

IS ISRAEL STILL GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE?

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The children of Israel were chosen by God, not because they were the largest nation, but because God loved them and kept his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Deuteronomy 7:7-9). To this nation, God gave a special law (Exodus 20ff), and he would watch over them, protect them, and guide them.

Yet, by the time we get to the book of 2 Kings, we find Israel either in Assyrian or Babylonian captivity. They lost their Temple and their land. Even with their restoration, they still were under the control of their captors (Ezra; Nehemiah).

None dispute that Israel went into captivity, nor that they came back to rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem. It is also recognized that Israel did not come back into the possession of its land when it came out of captivity. Because of this and because many believe that Israel was promised its land forever, that is, without end, people are still working to help Israel once again possess its land and return to its status as God's chosen.

In 1948, Israel was declared a nation once more. Palestine was said to belong to them and efforts are being put forth to help them regain control of this area. All this is a result of people believing that Israel is still God's chosen people.

Part of the problem in understanding God's intentions for Israel come from a failure to understand the nature of the Mosaic Law and to understand the conditions God placed on Israel. In order to answer our question concerning Israel, we must look back at several things taught to us in God's word.

Moses is, without doubt, the greatest leader Israel ever had. To him was given the law at Mount Sinai and of him God said there had not risen another prophet since like

Moses (Deuteronomy 34:10). It would seem then that we should be paying attention to what Moses said concerning our subject. Of this Moses, it is said that he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter having chosen to suffer with his people. Why did he make this choice? Because he esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures in Egypt" (Hebrews 11:24-26). Moses was looking for one greater than he to come and bring that great reward. Moses was looking for Christ.

It is this same Moses who told his people that he was not the one they would be listening to in the future (Deuteronomy 18:18,19). God would raise up a prophet from among them who would bring the people the word of God and they were to listen to him. In Acts 3:23, Peter applies this prophecy to Jesus. God showed the truth of this prophecy, when in Matthew 17:1-5, after Peter wanted to build a tabernacle to Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, God said that Jesus was his beloved son and they should hear him. Thus, Moses was teaching Israel there would be a time when things would change.

Moses also told Israel they would possess the land God had promised them (Deuteronomy 11:31), and this they did under the leadership of Joshua and then extending their borders through the days of Solomon until they possessed all that God had promised (Exodus 23:31; 1 Kings 4:21). In teaching them about their possessing the land, Moses also reminded them, "And ye shall observe to do all the statutes and judgments which I set before you this day" (Deuteronomy 11:32).

Later, Moses warns the people about disobeying God (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). If they did not obey God, God would scatter them among the nations and they would fear for their lives (vss. 58-68). Their holding the land of Canaan depended upon them obeying God – *"Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may*

prosper in all that ye do” (Deuteronomy 29:9; cf. Joshua 1:6-8). Thus, if Israel disobeyed God, they would lose their land.

Isaiah and Micah help us to understand the temporary nature of the nation of Israel when they both give us information concerning the establishment of the Lord’s house into which **all nations** would flow (Isaiah 2:1,2; Micah 4:1,2). Daniel teaches us of a new kingdom that would be established in the days of the Roman Empire (Daniel 2:44). This kingdom would consume all other kingdoms and it would endure forever. Or, as Jesus said, the gates of Hades will not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus and John taught that the kingdom is at hand (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). Since the Jews were already present, they could not be talking about that kingdom. They had to be talking about a different kingdom which is yet to come. Jesus addressed this idea in Matthew 16:18,19 when he told the apostles that he would build his church and give them the keys to **the kingdom**. On the day of Pentecost, this kingdom, the church, came into existence (Acts 2), and those who are saved are added to this kingdom (Acts 2:47; Colossians 1:13).

It should be noted that the Law of Moses, including the Sabbath law, was given to Israel only. The Gentiles were not required to observe the Sabbath Day nor any of the other laws found in the Law of Moses. In instituting circumcision as a religious symbol, God told Abraham that this would be that which would be observed by him and his seed after him (Genesis 17:10; Acts 7:8). The Sabbath was given as a sign between God and Israel, which God tells us twice in Exodus 31:13,17. Later, in the days of Ezekiel, God reinforced this concept (Ezekiel 20:12). The Law given at Mt. Sinai was not a universal law for all mankind, but was a law given to Israel for a special purpose.

What was the purpose of the Old Law? To best understand this, we need only look at the words of Jesus. In Mark 12:10, Jesus described himself as the stone which the builders rejected, a reference to Psalms 118:22. In showing that he was the Son of God (Matthew 21:42-45), Jesus quotes Psalms 110:1. When Judas came with the mob to betray him (Matthew 26:54-56), Jesus told them that this was a fulfillment of scripture (see Isaiah 53:7). Jesus told the Jews that the Scriptures testified of him (John 5:39), which is why Jesus was able to do the following: *“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself”* (Luke 24:27). What is Jesus saying? The Old Law was referring to him. This is seen in Galatians 3:24: *“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith”*. Paul taught us that Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection were all prophesied in the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3,4).

Because the Old Law was to point us to the Messiah, then it would be expected that this law would be only temporary in nature. The Hebrew writer, addressing a Jewish audience, had a lot to say about the temporary nature of the Old Law. If the first law had been kept correctly, no place would have been sought for a second law. But, because the Jews did not keep the Law, then a new law was to be brought in. Because there would be a new covenant, the first was made old and was ready to vanish away (Hebrews 8:7-13; 10:9). Christ is the mediator of this new covenant, which he purchased with his own blood (Hebrews 9:15,16). The sacrifices of the Old Law could not take away sins (Hebrews 10:4); the sacrifice of Jesus provided for our salvation (Hebrews 10:10-12).

At the cross, Jesus took the Old Law out of the way. That which had separated Jews and Gentiles was now removed and all would be reconciled in the one body, the

church (Ephesians 2:14ff; Col. 2:14). Paul, who had described himself as a Hebrew of Hebrews (Philippians 3), let the Roman brethren know that God was not just the God of the Jews, but was the God of the Gentiles also (Romans 3:29), and he confirmed the new law (Romans 3:31).

In order for us to have salvation today, it is of necessity that the Old Law be taken out of the way. Without Jesus, we would all be lost. Yet, if the Old Law was still in effect, we would not have our High Priest who has entered within the veil (Hebrews 6:18-20). Under the Mosaic Law, the High Priest was a descendent of Aaron from the tribe of Levi. Jesus was of the tribe of Judah. Yet, he is our priest after the order of Melchisedec. Because the priesthood has changed, it was necessary to change the law (Hebrews 7). Again, in God's plan, the Old Law would be in effect until Jesus is established as High Priest, which Jesus is (Hebrews 4:14,15).

Paul asked the following question to the Galatians: "*Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?*" (Galatians 4:21). He will tell them what the Law of Moses teaches us concerning which law we are to be under. As Hagar was the bondwoman of Abraham, the Old Covenant is the bondwoman. This law he specifically says was given at Mt. Sinai. As Isaac was the child of promise, so the new law is the law of promise. Paul concludes by showing that we are not of the bondwoman, but of the free (Galatians 4:24-31). Thus, the new law is that which we are to follow.

Paul would also relate to those at Galatia that wanted to be under the Old Law that they must not be entangled again in the yoke of bondage (Galatians 5:1). If they attempt to be justified by the Old Law, they will fall from grace (Galatians 5:4)

Not only has the law changed, but Israel has changed as well. Of physical Israel, Paul says, “*Who are Israelites...*” (Romans 9:4), and then stated “... *they are not all Israel, which are of Israel*” (Romans 9:6). Israel, which had prided itself on being descendants of Abraham (Matthew 3:9), would learn they are not children of God just because they were descended from Abraham. Getting back to the discussion of Isaac, the child of promise, Paul helps us to see that it is not the children of physical Israel who are the children of God, but it is those of spiritual Israel who are the children of God (Romans 9:7,8). Physical Israel will not be the children of God because they rejected the Messiah (Romans 9:33).

Paul, himself from a Jewish background, had previously in the book of Romans dealt with this subject. In Romans 2:28,29, we are taught that a true Jew is one that is circumcised in the heart and not in the flesh. This corresponds with what was given the Galatian brethren in Galatians 3:29: “*And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise*”.

Jesus rebuked the Jews because they rejected him. He told them that if they were Abraham’s children, they would do the works of Abraham. But, they were not following Abraham, because Abraham did not seek to kill one who taught him the truth. The Jews, though, sought to kill Jesus (John 8:39,40).

The Jews, who believed themselves to be superior to all others, were taught clearly that God is not just their God. Notice Romans 3:29: “*Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also*”.

While many today still believe that the physical nation of Israel are still God’s chosen people, the Bible teaches us otherwise. Paul wanted Israel to be saved, but

recognized they had to overcome this feeling of national pride which had caused them to believe themselves to be righteous, and the chosen of God. Israel had become arrogant, and had not humbled itself under God's commands. As Paul would state it, "*For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge*" (Romans 10:2). Their lack of knowledge in God's word had caused them to seek to establish their own righteousness, and this, in turn, caused them to not seek the righteousness of God (Romans 10:3). Physical Israel rejected God and his word and therefore were no longer the children of God.

Some have had a difficulty in understanding the temporary nature of both Israel and the Law of Moses because of certain verses in the Bible that use the expression "for ever". When we look up this expression, we find that it is used in 381 verses in the Bible. At times, it definitely has the meaning of "without end", especially when it is talking about God (Exodus 15:18). However, there are several occasions in which it means only a period of time or it is given with conditions. In other words, "for ever" does not always mean "without end" or "always". Consider the following:

1. Genesis 13:15; Exodus 32:13 – The land was to be Israel's for ever. However, we have already noted that this was conditional (they had to obey God's word).
2. Exodus 12:14; 31:17 – The Sabbath law would be an ordinance they would observe for ever. Yet, because the Law was temporary in nature (to bring us to the Messiah) and was taken out of the way at the cross, then for ever here can only mean "as long as the law is in effect".
3. Exodus 21:6 – A person who chose to be a slave would be the master's servant for ever. Yet, this can only mean as long as the slave shall live.

4. Numbers 10:8 – The priests would blow the trumpets for the congregation to assemble and this would be an ordinance for ever. However, this again was only to be done as long as the law was in effect.
5. 1 Samuel 1:22 – Hannah promised that Samuel would be given to the service of God and there he would abide for ever. This can only mean as long as Samuel was alive because Samuel did not live for ever (1 Samuel 25:1).
6. 1 Samuel 28:2 – Achish said David would be the keeper of his head for ever. Again, this can only mean in their life times as both have died.
7. 1 Chronicles 28:4-7 – David says that he was chosen to be king over Israel for ever (vs. 4), but in verse 5, he states that Solomon would sit upon his throne. If David was to reign without end, then how could Solomon sit on his throne. In verse 7, Solomon’s kingdom would be established for ever, if he kept the commandments of God.

We could show more examples of how the word “for ever” is used, but these should suffice to show us that this expression is used in various ways in the Bible. A careful study of the promises to Israel will show that these promises were conditional. Israel would be the chosen of God as long as Israel obeyed the commands of God.

Israel is no longer the chosen people of God. Because of their disobedience, their land was taken away from them. Because their law was temporary, as a nation, they would be dissolved when their law was taken out of the way. This the Bible clearly establishes for us. Physical Israel was taken out of the way and replaced by spiritual Israel, the church. This was always God’s plan (Ephesians 3:10,11).