

THE FUTURE (6)

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Does Israel Have A Future?

In Genesis 14:22 God is called, "The Most High God, Possessor of heavens and earth," and in Revelation 11:5 the "Lord of the earth".

Although God maintains His right over the entire earth, there is one country in particular which He calls His land, and which therefore occupies a special place. That is the land we know as Palestine. In Leviticus 25:23 He says, "The land is Mine." In Daniel 11:41 this land is called "the land of beauty," and in Ezekiel 38:12 (NASB) "the centre (Lit. 'navel') of the world."

There is also one nation on the earth that occupies an exceptional position, which God calls "His people" (Dt. 7:6-8). "And I will take you to Me for a people" (Ex. 6:6). And when He speaks to Pharaoh about this people He says, "Let My people go, that it may serve Me" (Ex. 7:6). That is the people of Israel.

This people and this land God has brought together. "When ye come into the land that I will give you... the land is Mine: for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me" (Lev. 25:2,23). God's purposes, insofar as they concern the earth, are directly related to them.

Of the land God says, "A land that Jehovah thy God careth for; the eyes of Jehovah thy God are constantly upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year" (Dt. 11:12). And it is said of the people, "Because Jehovah loved you" (Dt. 7:8), and "beloved on account of the fathers" (Rom. 11:28).

In that land and in the midst of that people Jerusalem was situated, the beloved city, the city of the Great King, the place "which the Lord your God will choose to put His Name to dwell there" (Dt. 12; 1 Ki. 11:36). The throne of the Lord stood there (1 Ch. 29:23). God gave His prophets there and He caused His Word to be written there. The Son of God, God revealed in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16), came there, He walked and lived on earth in the midst of these people. "For it is clear that our Lord has sprung out of Judah" (Heb. 7:14). There He was crucified and He finished the work of redemption; the only basis on which God can have contact with sinners and on which all things can be reconciled with God. There Christ was raised and ascended to heaven. There is the earthly birthplace of the Assembly. There the Lord Jesus will return from heaven to judge His enemies (Acts 1:11, Zech. 14:3,4). From Jerusalem, and with Israel as the center and channel of blessing, He will rule the earth with judgment and righteousness (Isa. 9:56; 11:1-10).

Indeed, Israel and Palestine are the keys to world problems. There, in Palestine, rather than in Russia, or in Western-Europe, everything will find its solution, the unraveling of all knotty world problems will take place. Yes, God's Word goes as far as to say in Deuteronomy 32:8 that God has established the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel. Israel occupies the central place in God's ways with this earth and therefore it is the most important nation on earth!

Why did God give this people that place? Not because there is truth in the blasphemies of a Hitler and a Goering, who claimed that God would be on the hand of them, that possess most cannons! "Not because ye were more in number than all the peoples, hath Jehovah been attached to you and chosen you, for ye are the fewest of all the peoples; but because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers, hath Jehovah brought you out with a powerful hand" (Dt. 7:7,8). Yes, before Abram, the first patriarch of Israel, was born, God had already grouped the nations on earth around Palestine in a fashion that agreed with the number of this people, that as yet did not exist and which would take possession of the land only centuries later (Gen. 10:25, Dt. 32:8).

Only God's will and God's promises are the basis for all of Israel's blessings.

God's Promises

In Romans 11:29 is written, "For the gifts and the calling of God are not subject to repentance." This verse is often quoted and applied to us. This is quite legitimate, for it is a divine principle. Everyone, however, who denies that Israel has still a future, would do well to consider that these words are applied to the promises given to *Israel*.

The apostle doesn't want to say that Jews would still be converted after the nation as such had been put aside. Nobody doubted that, did they? The thousands of Christians from among the Jews in Palestine and everywhere else were proof to everybody. Paul himself was a Jew, wasn't he?

But he uses these well known facts to prove that the people of Israel was not rejected for ever. At that moment it had been put aside and salvation had come to the nations (v. 11). God used this to provoke them to jealousy. And after the fullness of the nations has come, "all Israel shall be saved, according as it is written, The deliverer shall come out of Zion; He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. God has not cast away His people" (Rom. 11:26,2). Seeing that this characterizes God's ways, Paul exclaims jubilantly, "O depth of riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable His judgments, and untraceable His ways!" (Rom. 11:33).

If we want to see how both Israel's present rejection, as well as its future restoration, are both in complete agreement with God's promises, we must take a closer look at these promises.

God's Government

We find a very definite distinction between the position of man before and after the Flood. Before the Flood there was also a people of God. But we do not find any indication that they had to separate themselves from the world. Neither had God's government revealed itself as yet in judgment over the evil.

After the Flood we find a new earth. And God gives to Noah the responsibility to execute government, to curtail evil. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen. 9:6).

Sad to say, but Noah fell, just as man always falls today. Through his drunkenness he lost the respect of him who should have had it most of all, his son. And Satan knew how to instigate men to commence something unheard of before the Flood, idolatry (Josh. 24:2). Satan became the god of this world, for idolatry is in reality the worship of demons (1 Cor. 10:20).

God's Calling

It is then that God calls Abram out of his country and his kindred, his family, and his father's house, to go to a land that God would show him. That is a new principle. Abram is not put under any responsibility. God calls him as he is from the surroundings he is in, to come to Him and to be separated for Him. That is grace. And the promises God gives him, are in agreement with this. Not a single condition is connected with the fulfillment of these promises.

In Genesis 12:7 the Lord says, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." After the separation from Lot, in chapter 13:14,15, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land that thou seest will I give to thee, and to thy seed for ever." And in chapter 15:18 the boundaries are accurately described, "Unto thy seed I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates..."

These promises are emphatically confirmed to Isaac and Jacob in chapters 26:3 and 28:13; there also without a single condition. God has therefore given unconditional promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that their seed would possess the land of Palestine, according to the boundaries of Genesis 15, for ever.

Consequently, when God heard the groaning of the oppressed people in Egypt, "God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob: and God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them" (Ex. 2:23-25). God's goodness and grace delivered them out of the land of bondage, and bore with infinite patience all their crying and murmurings. He gave the manna from heaven for bread, water from the rock, and victory over the enemies (Ex. 15-17).

The Covenants in the Desert

In Exodus 19 we find the principle of the covenant with Abraham joined to the principle of the covenant with Noah. Promises of the goodness of God, but given conditionally. The law is the expression of the actual conditions of God's government. The people put themselves voluntarily under the law. But before they have received the law they have already transgressed. And Moses, as mediator, can only turn away the judgment, by reminding God of His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (33:13).

In Deuteronomy we find the same principles attached to the covenant mentioned there (29:1). Great blessings are promised to them, but all under the condition of obedience. And if the condition is not met, the blessings will be lost, and God's judgment will come upon them. That is the basis on which they move into the land, taking possession of it.

In the Land

We know the history of the people in the land. They were not obedient, but turned their backs to God and transgressed all His commandments. The priesthood corrupted itself in Eli (1 Sam. 2 & 4). When God gives a prophet (Samuel was the first prophet according to Acts 3:24), the people desire a king and thereby they practically reject God as King (1 Sam. 8:7). And after the failure of Saul, the king after the flesh, God gives David the man after His heart as the anointed one, but even his descendants become corrupt, so that the entire nation falls into the worst idolatry.

Then God cannot but act in accordance with the requirements of His government, by bringing upon the people all the curses which were determined as result of disobedience. First the ten tribes are taken away and later the two. And when, by the grace of God, a remnant is brought back from Babylon, God has to drive them also out of the country, they reject even their Messiah, the Son of God. God acted in accordance with the conditions to the promises in Exodus and Deuteronomy.

Has God cast away His People?

Would it be possible that the unfaithfulness of the people would negate the unconditional promises God gave to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? "The gifts and the calling of God are not subject to repentance" (Rom. 11:29), the apostle maintains. And happily this is true. What certainty would we have that God's promises to us would be fulfilled, if the unconditional promises to Israel were rescinded? Could we possibly doubt the immutability of God's promises?

No, God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be fulfilled! Israel will possess the land in eternity, and that according to the boundaries given in Genesis 15; from the Nile to the Euphrates.

The Prophecies

The prophets confirm this as well in hundreds of places. For those ensnared in a particular theological system these verses have unfortunately often been robbed of their strength. Attempts have been made to apply them to the return from the Babylonian exile or, at times, to the first coming of the Lord on earth. We will discuss a few places where this cannot possibly be maintained.

To begin with, we must keep the following in mind:

1. When reference is made to the return of both Judah (the two tribes) and Israel or Ephraim (the ten tribes) it must be future. Until today the ten tribes have not returned from the exile in which Shalmaneser brought them (2 Ki. 17). The return from Babylon was just a small remnant of the two tribes.
2. The portions stating that the people will not only be restored, but also be born again cannot possibly refer to the return from Babylon. The people were not born again then.
3. The same can be said when definite victories and subjection of enemies are mentioned. After the Babylonian exile the people have always been under the rule of foreign nations.
4. When it is said that the people will no more fall into sin or be forsaken of God, it must be future. Particularly after the return from Babylon they were guilty of the greatest sin. They rejected their Messiah and put Him to death.

5. When their deliverance is mentioned in connection with the coming of the Lord, it must be the return of Christ. At His first coming they were not delivered as a nation. To the contrary, shortly after they were carried away by the Romans.

6. When reference is made to a "staying in the land forever" it can only be future. We all know that the people did not dwell in the land during the last 1900 years.

7. Those things foretold by the prophets after the return from Babylon cannot possibly refer to that return.

If we now apply these points to the following scriptures for instance, there cannot be any doubt left that these things are still future and that Israel will again return to Palestine!

Isaiah 11; 14:1,2; 18.

Jeremiah 3:17,18; 31:27-40; 33:14-16!

Ezekiel 34:13-14,23-31; 36:6-12,22-38; 37 especially from verse 21 onward; 38:8,11,16; 39:25-29.

Hosea 3:4-5.

Joel 3:1-2,16-21.

Amos 9:14-15.

Micah 4:1-8.

Zephaniah 3:12-20.

Zechariah 9:9-13; 10:6-12; 12:9-14; 14.

Let us take Isaiah 11. There is no disagreement that this refers to the Messiah. Both Jews and Christians agree on that. But can we apply verses 4 etc. to the present time? 2 Thessalonians 2:8 tells us that it is future. And who dares to say that the earth is filled of the knowledge of the Lord today? Well, "in that day" the Lord shall acquire the remnant of His people, these driven out of Israel, and those scattered of Judah, from the four corners of the earth. And several important signs are mentioned, all of which are not yet fulfilled.

In Jeremiah 3:17-18 we find the throne of the Lord at Jerusalem, the nations gathered to that throne, as well as the two and ten tribes together in the land. That can only refer to the future, for none of these three things have ever come about since Jeremiah prophesied these words.

Zechariah 9:9 is referred to in Matthew 21 and John 12. But the words "and He is a saviour" have been omitted. At that time He did not come as deliverer of Jerusalem and the daughter of Sion. But one day His government will be from sea to sea and unto the ends of the earth (v. 10). The prisoners of Sion will be loosed on the basis of the blood of the covenant (v. 11), and they will slay their enemies.

In Zechariah 14:3-4 we see the Lord standing on the Mount of Olives to fight against His enemies. And in that day Jehovah shall be King over all the earth and they "shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; and Jerusalem shall dwell safely."

All indicated Scripture places and dozens more confirm that God will fulfill His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Israel will dwell in the land and enjoy the blessings of Jehovah.

To be cont'd