

## THE PLACE OF ISRAEL

- A. Introduction: We're talking about the soon return of Jesus to earth. We're discussing it, not as a freaky event described in a strange book called Revelation, but in terms of the big picture or God's overall plan.
1. God's plan was and is to have a family of sons and daughters with whom He can interact in a perfect world. That plan seemed thwarted when men and women rebelled against their Creator. Eph 1:4,5
    - a. But God immediately began to unveil His plan of redemption or His plan to deliver human beings and the earth from bondage to sin, Satan, corruption and death through Jesus. Gen 3:15
      1. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay the price for sin so that sinners can become holy, righteous sons and daughters of God. He will come again to cleanse the earth of all corruption and death and establish His visible eternal kingdom on earth. Isa 53; Rev 11:18
      2. The Second Coming is about the return of the rightful King of earth to complete His plan of redemption. His soon return should therefore be a source of hope and excitement for His people.
    - b. The Bible says the years leading up to Jesus' return will be increasingly challenging. Last week we looked at God's promise of protection and provision for His people in the midst of the chaos.
  2. One point we've stressed in this series is that there's a lot of misinformation in the Church today. Much of the inaccurate information comes from misunderstanding some things concerning Israel. In this lesson we want to look at Israel's place in God's redemptive plan.
- B. In 1921 B.C. God sovereignly chose a man named Abraham and his descendants as the people group through whom the Redeemer, Jesus, would come into this world. Gen 12:1-3
1. Abraham's descendants grew into the nation of Israel. They were entrusted with compiling, recording and preserving God's written record, the scriptures. Rom 3:1,2; Rom 9:4,5
    - a. The Old Testament is primarily a record of Israel's history, not because God likes them best, but because the Bible is redemptive history. It gives information about people and events directly related to the unfolding of the plan of redemption. It doesn't mention the U. S., Mexico or China (not because they don't matter) but because they weren't directly involved in the redemptive story.
    - b. God used Israel to reveal many aspects of His redemptive program. The Old Testament records accounts of real people who really lived. But much of what happened to Israel pictures or foreshadows aspects of redemption and what Jesus would do.
  2. When Abraham's descendants had grown into a tribal group of 75 family members they went to live for a time in Egypt during a severe famine. They were eventually enslaved and remained in Egypt for 400 years where they grew into a group of 600,000 men plus women and children.
    - a. God eventually delivered them from servitude under the leadership of Moses. What happened to them is called redemption (Ex 6:6). It really happened, but their experience also reveals aspects of God's plan by picturing what the coming Redeemer will do.
      1. An unblemished lamb's blood placed on their doorposts the night before they left shielded them from judgment. The blood of the Perfect Lamb protects us from judgment for sin.
      2. God brought Israel out of Egypt to bring them into Canaan, a land of full provision. Through His sacrifice, Jesus brings men out of sin and death into God's eternal kingdom.
    - b. God told Moses to tell Pharaoh: Let my son go (Ex 4:22,23). They were not individually, literally born of God (no one was until after the Cross). But this pictures the goal of redemption: to bring men and women out of bondage and transform them into sons through a new birth.
      1. Once Israel left Egypt God made a covenant with them, stating that if they obeyed and worshiped Him, they would be His peculiar (purchased), holy (set apart) people. Ex 19:4,5
      2. God purchased men and women for His family through the Redeemer's blood shed at the Cross. His death paid the price for sin, opening the way for men and women to become holy sons and daughters through faith in the Redeemer and His sacrifice. I Pet 1:18-21
      3. These are real people and real events, but they picture what being purchased by and set apart

to God looks like, what it looks like to have the care of a loving Father. Deut 1:30,31

c. God gave them Laws stating how they were to conduct themselves once in the land. It was real instruction designed to help them set up a functioning society but it also pictured redemption.

1. God instructed them to offer blood sacrifices to cover their sins so relationship with Him was possible, picturing the price the Redeemer would pay to redeem men.

2. God instructed them to build a Tabernacle where His Presence would meet with them picturing the ultimate goal of redemption: God indwelling His sons and daughters.

3. God interaction with Israel pictured what He aimed to accomplish through His plan of redemption.

a. Lev 26:1-13 lists the blessings of relationship with God for Israel: Full provision and peace in the land; No enemy can conquer them; God dwells among them; They are His people; He is their God.

b. As part of His Law God called Israel to celebrate seven major feasts every year (Lev 23). God referred to them as holy convocations (v4). A convocation is a meeting to which one is called.

1. The feasts show that God wants interaction with His people. But they are also prophetic.

They foreshadowed God's plan of redemption, both the person and the work of the Redeemer.

A. Four feasts were held in the spring and pictured Jesus' first coming: Passover (His death for sin); Unleavened Bread (His sinlessness); First fruits (His resurrection); Weeks (the coming of the Holy Spirit on believers).

B. The other three feasts took place in the fall and pictured Jesus' second coming:

Trumpets (the regathering of Israel); Day of Atonement (the national cleansing of Israel);

Tabernacles (the rest and blessing of the Redeemer's kingdom on earth).

2. There is a four month separation between the spring and fall feasts. Hidden in these prophetic pictures is not only the first and second coming but also the gap in between.

c. These various types and shadows given through God's interaction with Israel glorify God and His marvelous plan of redemption. Only He can tell the future before it happens. Isa 46:10

1. When Jesus came to earth the first time He could look back at the Old Testament and point out all the prophecies and types that spoke of and pictured Him. Matt 11:1-6; Luke 24:27,44

2. This written record of the future before it happens makes it clear that Jesus' coming is not random circumstance but rather the culmination of a loving plan carried out by Almighty God.

4. This written record of God's unfolding plan of redemption also shows that God keeps His Word, no matter what obstacles may arise. Israel's history is proof of God's faithfulness.

a. Gen 12:1-3--When God called Abraham as the one through whose descendants the Redeemer would come, the Lord told him: I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. Curse means to bind with a spell, to hem in with obstacles, or render powerless to resist.

b. When God spoke to Abraham he was an old man with no heirs who was being directed into a foreign land with many formidable enemies. But God promised him: Nothing (no one) can stop you from growing into a great nation through which the Redeemer will come. I'll see to it.

c. When we read Israel's story we see that everything that came against them to thwart God's promise to Abraham was overcome by the power of God. God kept His Word to Abraham.

1. While they were enslaved in Egypt, Pharaoh ordered all Hebrew baby boys killed at birth (Ex 1:15-20). But God preserved them. When Pharaoh refused to let Israel leave Egypt to return to the land where the Redeemer was to be born, God delivered them (Ex 5-14).

2. Once Israel was out of Egypt God told them: My Angel (Preincarnate Jesus) will go before you and bring you into the land. No enemy will be able to stand against you (Ex 23:20-23).

3. When Israel was on their way back to Canaan they encountered the King of Moab who hired Balaam the prophet stop them through a curse. But he couldn't do it. Num 22:6; Num 24

4. When Israel was taken as captives to Babylon for seventy years for persistent idol worship God preserved them, bringing them back to Canaan with the tribe and family through which

the Redeemer was prophesied to come (Judah and David's) still intact. Gen 10:49; II Sam 7

5. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem King Herod tried to kill Him. But God preserved Him

(Matt 2). When Satan inspired a mob to turn Jesus over to be crucified God beat him at his own game by making Jesus a sacrifice for sin and raising Him from the dead (I Cor 2:8).

5. Although individual Jews came to faith in Jesus (Peter, John, James, Paul), Israel as a nation rejected Him as the Redeemer. The first persecutions of Christians came, not from Rome, but from the Jewish leadership. Acts 4:1-21; Acts 5:17,18,33; Acts 7:1,54,57-59
  - a. Paul, a Jew, was called to be an apostle to the gentiles or non-Jews (Acts 9:15; Rom 11:13). He was greatly persecuted by the Jews, both non-believers who wanted to wipe out this new group and Jews who accepted Jesus but insisted that Gentiles must keep the Law of Moses to be saved.
  - b. In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote a lengthy passage about the Israel (chap 9-11). Paul loved his people (Rom 9:2,3). But he called them enemies of the gospel. Rom 11:28--Regarded from the standpoint of the Good News the Jews are God's enemies. Yet from the standpoint of God's choice, they are dear to Him on account of their ancestors. (20<sup>th</sup> Cent)
    1. There is a dichotomy. Even though Israel as a group rejected their Messiah and actively opposed His followers, God has not abandoned them for the sake of their ancestors.
    2. The prophets make it clear that Israel as a nation has a future when Jesus returns to earth. What all this will entail is not fully stated in scripture. It will be clear when it happens.
  - c. Thirty years after Jesus returned to Heaven, Israel revolted against Rome. In 66 A.D. Rome sent over thirty thousand soldiers (three legions) to Jerusalem in to end the rebellion. They surrounded the city for four years before they burned it and the Temple to the ground on Aug 10, 70 A.D.
    1. The Jewish historian Josephus detailed the slaughter that ensued. When Rome took the city 1,100,000 Jews were killed. Those who survived were removed from the land and scattered throughout the Roman Empire and Israel ceased to exist as a nation for two thousand years.
    2. Not a single Jewish believer in Jesus was killed. They heeded Jesus' warning, given just days before His crucifixion, to get out of the city when soldiers surrounded it. Luke 21:20-24
  - d. Jewish believers in Jesus did not join in the revolt against Rome because they had been instructed to obey civil authorities (Matt 22:21; Rom 13:1,2). Consequently, they were considered national traitors by Israel. Few Jews converted to Christ after Rome crushed the revolt.
6. On May 14, 1948 Israel was re-established as a nation. No other people group in the history of the world has remained intact while out of their land for such a long period of time. But it had to happen because God is faithful. He kept His promise to Abraham that nothing would thwart His plan for him.
  - a. Israel was a major player in events connected with Jesus' first coming and will be with His Second Coming. Jesus was born in Israel, carried out His ministry, and was crucified there. He'll return to the Mount of Olives, the place from which He went back to Heaven. Acts 1:11; Zech 14:4; etc.
  - b. The final seven years leading up to the Lord's return will be particularly difficult for Israel. There will be war in their land (Armageddon) Dan 12:1; Zech 12:2,3; 14:2; Jer 30:7; etc.
    1. The final world ruler will enter a rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem and declare Himself to be God.
    2. He will then try to wipe out the descendants of Abraham to prevent the Lord from keeping as yet unfulfilled promises to Abraham and David. Dan 9:27; Gen 15:18; Ps 89:4,29; etc.

- C. As we stated earlier, there is much misunderstanding concerning the place of Israel in God's redemptive plan. TV preachers make it sound as though one of our greatest duties as Christians is to insure the survival of national Israel. They say we need to go back to our Jewish roots learn Hebrew and celebrate the feasts.
1. What does it mean that Israel is the chosen people of God? It doesn't mean that they're more important to God than everyone else or that everyone else has a lesser place in the plan of God.
    - a. They were chosen as the people group through whom the Redeemer came, chosen to receive the written record, chosen to picture the Redeemer and His plan of redemption until He came.
    - b. Israel is not called the chosen people in the New Testament. Believers in Jesus are called chosen. That's not a rejection of Israel. It is a recognition of their place and role in redemptive history.
      1. Peter (a Jew) applied Ex 19:5,6 to the Church. I Pet 2:9,10--But you are God's "chosen

generation”, his “royal priesthood”, his “holy nation”, His “peculiar people” — all the old titles of God’s people belong to you...Now you are the people of God. (Phillips)

2. Chosen is the same word used when Paul stated God’s purpose in redemption (Eph 1:4). The word means to select for oneself with the accessory idea of kindness, favor and love. God chose all men and women for sonship through faith in Christ and His sacrifice.

c. Jesus didn’t die to make us Jewish. He died to make us all (Jew and Gentile) literal sons of God through the new birth. Col 3:11--There is nothing but Christ in any of us (Knox); In this new man of God’s design there is no distinction between Greek and Hebrew, Jew or Gentile, foreigner or savage, slave or free man. Christ is all that matters for Christ lives in them all (Phillips).

d. TV preachers talk about how we have to support national Israel or we will be cursed. Gen 12:3 has nothing to with whether or not our Congress passes agreements favorable to Israel. That interpretation waters down the wonderful promise God made and kept to Abraham.

1. Let me clearly state: As America’s ally and as a fellow democracy, I believe it is right for our country to support them. But we’ve taken that verse way too far.

2. If you can’t be blessed unless you support Israel what did everyone do from 70 A.D. when it ceased to exist as a nation until 1948 when it was reestablished? What happened to the early Christians who, under the direction of Jesus, didn’t support Israel’s revolt against Rome?

2. The feasts, the sacrifices, the various rituals established by God were not set up for all time. They were types and shadows. When the substance comes there is no more need for the shadows. Heb 10:1

a. In his writings Paul dealt with those who said we must keep these Old Testament (Jewish) rituals.

1. Col 2:16,17--Let no one sit in judgment on you in matters of food and drink or with regard to a feast or a new moon or a Sabbath (Amp). These things are only the shadow of what was to come, the substance is in the Christ (20<sup>th</sup> Cent).

2. To those who said the Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved. Paul wrote: We have circumcision of the heart through union with Christ. Col 2:11

b. If the feasts and rituals are for the Church then why didn’t Paul (a Hebrew among Hebrews, Phil 3:4,5) tell Christians to hold on to these Jewish roots and continue to celebrate them?

3. We’ve got TV preachers selling shawls for prayer and shofars (rams’ horns) for protection.

a. Jewish law said: A man should veil himself when he prays to show he is ashamed before God and unworthy to behold him. Paul said this was inappropriate for a New Covenant believer. I Cor 11:4

b. Paul wrote that through union with Christ we share His authority (Eph 2:6). We have the right to speak in Jesus’ name (John 14:13; etc.). That’s our protection, not a ram’s horn.

4. Jewish people need salvation from sin through faith in Christ as much as any Gentile. They’ve rejected their Messiah, the only satisfaction for sin. Belief in the Father is not enough. John 14:6

D. Conclusion: Let’s not allow unscriptural teaching rob us of the blessing that comes from seeing Israel’s place in the plan of redemption. Their story assures us of the faithfulness of God. He keeps His Word.