

Israel: Past, Present, and Future #10

Jeremiah 23:5-8

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I believe there is often confusion that exists in the minds of Christians that leads them to deny any future national conversion of Israel and to deny a future restoration of the land to Israel in peace and safety. That confusion exists from not properly distinguishing between Israel as a church and Israel as a nation. Let me explain.

In the New Covenant there is ecclesiastically only one bride of Christ (composed of believing Jews and Gentiles), one temple of God (composed of believing Jews and Gentiles), one seed of Abraham (composed of believing Jews and Gentiles), and one olive tree (composed of believing Jews and Gentiles). The Church of Israel in the Old Testament (and the ceremonial law associated with it) has now been ended by the death of Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:13-14). Matthew Poole (1624-1679) writes in his Commentary on this passage:

[B]ut he [Jesus—GLP] did effectually, with the nails with which he himself was crucified, by interpretation, fasten the handwriting of ordinances to his cross, and abolished the ceremonial law in every regard....

The Church of the Old Testament was a church underage being taught by way of the temple, priesthood, and ceremonies truths using pictures as one would teach a toddler (Galatians 4:3). We read in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (19:3) the following:

Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, **as a Church underage, ceremonial laws**, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated under the New Testament.

In other words, the Church of the New Testament is the full-grown son and heir of the promises that were made to the Church of the Old Testament that was in its childhood. Thus, the Lord Jesus has brought to an end the Old Testament temple, priesthood, sacrifices, and ceremonies

and has appointed a New Testament temple composed of Jewish and Gentile believers with a new priesthood/ministry under Jesus (our Great High Priest) and with His appointed worship and church government given in the New Testament. Therefore, may rightly declare that the Old Testament Church of Israel is superseded by and realized in the New Testament Church that is composed of all the nations (it's the same Visible Church as to substance, but different as to outward administration—the same person that has moved from childhood to adulthood—the same olive tree).

But the confusion of which I spoke occurs (I believe) when Christians declare that the blessings promised to **national Israel** (in the Old and New Testaments) are all realized by the New Testament Church. Remember Israel was both a church and a nation. The Old Testament Church was typical of the New Testament Church, but the Old Testament nation of Israel (as a civil government separate from the church) was not typical of and realized in the New Testament Church.

God has made certain promises to Israel as a nation that will yet be realized in Israel as a Christian nation: namely, a national conversion to Christ (Romans 11:26) and a national restoration of her land (Genesis 15:18-21; Genesis 17:7-8). Thus, I submit, that the Old Testament Church of Israel is indeed superseded by and realized in the New Testament Church of many nations, and yet the Old Testament Nation of Israel will still see the promises made to her fulfilled in the future (which I have sought to demonstrate from recent sermons).

Sadly, it seems that any mention of the promise of the LAND to Israel as a NATION in the future is (by many) intrinsically tied to the restoration of the ceremonies of the Old Covenant (a rebuilt temple, priesthood, sacrifices, and ceremonies). But the restoration of the land to Israel as a nation does not require the return of Israel to the Old Testament Church and ceremonies. For the death of Jesus Christ brought to an end the

temple, priesthood, sacrifices, and ceremonies of the Old Testament Church (Colossians 2:14), but His death did not bring to an end His promises to Israel as a nation (a national conversion/land).

Let us consider some further passages of Scripture that confirm God's promise to restore Israel to Christ as Christian nation (with the further blessing of the land).

I. **Jeremiah 23:5-8.**

A. The Lord here condemns the false/corrupt shepherds of the flock of Israel (Jeremiah 23:1-2). Though God promises that He will gather Israel back into the land and will give them faithful shepherds (Jeremiah 23:4), it is not until we get to verses 5-8 that we learn when this will be fully accomplished.

1. It will be realized in the Messianic age between the First and the Second Comings of Christ (Jeremiah 23:5) at which time Jesus will reign as King over the whole earth. Jesus was officially enthroned in Acts 2:30-36, but He will especially manifest His kingship during the millennium.

2. **In His days** He will save Judah and Israel (Romans 11:26), and note that Israel will dwell in safety from all her enemies (Jeremiah 23:6). Judah and Israel will call Jesus, the Lord our righteousness.

3. Their conversion to the Lord Jesus as a Christian nation will also issue forth in her being delivered out of the nations to dwell safely in her own land, which the Lord says will be greater than the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt (Jeremiah 23:7-8).

4. John Gill (1697-1791), certainly no dispensationalist, notes in his Commentary on this passage,

they shall dwell in their own land: which has never been fulfilled as yet of the seed of the house of Israel, or of the ten tribes; but will be when all Israel shall be saved [Romans 11:26—GLP].

B. This is not a passage that can be easily dismissed because of its

clear fulfillment in the Messianic age.

1. Just as Israel as a nation was delivered out of Egypt and brought into the Promise Land, so there will be a future national fulfillment to Israel in being delivered out of the nations and restored to safety and peace in “their own land” (Jeremiah 23:8). If the “countries” are nations with land from which Israel will be delivered (Jeremiah 23:8), then Israel shall be a nation that shall dwell in her “own land” in safety.

2. I submit this prophecy has not yet been fulfilled in which Judah and Israel as a nation have been converted to Christ and restored to their own land in safety, but it shall come to pass: Romans 11:26.

II. Matthew 23:37-39 (Luke 21:24).

A. Here the Lord Jesus prophesies with strong words of judgment against Israel as a NATION for their rejection of the gospel sent to them through the prophets and through Christ Himself (specifically directing His words against “Jerusalem” in verse 37 as representative of the entire NATION). The temple will be destroyed the Lord prophesies in verse 38 (which occurred in 70 a.d. at the hand of the Romans).

B. But then hope is held out to Jerusalem and the NATION of Israel in verse 39 when the Lord says that they will not see Him from this time forward TILL [i.e. until that time that—GLP] ye shall say, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” The Lord holds forth the hope that Israel as a NATION will yet be restored to Christ and profess Him to be their Messiah and Savior (as taught by Paul in Romans 11:26, “And so all Israel shall be saved”). The very nation that rejected Christ will as a nation call Him blessed. That hasn’t happened and awaits fulfillment.

III. Acts 1:6-7.

A. During the 40 days after Christ’s resurrection and before He ascended into heaven, He taught His disciples concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3) which likely involved a preview of the future redemptive

history for both Israel and the nations (and this would seem to be the reason the disciples put this question to the Lord).

B. The question that the disciples ask the Lord implies two truths: (1) The Kingdom of God (the Visible Church) has indeed been taken away from Israel as a nation (as the Lord declared in Matthew 21:43 [Matthew 28:19-20] and as Paul taught in Romans 11:17-21 concerning the natural branches being broken off from the olive tree of the Visible Church and Kingdom of God); (2) The Kingdom of God shall in the future be restored to Israel as a NATION (as Paul states in Romans 11:24). Neither of these truths does the Lord deny or reject as false—to the contrary, his silence actually confirms the truthfulness of the statements implied in their question (silence implies consent).

C. The Lord's silence affirms that the Kingdom of God shall be restored to Israel as a NATION, but that the time at which this shall be fulfilled is entirely left with God and His redemptive plan. The restoration of Israel as a NATION into God's Visible Church/Kingdom implies the restoration of the LAND of Israel (for without a land/government, it is not a nation and God's everlasting covenant with Abraham and Israel was to give her the land as an everlasting possession and inheritance).

IV. 2 Corinthians 3:14-16.

A. The context of 2 Corinthians 3 reveals that Paul has in view Israel as a NATION (see verse 13 where it was the children of Israel as a NATION at Mt. Sinai that are in view in verses 14-16). Here Paul speaks of the minds of Israel as a NATION being blinded (the same word used for Israel being blinded in Romans 11:7,25).

B. Just as Paul teaches in Romans 11:7,25 that Israel as a NATION has been spiritually blinded by God, so he teaches the same truth here in 2 Corinthians 3:14-15. And just as Paul teaches in Romans 11:25-26a that the judicial blindness sent from God upon Israel as a NATION is not

permanent but will be removed when “the fullness of the Gentiles comes in; and so all Israel shall be saved”, so likewise here in 2 Corinthians 3:16, Paul holds forth the same hope that the judicial blindness upon Israel as a NATION is not permanent. The conversion of Israel as a NATION implies the restoration of the LAND of Israel (Deuteronomy 30:1-5).

VI. Application

A. Material blessings are graciously included in God’s covenant with His people (whether as nations or as individuals).

1. I am not promoting a heretical prosperity gospel in making that statement. Just as there is a danger in the prosperity gospel (that God promises us immense wealth and perfect health), so there is a danger in the gnostic gospel (where only that which is spiritual is good and that which is material is evil).

2. The spiritual blessings promised to us in Christ are certainly most important (Ephesians 1:3—justification, adoption, eternal life, communion with Christ, sanctification, glorification). However, Christ’s redemption includes the purchase of material blessings for us as well (2 Corinthians 1:20). Some of those promises in Christ pertain to our body as well to our soul (Philippians 4:19; Matthew 6:11,33). Even our prayers for healing are blessings included in God’s gracious covenant with us (Jesus not only healed the souls of men, but also their bodies, and we are encouraged to pray accordingly)—the ultimate healing of the body will be at the resurrection (Romans 8:23). Even our bodies at death remain united to Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Listen to the *Shorter Catechism* (Question 37):

Q37: What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?

A37: The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.

B. What does this have to do with the restoration of Israel?

1. It is not contrary to Israel’s conversion to Christ to see

material blessings promised to her (which flow from her spiritual blessings). Both kinds of blessings are included in God's gracious covenant to Israel and to all nations (Isaiah 2:4).

2. God is not playing favorites with Israel in promising to her the land, any more than He was in healing Peter's mother-in-law, but not healing Paul of the thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12). God has not only promised material blessings to Israel as a Christian nation, but to all Christian nations.

3. We should not feel the need to spiritualize material blessings in Christ to Israel or to any nation any more than we should feel the need to spiritualize material blessings in Christ to each of us as individual Christians. Both spiritual blessings and material blessings have been purchased for us by Christ, but He disperses them as He sees fit for our spiritual good/welfare.

4. Thus, let us not think that the material blessing of land to the converted nation of Israel is in any way inconsistent with God's blessings in the New Covenant of Christ's blood. Let us rather rejoice that God cares for us and His people in redeeming both soul and body in Christ Jesus.

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