

ISRAEL: THE EPICENTER OF GOD'S PLAN WEEK 1

Defining Israel

There is confusion in the Church re: the term "Israel":

A Pastor told us as a group – several years ago – "Israel' is political"!!!! Now – I do believe he meant that in a negative sense.

BUT – let's look at it Biblically:

- In the Bible we see God dealing with NATIONS – Assyria, Babylon, Egypt. . . .
- God tells us in Daniel 2:21 – “. . .*He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings.*”
- Proverbs 21:1 – “*The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.*”
- In the book of Daniel, we find the kingdoms of this world outlined. AND, we find the KINGDOM of God (Daniel 2).
- God's desire was to serve as King over Israel (I Sam. 8:7 – “*And the LORD said to Samuel, 'Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.'*”)
- In Isaiah 9:6 we read that the GOVERNMENT of that Kingdom of God will be on Messiah's shoulders!
- We sing at Christmas, “Born is the King of Israel”!
- Scripture records for us the sign on the cross – “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” (John 19:19).

“Political” is defined in the dictionary as - *Of, relating to, or dealing with the structure or affairs of government, politics, or the state.*

Re: the term “Israel”: the OT records over 2,000 usages; the NT records 73 usages.

- The use of the term “Israel” in the OT:
 - Gen. 32:28 – first used; God changed Jacob's name to Israel – “striving/struggling with God,” “God rules.”
 - Gen. 32:32 – the “children of Israel” – physical children.
 - Isaiah 43:1 – “But now, thus says the LORD, Who created you, O Jacob, and He Who formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. . . .I gave Egypt for your ransom. . . since you were precious in My sight. . .I will bring your descendants from the east and gather you from the west.”
 - **God CREATED Israel from Jacob.** Jacob is the father of the 12 tribes of Israel!
 - **Israel – physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.** NOT just Abraham! NOTE: Gen. 21:12 and Rom. 9:7 – “In Isaac your seed shall be called” – the promise would come through Isaac and not through Ishmael; it would come through Jacob and not Esau (Rom. 9:12).

- Gen. 12:1-2; Gen. 18:18 – God promised to make of Abraham a great nation.
- Gen. 12:7 and Gen. 15:18 – **land is promised to Abraham’s descendants. Land – a physical designation with physical boundaries.**
- Additional physical designations:
 - **The Messiah would be from a specific people group (Jewish):**
 - Gen. 49:10 – from Judah.
 - Deut. 18:15 – from Moses’ brethren
- Ex. 19:3-6 – children of Israel – a special treasure above all people; **a kingdom of priests; a holy nation.**
- Deut. 6:4 – Israel – the people group whom God had delivered from Egypt – Dt. 6:20-23.
- Deut. 7:6-8 – **a chosen people** – distinguished from “any other people” (v. 7).
- Deut. 28 – blessings and curses on the children of Israel. See Deut. 28:37 (God will drive them to the nations; we see a difference between the children of Israel and all the other nations).
- II Sam. 7:23-24 – “And who is like Your people, like Israel, the one nation on the earth whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people. . . .”

“Israel” is used throughout the Scriptures to refer to a specific national people group. In Scripture we see a uniqueness to Israel. That uniqueness is tied to God’s choice – to His sovereignty. When God chose Abram and made a covenant with him, God did not do so based on what Abram was or who the people would be. God chose Israel because of Who God is – because of what HE would do. How can a nation be considered unique? Who is considering that nation “unique”? GOD!

God is sovereign and He has chosen to extend His grace in a greater degree to certain individuals and certain “entities.” (Romans 9:14-18). In this particular case we’re talking about a NATION when we’re speaking about national/ethnic Israel. **Israel’s UNIQUENESS is for the purpose of fulfilling God’s purposes that will impact THE WORLD!**

We refer to Israel as national/ethnic Israel because they are a specific people group with a specific lineage/blood line!

IMPORTANT: The Church – the body of Christ – is NOT Israel.

The NT consistently differentiates between the Church and the nation of Israel.
NOTE: Jewish people who have rec’d Jesus are in the body of Christ – the Church. They are also part of Israel since that is their lineage.

- The Church was born at Pentecost – 50 days following Jesus’ resurrection. Israel had already existed for centuries.
 - Israel is a created nation – Isa. 43:1
 - The Church is NOT a nation. The Church consists of many nations (tongues, people groups) (Zech. 2:10-11; Rev. 7:9).

- Jesus uses the future tense when referring to His Church in Matthew 16:18.
- The Church is noted as a mystery in the NT. A mystery in the Bible is a hidden truth not revealed until the New Testament (Eph. 3:3-5, 9; Col. 1:26-27). It was no mystery that God was going to provide promised salvation to the Jews and that the Gentiles would be blessed in that salvation (Gen. 12:3). The mystery: God forming Jews and Gentiles into one body. That truth was never revealed in the OT.
 - The body concept of Jewish and Gentile believers united into one body is designated as a mystery in Ephesians 3:1-12.
 - The doctrine of Christ indwelling every believer, the Christ-in-you concept, is called a mystery in Colossians 1:24-27 (cf. Col. 2:10-19; 3:4)
 - The church as the Bride of Christ is called a mystery in Ephesians 5:22-32.
 - The Rapture is called a mystery in 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. The Rapture is specifically for the Church (1 Thess. 4:16-17 – those “in Christ” – according to the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
- Within the Body of Christ – the Church – there is now a unique relationship between Jews and Gentiles – called one new man in Eph. 2:15. The unity of Jews and Gentiles into one new man covers only the Church age from Pentecost until the Rapture after which time God will restore Israel and complete her destiny (Acts 15:14-18).
- 1 Corinthians 10:32 reflects the distinction between Israel and the Church - *"Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God."*

And who are the Jewish people?

- “Jew” comes from the word “Judah” – (Yehudah) – which means “praise”.
 - Called Jews in the Babylonian captivity (tribe of Judah carried away captive in 586 BC) – Jer. 34:9.
 - BUT – first used in II Kings 16:6 (prior to 586 BC) – during Ahaz’ reign.
- There are still Jews today. God through Paul names 3 groups in I Cor. 10:32 – Jews, Greeks, Church of God. (Know that the Church is comprised of Gentiles AND Jews today). Some use Gal. 3:28 to say that there’s no distinction. Need to realize that this is in terms of salvation/justification – being declared righteous. Read the rest of the verse. What about distinctions between men and women? Are they passé?
- “Hebrew”
 - Means “to cross over”.
 - Who was the first “Hebrew”? Abraham
 - Abraham was actually a Gentile by blood – came from Ur of the Chaldees. Abraham was a Chaldean.
 - Yet “Jew” and “Hebrew” are used interchangeably in Scripture. Paul calls himself a Hebrew of the Hebrews (Phil. 3:5), of the stock of Israel (Phil. 3:5), of the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:5); calls himself an Israelite (Rom. 9:4). Paul was a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5) – and the Pharisees are seen as being of the Jewish leadership in the Gospels.
 - Paul conveys that he is Jewish – Acts 21:39, Acts 22:3.

- **Being Jewish is a birth issue/blood issue.** When a Jewish person becomes a believer in the Messiah Jesus – their blood doesn't drain out of their body! I'm Ukrainian. Did I cease to be Ukrainian when I accepted Jesus?
 - When one is born Jewish, they will die Jewish. No one can take away a person's Jewishness.
- **Descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**
 - Genesis 21:12 – In Isaac shall thy seed be called
 - Romans 9:7
- **Judaism is a belief system. Judaism, Christianity – are choices.**
 - Belief in Jesus does NOT result in a Jewish person casting aside their Jewishness. A person who is born Jewish will die Jewish. The Apostle Paul remained Jewish when he came to faith in Jesus. Jesus disciples remained Jewish. Jesus is returning as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the root of David!

Rabbinical teaching – what the Rabbis teach - (Judaism today) teaches that a person is Jewish only if their mother is Jewish. During the Crusades many Jewish women were raped – and they didn't know who the father. From the Tanakh/OT we see a patriarchal society. Genealogies were traced through the father. If a person's father is Jewish – they're Jewish. If their mother is Jewish – they're Jewish. How do you understand your lineage?

What does God say about Israel from Scripture?

- Deut. 7:6-8 - *“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.”*⁷ *The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples;*⁸ *but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”*
- Isa. 43:1 – *“But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine.”*
- Jer. 31:3 – *“The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.”*
- Isa. 49:16 – *“See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands. . . .”*
- Deut. 32:10 - *“He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye.”*
- Zech. 2:8 – *“For thus says the LORD of hosts: “He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the **apple of His eye.**”*
 - Apple of the eye – pupil. **Protection!**

- Jer. 3:14-15 - *“Return, O backsliding children,” says the LORD; “for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.*

What is God’s plan for Israel?

God has a plan for Israel – past, present, and future.

God has NOT cast away Israel!

Paul PROCLAIMS in Romans 11:1-2, *“I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew.”*

God made promises to Israel. Many of those promises are still to be delivered. God is FAITHFUL! His will can NEVER be thwarted. He will deliver on those promises.

God called the Jewish people – His chosen people (Dt. 7:6-8 - *“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. ⁷ The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; ⁸ but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt”* - to be faithful to Him.

God chose Israel based on His sovereign choice! God chose Israel not because of any merit on Israel’s part. God chose Israel because of Who God is and because of what He would do!

While Israel – as a NATION – is not all on the same page Biblically – there are many Jewish people who do not believe in God – BUT GOD has promised a REMNANT of faithful Jewish people who trust in God and believe in all His promises including redemption through the Messiah (Isa. 1:9; Isa. 6:13; Rom. 11:5).

Zech. 12:2 tells us that Israel is a cup of trembling/reeling – the world gets intoxicated with Israel – the world doesn’t know how to respond to Israel. All eyes are focused on this tiny country a bit smaller than NJ!!

BUT GOD tells us that anyone wishing to remove Israel from its place will suffer consequences! *“And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it.”* (Zech. 12:3).

AND GOD states in Scripture that He will make Jerusalem a praise in the earth! (Isa. 62:7)

How is God dealing with Israel today?

If God is not protecting Israel today – if He doesn’t have a present plan for Israel - how do we then explain the miraculous victories wrought by God during the 1948 War of Independence, the 1967 Six-Day War, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, not counting His having preserved Israel through to - today? I believe Scripture teaches that there is a

connection between Israel and the world. **God's plan for Israel IMPACTS the world.** It impacts us. It impacts your families. It impacts the ladies in the adjoining room! It impacts AZ, the US – it impacts the WORLD!

God's plan for Israel can be seen throughout the Bible and summarized in Romans 9, 10, 11:

Past (Romans 9 – written after Jesus' crucifixion)

- Israel was chosen by God:
 - To be the recipients of the Law and the custodians of the Law
 - To be His witnesses (Isa. 43:10) of the one true God to the world
 - To be the channel through Whom the Messiah would come (Gen. 49:10; Deut. 18:15-18; Isa. 7:14; Isa. 9:6; Micah 5:2).

Present (Romans 10/11)

- Israel remains. Israel exists amidst attempts at annihilation of Israel.
- Because the Jewish leadership in Jesus' day rejected Jesus, God is not using Israel as His tool of redemption. God is now using the Church – COMPRISED OF BOTH Jewish people and Gentiles – as His witnesses.
- But God continues to have a covenant relationship with His people.
- While the nation of Israel rejected the Messiah (altho' there have always been Jewish believers in Jesus; the first believers in Jesus were Jewish) – salvation has been more open to the Gentiles. And, the Gentiles are to provoke the Jewish people to jealousy to know their God (Rom. 11:11).
- God is setting the stage with Israel for His end time plan for the world!

How then is God using Israel today?

- **God is setting the stage for end time events revolving around Israel.**
- **God is blessing us or not based on our treatment of Israel (Gen. 12:3).**
- **God is showing the world how crucial Israel is within His plan of redemption.**
- **AND God is proving Who He is through Israel!!!**

Future (Romans 11):

- God will seal 144,000 Jewish men (Rev. 7 & 14) to function as His servants during the Tribulation/the Time of Jacob's Trouble. God will purge and refine Israel through this 7-year period.
- God will restore Israel at the end of the Tribulation (Zech. 12:10ff)
- Jesus will return when Israel is restored and will establish His Kingdom on earth. Jesus will reign from King David's throne in Jerusalem.
- God will use national/ethnic Israel as a light for the world (Zech. 8:23).

How is God using Israel to impact the world?

- God chose Israel to be a light to the nations – to tell them about the one true God.
- While there were always OT saints – Jewish people that we read about in the OT who trusted in God and believed in all His promises including His promises concerning the Messiah (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, King David. . .), the nation as a whole did not trust – they did not repent of their sins. We see this in the writings of the prophets – whom God used to warn the children of Israel.
 - Jonah was called to be a missionary to the Ninevites – and Jonah ran the other way.
 - God used Jonah – in spite of Jonah – after apprehending him and placing him in the belly of a great fish – and then that fish spit him up on the shores of – Assyria.
 - Jonah was the disobedient Jewish missionary.
 - BUT GOD used him because that was God’s plan.
AND – the largest revival that we read about in the OT occurred!

God is going to pick up where He left off with the Jewish people – with Israel – during the Tribulation:

- Rev. 7 and Rev. 14 – 144,000 Jewish male virgins will be sealed and used as God’s servants during the Tribulation period to apparently share the Gospel. In Rev. 7:9 after we read about the sealing of the 144,000, we see the GREATEST revival noted in Scripture – *“a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands. . .”* – praising God for His salvation!
- Rev. 11 – the two Jewish witnesses (perhaps Moses and Elijah) are used by God to testify of Him and His power. They are killed and then resurrected.
- Zech. 8:23 – during the Millennium – *“In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.””*
- Romans 11:15 – Paul speaks about the RESTORATION of Israel following the Tribulation - *“For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”*
 - When Israel is restored at the end of the Tribulation, Jesus will return and establish His Millennial Kingdom – and that will truly be LIFE from the dead for the WORLD!

We are living in exciting times. We are SEEING BIBLE PROPHECY played out on TV! What we are seeing in the news and living out today is a result of how the world is NOT understanding Israel – of how the world is coming against Israel!

God has called Israel “the apple of His eye” (Dt. 32:10; Zech. 2:8) – God has promised protection to Israel – thus, when a nation comes against Israel – WATCH OUT! When God makes a promise, He delivers because God is FAITHFUL!

How is Israel the Epicenter of God's Plan?

What is God's Plan?

Hab. 2:14 – for the earth to be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

How will that occur? For the world to be reconciled to God – to be brought into a right relationship with God. For the world to be righteous.

When will this occur?

This will occur after the Tribulation – the 7 year period of judgment of the nations and purging of Israel.

Those who go into the Millennial Kingdom – when Jesus will be reigning for 1,000 years from Jerusalem (Rev. 20) – are only believers (Matt. 25:31-46

Following the Millennial Kingdom – the New Jerusalem – the Eternal State.

How is Israel the Epicenter of God's Plan?

- Deut. 32:8-9 – *“When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel. For the LORD's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance.”*
- Ezekiel 5:5 - *“Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries all around her.’”*
- Psalm 122:6 – *“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: may they prosper who love you.”*

Psalm 122:6 – **“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem”** (Psa. 87:7; Psa. 137:7).

WHY?

- God's Name is in Jerusalem (II Chron. 6:6).
- All nations will come against Jerusalem at the end of the tribulation (Zech. 12:1-3; Joel 3:1-2)
- Nations are coming against Jerusalem NOW and have been for millennia (586 BC – start of the “times of the Gentiles” – with Babylon destroying the Temple and carrying off the southern kingdom – as captives – to Babylon).
- Jesus will return to Jerusalem – His feet will touch the Mt. of Olives outside of Jerusalem (Zech. 14:4).
- Jesus will reign for 1,000 years from Jerusalem (Rev. 20).
- **God's plan of redemption/salvation for the WORLD is ANCHORED in Jerusalem** (Gen. 22:13-14 – *“Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide;^[b] as it is said to this day, “In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”*) (Mount Moriah; site of Golgotha/Calvary)

- We NEED to pray for the peace of Jerusalem BECAUSE GOD TELLS US TO DO SO!!

We are seeing SPIRITUAL WARFARE connected with Israel!

Why does Jerusalem have such a central place in the plan of God? Why has it always been at the center of the struggle for peace in the Middle East? Why does it still have a place in Biblical prophecy even 2,000 years after Jesus predicted its destruction by the Romans in 70 A.D.?

- **God loves Israel – Jer. 31:3; Isa. 49:16**
- **Satan hates Israel – because God loves Israel**
- **Jesus is returning to Israel** – when they say “Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matt. 23:39; Hosea 5:15; Zech. 12:10ff) – because God promised to restore Israel.

Are we then surprised at Zech. 12:1-3 – cup of trembling? A cup of drunkenness to all the “surrounding” people who come against Judah and Jerusalem? Jerusalem is pictured as a large basin from which the nations will drink (figuratively speaking) with eagerness – they’ll be focused on Israel – only to find themselves becoming intoxicated – disoriented – deceived. The world has gone mad with their verbiage about and hatred toward Israel.

BUT GOD has an everlasting love for Israel and His plan for them will NOT be thwarted!

As believers in Jesus, how should we respond to Israel and the Jewish people?

Shouldn’t we love whom God loves? Shouldn’t we embrace His plan for the world?

What does the Jewish roots of Christianity mean?

- Studying the NT with Jewish eyes.
- Studying the Bible within its cultural/historical context
- Understanding that the entire Bible consists of 2 covenants that God made with the Jewish people:
 - Old Covenant
 - New Covenant

The Bible is a very Jewish book:

66 books written by 40 authors – 39 of whom were Jewish.

First believers in Jesus – Jewish

Disciples - Jewish

Early church – Jewish.

The church was BORN on the Feast of Pentecost/Shavuot – a Jewish feast!!!

The Messiah is Jewish (Rev. 5:5 – He will return as the Lion of Judah and the root of Jesse).

From the tribe of Judah

Had a Jewish mother!

3,000 Jewish people accepted the Lord on the FEAST OF SHAVUOT (weeks in Hebrew; “fifty” in Greek – thus “Pentecost”) – and the Church was born.

Recommended Reading

Betrayed – Stan Telchin

Hebrew Christianity – Arnold Fruchtenbaum