

ISRAEL IN PROPHECY

The aim of this study is to help Christians know better the Word of God. A poor knowledge of the Word robs the Holy Ghost of one of His most powerful weapons (Eph 6:17b; 1 Jn 2:14). ***“Give attendance to reading...to doctrine”*** (1 Tim 4:13). ***“When by this time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat”*** (Heb 5:12).

To understand God’s overall purpose in history, it is necessary to know something of Israel’s place in it. These notes outline some major prophecies concerning Israel, particularly their world-wide dispersion, latter-day return and prophecies yet awaiting fulfillment. A grasp of these together with current events in the Middle East is an ideal tool to bring the unconverted to see the relevance of the Bible and their need of salvation.

There are two covenants fundamental to a proper insight into God’s dealings with Israel:

- a) the promise of a land of their own, living as an independent nation.
- b) the promise of a coming Messiah-King, Who would one day rule over them for ever, making Israel the head of all nations and thereby establishing God’s rule over all the earth.

The following is an outline summary of this study:

- (1) The promise of the land as an everlasting possession
- (2) The threatened national dispersion
- (3) The world-wide dispersion
- (4) The prophecy of the final return to the land and subsequent events
- (5) The fulfillment so far
- (6) Events yet to come
- (7) Conclusion

(1) The promise of the land as an everlasting possession

(N.B. Even at its greatest extent, in the reigns of David and Solomon, Israel never fully possessed her God-given borders. Present-day Israel only occupies a fraction of them. Only when Messiah reigns will they be fully possessed.)

Gen 15: 18 - 21: The original promise to the descendants of Abraham of the land of Canaan from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates.

Gal 3: 16 - 18: This covenant was an *unconditional* promise. It could not be altered later.

Gen 17: 7 - 8: It was an *everlasting* covenant, and the land theirs for an everlasting possession.

(2) The threatened national dispersion

Though promised the land, neither Abraham, Isaac nor Jacob inherited the promise (Heb 11:8-10, 13-16). God had told Abraham that before they did the nation would be held in bondage in Egypt (Gen 15: 13-14).

After Moses led the Children of Israel out of Egypt (c 1500 BC), God entered into a covenant with them at Mt. Sinai. Disobedience would lead to chastening, a chastening culminating in expulsion from the land. Deuteronomy 28-30, and Leviticus 26 detail the conditions of blessing and chastening.

Lev 26: 1-13	conditions of blessing in the land.
14- 15	warnings of chastisement.
16-26	the first four chastisements.
27- 31	the fifth chastisement: sieges culminating in cannibalism; cities laid waste
32	the land itself laid waste.
33- 39	national dispersion.
40-44	but, Israel not utterly cast off (v.44); God's original promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob not forgotten (v.42).

Eventually disobedience did lead to dispersion. After Solomon's death the nation was divided into the northern kingdom (Israel/Samaria), and the southern (Judah). Firstly Israel was led into captivity by Assyria in 722 BC, then Judah by Babylon 136 years later.

As predicted by Jeremiah (25: 1- 2; cp. Dan 9:2), after 70 years the Jews were allowed to return to their land. Some did with Zerubbabel, and later Ezra. Jerusalem was rebuilt and the temple worship restored.

Except for a very short period during the Maccabean revolt, however, they never regained national independence. First Persia, then Greece and finally Rome controlled Palestine.

(3) The prophecy of the world-wide dispersing and its fulfillment

When Jesus came, the Jews were looking for their promised Messiah to throw off the Roman yoke and establish His long-awaited rule over the whole earth. Because they failed to recognise and accept Him as their King, however, there came instead a further dispersal.

Matt 24: 1-2	The words of Jesus describing how this final dispersion would come about:
Luke 19:41-44	Jerusalem surrounded by enemy armies, besieged, and leveled to the ground;
Luke 21: 20-24; 23:27- 30	The temple pulled down stone by stone; the whole land desolate. Even women & children suffer terrible distress. Jews scattered among all nations as slaves.

All this was literally fulfilled in A.D.70. The Jews rebelled against the Romans. Their armies then besieged, and finally entered, Jerusalem after terrible deprivations during which the inhabitants even resorted to cannibalism (cp Deut 28: 52- 57). The temple was torn down stone by stone and 100,000 Jews enslaved. The estimated 6 million Jews in Palestine at the time of Jesus were reduced to less than 1 million through deportation and suffering (See Deut 28: 62). To erase all trace of Jerusalem, the Romans completely destroyed it by ploughing over the ruins and sowing with salt.

Later, in A.D.132, the emperor Hadrian built a new city and banned all Jews. A final revolt by the Jewish remnant in Palestine culminated in an estimated half million losses.

The land had been emptied and the inhabitants scattered. The Jews had filled up their sins, the predicted wrath had come upon them (Matt 23:32- 36; 1 Th 2:14-16).

The land continued under Roman rule until overrun by the Arab armies of Mohammed in the 7th C.

In the 16th C the Ottoman Turks took control, being finally expelled in the 1st World War by Great Britain.

Deut 28: 65- 67: As predicted, throughout centuries of exile, there was continual persecution; e.g. Jews refusing to become Catholics in Medieval Spain were expelled from the country. In our own day, consider Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini. 6m Jews perished under Nazi rule alone.

Num 23: 9 Yet, despite centuries without a national home, the Jews have never been absorbed nor lost their separate national identity.

(4) The prophecy of the final return to the land and subsequent events

Ezekiel 36 and 37 provide a good overall outline of this return and what follows. Note carefully the successive stages and the order of events. We are seeing the fulfillment of this prophecy in our day.

Ezek 36: 21 - 31: (a) firstly, the nation's promised return to the land (vv 21- 24).
 (b) then cleansing, a new heart & turns to God in repentance (vv 25-27, 31).

Ezek 37: 12 - 14: Firstly a national regathering; then their conversion.

Ezek 37: 15 - 28: The same process described in greater detail:

- (a) the return to the land (v 21)
- (b) the nation formed after the return (v 22a)
- (c) the long-awaited Messiah-King, the Son of David, reigns over a re-united Israel and Judah (vv. 22b, 25). No longer are they two nations (vv. 15-19)
- (d) the re-united nation is cleansed and converted

(5) The fulfillment so far

Only the first two stages of the process have been fulfilled so far: the return to the land and rebirth of the nation.

The instrument used to call the Jews back from their exile of nearly 1900 years was Theodore Herzl (1860 -1904). In 1897 he planned a Zionist conference to arouse the Jews to a realisation of their destiny and to secure a Jewish national home in Palestine.

Success came as a result of World War 1. Britain could not import materials vital to the production of explosives. A fervent Zionist, Dr Chaim Weizmann, perfected a method of producing them artificially. He was rewarded by the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which established Palestine as a Jewish national home.

Since then, Jews have returned to their homeland from 100 different countries, despite all efforts to stop them. Attempts by Britain to restrict Jewish immigration, due to Arab protests, caused so many problems that she abandoned her control of Palestine, and on May 14 1948 Israel became an independent nation for the first time in over 2000 years.

(6) Events yet to come

With the return to the land and the nation reformed, the scene is set for the remaining two steps of Ezekiel's prophecy: the return of the Messiah and the national conversion.

Zechariah 12-14 details how these will be fulfilled during an international invasion of modern-day Israel.

(NB Before Zechariah's prophecy could come to pass, Palestine and Jerusalem both had to return to Jewish hands. All is now ready. 1948 saw the rebirth of the nation; the 1967 6 day war saw the prophesied recapture of Jerusalem from Gentile dominion for the first time since the time of Jesus (Luke 21:24))

- Zech 12: 1 - 3: The nation and its capital besieged. Jerusalem a “burdensome stone” and a “cup of trembling” to all involved, whether surrounding nations or all the nations of the earth.
- Zech 12: 8 - 9: God’s intervention; He destroys all the invading armies.
- Zech 12: 10 -13:1: The Spirit of grace and supplications outpoured on both Jerusalem and the whole nation. Seeing their wounded Messiah, they recognise Him as the One they rejected at Calvary. In deep repentance they at last avail themselves of the cleansing Blood.
- Zech 14: 1 - 12: A closer examination of the invasion.
- v2 All nations gather against Jerusalem; the city is taken, & half the inhabitants exiled.
 - v3 Then the Lord intervenes.
 - v4a The intervention takes the form of His personal return to the Mount of Olives.
 - vv4b - 5a The mount splits in two giving an escape route for fleeing Jews during the invasion.
 - v5b The Lord Himself returns with all His saints.
 - vv8-10 The Mount of Olives earthquake affects the physical geography of the whole land.
 - v9 The Lord now establishes His rule over the whole earth.
 - v12 The destruction of the invading nations.
- Zech 14: 16: All nations then worship the King, going up to Jerusalem once a year.
- Isaiah 2: 2 - 4: Jerusalem becomes the political and religious centre of the earth, with Israel the head and no longer the tail of the nations (Deut 28: 13).

(7) Conclusion

To avoid all confusion, it should be borne clearly in mind that the Church and national Israel have quite distinct roles in God’s purpose.

If an individual Jew is in Christ, his race is no longer significant (Col 3: 10 - 11). But God has yet a future for national. With Jerusalem back in Jewish control, the end is at hand of ***“the times of the Gentiles”*** (see Luke 21:24), i.e. the period when world politics are controlled by Gentile nations. The Jews are a nation again in their own land. Jesus said the generation that sees the fig tree (a symbol of Israel) put forth leaves would see the establishing of God’s kingdom (Luke 21:29 - 32). So we see how close is the fulfilling of Zechariah’s prophecy. Very soon the Messiah will return to Jerusalem and establish His world-wide rule from there.

Watch events in Israel and Jerusalem. Watch the international attitude towards them.

In the light of this ***“What manner of persons ought we to be?”*** (2 Peter 3:11).

For further study

- Daniel 2 & 7 - 12: Prophecies of the period of worldwide Gentile rule, and the final establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.
- Romans 11: The position of Israel during the present calling out of the Church.