

END-TIMES ISSUES

#9 The nation Israel: *Why* it exists... and for *how long*?

Why did the nation of Israel come into existence? It was not *their* doing... but *God's*!

1. It was because of promises God made to their ancestors.

- It is an unconditional promise that he made to them. This means it does *not* depend on anything Israel may do.

He remembers his covenant **forever**, the promise he made, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with **Abraham**, the oath he swore to **Isaac**.

He confirmed it to **Jacob** as a decree, to **Israel*** as an **everlasting** covenant:

"To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit."

Psalm 105:8-11 (NIV)

UNENDING

GENESIS 12:7; 13:15; 15:18

GENESIS 26:3-6

GENESIS 28:10-15

UNENDING

THE FOCUS OF THIS SPECIFIC PROMISE

* ["Jacob" = "Israel"]

2. This is a common theme in the Old Testament, especially during their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land.

⇒ The original promises can be found in Genesis; but throughout Israel's history, God's people recognized them as true and binding. (And God *never* said they were wrong in their view.)

- Even in their prayers, they "reminded" God of his promise.

MOSES: Their prayer was based on *God's* faithfulness to this promise.

"Remember Your servants **Abraham, Isaac, and Israel**, to whom You swore by Your very self when You declared, 'I will make your **descendants** as numerous as the stars in the sky, and I will give your **descendants** all this land that I have promised, and it shall be **their inheritance forever**.'" Exodus 32:13 (NIV)

KING JEHOSEPHAT: (HUNDREDS OF YEARS LATER.)

Are you not our God who drove out the inhabitants of this land before **your people Israel** and who **gave it forever** to the **descendants** of **Abraham your friend**?

2 Chronicles 20:7 (CSB)

3. About this promise to Abraham ...

- ⇒ It was about the **people**.
- ⇒ It was also about the **land** where they would live.
- ⇒ It was described as lasting **forever**.

FROM THE 3 VERSES WE ALREADY SAW:

...**this land ... gave it forever ...**

2 Chronicles 20:7b (CSB)

... an **everlasting** covenant:

"**To you I will give the land of Canaan** as the portion you will inherit."

Psalm 105:10b-11 (NIV)

"... **I will give** your descendants all **this land** that I have promised, and it shall be their inheritance **forever**."

Exodus 32:13b (NIV)

(Scripture NEVER cancels this promise, nor its "forever" nature.)

⇒ There were also additional promises that applied to Israel.

- The coming of Jesus was an expression of God's mercy, and was related to the promise.

[God] has helped his servant **Israel**, remembering his **mercy** to **Abraham** and his descendants **forever**, just as he spoke to our **ancestors**.

Luke 1:54-55 (CSB)

⇒ There were also promises that applied to non-Jews.

- Acts 3:24-26 points to the New Testament fulfillment of this promise, in Jesus.

The Lord had said to **Abram**, ... "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and **all peoples on earth** will be **blessed** through you."

Genesis 12:1a, 3 (NIV)

4. Regarding the land ...

⇒ God told them the size of the territory he would give them. Ultimately, it would be much larger than just Canaan.

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land—from the **river of Egypt*** to the great **River Euphrates**—the **land** of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites."

Genesis 15:18-21 (BSB)

"I will establish your borders from the **Red Sea** to the **Mediterranean Sea** and from the **Sinai Desert** to the **Euphrates River**."

Exodus 23:31a (GW)

Your borders will be from the **desert to Lebanon**, from the **Euphrates River** to the **Mediterranean Sea**.

Deuteronomy 11:24b (GW)

* (A small river on the border of Egypt.)

⇒ This land promise has not yet been totally fulfilled.

It was partially fulfilled by King Solomon, who collected tribute from the nations in those areas that surrounded the land of Israel.

Solomon ruled all the kingdoms from the **Euphrates River** to the **country of the Philistines** and as far as the **Egyptian border**. These kingdoms paid taxes and were subject to Solomon as long as he lived.

1 Kings 4:21 (GW)

APPROX. EXTENT OF SOLOMON'S EMPIRE (ISRAEL + KINGDOMS THAT PAID TRIBUTE) COMPARED TO TODAY (= MUCH SMALLER).

⇒ **NOTE THE IRONY!**

WHAT MODERN-DAY ISRAEL'S ENEMIES WANT: They want to possess all the land "**between the river and the sea.**" They mean from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea (= the entire nation of modern Israel).

WHAT ISRAEL WILL BE GETTING: God has promised Israel that he will give Israel all the land "**between the river and the sea.**" He is referring to a much larger area: from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea!

APPROX. EXTENT OF SOLOMON'S EMPIRE (ISRAEL + KINGDOMS THAT PAID TRIBUTE) COMPARED TO TODAY (= MUCH SMALLER).

5. This promise to Abraham was NOT based on Israel's conduct.

⇒ It was given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (also named Israel), NOT to the nation. (Refer back to verses we've already quoted.)

⇒ Even before the nation entered the land, they deserved to be destroyed. Consider what happened when the Israelites decided to worship the golden calf:

"I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now **leave me alone** so that my anger may burn against them and **that I may destroy them.**"

Exodus 32:9-10a (NIV)

- **Moses interceded on their behalf**, and appealed to God's promise to Abraham, Isaac and Israel (= Jacob) – v. 13 (already quoted).
- Then God, based on his promise to their ancestors, did not destroy them.

6. This promise was about a nation that would reject him.

⇒ **Before they entered Canaan**, God told them what they could expect. So Israel knew these things in advance.

- He told them about the **blessings** they could expect.
- He also warned them about the **judgments (curses)** that would occur, if they chose to turn against him (since he is the source of those blessings).

⇒ **Once in the land**, their history was characterized by:

- **Following** God for a while, and receiving the blessings.
- **Rejecting** the God who blessed them, and going after false gods – thus receiving the consequences: the curses.
- **Returning** to God, being delivered from their enemies, and blessed by him... only to later go back to their evil ways.

The Jews would receive blessings that no other nation had ever received. But it required them to be loyal to the God who blessed them, by following his righteous and good laws.

Observe [these decrees and laws] carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."

What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him?

And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

Deuteronomy 4:6-8 (NIV)

If they chose to turn against this God (the source of these blessings), then the blessings would have to be taken away... until they repented and turned back to God.

Leviticus 26 – Israel was told the options.

This chapter contains a series of "if" statements. The people must choose the way they will go... and whatever they choose will have consequences – which are carefully described.

BLESSINGS

- ✓ Vs. 1-13 – The need to obey God; the blessings they would receive IF they do so.
- ✓ Vs. 14-26 – Curses that come with rebellion: A series of judgments of increasing severity, IF they choose to rebel.
- ✓ Vs. 27-39 – The ultimate judgment of exile from the land, IF they still choose to rebel.

RESTORATION

If they reach this point, is it all over for Israel? NO! God shows them the way to hope!

- ✓ Vs. 40-45 – IF they humble themselves and repent of their sins, God will remember his covenant promise to their ancestors. He will remember the people and the land.

God's promise to Israel, *if* they go into exile:

If they are willing to humble themselves and repent, God will remember his covenant promises to their ancestors.

Because of his covenant "with them," he will be faithful to the covenant he made with *their ancestors!* That is why he won't annihilate them.

I will remember **my covenant** with **Jacob** and also **my covenant** with **Isaac** and also **my covenant** with **Abraham**, and I will remember the land.

... when they are in the land of their enemies I will not reject them and abhor them to make a complete end of them, to break **my covenant with them**, for I am the LORD their God.

I will remember for them **the covenant with their ancestors** whom I brought out from the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God. I am the LORD. "

Leviticus 26:42, 44b-45 (NET)

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7. God *knew* they would reject him.

What happened *after* the Leviticus 26 passage?

- ⇒ They had been told these options (and their consequences) approximately 2 years after leaving Egypt. In that time:
 - They were given the Law.
 - The temple was constructed.
 - *They were ready to enter the Promised Land.*
- ⇒ **So what did they do?** *They quit trusting God and wanted to go back to Egypt (Numbers 13-14)!*
 - The result: They were forced to stay in the wilderness for 38 more years (total = 40), until those who had seen God's mighty works in Egypt were all dead (except for Joshua and Caleb, who had continued to trust God).
- ⇒ When the time finally came for the new generation to enter the Promised Land, Moses reviewed the Law with them. This review is found in the book of Deuteronomy. ↘

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Deuteronomy: Blessings, curses, restoration.

This time, there are about 5 *chapters* of warnings. Even so, God *knows* that they will disregard these warnings... *and tells them so.*

- ✓ Ch. 27:11-26 – A list of curses to be placed upon those who do evil. (The people must affirm these curses when they enter the land.)
 - ⇒ Ch. 28:1-14 – **Blessings** for those who obey God.
 - ⇒ Ch. 28:15-68 – **Curses** that will come with rebellion (with increasing severity).
- ✓ Ch. 29 – A reminder of the great things God has done; a warning against secretly going after false gods. (This is probably the *first step* toward the open rebellion mentioned in ch. 28.)
 - ⇒ Ch. 30:1-10 – **Restoration** that will occur if they return to God.
- ✓ Ch. 30:11-20 – **They must choose the way they want to go:**

See, I have set before you today life and goodness, as well as death and disaster.

Deuteronomy 30:15 (BSB)

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Deuteronomy: A song that will testify against them.

- ✓ Ch. 31 – Moses prepares to die; God gives him a song to recite, which will testify against the people when they turn to evil.
- ✓ Ch. 32:1-43 – The song.

God already knows they are going to turn to evil.

"For I will bring them into the land I swore to give their ancestors—a land flowing with milk and honey. There they will become prosperous, eat all the food they want, and become fat.

But they will begin to worship other gods; they will despise me and break my covenant. And when great disasters come down on them, **this song will stand as evidence against them**, for it will never be forgotten by their descendants.

I know the intentions of these people, even now before they have entered the land I swore to give them.

Deuteronomy 31:20-21 (NLT)

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Moses also knows they are going to turn to evil.

"For I know how **rebellious and stiff-necked** you are. If you are **already rebelling** against the LORD while I am still alive, **how much more will you rebel** after my death!"

Deuteronomy 31:27 (BSB)

"For I know that after my death you will become **utterly corrupt** and **turn from the path** I have commanded you. And in the days to come, disaster will befall you because **you will do evil** in the sight of the LORD to **provoke Him to anger** by the work of your hands."

Deuteronomy 31:29 (BSB)

The people always *claimed* they would obey God (Exodus 24:3, 7; Deuteronomy 5:27; also Joshua 1:17; 24:24). But God and Moses (and Joshua) knew better.

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The song God wrote, which testifies against Israel.

(Their **rebellion** and **judgment** are described in "*past*" tense.)

- ✓ Vs. 1-6 – **God's** ways are perfect; **their** ways are corrupt.
- ✓ Vs. 7-14 – Remember God's goodness toward you in the past.
- ✓ Vs. 15-22 – In your prosperity, you turned away from the God who blessed you and went after false gods. Therefore, God has turned away from you.
- ✓ Vs. 23-27 – God would have destroyed you, except that *the enemies would have misunderstood what happened.* →

"I said I would scatter them and erase their name from human memory, but I dreaded the taunt of the enemy, **lest the adversary misunderstand and say, 'Our hand has triumphed; the Lord has not done all this.'** "

Deuteronomy 32:26-27 (NIV)

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The song that testifies against Israel (continued).

(Their **restoration** is described in "future" tense.)

- ✓ Vs. 28-33 – Anyone who has any sense would realize that *God* was involved in this judgment!
- ✓ Vs. 34-35 – In due time, God will take vengeance on his enemies.
- ✓ Vs. 36-42 – When Israel has reached the depths of powerlessness, God will step in and judge his enemies.
- ✓ V. 43 – The final result will benefit both the land [= Canaan, the land God was giving them] and the people [= Israel].

Rejoice, you nations, with his people,
for he will avenge the blood of his servants;
he will take vengeance on his enemies
and make atonement for his **land and people**.

Deuteronomy 32:43 (NIV)

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Regarding Israel's existence, we have to conclude...

GOD NEVER SAID...

"I'll make Israel into a nation forever, in the land of Canaan...
AS LONG AS they behave!"

INSTEAD, GOD SAID...

"I'll make Israel into a nation forever, in the land of Canaan...
knowing full well that they WON'T behave!

"Instead, they will reject and hate me, go after false gods,
kill my servants, and do all kinds of evil – and I'll have to
punish them severely."

"But I made the promise to their ancestors, not to them."

We have no basis for claiming that God "got rid of" Israel, because of their sins, and that they have now been replaced by "the church."
Nothing in these (or other) passages suggests anything like this.

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★ So, what does all this mean to us? ★

At this point in time, we have seen Israel with blessings , Israel with curses and exile ; but we have *not* yet seen Israel with restoration .

- ✓ Next time, our goal is to see how God is accomplishing restoration.

① God is not finished with Israel.

- ✓ **God is using all that happens – even sin** – to move the nation in the direction of repentance and humility (which will enable restoration).
 - We are witnesses of part of that process; and someday we will see how it all worked out.
- ✓ **Their future and ours are connected.** (We will look further at this issue at another time.)

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② We can learn from Israel's past.

Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ...

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us , on whom the culmination of the ages has come.

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

1 Corinthians 10:6, 11-12 (NIV)

- ✓ **Sin has consequences.** We shouldn't be surprised if there are consequences to our actions that we can't escape.
- ✓ **God will keep his promises.** We must understand God's promises within their context. Some don't apply to us; others may require a response on our part – such as repentance. But because of God's promises, we can have hope for the future!

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Today's MISSION!

When looking at verses such as these, we need to make every effort to not go beyond what Scripture teaches.

As we do this, we can...

⇒ **LEARN** from the *past!*

⇒ **PREPARE** for the *future!*

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Credits

SCRIPTURE

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