

Israel's Future in Prophecy

The nation of Israel has a significant role in future events. Many of the prophecies made to Israel, thousands of years ago, will be fulfilled at that time. It must be understood that this is not because Israel *deserves* to have a special role in prophecy, because they *don't*. It is because of promises God made to their ancestor Abraham that it will happen.

God called Abraham to leave everything he was familiar with, in exchange for a promise that would take centuries, or even millennia, to fulfill. Even though Abraham would see very little of that promise fulfilled during his lifetime, he obeyed God and trusted that God would keep his promise. Furthermore, he did so in circumstances in which most people would have disobeyed and quit trusting God.

Read Genesis 12:1-3, to see the first recorded instance of this promise.

If you're tempted to think this was an easy matter, consider how many times *you* have done things your own way, when it didn't look as though things would work out right. Think about how often *you* have chosen to go your own way, rather than trusting and obeying God. For a short time, Abraham *did* have such a lapse of trust, but it was not his normal way of life. This temporary lapse of trust resulted in problems that continue *to this day* – it was the starting point for all the major conflicts we have in the Mideast, between Jews and Arabs. (This is a prime example of how distrust in God eventually has evil consequences.)

In contrast to Abraham, the nation of Israel had (and continues to have) a history of nearly *constant* disobedience and rebellion against the God of the Bible (and against Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of everything the Old Testament looked forward to). In every generation, there have been individual Jews who followed God; but most have always gone their own way. A New Testament summary of their history can be read in Acts 7:37-53.

In keeping with his promises to Abraham – and for that reason alone – God chose Israel to have a special relationship with him. When Moses led the nation out of Egypt, God made a covenant (agreement) with them – one they wholeheartedly agreed to and claimed they would follow. This covenant was good, and would result in special blessings, along with obligations that were appropriate for such blessings. (This is part of the reason for the ceremonial regulations found in the Old Testament Law.)

Almost immediately, Israel rejected the God who created them and who redeemed them out of slavery, and went after the false gods of human invention. They chose to violate the covenant and to go after the idols of the nations around them. They liked the privileges of the covenant, but had no interest in following the God who gave them those privileges. God repeatedly warned them about what would happen, if they continued to persist in rebellion. Even before they rebelled, God warned them of the horrible consequences that would occur – see Deuteronomy 28, for example.

In addition to warnings about judgment, God told them about the blessings that would come if they repented of their sins and returned to him – see Deuteronomy 30, for example. The nation experienced this many times throughout their history (every time they temporarily returned to God); yet they refused to learn, and in the end, God had to drive them out of the land.

Because Israel kept on breaking the covenant (promise or agreement) they had made with God, he told them he would replace it with a *new* covenant. This new covenant would result in changed hearts and minds, and would cause people to *want* to obey him. (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Instead of being an agreement

written on tablets of *stone*, it would be an agreement written on the very *hearts* of those who accepted it. *The New Testament is the fulfillment of this promise* – and all Jews who accept the Old Testament message will accept the New Testament covenant that the Old Testament said would come.

Several things happened, because of Israel's persistent rebellion. First, when God did replace the old covenant with the new, Israel rejected the new covenant as well. Because of this, God has offered the good news of salvation (the essence of the new covenant, which changes the heart) to non-Jews. (This is why most followers of the Bible are currently non-Jews.)

Second, as far as the nation of Israel was concerned, God eventually destroyed both them and their temple, in AD 70. He had warned them down through the centuries, and Jesus (who was the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies) also warned them. The time finally came that judgment could no longer be held back.

Nevertheless, God's promises to Abraham would still be fulfilled – but in greater ways than one might have expected. First, there would still be a future for Israel. But even greater, the salvation of non-Jews would become part of the fulfillment of those promises!

Today, God has brought the nation of Israel back into existence, in preparation for the final fulfillment of these promises to Abraham. As a nation, Israel presently experiences undeserved blessings, for the nation still remains steadfast in its rebellion against God (and against the now-existing *new* covenant). It will take an even greater judgment to purify the nation and to bring it back to God *permanently*. The events recorded in the book of Revelation (and in many other prophetic passages) describe that judgment. Though we aren't given the specific timing of these events, we are told that they will reach their conclusion after the good news has been preached to all the peoples of the world – something that is happening right now – and when the final number of non-Jews who will be saved is reached.

At the time these events are about to be fulfilled, the nations of the world will become increasingly hostile to God and to his people – both the Jews (God's people because of what Abraham did) and the followers of Jesus (God's people because they accepted the good news that has been offered to people around the world). The world will try to destroy them all. Even today, this hostility is increasing. Hatred toward Israel is increasing; Christians are being killed in greater numbers than ever before.

Eventually the nations will gather in one final effort to utterly destroy the nation of Israel. They will accomplish the final fulfillment of God's judgment against Israel; but in doing so, they will be setting themselves up for their own judgment. At that time, when Israel is almost destroyed (in the final battle of "the world vs. Israel"), the surviving Jews will humble themselves in the presence of their God, will accept all that his Word says, and will call upon their Messiah (Jesus) for deliverance. Jesus will return and will save them (and the surviving Christians) from their enemies, and will judge the world. He will set-up his throne in Jerusalem, as king over Israel. After a few additional events, also mentioned in prophecy, he will bring the final Day of Justice – for both the living and the dead – and the eternal kingdom.

At that time, all that has been prophesied about the nation of Israel – indeed, *all* the promises given to Abraham – will be accomplished.