

## Israel—Past, Present, and Future #1

Genesis 17:1-8

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With the recent news of renewed war between Israel and the Palestinians (and with the threat of that war involving many more nations), I thought it might be helpful to outline from Scripture what God has given to us concerning Israel—Past, Present, and Future. It is most important that we know God's thoughts about Israel (even over the thoughts of news reports, historical documentaries, and defenders of Israel or the Palestinians). I am not discounting credible history, but even history is interpreted through the lens of a person's or a religion's or a nation's worldview. History can be complicated, but it is even more complicated when not approached from a Biblical (God's) worldview.

Our Triune God (revealed in Scripture) is the God of history. He has sovereignly ordained all of the events of history to declare the glory of His power, justice, and mercy in which all of history (past, present, and future) has its meaning/purpose realized in Jesus Christ (Prophet, Priest, and King). From the fall of Adam and Eve which brought sin, God's just condemnation, death, and all of the miseries of this life into this world, God promised (in Genesis 3:15) that He would send a Savior and King to defeat and destroy the devil and his destructive power. All of history (from a Biblical worldview) is the realization of God's holy and wise purpose to reveal Jesus Christ, the only One who can and will restore peace to mankind through His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement to the right hand of God the Father.

The true history of Israel is ultimately not about a nation, but is about Jesus Christ, who was brought into this world through that nation (as God purposed/promised). Israel was called by God to bring forth the Prince of Peace, who came into this world as true God and true man. Israel was not chosen by God because it was better than all nations (Deuteronomy 7:7; Deuteronomy 9:6). God set His free, sovereign love upon Israel and chose that nation out of all nations to bear testimony throughout redemptive history to Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who was to come (through the revelation, the law, the ordinances, the sacrifices, the covenants, the promises, and through God's preservation of that people/nation even when they grievously rebelled against the Lord). God didn't choose Israel to be His people because they were special; they were special because God chose them to be His people (sinful and rebellious as they were).

God called Israel to bear the light of truth and righteousness that all nations might be brought to Christ. God's plan for Israel as a nation was not that Israel might rule over all nations or might be distinguished from all nations in its doctrine, worship, and church government, for all nations (including Israel) will yet become Christian nations flowing into the Church of Christ through the gospel of Jesus Christ (Psalm 72:8,11,17; Isaiah 19:21-25—the empire of ancient Assyria encompassed the nations of modern Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and even parts of Iran, Lebanon, and Jordan—those nations that are presently hostile enemies to Israel shall be covenanted nations one with another in serving the Jesus Christ).

I don't want to get ahead of myself into the future of Israel, as this sermon is intended to focus upon Israel in past redemptive history. As we briefly summarize the past redemptive history of Israel, let us focus upon these time periods: (1) Israel under the Patriarchs; (2) Israel under Moses; (3) Israel under David; (4) Israel from the Restoration to Christ.

### **I. Israel under the Patriarchs.**

A. God made a promise to Adam and Eve that He would send a Savior to crush the head of Satan and conquer the enemies of sin and death (Genesis 3:15—Covenant of Grace). That promise of salvation was first carried in the line of Seth after Satan sought to destroy the promise when Cain murdered faithful Abel (Satan's plan throughout history).

B. God overcame Satan by raising up another faithful seed to carry forth that promise of salvation in Christ when Seth stood up in the place of Abel and through his posterity embraced that glorious promise of God until the time of Noah (even the line of Seth had fallen away).

C. The promise of Christ to come seemed almost forgotten and destroyed when the Lord brought destruction by the flood upon the world due to its pervasive rebellion against the Lord. But Noah found grace in the eyes of Lord, and was preserved with his family. After the flood, the promise of Genesis 3:15 was embraced in embraced for a time in the family of Shem. But it was once again forgotten and was corrupted by idolatry until we arrive to one of Shem's descendants, Abraham, to whom the promise of Christ was renewed in a more clear revelation than had been previously recorded in redemptive history.

D. In the everlasting covenant God made with Abraham (the Covenant of Grace), three blessings were promised (Genesis 17:4-8).

1. God promised a seed to Abraham (which would spread to become many nations—Israel, Edom, Midian, Arabs, etc.)—but especially a spiritual seed through Christ, the Great Seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16). Abraham was to become the father of many political nations, but more importantly, the father of all who believe in Christ (Romans 4:3,16; Galatians 3:8).

2. God promised to Abraham and his seed the Land of Canaan, which God gave to Abraham's seed, Israel (Deuteronomy 1:8). As to whether this land was given to Abraham and his seed as a temporary or as a permanent ("everlasting") possession, we say more about that in another sermon.

3. But most importantly in this everlasting covenant with Abraham, God promised to be Abraham's God and the God of Abraham's seed (posterity)—Genesis 17:7-8. There is no greater blessing than this: God first gives Himself to us (as Lord and Savior), and then we give ourselves entirely to God to trust Him, to love Him, and to obey Him. The sign God gave to seal that gracious covenant was circumcision, which covenant is the same gracious covenant God enters into with us and our seed—this covenant was confirmed "in Christ" (Galatians 3:17) and those promises of salvation are made to us and to our seed (Acts 2:39).

4. That same promise made to Abraham (of a coming Seed to bless all families/nations) was confirmed to Isaac, Jacob (Israel), and to his 12 sons, even when Jacob and his family moved to Egypt to be cared for by Joseph during a great famine. While there in Egypt, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob increased to such an extent that the Egyptians feared them and put them to a harsh servitude.

## **II. Israel under Moses.**

A. It might appear to an observer looking at the cruel conditions of Israel and even to the satanic plot to destroy the promise (by killing all male children) that the promise of a coming Savior through the posterity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would never be realized. But Satan can never thwart the promise of God, and God raised up a deliverer, Moses, to take God's people, Israel, out of Egyptian bondage by means of 10 miraculous, devastating plagues (the Passover—blood of the Lamb on the door posts). God then delivered Israel through the Red Sea.

B. God's covenant and promise was renewed to Israel at Mt. Sinai in which the Lord organized Israel as both church and state, giving to them His good laws to wisely govern them. In the many ceremonies, sacrifices, feast days, etc., God signified to Israel the coming of Christ to rescue them from all their spiritual/moral defilement. These laws were a tutor to point Israel to Jesus Christ (Galatians 4:1-6).

C. After Moses died, God appointed Joshua to lead Israel in the conquest of the Promise Land of Canaan in realization of the covenant God made with Abraham. The promise of the coming Savior/Conqueror in defeating all His enemies was seen in the conquest of Joshua (Jesus). After the death of Joshua, God led His people, Israel, through Judges (like Gideon, Samson, and Samuel) whom God raised up to defeat Israel's enemies and to act as judges in giving God's will in difficult matters.

D. At the time of Samuel (the last judge), Israel demanded a king to rule over them like all of the surrounding heathen nations (they wanted to be like the world, not like a nation directly under the kingship of God). God told Samuel that Israel had rejected Him to be their King (1 Samuel 8:7). God gave them a king in His wrath, Saul (Hosea 13:11). The people wanted to be like the world, so God gave them a worldly king (God gave them what they wanted). There are two kings—Satan or Christ. Satan is a king by popular choice; Jesus is the King by divine right. Individuals, families, churches, and nations will acknowledge and serve one king or the other. There is no neutrality or middle ground. If one does not consciously trust in Christ as Savior and Lord, love Him, and walk in His commandments, that one has decided to serve Satan. We must each one respond to the direct address given by Joshua: “Choose you this day whom ye will serve” (Joshua 24:15). May we with Joshua respond: “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

### **III. Israel under David.**

A. God then graciously gave to Israel a king after God’s own heart, David. They wanted a worldly king in Saul, but God gave them a king in David from whose seed would come forth the mighty Savior/King, Jesus Christ. This was further narrowing the promise to a particular tribe (Judah) and to a particular family (David). Both of the genealogies of Christ in the Gospels (in Matthew through Joseph and in Luke through Mary) connect Jesus to David and Abraham (Matthew 1:1). God gave to David the promise that from his seed would come forth a King who would reign upon his throne forever (1 Chronicles 17; Acts 2:29-36—realized).

B. The United Kingdom of Israel prevailed under David and his son, Solomon (who built the temple according to God’s exact word). However, the Kingdom of Israel was divided under Rehoboam—the ten tribes of Israel to the north and the two tribes of Israel (Judah/Benjamin) to the south. Both kingdoms rebelled against the Lord and His promised Messiah through idolatry (even though God sent His prophets to them). Assyria conquered and dispersed the ten tribes of Israel in 722 b.c. while Babylon conquered and led the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin into captivity in 605 b.c. Was the promise of a Savior/King through the seed of David forever gone? Would God keep His promise even in these dark times of Israel’s history? King and kingdom were gone. The temple was destroyed. Jerusalem was in shambles. Where was hope? There was only hope in the promise of God (Abraham, Moses, David) who cannot lie.

### **IV. Israel from the Restoration to Christ.**

A. When the Medo/Persians under Cyrus conquered Babylon (ca. 538 b.c.), God moved upon Cyrus to set God’s people free to return to their land in order to rebuild the temple and subsequently Jerusalem. Through gifted leaders like Ezra and Nehemiah the temple and the city were rebuilt even in the face of great opposition from Persian kings, the Samaritans, and the worldliness of Jews themselves. The hope of the Messiah to come was revived in the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah.

B. However, the restoration of the Jews to their homeland did not bring persecution to an end, for the Persians were conquered by the Grecian Empire (under Alexander ca. 330 b.c.). From the division of the Grecian Empire, there arose in Syria a most cruel tormentor and persecutor in the person of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 b.c.), who sought to destroy the one true religion of Jehovah God, slaughtered the faithful, and polluted the temple. Again, there were so few that were faithful as the majority of Jews compromised and gave away the faith. It appeared that the promise of the coming Messiah would be destroyed. But the Lord destroyed Antiochus by means of a faithful family, called the Maccabees. The promise God made to Abraham, to Moses, to David, to the prophets was not dead—the hope in God’s people, Israel, was made alive once again.

C. The Romans conquered and overtook the Greek/Syrian dominion of Israel in 63 b.c. From time of the Babylonian captivity (605 b.c.) forward to the destruction of Jerusalem (70 a.d.), Israel did not exercise

sovereign rule over itself. When the promised Messiah was born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of prophecy (Micah 5:2), Herod (under the inspiration of Satan) sought to destroy Him, who was born King of the Jews. Redemptive history and the most important promise ever given (to Adam/Eve, to Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets) was realized in the coming of the Messiah (to the very time of Christ's baptism by John in 26/27 a.d. as prophesied in Daniel 9). The devout Jews within Israel were in great expectation, and flocked to John the Baptist who declared he had been sent to prepare the way of the King.

D. This is the abbreviated history of Israel to whom was given God's precious promise of the Messiah from the beginning to Christ.

1. Paul notes the many precious treasures given by God to Israel (Romans 9:4-5). But those many gracious blessings did not save them from sin and condemnation apart from faith in the promised Messiah/Christ who came as Savior/Lord. Israel rested/trusted in their exalted status and in the blessings rather than in the God of those blessings and fell under God's judgment. They became proud and fell away from their Triune God.

2. Let each of us rejoice in the blessings of salvation and in our exalted status as the children of God, but let us not fail to rest/trust in the Christ who was sacrificed for us to redeem us from sin and to purchase for us His forgiveness, righteousness, eternal life; who was also raised from the dead to evidence our sins were paid in full, and who was enthroned as King of kings at God's right hand.

3. We rejoice in the precious promise given to Israel and the Covenant of Grace made with them, but a promise made and a covenant made is not a promise received or a covenant embraced by faith. That is where Israel is today. Let us not follow in her footsteps. Let us receive the promised and realized Messiah, Jesus Christ.

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