

## CHRIST AND NATIONAL ISRAEL

By

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The two disciples walking the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus could not conceal their misery from the stranger who had joined them. Their master had been crucified and their hopes had been dashed to pieces. As Jesus drew near they failed to recognize Him and began to tell Him about the crucifixion saying, “We hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21).

A large portion of the religious world still thinks, as did these two disciples, that the old nation of Israel is to be restored in Palestine when Jesus comes again. Their hopes are raised with every new rumor of war and every skirmish on a Middle East battlefield.

Jesus’ reply to these two disciples abruptly ended their false hope. “And He said unto them, O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Behooved it not for Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into His glory? And beginning from Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:25–27).

The heart of prophecy is Jesus, not the nation of Israel. In fact, the prophecies that centered on Israel had to do with its demise and not with future glory.

Israel was chosen and singled out to be a unique vessel of God, a demonstration to all other nations of a people united under God to carry out God’s purpose. God dictated their laws, selected their Kings, and fought their battles. As long as they were obedient to Him, He defeated their enemies without the loss of a single Israelite. There was only one church. A plurality of religion was not to be tolerated. Everything that conflicted with the law was condemned.

This was God’s kingdom, and God was to be glorified in Israel. However, in His foreknowledge, the lord knew from the beginning that it wouldn’t last forever. His promise was that if they refused to obey His commandments, they would be cursed and scattered among all the kingdoms of the earth (Deut. 28 to 31); In time, after David’s death, the nation of Israel began to imitate the neighboring nations. Only a few faithful ones tried to hang on the original idea. The rest adopted the ways of the nations (the Gentiles) and God allowed them to suffer the consequences of deserting Him. Kings used the troops for their own selfish purposes, levied unlawful taxes, made alliances with pagan nations and finally adopted idolatry and promoted it throughout the nation.

In the meantime, there were the promises of the prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zachariah, Daniel, and others. When Christ came, He quoted the prophets to support His claim as the Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom. The apostles also quoted the prophets to establish the fact that the promised kingdom had now been established through Jesus Christ. They had nothing to say about any future nation of Israel, but they had a great deal to say about how Old Testament prophecies for Israel had been fulfilled in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The establishment of Israel and the inauguration of the Old Covenant are one and the same thing. Moses, who was the instrument in giving the law and also in establishing the nation, foretold the coming of Christ, Who was to supersede him. “A prophet shall the

Lord God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unit me; to him shall you hearken in all things whatsoever he shall speak unto you and it shall be that every soul that shall not hearken unto that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people” (Acts 3:22–23, quoted from Deut. 18:15–19). Peter claimed that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. The age of the Law and consequently the age of National Israel had come to a close with the gospel of Christ, as Moses predicted.

From the outset of His ministry, Jesus pointed out that Israel, as a political, earthly kingdom was coming to an end. The temple was to be destroyed. Christ himself takes the place of the temple, being priest and sacrifice all in one. The parable of the barren fig tree (Luke 13:6–9), the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11–27), and the parable of the husbandman in Luke 20:9–18, all illustrated the fact that the nation of Israel was under a judgment and was to be brought to an end.

The Jews could not receive Jesus as Messiah because they saw the ultimate kingdom as a restoration of the old kingdom of David. When Messiah came He was to miraculously throw off the yoke of Rome, re-establish the Old Covenant justice and the Jews again would reign supreme over all their enemies. Like those two disciples on the Emmaus road, they all hoped that the Messiah would redeem Israel.

But instead, Jesus emphasized that the kingdom was to be taken from the Jews. “Therefore say I unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). This is the application Jesus made of His parable of the householder and the wicked husbandman. At the conclusion of the parable the chief priests and the Pharisees “perceived that He spoke of them. And when they sought to lay hold of Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet” (Matt. 21:45–46).

In His lament over Jerusalem and her rejection of Him Jesus concluded “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate” (Matt. 23:38). In everything that Jesus had to say to Israel and about Israel there was absolutely no hope whatsoever of any future for Israel as a political, geographical nation.

The original nation of Israel was dependent upon the Old Covenant Law, and not strictly upon race. Every citizen was a covenant member, every male being circumcised according to covenant law. But the Old Covenant, the law itself, was temporal; it was never intended to be permanent. “What then is the law? It was added because of transgression, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angles by the hands of a mediator” (Gal. 3:19). The seed that was to come was Christ. “Now to Abraham were the promises spoken and to his seed. He said not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). So the law which was the basis of the kingdom of Israel was to be enforced until the New Covenant came with Christ.

It is interesting to note that those who insist that the nation of Israel is to be restored, also tell us that the church age is a “parenthesis,” that it was added because Christ failed to become the King of Israel. The fact is that the Old Covenant was the parenthesis. Paul said it was added because of transgressions. It was added between the promise to Abraham and the final fulfillment of that promise in Christ, who was the seed of which God spoke to Abraham and through which the whole world would be blessed.

At Christ’s death the temple veil was torn from top to bottom, bringing an end to the function of the earthly priest, the one who entered beyond the veil to offer sacrifice

for sin. Christ had made the one complete sacrifice (Heb. 10:10–14) and never again could the earthly priest offer an acceptable sacrifice in the temple's Holy of Holies. The Old Covenant, made with fleshly seed of Abraham, was over, and therefore so was the fleshly nation of Israel.

The New Covenant is made through the blood of Christ, and with people of all races. Any attempt to restore the fleshly nation of Israel must include a restoration of the Old Covenant, and that would be outright rebellion and denial of Christ.

By His death Christ “broken down the middle wall of partition” and abolished the distinctions between Israel and other nations “that he might create in himself of the two one new man...” (Eph. 2:14–15). How can one show greater contempt for Christ's work than to try to restore that “middle wall” and undo what the Lord has done?

That which God purposed “before the foundation of the world” He revealed through the death and resurrection of Christ, having “Purposed in him unto a dispensation of the fullness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:3–14). God's promises and purposes are all summed up in Christ, not in a particular race or nation.

The apostle Paul obviously saw no future for the nation of Israel. In writing to the Thessalonians, he said, “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus: for you also suffered the same things of your own countrymen, even as they did of the Jews; who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove out us, and please not God, and are contrary to all men; forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved; to fill up their sins always: but the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost” (I Thess. 2:14–16). This was written only a few years before the final siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the entire nation of Israel. There is no indication from Jesus or the apostles that the ancient kingdom of Israel is ever to be restored.

The kingdom which is promised and which Christ came to establish is not an earthly, fleshly kingdom. Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” The mighty in the new kingdom are not the ones who sit on thrones or exercise political rule, but rather are servants, according to Mark 10:4, 43. The promise in the Old Testament, first to Abraham, later on through Moses and then through other prophets, was that God would bless the entire world through Christ. The fact is pointed out by Paul, that God calls His people “not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles” and then cites the prophecies of Isaiah as evidence.

There would be far less confusion and error concerning Israel if the modern prophets would look at the Old Testament through the eyes of the New Testament writers. Instead, they quote Old Testament prophecies in a carnal earthly kingdom just as did the Jews who Jesus accused of being blind and deaf to the truth.

The law of Moses had been designed to bring the Jews to righteousness found in Christ (Rom. 10:4, Gal. 3:24), but the Jews had set their hearts on an earthly king on an earthly throne in a political kingdom. Consequently, when Paul went out to preach the gospel of the death and resurrection of Christ, he was strongly opposed by the Jews who held this false hope. Before King Agrippa he cried out, “And now I stand here to be judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers; unto which promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. And concerning this hope, I am accused by the Jews, O King! Why is it judged incredible with you if God does raise the dead?” (Acts 26:67–68). The true hope of Israel according to Paul is that

which is attained through the gospel of Jesus Christ: the remission of sins and the resurrection of the dead.

“Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom. 11–15). Their hope is not in race, but in grace, to be redeemed by the death of Christ.

But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they,” is the comment of the apostle Peter (Acts 15:11).

Unbelieving Jews of today are still trying to hold to a piece of land, at the cost of billions of dollars and thousands of lives, because Judaism finds its power and satisfaction on the concept of earthly security and political success. This was the mistake that they made when they rejected Christ in the first place. On the other hand, Christians are not bound to a geographical location nor to a human government. We do not expect fulfillment in carnal and earthly blessings as did the Jews but rather in the eternal blessings of a new creation (II Peter 3:13).

There is no redemption for a national Israel, but that which Paul preached still holds true, that “the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes, to the Jews first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

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