

21

What about the Jews?

The nation of Israel was rescued from Egypt and declared by God to be “*a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*”. These were the people who first occupied Jerusalem as “*the place*” where God has said He would dwell in the midst of His people.¹

- ✓ It was their king who “*sat on the throne of the LORD*”, reigning over the Kingdom of God on earth;
- ✓ It was to them the prophets of God came and declared the unfolding purpose of God;
- ✓ It was to this nation that God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

By their unbelief and their rejection of Jesus, has the Jewish nation thrown it all away for ever? Or is there some future role it must fulfil in God’s coming kingdom? What has this nation to teach us today?

❖ “**Kinsmen according to the flesh**”

When Paul contemplated the gracious climax of God’s purpose with His creation, in that lovely passage that ends Romans chapter 8, his very next thought was about the Jewish people: his own nation. This is what he said:

*“I am speaking the truth in Christ – I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit – that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. **They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promis-***

¹ To follow the idea of a chosen “*place*”, where God would dwell in the midst of His people, see Deuteronomy 12:5, 14, 18, 21 and 26 and any cross-references you might have.

es. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen” (Romans 9:1-5).²

The apostle then spends two chapters of the letter explaining what went wrong with the nation, so that we can avoid making the same mistakes. He explains how it will all work out for the best in the long term, when God restores the nation to His favour. To get maximum benefit from his argument we need to develop another technique which will help us in understanding the Bible for ourselves, that of summarising an argument into a few key points. Try reading the three chapters in question (Romans 9 to 11), note down what you see as the main points and then compare your list with this one:

Romans	Key Point
9:1-5	I have great sorrow for Israel because they have had so many advantages and opportunities and are missing out on so much now.
9:6-18	God’s promises have not failed: only those who believed the promises of God can really be counted as His children. God has always worked through those He chooses – it’s His choice.
9:19-29	God is sovereign in all these matters – like a potter who shapes the clay.
9:30-33	Gentiles have learned how to become righteous by faith (by what they believe), but the Jews are still trying to work out their own salvation: by trying to be obedient to the Law of Moses.
10:1-13	I really want the Jews to be saved but they have to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as the one who can give them righteousness – he is Lord of both Jew and Gentile and we must all believe in him and confess that he is Lord if we are to be saved.

² This is better rendered “to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen” (RSV). As we have seen before, that is a translation which is consistent with Bible teaching elsewhere.

Romans	Key Point
10:14-21	That is why the gospel is preached; but it has long been predicted that not everyone will accept the message. Sadly, many Jews have become both disobedient and obstinate.
11:1-5	Does that mean that God has finished with the Jewish people? Far from it! God has always worked through a remnant – a small number of people who have remained faithful: that has happened throughout the ages.
11:6-10	In all that time the Jewish people have been unwilling to accept Jesus as Lord: they have been like blind people.
11:11-24	They have stumbled but have not fallen beyond recovery. Their loss has been gain for the Gentiles, who now have what Israel once had. But Israel will return to favour with God. That will also be the time of the resurrection of the dead; it will be as if the original branches are grafted back onto the stock of the tree.
11:25-36	When that happens “All Israel will be saved” – the nation of Israel, the people racially descended from Abraham, will at last be saved, and all this will give glory to God.

❖ **The Hope of Israel**

One key feature of Paul’s inspired explanation is that the Gentiles have become heirs of the promises of God, which were first entrusted to Israel, by accepting and believing those very same promises. God has not started a new and different way of establishing a right relationship with Him. It is the way which was outlined in the



Old Testament, but it is the way of faith, not of works. In other words, try as we might, we can never be good enough to merit what God offers by way of salvation from sin and a place in His kingdom. We can only obtain that by God's grace and favour – as a *gift*, not as a right. This is a point that Paul makes many times in his various letters, including in Romans, as we have seen.

If we want to obtain God's favour, we have to become Jews inwardly, a point that Paul made early in the letter:

*“No one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. **But a Jew is one inwardly**, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God” (Romans 2:28,29).*

We become members of the family of God by embracing the promises first made by God to the Jewish people and thus becoming relatives of Abraham, by faith. Again that is something that Paul established as his argument was developing:

*“He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. **The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised**, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, **and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised**. For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith” (4:11-13).*

This is why the Bible insists that the one hope it contains is a Jewish hope through and through. The Lord Jesus once said, to a Samaritan woman:

*“You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for **salvation is from the Jews**” (John 4:22).*

And his apostles were equally insistent that if you want to be part of God's purpose you must find and keep the “*hope of Israel*”. This is the one and only hope of salvation that there is. The apostle Paul was persecuted by Jews who opposed what he was teaching and preaching. But he had

no hesitation in saying that the faith he preached was, in fact, the hope of Israel; if only they would accept it themselves! He explained this at one of his trials: ³

*“Because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar – though I had no charge to bring against my nation. For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of **the hope of Israel** that I am wearing this chain” (Acts 28:19,20).*

Earlier he had spelled it out even more clearly:

*“I stand here testifying both to small and great, **saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass**: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, **he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles**” (26:22,23).*

There was salvation available to both Jews and Gentiles on the same basis – by faith in the promises of God and through baptism into the saving name of Jesus Christ.

❖ Jewish Hope

This hope is “*of the Jews*” or “*of Israel*” for several reasons:

- 1 The promises about a Saviour who would redeem mankind were made by God to Jews and were first believed by them – that is Paul's observation in Romans 9:4, when he says “*to them belong ... the promises*”.
- 2 The Saviour was to be a Jew, born of the tribe of Judah, in a Jewish town, to a Jewish girl, to occupy a throne in Jerusalem the capital of the nation of Israel.⁴
- 3 Salvation will only come to the world when the king comes to Zion (another name for Jerusalem), and at that time both Jew and Gentile will be saved.

Paul refers to these Old Testament predictions about Jesus coming to Jerusalem as Saviour of the world:

³ *“There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:4,5).*

⁴ *See Genesis 49:10 (Jesus was to be born of the tribe of Judah); Micah 5:2 (in Bethlehem); Isaiah 7:14 (to a virgin daughter of Israel); Isaiah 9:7 (to rule on David's throne in Jerusalem).*

*“In this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, **‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob’; ‘and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’**”*

As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:26-29).

Here the inspired apostle combines at least two Old Testament passages – Isaiah 59:20,21 and 27:9. In their original settings within the prophecy of Isaiah they are about a redeemer who would come to rescue mankind, at a time when there was nobody else who could help. He armed himself with righteousness and thus brought salvation, and he will come again to Jerusalem to destroy all opposition and save those who “turn from transgression” (Isaiah 59:20). The coming deliverer – the Lord Jesus Christ – will then make a new covenant or agreement with the nation of Israel: the guilt of the nation will then be atoned for, and their sin will be removed (Isaiah 27:9).

There are many such prophecies in the Old Testament Scriptures⁵ about the coming of a king who will redeem and rescue God’s people and make “Jerusalem to be a joy in the earth, and her people to be a gladness” (Isaiah 65:18). We looked at some of them in the last chapter about the place of Jerusalem in the coming Kingdom of God. But we did not then explore the role of the Jewish people when the one comes who long ago was declared to be the “King of the Jews”. Paul insists, in chapters 9-11 of Romans, that the Jews will have an important part to play, when “all Israel will be saved” (11:26).

❖ Hope for the World

There are very many passages in the Old Testament that predict the coming of a Saviour to rescue Israel and the world out of all trouble and distress. They promise that the work of Jesus will be in that order: he will come to rescue Israel out of trouble and that will result in a change in the fortunes of all nations.

Immediately prior to his ascension to heaven, Jesus was

⁵ For example: Leviticus 26:44,45; Jeremiah 3:14-18; Ezekiel 37:21-23; Joel 2:32 and 3:16.

walking with his disciples on the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem, when they asked him about that time and whether it was near. If they had thought about it they would have known that at that very same location, just a few weeks before, Jesus had told them what would first happen to the Jewish nation and to the whole world.

Then they had asked him about the timing of his coming and of the end of the age and Jesus replied by giving them a list of things that would come to pass before his return from heaven. You can read the words of Jesus in three of the gospel accounts,⁶ and you might like to compile a complete list of everything that Jesus predicted. Among the things that Jesus said would happen before his coming are the following:

- ✓ *The rise of false Christianity and false Christs;*
- ✓ *The persecution of true Christians;*
- ✓ *Wars and rumours of wars;*
- ✓ *Earthquakes, famines and diseases;*
- ✓ *Jerusalem surrounded by armies;*
- ✓ *The Jewish nation separated from Jerusalem;*
- ✓ *Jerusalem under foreign control, until the Jews return;*
- ✓ *Tribulation and distress amongst the nations.*

The Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest of all prophets and his prediction has come remarkably true over nearly 2000 years since he spoke those words. We have had occasion several times already to note how the original Christian message has been distorted and falsified. Over the years, there have been many individuals, and even Church organisations, who have claimed to be Christ, or Christ’s representatives on earth. Yet the sad fact is that the churches which make these claims have often been at the forefront of the persecution of those who challenged their wrong teaching.

Whilst all that was happening, and sometimes because of it, the world has also been at war and often still is. The present conflict against terrorism in its many forms seems set to continue for many years to come and has been

⁶ This prophecy given by Jesus is sometimes known as the Mount Olivet prophecy and is recorded in Matthew 24; Mark 13 and Luke chapter 21.

instrumental in increasing the level of distress and anxiety in the world. Now everybody is at risk and nobody is safe. Whilst there have been such fears before about things getting out of control, the risks are now such that people really do believe there is no way out for mankind, and that an accident or a deliberate act could wreak huge damage to the environment, even perhaps destroying life on earth.

Climate change has resulted in similar concerns and there seems to be no obvious answer. Mankind as a whole shows no willingness to curb its materialistic pursuits, regardless of the consequences for future generations. Climate change has already produced an increase in freak weather conditions – including floods, earthquakes and tornadoes – and the sea level is now rising steadily, as the ice caps begin to melt. It's no wonder that people are distressed about the present state of things and are anxious about the future.

Of course, things have been bad at many periods of human history and people have often been distressed: that's the nature of human government and human misrule. Many times in the past people have thought that the end of everything must be near and that things couldn't get any worse; but they have. This time things are different, and the Jews play an important part in indicating that the coming of Jesus is near, at long last.

❖ Jewish Witness

From the time God called the Jews to be His people, it was intended that they would be the means by which His gracious offer of salvation would be conveyed to all nations. That was made clear to Abraham at the outset when he was told that *"in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* (Genesis 12:3). It became increasingly clear, as time passed, that individuals from other nations could share in Israel's blessings.

- There was such a provision made when the Passover meal was being shared in Egypt and a mixed multitude of people left Egypt with Israel (Exodus 12:38,48,49);
- When they entered the Promised Land, there were opportunities for people like Rahab and Ruth to be accepted as members of the nation of Israel (Joshua 6:25; The Book of Ruth);

- When Solomon dedicated the temple at Jerusalem he expressly included a prayer about foreigners who would come to worship the God of Israel, and there were at least two prominent Gentiles⁷ during his lifetime who became worshippers of the one true God (1 Kings 8:41-43);
- The prophets spoke repeatedly about the admission of the Gentiles into the congregation of Israel,⁸ explaining that Messiah would enlarge the purpose of God in just that way: *"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth"* (Isaiah 49:6).⁹

By the time of Paul's Letter to the Romans – written both to Jewish and Gentile believers – it was an established fact in the Christian community that there was no difference between them in the sight of God.¹⁰ There was just one way of salvation for everyone, regardless of birth, race and gender, and Jews were as much in need of it as everyone else. If they wanted salvation they had to be reborn, by baptism into Christ, and many Jewish believers accepted that opportunity.¹¹

The gospel was preached by Jews to Jews in the first place, but as they gradually became unwilling to accept the message of the apostles, the focus of attention switched to the Gentiles. Sadly, many Jews are depicted in the New Testament as opponents of the gospel. Thus the Book of Acts ends with the apostle Paul rebuking the Jews at Rome for their unbelief and declaring that henceforth the gospel would be taken to the Gentiles:

⁷ They were Hiram, the King of Tyre and the Queen of Sheba.

⁸ Paul cites some of those prophecies in Romans 10:19-21, which also explain that whilst the Gentiles would believe, the Jews would not at first accept what God was doing through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹ The apostle Paul also quotes this Scripture to show that he was continuing the Lord's work in taking the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 13:47).

¹⁰ Paul makes this very clear in Galatians 3:26-29 and also explains his own task to preach the gospel to Gentiles in Romans 15:14-22, which is why he wanted to come to Rome.

¹¹ See Acts 2:41 and 4:4, where we read about the baptism of 5000 Jewish believers.

“For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’ **Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.** He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, **proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance**” (Acts 28:27-31).

❖ Reluctant Witnesses

So it came about that the Jews, who should have been God’s willing witnesses to teach the nations all about God and His gracious purpose, actually became resistant to the gospel. But that did not mean that God’s purpose with His people was finished. It meant that they became witnesses of His purpose in a rather different way. They became witnesses to the severity of God, showing all nations that God’s Word is not to be lightly set aside, and that He is in control of everything that happens in the world.

Long ago in Israel’s history their leader Moses spelled out the options for the Jewish people. You can read the full text in Deuteronomy chapter 28 or in Leviticus chapter 26. It amounted to this – If they obeyed God and remained faithful the nation would be hugely blessed by God in every respect; but if they disobeyed they would suffer greatly at the hands of other nations. That suffering would include their conquest by another nation, their dispersion to all nations, and their continued persecution wherever they were scattered. Look at an extract from these long prophecies:

“The LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. And among these nations you shall find no respite, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot, but the LORD will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life. In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were evening!’

and at evening you shall say, ‘If only it were morning!’ because of the dread that your heart shall feel, and the sights that your eyes shall see” (Deuteronomy 28:64-67).

This is not the place to undertake a review of Jewish history through the ages, fascinating though that is. It should be sufficient for our purposes to say that some 40 years after Jesus had been executed in Jerusalem the city was besieged and taken by the Romans, following a Jewish revolt, and the survivors were either butchered or deported. It is said that the slave markets were glutted with Jewish slaves and the end result was the dispersion of Jews all over the world. The Romans banned the Jews from Jerusalem, renamed the city, even had a plough dragged over it to declare ceremonially that it would never be rebuilt.

Over the centuries a host of other people occupied Jerusalem including Romans, Persians, Byzantines, Arabs, Egyptians, Turks, Crusaders, Muslims and the British, who conquered Jerusalem from the Ottoman Turks in 1917. Meanwhile the Jews – who were often denied the opportunity to own land in or around Jerusalem, and who were sometimes banned from even living there – suffered greatly in the lands where they had been dispersed. Often they were forced to flee from country to country in search of a safe haven; often they had to move on again as fresh persecutions broke out. There are stories of harsh treatment meted out to Jews in many countries – pogroms in Russia, burnings in Britain, the annihilation of six million Jews in Nazi Germany.

In all those events the Jews were witnesses to God’s Word. He had said this would happen if they were unfaithful and disobedient and it happened exactly as predicted. It was always open to the Jews to throw themselves upon the mercy of God and to accept the Lord Jesus Christ. Their own Scriptures kept open the promise that if they inclined their hearts to God and sought His salvation, He would heed



and act to save them.¹² But there has been no such national inclination and most of the Jewish people today are persuaded, as were their ancestors, that the claims made by Jesus of Nazareth are false. Indeed many of them no longer believe that God exists!

❖ Return to the Land

Despite the continued unbelief of the Jews, and the centuries of their dispersion, the prophets of God also made it clear that there would come a time when God would act to bring this time of Jewish trouble to an end. There would come a time when – to use Paul's figure in Romans 11:12-24 – God would graft back into the ancient stock those olive branches that had been cut off for so many generations. The natural olive (the Jews) and the wild olive (the Gentiles) would then grow together and be fruitful for God, when He had mercy on the natural descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob:

*“Just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so **they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy.** For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Romans 11:30-33).*

This outworking of God's mercy has been apparent during the second half of the 20th century and into this one, for the Jewish people are now back in the land that God once promised to their forefathers. Having been a nation in exile for more than 1800 years, they have retained their national identity in a quite remarkable way and towards the end of the 19th century began a process of national recovery and resettlement which is unique among nations. Many ancient people like the Babylonians, the Phoenicians, the Philistines, even the Romans, have ceased to be nationally identifiable. Over time they have intermingled with their neighbours until their original characteristics have

¹² See Leviticus 26:40-45; Deuteronomy 4:29-31; 30:1-20; 1 Kings 8:47-50; 2 Chronicles 6:37-39; Psalm 91:15; Isaiah 55:6,7; Hosea 5:15 - 6:1-3; Amos 5:4-6 and Zephaniah 2:1-3.



been lost. But the Jewish people remain as distinctive and recognisable as ever they were.

The prophets had foretold all this as well, including their return to the land and their continuing unbelief. Even the brutal acts now undertaken by the Israelis and their willingness sometimes to act against their military opponents have been foretold. In all this the Jews continue to be God's witnesses to the nations that His purpose is on track and that all these happenings are the final events due to take place before the return to earth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here are some prophecies about the regathering of the Jews and their return in unbelief:¹³

*“Return, **O faithless children,** declares the LORD; for I am your master; I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, **who will feed you with knowledge and understanding** ... At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart” (Jeremiah 3:14-17);*

*“Behold, **I will bring them** from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labour, together; a great company, they shall return here. With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy **I will lead them back,** I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, **‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock’**” (31:8-10);*

*“Behold, **I will gather them from all the countries to***

¹³ Here are some more references you might care to look up, also about the regathering of the Jews to their ancient land (Isaiah 54:7; Ezekiel 20:34,41; 36:24; 37:21; Micah 2:12; Zephaniah 3:19 and Zechariah 8:4).

which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. **I will bring them back to this place,** and I will make them dwell in safety” (32:37);

“Thus says the Lord God: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.’ **And when they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them.**¹⁴ I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their deeds upon their own heads, declares the Lord God” (Ezekiel 11:17-21).

The return of the Jews to the land once occupied by their forefathers and their re-establishment as a nation among nations is a modern miracle, no less. It is part of God’s witness to this generation that He is still ruling in the kingdom of men and that His purpose is working out exactly as predicted. The time is coming when Israel will accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their long-awaited Messiah and Saviour.

❖ National Resurrection

The prophet Ezekiel tells us a lot about the events that lead up to the return of Jesus and the start of the new age, when the Kingdom of God is re-established on earth. One of his visions captures the coming transformation in a very graphic way. He saw a valley which was full of very dry bones and was told to prophesy over those bones, which he duly did, as he spoke the Word of God. He told the dead bones what God was about to do – that they were going to re-assemble and become bodies once again – and as he prophesied it happened.

Bone came to bone and sinews and flesh covered them

¹⁴ Reference to a new heart and a new spirit is God’s promise of a new relationship, or a new covenant to be established with the nation. This is what Paul referred to in Romans 11:26,27.

until the valley was full of lifeless corpses. Next he was told to summon the four winds that they might breathe life into the corpses:

“So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. Then he said to me, ‘Son of man, **these bones are the whole house of Israel.** Behold, they say, Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off. Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And **you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people.** And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord” (Ezekiel 37:10-14).

This divine prediction comes with its own explanation. Ezekiel was prophesying about the nation of Israel which, in his lifetime, had seemed to be on the point of national extinction. He spoke these words just after Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had sent his troops into Jerusalem to kill the inhabitants and pillage the city. Some of their actions are described in Jeremiah 7:30-8:3 where Jeremiah tells of the way the tombs were rifled and the dead bodies left out in the open, drying in the sun.

We have already seen that Ezekiel prophesied that, at this time, the kingdom of Israel would be overturned and would be no more until the Messiah came.¹⁵ In the chapter we are currently looking at, the prophet now tells us of the way the nation of Israel would be reborn prior to the coming of their king.

In the middle of the 20th century, the Jews faced extinction once again, at the time of the Holocaust. But at that point of national extremity – a circumstance more extreme than anything faced by any other nation – God rescued them and brought them back to the land. There had been earlier indications that individual nations would view sympathetically the re-establishment of a Jewish state in their original homeland. The events of the Second World War

¹⁵ Ezekiel 21:26-27

touched the hearts and consciences of many nations. In 1947, just two years after that war ended, a majority of the League of Nations voted to support the rebirth of Israel as a nation, since when millions of Jews have returned to establish modern Israel.

❖ Act of God

Ezekiel predicted that this would not be a gesture of goodwill on the part of mankind – a sort of reparation for all the injustice the Jews had suffered in many places. It would instead be an act of God, something that had been predicted. God brought the Jews back to the land and He re-established them there, using human political systems and national decisions as part of His purpose, as He has always done. But notice the two stages of Ezekiel’s prophetic vision:

- 1 The Jews were to return as a body of people: they would be a national entity, recognizable among the nations of the world.
- 2 Later they would be energized by the Spirit of God. As God said: *“I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live”* (37:14).

That means that the time is coming when Israel will come to a proper relationship with God. They will learn to live by faith and will then accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour and King. When that happens we will be on the brink of the Kingdom of God being established. Remember what the apostle Paul said:

“Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?” (Romans 11:12-15).

These are such exciting matters that we need to make a slight diversion from Romans to consider just how all this is going to work out, so that *“all Israel will be saved”*.

Things to Read

-  Read Ezekiel chapter 37 which contains a very graphic picture of the restoration of the Jews at a time when their hope seemed lost. Notice what the prophet said about their coming king.
-  Jeremiah chapter 30 contains another colourful description of God regathering the Jews, as though He were a shepherd collecting His sheep. Notice what it says about Israel becoming the people of God once again.
-  If you haven’t already read one of the three accounts of the so-called “Olivet Prophecy,” in which Jesus predicted the signs that would lead up to his coming and the end of the age, try reading Luke chapter 21.

Questions to Think About

- 21.1 Read Romans chapter 10 and then answer the following questions:
 - a What was it that Israel failed to do? (v 1-3)
 - b What was the Law of Moses unable to give them? (v 5-8)
 - c What does everyone, whether Jew or Gentile, need to do in order to be right with God? (v 9-13)
 - d How do we get to have faith in God? (v 14-17)
 - e Did the prophets predict that the Jews would not believe in Jesus, but that the Gentiles would? (v 16-21)
- 21.2 In Romans 11:1-6 Paul explains that God often works through a “remnant” – a small number of people who believe, while the majority does not. Can you think of any other occasions when there were only a few who believed whilst the rest did not? What does it tell you about believers today? (Genesis 6; Numbers 14; Joshua 2)