in 1908. Here's what he wrote about himself, "For everything there is needed only one wise, clever, and active man with the initiative to devote all of his energies to it and the matter will progress all obstacles in the way notwithstanding. In every new event, every step, even the smallest in the path of progress it is necessary that there be one pioneer who will lead the way without leaving any possibility of turning back." For the revival of the Hebrew language that pioneer was Eliezer Ben Yehuda.

Part 3

Dr. Reagan: The life story of Eliezer Ben Yehuda is truly a remarkable one. And that remarkable story is contained in this book, *Tongue of the Prophets*, by Robert St. John. You'll be told at the end of the program how you can get a copy of it.

When I was recently in Jerusalem, I found the grave of Ben Yehuda while I was exploring the thousands of Jewish graves on the Mount of Olives. It is the most ornate grave on the side of the mountain, surrounded by a high ironwork fence. What a blessing it was for me to put a stone of remembrance on his tomb.

Like all Orthodox Jews, Ben Yehuda desired to be buried on the Mount of Olives because Orthodox Jews believe that when the Messiah comes, He will come first to the Mount of Olives. They therefore believe that those who are buried on the Mount of Olives will be the first to be resurrected.

That belief, of course, is very biblical because Zechariah 14 says that when Jesus returns, He will return to the Mount of Olives, and that when His feet touch the mountain it will split in two. He will then speak a supernatural word that will destroy all the forces of the Antichrist and He will begin His reign over all the earth as the King of King and Lord of lords.

So, the Orthodox Jews are correct in their expectation that the Messiah will return to the Mount of Olives. What is going to surprise them is His identity, for He is going to have nail prints in His hands.

Part 4

Dr. Reagan: Welcome back to Christ in Prophecy and our consideration of the miraculous revival of the Hebrew language, in fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Now I've asked my colleague, Nathan Jones, to join me for a discussion of prophecy being fulfilled in Israel today. Nathan, welcome.

Nathan Jones: Thank you, good to be here.

Dr. Reagan: Always good to have you on the set. Well Nathan at the beginning of the program I mentioned a number of prophecies being fulfilled in Israel today and the one we focused on was the revival of the Hebrew language. How do you feel about that, do you believe that is really a sign of the End Times that we are living on borrowed times?

Nathan Jones: Well just like Israel becoming a nation again after almost 1,900 years, a language coming back from the dead and becoming a national language. I mean for instance Latin, sure people speak Latin but only in academic circles.

Dr. Reagan: That's right.

Nathan Jones: But Hebrew is an official language of a country that means something. You can go back to Zephaniah 3:9 where it says, "Then will I purify the lips of the peoples that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve Him shoulder to shoulder." So when the Messiah comes back He wants a people group ready to be able to speak to them in a pure

language, pure of heart, but also pure of speech in the language of Hebrew. Which I had to look up because depending on the translation it is either lips, or language. So I looked up the word lips and it “sopa” which means lips, language or speech so it covers both of them.

Dr. Reagan: Right, right. Well let me ask you another question at the beginning of the program I listed the seven prophecies that I think are being fulfilled in Israel today. And all of them beginning in the 20th Century and some of them in the early 20th Century. Is there another one of those that you would emphasize as a sure sign that we are living in the season of the Lord’s return?

Nathan Jones: Well my favorite one and this is from one of our trips over to Israel while we were touring we were heading up north from Tel Aviv up towards to Caesarea Maritima and all. And as we are driving down the road the sides of the highways were covered in flowers.

Dr. Reagan: Yes.

Nathan Jones: And as we got even around the Dead Sea they had gardens there were they were growing trees, and things. And I was amazed at the agricultural bounty of Israel. And I had read that Mark Twain had gone back there in the 1800’s and he said it was a barren wasteland. They actually had the trees counted. But when I went through there I was just amazed at how they have turned that place back into a garden paradise again.

Dr. Reagan: Well I’m not the least bit surprised that you would focus on that one because what our viewers don’t know is that you are a guy who loves plants, who loves to plant everything. In fact when you first moved to Texas you planted everything you shouldn’t have planted and it all died.

Nathan Jones: Yes.

Dr. Reagan: In fact you even got things from Israel and you had to learn that certain plants are set for certain soils.

Nathan Jones: That and customs won’t let them through. But I love Ezekiel 36:34-35, “The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say, ‘This land that was laid waste has become like the Garden of Eden. The cities that were lying in ruins desolate and destroyed are now fortified and inhabited.’” And all the cities are back, the gardens are back, the growth is back, the production is back. Supposedly all that plant life has increased the rain fall in Israel. That’s a miracle.

Dr. Reagan: It really is. And when I take groups over there I try to get them to do a lot of reading before we go so they can appreciate that because if you just go and you don’t know anything about the background of Israel you don’t realize how it has literally been converted from a wasteland to what looks like the Garden of Eden today because it is so agriculturally productive. You know when you drive through the Valley of Sharon you look out the bus and on one side there are cotton fields, and strawberry fields. And you look on the other side and there are peanut fields, and there are all kinds of tropical fruit like bananas, I mean they grow everything over there, it is amazing what has happened. The Bible promised that when the Jews came back God would bless the land once again and that is exactly what has happened. You know when I look at that list of seven one that really impresses me is the regathering of the Jewish people from the four corners of the earth.

Nathan Jones: Yes, defiantly.

Dr. Reagan: I mean they were literally scattered all over creation by the beginning of the 20th century there were Jews on every continent, every land and yet God began to regather them. It is the most prolific prophecy in the Old Testament. I often wonder how anyone can look at what God did in the 20th century regathering those people and not realize that this is a God thing, this is a miracle of God. Yet so many Christians are just blind about that because they have been taught that God has no purpose left for the Jews.

Nathan Jones: I know they have been taught all their lives that the Jews regathered when they came back to Babylon. But when you read Isaiah 11:11-12 it clearly says, "In that day the Lord will reach out His hand a second time." And it even lists all the nations, it's not just Babylon, it goes on to say, "The islands of the sea." That's the entire planet. So that the Jews are being regathered from the entire planet is a phenomena I mean unheard of in human history.

Dr. Reagan: In fact in the very next verse it says, "He is going to re-gather both Judah and Israel." That's all the Jewish people. And yet when I was a kid and I discovered that my pastor said, "Oh, no, no that has all been fulfilled in the return from Babylon." Well that doesn't have anything to do with the return from Babylon yet we have lived to see it happen. You know one of the things that I enjoy most about taking people on a pilgrimage to Israel is to take them to Independence Hall. Tell us how you felt the first time you went there.

Nathan Jones: Well it's kind of similar to Independence Hall in Philadelphia, I used to live in Philadelphia and you felt the weight of history come upon you. And you go into that and it's not a very assuming building or anything but you know that a nation was launched there. A nation that biblically, prophetically said it was going to launch. If you go back to Isaiah 66:7-8, "Before she goes into labor she gives birth. And before the pains come upon her she delivers a son. Who has heard such a thing? And who has ever seen such things? Can a country be born in a day, or a nation be brought forth in a minute?" And yet on May 14th, 1948 it happened. And to go there and to see that makes you kind of feel a little part of history too.

Dr. Reagan: Well it really does. And I of course too have the same feeling about the comparison you made between that and Constitution Hall in Philadelphia except for one thing and that is the Hall there in Tel Aviv means so much more to me because it is a fulfillment of Bible prophecy and we got to see it with our own eyes. And you go there the thing that gets me it is such a small place, maybe at most you could crowd 200 people in there but they would be shoulder to shoulder. And there was only photographer there, there was no CNN no Fox News nothing like that. It was just an event that most the world was not even aware of when it took place. And yet what a momentous fulfillment of Bible prophecy it was and how Harry Truman intervened to recognize Israel 14 seconds later and that actually saved the state.

Nathan Jones: It is amazing that America could be part of Bible prophecy being fulfilled.

Dr. Reagan: Absolutely. Well we got a list of seven there and we mentioned several of them. Is there any other one that you would want to mention that has been particularly important to you? You see that whole list of seven?

Nathan Jones: Yeah, just turn on the news. I've never seen a country the size of New Jersey basically constantly in the news, constantly. The elections that go on everyone is concentrating

on what are we going to do with Israel? The Middle East is all embroiled over Israel and that goes back to Zechariah 12:1-3, "That all the nations of the earth would be besieged against her." Now of course we know that will find final fulfillment when the Antichrist army surrounds Jerusalem at the end of the Tribulation. But the entire world is focused on who is controlling Jerusalem, and what land Israel gets, that means something, that's important.

Dr. Reagan: It really is and particularly and it is amazing when you consider the fact that Israel is so tiny, it is only 75 miles wide, it is only 300 miles long. As you said it is about the size of the state of New Jersey, yet it is the focus of all of world politics. There is more international correspondents in the City of Jerusalem than any other city on planet earth. And that's because it's the center of the cosmic battle between God and Satan. And it is where Jesus Christ is going to return, defeat Satan totally and begin to reign as King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

Well, folks, that's our program for this week. I hope it has been a blessing to you. Until next week, the Lord willing, this is Dave Reagan speaking for Nathan and myself saying, "Look up folks, be watchful, for our Redemption is drawing near."

End of Program