

THE PLACE OF ISRAEL IN PROPHECY

OK. You've made the commitment to read through the Bible. You start with Genesis and the first four chapters are interesting and now you love the genealogy in Genesis 5 because you know it's the godly line of Seth through which the seed of the woman is going to come and you even like the genealogy of Genesis 11 because you know it's the godly line of Shem that's leading up to Abraham. You read about Abraham and God's covenant with Abraham and now you know the Messiah is going to come through Abraham. You read on about Isaac and Isaac's son Jacob and Jacob's twelve sons and now you know the Messiah will come from the tribe of Judah and the Messiah will be a king. You finish the book of Genesis with great satisfaction and launch into the book of Exodus. It's exciting reading the story of Moses and the Ten Plagues and the Great Escape of the Israelites from Egypt and then you hit Exodus 21...

28“When an ox gores a man or a woman to death...

Exodus 21:28

But you soldier on through to Exodus 29...

22“You shall also take the fat from the ram and the fat tail and the fat that covers the entrails, and the long lobe of the liver and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and the right thigh...

Exodus 29:22

Undeterred you continue to read on into Leviticus 13...

36 ...and if the itch has spread in the skin, the priest need not seek for the yellow hair...

Leviticus 13:36

And now you're wondering, “What does this have to do with my life? Why in the world is this in the Bible?” Perhaps you've wondered why so much of the Bible has to do with the nation of Israel and its history. Keep in mind that when we speak of the Israelites or the Jews, we are talking about the descendants of Abraham through Isaac, Jacob and Jacob's twelve sons.

So why does so much of the bible focus on Israel? Why does so much of bible prophecy focus on Israel? Isn't prophecy about us, the Church? What we need to understand is that while there is prophecy that concerns us, the Church; much of the prophecies that will be fulfilled in the future focus on the nation of Israel. Before we go further in our study of prophecy, I want you to understand why Israel figures so prominently in prophecy.

GOD'S PROMISES TO ISRAEL (Genesis 17:7-8)

It begins with the Abrahamic Covenant. As we studied last week, God made an unconditional covenant with Abraham and his descendants. In this covenant, God committed Himself to give Abraham and his descendants, the Israelites, the land, the seed and the blessing. It is an unconditional covenant in that God swore to give the land, the seed and the blessing without requiring anything from Abraham or the Israelites.

⁷And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. ⁸And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”

Genesis 17:7-8

What is really interesting is that in the Abrahamic Covenant God reveals to Abraham that his descendants will be enslaved for 400 years and then liberated.

¹³Then the LORD said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. ¹⁴But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

Genesis 15:13-14

So God made an unconditional covenant with Abraham and his descendants to give them the land, the seed and the blessing. God fulfilled His promise to Abraham and gave him a son through Sarah. Their son was Isaac. Isaac had a son named Jacob and Jacob had twelve sons. Because of a famine in Canaan, Jacob, his twelve sons and their families moved to Egypt where eventually, just as God revealed, they were enslaved for 400 years. After 400 years, God raised up Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. The Israelites escaped the pursuing Egyptian army by miraculously crossing through the Red Sea to the Sinai Peninsula. God directed them to make camp at the base of a mountain called Mount Sinai. It was there at Mount Sinai that God made another covenant with the Israelites, the descendants of Abraham. This is the covenant we call the Mosaic Covenant and we also refer to it now as the Old Covenant.

Keep in mind that the Abrahamic Covenant was still in force when God made the Mosaic Covenant with Israel. The Mosaic Covenant did not replace the Abrahamic Covenant. Actually, the Mosaic Covenant was the means by which the purpose of the Abrahamic Covenant was to be accomplished.

GOD’S PURPOSE FOR ISRAEL (Genesis 22:18; Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 4:5-8)

What was the purpose of the Abrahamic Covenant? What did God want to accomplish through Abraham and his descendants? Here is what God said to Abraham:

¹⁸and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed...

Genesis 22:18

Here is what God said to Israel:

⁵Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

Exodus 19:5-6

God’s purpose for Israel is that Israel would reflect and reveal God to the gentile nations. The promises of the Abrahamic Covenant put Israel in place to be a light to the nations. The commandments of the Mosaic Covenant formed Israel to be a light to the

nations. The Mosaic Covenant was the means by which Israel would become an attractive reflection of God's wisdom and goodness to the gentile nations.

Think about the strategic location of the Promised Land. The trade route that connected the African, Asian and European continents coursed right through the middle of Israel. As travelers and trade caravans passed through the land of Israel, they would see bountiful crops, thriving businesses, compassionate treatment of the weak, just laws, beautiful worship and they would be piqued to know the God of the Israelites.

The Land promise of the Abrahamic Covenant put Israel in that strategic position to make contact with the gentile nations of the earth. The commandments of the Mosaic Covenant formed the society of Israel to be a just and compassionate society.

In Deuteronomy 4, Moses casts a vision for the nation of Israel as they prepare to enter and settle the Promised Land

⁵See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ⁶Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' ⁷For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? ⁸And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

Deuteronomy 4:5-8

The means by which Israelite society and worship would become a light to the gentile nations was through obedience to the commandments associated with the Mosaic Covenant.

Now the Mosaic Covenant differed significantly from the Abrahamic Covenant in that the Mosaic Covenant was clearly a conditional covenant. In the Mosaic Covenant God's blessings were conditioned on the Israelites' obedience. In the Mosaic Covenant God promised that if the nation obeyed the law, God would bless them in every aspect of their lives and society. On the other hand, if the Israelites disobeyed the laws of the Mosaic Covenant, God promised to curse them and drive them from the Promised Land.

GOD'S REVELATION OF ISRAEL'S FAILURE (Deuteronomy 4:25-31)

In this same chapter of Deuteronomy in which Moses cast a vision for the nation of Israel to be a light to the nations of the earth, Moses also prophesied Israel's failure to accomplish her purpose. But even as Moses reveals Israel's future failure he assured Israel of God's faithfulness based on the Abrahamic Covenant.

²⁵"When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, so as to provoke him to anger, ²⁶I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed. ²⁷And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you. ²⁸And there you will

serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. ²⁹But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. ³⁰When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice. ³¹For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.

Deuteronomy 4:25-31

God prophesied that after conquering and settling in the Promised Land that the Israelites would be unfaithful to Him and would violate the Mosaic Covenant and worship other gods. Per the Mosaic Covenant God forewarned the Israelites that He would punish them and drive them from the Promised Land. But God also prophesied that the nation of Israel will repent and return to the Lord in the latter days and God will not abandon them because of the Abrahamic Covenant, the covenant He made with the fathers of the Israelites: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

This is extremely important to understand because it has been taught in the church that God is finished with Israel because of Israel's failure to keep the Mosaic Covenant. That cannot be because throughout the Old Testament God knows and prophesies the failure of the Israelites to keep the Mosaic Covenant. In fact, God reveals that the Israelites will reject Messiah when He comes! But just as God does in Deuteronomy 4, He does repeatedly throughout the Old Testament: God assures Israel that He will be faithful to them because of the Abrahamic Covenant.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO ISRAEL (Ezekiel 36:22-36; Romans 11:25-29)

This is why the nation of Israel figures so prominently in prophecy. This is why we will keep talking about Israel and the future of Israel. God made an unconditional covenant with Abraham and He will fulfill all His promises to Abraham and His descendants. God's reputation depends on His fulfilling His promises to Abraham.

Turn with me to Ezekiel 36.

²²“Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. ²³And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. ²⁴I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. ²⁸You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. ²⁹And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. ³⁰I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations.

³¹Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. ³²It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.

³³Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt. ³⁴And the land that was desolate shall be tilled, instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by. ³⁵And they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden, and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.' ³⁶Then the nations that are left all around you shall know that I am the LORD; I have rebuilt the ruined places and replanted that which was desolate. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it.

Ezekiel 36:22-36

The nation of Israel was to glorify the name of God among the nations; that was God's purpose for them. But because of their disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant, they caused God's name to be profaned among the nations. Even though they have profaned God's name among the nations, God will not abandon Israel, rather, He will make a New Covenant with Israel that will replace the Mosaic Covenant. As described here by the prophet Ezekiel, the New Covenant will give the people of Israel a new heart and a new spirit and the Holy Spirit will dwell in them and empower them to obey God's law..

God is not done with Israel. God will not fail to accomplish His purpose through the nation of Israel. God will do what He has promised to do in Ezekiel 36. God will do this in the final days of the Tribulation period when the nation of Israel will turn to God and accept Jesus as their Messiah. This is what is prophesied by the Apostle Paul in Romans 11

²⁵Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

²⁶And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,

"The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob";

²⁷"and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

²⁸As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. ²⁹For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Romans 11:25-29

So why is Exodus 21:28 in our Bibles?

²⁸"When an ox gores a man or a woman to death..."

Exodus 21:28

Because it is one of the 613 laws of the Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant was the means by which God intended to accomplish His purpose that the nation of Israel would be a light to the gentile nations. The good news of this story is that even though Israel failed God, God will not fail Israel. God will fulfill the promises of the land, seed and blessing that He made to Abraham and his descendants. And in the end, Israel will be a light to the nations and will fulfill her God given purpose.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO THE BELIEVER (Romans 8:31-39)

³¹What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:31-39

Just as with Israel, some people teach that God will give up on you if you fail Him. But that's not true. Once we place our faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins all our sins past, present and future are paid for in full. God will not condemn. God knows our struggle with sin and gives us the Holy Spirit to empower obedience. If God knows our struggle with sin and tells us we're going to struggle with sin and makes provision for us, will He then condemn us for this sin? No! God is faithful and will fulfill all His promises to us in Christ Jesus.