



God's purpose with Israel

8. Israel's special place

Stephen Green

IN THIS SERIES of articles we have looked at arguments which are commonly used against the relevance of Bible prophecy to the future of Israel, and have sought answers. We have mostly looked at things from a negative angle, answering arguments for the rejection of Israel. There is now the opportunity to finish the series with a positive approach, and see the special place which God has for Israel, and how the Scriptures display Israel's "last end". God turned the words of Balaam from a curse into a blessing, and the end of Israel is truly one which other nations can covet: "let my last end be like his!" (Num. 23:10).

Israel chosen of God

Israel's special place began with God's choice of Abraham and his descendants. The reason for this choice was the degeneration of the nations which grew up after the Flood. Noah's was the tenth generation from Adam, while Abraham's was the tenth from Shem, the son of Noah. There was therefore a similar opportunity for the people of the earth to become widely corrupt. To discourage the disappearance of true religion, and to restrict men from doing just as they wished, God confused the language, and divided and scattered the people of the earth (Gen. 11:7,8). This measure, though it probably delayed corruption, did not prevent it.

In the generation of Abraham, God took a further step. He separated Abraham by making him promises and by giving him commands (12:1-3,7; 13:14-17), which Abraham subsequently obeyed. The selection process continued with Abraham's descendants, when the line of faith and obedience passed through Isaac and then Jacob, but not their older brothers.

God made this choice of a smaller group through which to work so that His Name and His ways should not be hidden and lost in the

earth, but remain a light by which other people could be attracted. The aim was expressed in the promise to Abraham, "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (12:3). The smallness and feebleness of Abraham's family helped to emphasise that what was achieved was by God Himself, not by man.

For this reason, since the time of Jacob, his descendants have been God's chosen people, and have been the centre of God's approach to the human race and the centre of human response to Him. However, this choice only became 'official' when the tested and renewed nation were about to enter the land, "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6).¹ The special choice of Israel may have been objectionable to the pride of other races or nations, for it looks as if the nation of Israel is being honoured as superior to others. However, this special place has been accompanied by uncomfortable demands upon Israel to reach a higher level of faith than so far they have been able to achieve as a nation, and this has led to much affliction for them.

For the sake of God's Name

The Name of God is deeply involved in the choice, refining and affliction of Israel:

"For My name's sake will I defer Mine anger, and for My praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off. Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. For Mine own sake, even

1. God's choice of the people of Israel has been confirmed many other times; see, for example, Deuteronomy 14:2; 26:18; 1 Kings 3:8; 1 Chronicles 16:13; Psalm 33:12; Isaiah 41:8,9; 43:10; 44:1,2.

for Mine own sake, will I do it: for how should My name be polluted? and I will not give My glory unto another” (Isa. 48:9-11).

God’s choice of Israel when they were in Egypt is joined to His work for His Name’s sake in bringing them out of that land:

“. . . I chose Israel, and lifted up Mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made Myself known unto them in the land of Egypt . . . I wrought for My name’s sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they were, in whose sight I made Myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt” (Ezek. 20:5-9; cf. v. 14).

A similar work must be done again when Israel will be brought “into the wilderness of the people” (v. 35), and be taught to serve the Lord God (vv. 37, 40, 44).

The faithfulness of God to His people “for His great name’s sake” was recognised by Samuel (1 Sam. 12:22; cf. Ps. 79:9), whilst Ezekiel sees the ultimate glorification of God’s Name through His chosen people:

“I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for Mine holy name’s sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. And I will sanctify My great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you” (36:22-25).

The sanctification of God’s Name is a highly significant and important event, and it must be openly seen and recognised within His creation. The only meaningful way by which this aim can be achieved is if the nation of Israel will continue to have a part to play as God’s chosen, but mortal, people, and at the same time are cleansed of their sins.

So the choice of Israel was not a temporary phase leading to a better thing (as the Mosaic Law was), but the kernel of God’s love and purpose for man, which worked out, and continues to work out, in the seed of Abraham. In the Old Testament we see it in Israel being repeatedly but imperfectly cleansed of their wickedness, and

in the New Testament in the choice of the perfect and holy One of the tribe of Judah, Jesus, who was subsequently raised from the dead, and who waits to become King of Israel. A renewed and cleansed people of Israel will form the Kingdom’s mortal core, with Christ reigning in glory. Other nations also will be joined to the Lord through Israel.

God has not failed in His work with Israel. Humanly speaking, His purpose may be thought of as having been delayed. But God always makes good use of His opportunities to produce the effect He desires. For God to maintain the honour of His Name has meant that Israel had to be preserved through the ages in spite of their sins.

Israel’s preservation

In parts 5 and 6² we considered the casting away of Israel and the false claim that she has been replaced by a Gentile church. Here we look at the same topic from the positive view of Israel’s preservation through the ages. In Isaiah 49:6 we find an assertion that God intends to preserve Israel: “And He said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the *preserved* of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth”.³

The restoration of Israel and the enlightenment of the Gentiles are joined as one project, so the ultimate meaning of this passage can only be that “My servant” is Christ, who will be God’s salvation to raise up and restore the tribes of Israel and to provide light for the Gentiles. “Unto the end of the earth” implies a very wide fulfilment. But Christ has not yet raised up the tribes of Jacob nor restored the preserved remnant of Israel.⁴ There is nothing conditional about this prophecy. It remains to be fulfilled in God’s Kingdom, when Christ is the salvation of Israel and the Gentiles. No application to another “servant”, such as Hezekiah or Cyrus or Zerubbabel, can be the proper fulfilment of these words.

2. See [Jan. 2002, p. 5](#); [Mar. 2002, p. 73](#).

3. The normal translation of this word ‘preserved’ is ‘keep’ or ‘preserve’, and the AV text seems perfectly satisfactory in spite of its marginal alternative, ‘desolations’.

4. Compare verse 5, “Though Israel be not gathered”. This is the situation which exists now and will exist at the time of Christ’s return.

The historical fact of Jewish preservation can be seen today, as discussed in [Part 7](#).⁵ Preservation of the ten tribes is much less obvious, but remnants, no doubt, exist ethnically and will be revealed in time.⁶

God says that no other nation will be preserved, yet Israel will be: "For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished" (Jer. 30:11; cf. vv. 16,24; Lev. 26:44; Deut. 4:27). Other peoples and cultures which flourished at the time when Israel was a nation have disappeared. Combined with the fact of their scattering into all nations, the fact of Israel's preservation is remarkable, and is evidence of deliberate care by God.

The preservation of Israel through 3,500 years, in spite of all their enemies and against all odds, is evidence of God having a reason to preserve Israel. What reason or purpose can that be other than that the nation is still God's chosen people, for whom He still has a future work? This preservation, together with their return to the land in modern times, is factual evidence for the relevance today of the prophecies about the land, the city of Jerusalem and the people today, and for the interpretation presented in this series.

Still God's chosen

The original choice of Israel as God's special treasure was not for their own sake, but for the sake of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and for the sake of the promises made to those fathers (Deut. 7:6-8; 9:5). It follows that the continuation of her chosen status as a people or nation was not terminated as a result of her sins. Even though Israel rejected God's Son, He only rejected the faithless sons of Israel as individuals, not the Israel of all generations (Ezek. 18:20).

We saw in the previous article that Israel are now in the land, in spite of unbelief, because of the promises. For the same reason God considers them His chosen: "As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes" (Rom. 11:28). So, though individual branches are broken off the cultivated olive tree, the tree continues to grow, always sprouting new shoots.

Thus Israel as a people are still God's chosen. As a consequence of this status:

1 They are to be finally and completely gathered out of the nations (Deut. 30:3-6; Ezek.

20:34; 37:12,21; Mic. 4:6);

2 They are to be purged and given a new spirit (Ezek. 20:35-38; 36:25-27; 37:23; Joel 3:21; Zeph. 3:11-13);

3 They are to be restored as God's Kingdom in their land to all generations (Isa. 60:21; Jer. 31:27,28; Ezek. 20:40,41; 36:28; Joel 3:16,17,20; Mic. 4:7,8; Zeph. 3:14-20).

In Israel's restored state they will be situated at the centre of Christ's dominion in the Kingdom of God. Their city Jerusalem will be his throne and also the world centre for the worship of God, the location of God's house to which all nations will assemble (Isa. 2:1-5; Jer. 3:17).

The dry bones prophecy of Ezekiel 37 has not been mentioned in this series. It speaks of the whole house of Israel (v. 11). Its proper fulfilment, therefore, awaits the completed gathering of all Israel to their land, when they stand as a great army and a new spirit is in them (vv. 10,14; cf. Jer. 31:33,34; Ezek. 36:26,27). At present Israel have no king, but, in the fulfilment of the remainder of Ezekiel 37, which refers to the one king/shepherd, the whole house of Israel will be united under Christ reigning in the land of the fathers of Israel (vv. 19-28; Hos. 3:5).⁷

None of the above prophecies were fulfilled in the return from Babylon, nor by the work of Christ at his first coming, nor by his apostles. They are not conditional on events which are now impossible. There is no reason why they should be reinterpreted in a metaphorical sense to the exclusion of the literal nation of Israel; in fact, to do so is highly destructive of God's words.

The importance of Israel's hope

"The hope of Israel" is synonymous with the purpose God has defined for Israel, and, as we have seen during this series, its starting point was in the promises to Abraham. Since the hope of Israel is the teaching of the Kingdom of God (Acts 28:20,23), it is also the gospel of the Kingdom. Since it began with the promises to Abraham (26:6,7), it is also the gospel "preached before . . . unto Abraham" (Gal. 3:8).

5. See [June 2002, p. 220](#).

6. The ten tribes are to be preserved in exile for a long time (Hos. 3:3-5; 6:1-3; Ezek. 6:8-10), and Ephraim are to be brought back (Jer. 31:6-12).

7. The name David (Ezek. 37:24; Hos. 3:5) means 'beloved', and refers to Christ, for the reign of David the king joined Judah and ten tribes and was typical of the coming Messiah.

There is, we are told, only “one hope of [our] calling” (Eph. 4:4). All other ‘hopes’ mentioned are centred in this one hope, which is “the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:13), the seed of Abraham. This central hope is, therefore, the hope of Israel. From Christ’s future revelation follow many graces, including the hope of the resurrection and the “hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 1:18). The hope of Israel is therefore essential for belief, as the Kingdom on earth is essential truth; and someone who does not accept God’s future purpose with Israel is not a believer. A full understanding of the gospel will recognise its Israelitish nature and the part Israel will play in its future implementation.

Israel’s message for the world today

Some people have a problem with modern Jewry being called ‘God’s witnesses’ (Isa. 43:8-12), and they prefer to see them as a sign. This is because the Jews are in unbelief and therefore individually rejected by God, and they find it difficult to see how they can witness to God in that condition. However, the word ‘sign’ is used of some extraordinary and highly visible event which demonstrates that God is operating. Jonah being cast out of the whale’s belly was such, as was the Son of man rising from the grave (Mt. 12:39,40). As we saw in the [previous article](#), the modern State of Israel is such a sign. On the other hand, the majority of Jews are still in dispersion and so are not presently involved in that sign. Do these others not witness to God?

Jewry in the past have witnessed to God through their practice of His holy Law, and on occasions through their faith. But even when they sinned they continued to witness, although unwillingly, through the visible operation of God’s punishments upon them; and it was without any obviously miraculous or extraordinary sign. This situation remains true for the Diaspora today, and so the title of ‘witnesses’ is still appropriate. It is notable that the New Testament apostles, and those who accompanied them in their preaching, were called witnesses of *Jesus* (Acts 1:8; 5:32, etc.). They never took away the place of Israel as *God’s* witnesses.

The fruit of Israel’s affliction

God has “chosen [Israel] in the furnace of affliction” (Isa. 48:10), but He is also working through Israel on behalf of all nations. As Christ was God’s suffering servant by whom all who come to God have redemption, so in her suffering Is-

rael illustrates the principles by which He works, and enables other nations to watch, learn and respond to God, both nationally and individually.

When Israel proved responsive to God in earlier times, they provided the means by which Gentiles were able to come to Him. The supreme example has been the birth of God’s Son, as a Jew, to provide the means of personal salvation, not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles (Jno. 4:22; Rom. 4:9-12; 9:24). There is need to aid Israel in her afflictions, that we might also be associated with her in her glory (Isa. 60:9-14; 66:20; Zech. 8:23). Many are familiar with the idea of being associated with Christ’s afflictions (Col. 1:24; 1 Pet. 4:13,14), but less so with that of the nation of Israel’s.

Israel’s ‘death’ over the past two thousand years, and their resurrection at the start of the coming Millennium, is following the pattern of the ‘death’ and ‘resurrection’ of Jonah. When Israel as a nation once more “live in [God’s] sight” (Hos. 6:1,2; Ezek. 37:14), then through their experiences they will have become more willing and better able to provide help for other nations to approach and worship God.

Without waiting for God’s future arrangement, there is at this present time a Divine opportunity for Gentiles to become associated with Israel. Ephesians 2:12-19 explains how Gentiles in the present age can join themselves to Israel, so that they are “no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens” and able to share in the covenants of promise originally made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Having made that link through Christ, our response should be one of thankfulness and humility if we wish to maintain our connection with Israel (Rom. 11:17-21). We should mirror the feelings God has for her, His sorrow and pity (Ps. 106:43-47; Isa. 63:9; Joel 2:18; cf. Jas. 5:11); as also the tender care of His Son when he comes again (Mt. 23:37-39).

Do we pray for Israel?

God said to Abraham: “and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). This blessing is later applied to the nation (27:29; Num. 24:9). By praying for Israel’s future we mark ourselves as those who bless her.

Psalm 122 calls for a prayer for Jerusalem: “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall pros-

per that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces" (vv. 6,7). Isaiah 62 calls for prayer without rest: "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, and give Him no rest, till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (vv. 6,7). Are we 'watchmen upon the walls of Jerusalem' keeping our stations and giving God no rest? These are not prayers for the maintenance of modern political structures in Jerusalem or the easing of relations between the many human parties which compose the modern city. They are prayers for a drastic change and the imposition of God's peace by the hand of the "Prince of Peace".

We are "sons of the stranger", but joined to Israel through the New Covenant (Isa. 56:6,7; Eph. 2:13,14). Our interest is in the people as well as in the city. We feel as did Paul: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Rom. 10:1). If today Israel is the prodigal son soon to return to his Father, then the present Gentile ecclesia must be the brother left at home, and we must

be careful not to be caught by a response which does not mirror the mercy of our Father.

In being allowed to hold "the hope of Israel", and the wonderful blessings we inherit through that hope, our attitude with respect to Israel can only be one of great thankfulness for the part in her future we have been permitted through Christ. We can only desire to bless them, and to promote God's message to the world about her future glory and the blessings all nations will share.

The aim of this series has been to take up the challenge of those who see Christianity taken over by Gentile nations, and Israel forgotten by God and of no significance for us today or in the days to come. It is a view which remains centred in the ideals and aims of "this present world". The Bible, in contrast, presents a refreshing view of the future, with an immense improvement in the fortunes of Israel and the joining of Gentiles on a much greater scale than in recent generations, as fellow-citizens in the Kingdom of God.

Israel's special place in God's purpose has continued throughout His work with her. Let us consider the truth that without Israel there can be no future Kingdom on earth.

(Concluded)



Encounter

Reprinted items from earlier issues, chosen by the Publishing Editor

The Law given through Moses*

12. The general nature of the Law

Islip Collyer

IT MAY BE appropriate at this stage to raise some questions which are ever to the front in these sceptical days, and which may be in the minds of readers while perusing our earlier articles. What is our attitude to the Law given through Moses? Do we regard it as coming from God or only as the work of man? Is it among the assets for Christian evidence or is it a liability which may cause difficulty?

The matter can be reduced to a single question: Is it a good law or a bad one? If it has to be admitted that it was a good law, effective and

salutary even in its very exceptional and extraordinary features, then the honest unbeliever is presented with a very difficult problem to account for its origin at such a time in human history. If it was a bad law, harsh and unjust as

* First published in December 1947. It may be noted that Brother Collyer appears to be addressing himself to unbelievers at times, but it should be remembered that in those days *The Testimony* was intended for non-Christadelphians to read, and many copies were put in public libraries.—T.B.