

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

ISRAEL IN THE PURPOSE OF GOD

"For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain" (Acts 28:20).

The great purpose of God with the earth is to fill it with the knowledge of His glory (Num. 14:21; Ps. 72:19; Isa. 6:3; Hab. 2:14). He will be "all in all" at the end of the Kingdom, when, under the good reign of His Son, all human rulers and authorities will be put down, and death itself will be no more (1 Cor. 15:24-28). The earth will then be populated by men and women who reflect the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26).

The promises of God

In His wisdom, God has chosen a nation, Israel, to be the means or channel by which this great purpose will be achieved. It was to the fathers of Israel that God gave covenants of promise (Gal. 3:16; Eph. 2:12). God appeared to Abraham at least seven times, and gave him promises concerning the land of Canaan, eternal life, nations that would descend from him, and a seed who would bring blessings to all nations (Gen. 12:1-3,7; 13:14-17; 15:18-21; 17:3-8,19; 22:15-18). Similar promises were made to Isaac, his son, and Jacob, his grandson (26:2-5,24; 28:13-15; 35:9-12; 46:3,4).

From Jacob the twelve tribes of Israel descended and became a large nation in Egypt, from whence they were led out by Moses to the Land of Promise (Canaan). God told them that they were a special nation for Him, and that they should behave as holy people. Through Moses, God gave them His laws and the Ten Commandments, which Israel agreed to keep (Ex. 19:5,6; 20; 24:4-8; Deut. 7:6-11; 9:3-6). But Israel failed to keep God's laws, and added to their sins by rejecting God, Who was their unseen King, and asking for a king they could see. Eventually God gave them David, "the sweet psalmist of Israel" and the conqueror of Goliath, "a man after [God's] own heart", and he was anointed with oil as their king (1 Sam. 8:7,8; 13:14; 16:11-13; 2 Sam. 23:1).

David, the king of Israel, was given further covenants of promise. His kingdom (Israel, the kingdom of God) and throne (Jerusalem) would be established for ever, and, like the promises to Abraham, there would be a seed (descendant) who would fulfil these things. David himself would see it all (2 Sam. 7:12-17; 1 Chron. 17:11-15; 28:5; 29:11,23; Ps. 89:20-37).

The coming of the seed

A succession of kings followed David, some faithful and others not. God remonstrated with His people by sending many prophets to Israel, such as Jonah, Isaiah and Jeremiah. Eventually the nation became so corrupt that God sent foreign invaders, the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Greeks, as punishment (2 Chron. 36:15-17; Ezek. 21:25-27; Dan. 11). At the time when the Romans had succeeded the Greeks as the dominant power in the region, Jesus Christ was born a Jew.

Although the common Jewish people heard Jesus gladly, their rulers did not, and they had Jesus crucified. But he rose from the dead after three days, and was given everlasting life. He instructed the apostles in his teaching for forty days, and went to heaven with the promise that he would return to the earth. Shortly after his ascension to heaven, the Romans besieged Jerusalem, and Israel as a nation ceased to exist. It has been predominantly Gentiles over the last 2,000 years who have accepted the teachings of Christ and his apostles (Lk. 21:20-24; Acts 1:11; 2:22-24; 13:46).

Although for nearly 2,000 years the nation of Israel did not exist, the purpose of God through His people is unchanged. Jesus, through his mother Mary, is Jewish and descended

from Abraham and David. He is the seed promised to these two men who will sit on David's throne in Jerusalem and rule for ever over the Kingdom of God (Israel restored and enlarged) and bring blessing to all families of the earth (Mt. 1:1; Lk. 1:31-35; Acts 1:3-7; 2:30,31; 3:19-21). When Jesus came 2,000 years ago, the Jews did not realise that, before the promises to Abraham could be fulfilled in their entirety, he would offer himself as a sacrifice for sins. Abraham was shown in Genesis 15 that the promises were conditional upon sacrifice, and enacted that sacrifice with his son Isaac (ch. 22). Several prophecies of the Messiah foretold his sufferings for sins and his resurrection (2 Sam. 7:14,15; Ps. 16:9-11; 22; Isa. 53).

Israel restored

Today, after 2,000 years of being scattered and persecuted, there is once again a nation of Israel for the Jewish people. This has all happened just as God foretold in the prophets (Deut. 28:15-68; Isa. 11:1,10-16; Jer. 30:3,10,11; 31:10-14; Ezek. 37:21-28). But modern Israel still turns its back on God, and their religion, Judaism, fiercely rejects Jesus Christ as being the Messiah.

The prophets, again, show us how modern Israel is to change. They will accept and love Jesus as their King and Redeemer so that they become a righteous, faithful and God-fearing nation. They will be God's people and He will be their God. There is to be a great invasion of Israel by northern and western nations in the not too distant future, which will overwhelm and crush Israel. But God will bring a huge earthquake, hail and brimstone, disease and mutual destruction upon the invaders. Jesus will be revealed as their Saviour, and, after intense national mourning, a remnant of the nation will welcome Jesus, as he foretold long ago, and the twelve apostles will rule over their twelve tribes (Ps. 118:22-26; Isa. 59:19-21; Ezek. 37:23-28; 38; 39; Joel 3; Micah 5:4,5; Zech. 12:9-14; 13:6-9; 14:1-11; Mt. 19:27,28; 23:37-39; Rom. 11:25-29; Rev 1:7; 16:15-18).

A worldwide Kingdom

Israel has been and still is at the centre of God's purpose. Israel's immortal King (Jesus Christ) and co-rulers (those faithful to God since the Creation up to the return of Jesus) will rule from Jerusalem, as David was promised, over God's Kingdom (the nation of Israel). The cleansed and righteous nation will be a tool of judgement against nations who rebel against Christ's authority, and an example of obedience for the Gentile nations. The Kingdom of God under the guidance of the Lord Jesus Christ will extend over all the earth and bring blessing to all peoples (Ps. 72; Isa. 2:2-4; 32:1,15-19; 44:21-23; 49:13-23; 60; 62:1-7; 65:17-25; Jer. 31:31-37; 51:19-23; Zeph. 3:8-20; Zech. 14:14-21; Mt. 5:35; Jno. 4:22; Acts 24:14,15; 26:6-8; 28:20,23).

Centre of the gospel

The gospel taught by Jesus and the apostles is centred in the promises and prophecies given earlier in the Scriptures. A true Christian understands the Israelitish nature of his hope and rejoices in the partial return of the Jews to Israel as an indication that the return of Jesus is not far off, and the resurrection and the setting up of the Kingdom also. Such believers who are baptized into the saving name of Jesus Christ are "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise", and will in God's mercy see the glorious things that are to be fulfilled in Israel (Dan. 12:1-3; Lk. 21:24-28; Rom. 11:1,11-36; Gal. 3:8,9,16,26-29; Eph. 2:11-13).

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