

God's plan had always been to have a people on the earth who would model relationship with him to the rest of the nations, and so draw them into a loving relationship with him. They were to be an example of a nation living under the protection, blessing and favour of God. As they lived out this covenant relationship, all men would be attracted to desire God too, so filling the earth with the knowledge of the glory of God. He could have chosen any nation, but he chose the Jews because he chose the man: Avram – later to become Abraham. Some look on this choice as the "scandal of particularity" – why did he choose this man above any other? I believe it is because God saw Abraham's heart. Abraham believed God (Gen 14:6) and God's huge heart of love answered with blessing. Earlier, (Gen 12:2-3) God had established his covenant of blessing with Avram, through which he purposed to bless all the people on the earth.

Why did God choose one man, one family, one nation? Let me illustrate it this way: A father buys some chocolate for his three children. He has the choice of buying three separate bars and giving them each the same; or he could buy one bar and give it to one child and tell them to share it. Although the first option seems fairest and probably most peaceable, the problem is the children remain unconnected as individuals. If the father wants to teach his children how to live as family, then the second option will help them to relate together.

So, instead of dealing with each nation separately, God chose to reveal himself specifically to one nation, the Jews, with the intention that all nations might know his blessing through them. God's choosing of Israel as his holy nation was based on covenant through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It was not through any greatness that they were chosen (Deut 7:6-8) but simply out of his sovereign love, rooted in his Father heart.

And so God nurtured, protected, empowered and embraced his people and brought them into the land that he had promised Abraham centuries before. But Israel became a rebellious people, and did not always listen to what God told them. They turned to other gods, and got caught up in the detestable occult practices of their neighbours. Time after time God warned them through his prophets that he will not tolerate their unfaithfulness, and that if they do not turn from their wicked ways he will have to act to give them a wake-up call. But still they did not listen. After the death of King Solomon civil war ensued, and the nation split into two, with 10 tribes forming Israel in the north, with centres at Bethel and Samaria – but they forsook Jerusalem and the royal blood-line. The remaining two tribes kept Jerusalem as their capital and took the name of Judah – and more importantly retained the royal blood-line.

After a short period of prosperity Israel, the northern nation, returned to their unfaithful ways, adopting many of the practices of the neighbouring Canaanites and profaning the holy places with pagan fertility rites. God could not turn a blind eye to their disobedience, and after final warnings by Amos then Hosea, God allowed the Assyrians to conquer them and take them into exile. Israel never returned to the land again.

Judah, the southern kingdom remained in the land a little longer, but again their consistent rebellion and unfaithfulness to God compelled God to act in righteous judgement. They were taken away into exile by the Babylonians in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Later, under the leadership of Ezra, Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, a remnant of Jews returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls and the temple.

Subsequently the Jews who returned to the land came under Macedonian, Greek and then Roman rule until the birth of Yeshua (Jesus) the Messiah.

With the coming of Yeshua was renewed the hope of restoration of the kingdom to Israel. In Acts 1:6 Yeshua is asked if he is now going to establish an earthly kingdom. Yeshua responds by changing their thinking to understand a spiritual kingdom. But at the same time, he does not reject their belief in an earthly kingdom, but instead adjusts their thinking about the timing of it. This is important because the Jewish understanding is of an earthly kingdom, whereas the church thinks mainly in terms of a spiritual kingdom. The reality is that both are true, it's not "either or" it's "both and". The church (mostly Gentile) understands that Yeshua is returning soon, but appears to be largely unaware that he is coming to establish an *earthly* kingdom "rooted in David", and to occupy His throne on earth (cf Psalm 110).

Because of the Jews' rejection of Messiah and his kingdom, God hands over the mandate for the spreading of the gospel to the Gentiles, and so ushers in what is known as "the age of the Gentiles", which is the time we are living in today.

So where does all this bring us to as far as Israel is concerned. Has God finished with the Jews forever? Has the church replaced the Jews in God's plans for the world? The answer from scripture is an emphatic No! The key passage of scripture that will help us understand how Israel still figures in God's plan is Romans chapters 9 to 11. Many have treated these chapters as a parenthesis in Paul's magnificent teaching on the grace of God. However, far from being a parenthesis, it is actually the focal point of the book, dealing clearly with the tension between Jew and Gentile. Paul reminds the readers that God has not finished with the Jews just because they rejected him. In Romans 11:11 we are told that Israel's "stumble" is not a "fall". God has used Israel's disobedience to bring salvation to the Gentiles. The fact that salvation has now come to the Gentiles will ultimately provoke the Jews to jealousy. Furthermore, in verse 8 Paul tells us that God has deliberately and supernaturally caused the eyes of the Jews to be temporarily blinded to the gospel.

The chapter goes on to explain God's end time strategy for the world, and the winding up of this phase of the world's history. Paul describes it as a "mystery" or hidden plan, which is received by revelation of the Holy Spirit rather than by the natural mind. As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul urges the church not to be ignorant or arrogant, and to grasp hold of the revelation God has brought regarding Israel. He pours out the longing in his heart to see his brothers, the Jews, saved. He warns us not to be arrogant, or "wise in our own opinions". He illustrates this with an olive tree in which the natural branches (the Jews) have been cut off; if we are arrogant we run the risk that we (the Gentiles who have been grafted in) may also be cut off. We have the

privilege of benefiting from the “root and fatness” of the tree – ie the blessings that have come from Israel’s long relationship with God – indeed, we are supported by the root, not the other way round.

But then Paul reveals the stunning climax to the mystery: that all of Israel is going to be saved! At present they are under a temporary blindness, and at the moment it looks as though Israel has lost her role and destiny in God’s purposes. But this is just for a season – until “the full number of Gentiles has come in” (v25). God is showing immense patience, but there will come a day when he will usher in the end of the age.

What will happen then?

- A great revival among Gentiles of all nations (Rev 7:9)
- The greatest persecution of all times of Christians and Jews by the Antichrist
- Many martyrs, both Christians and Jews will spill their blood
- An intense increase in intercession (Rev 5:8)
- The emergence of a radiant church, spotless, holy and blameless
- Many signs and wonders in the Spirit of Elijah (Luke 1:17)
  
- **Israel will see** an intense persecution of Jews and Christians together
- **Israel will see** Christians identifying with Jews even in death
- **Israel will see** Christians moving in signs and wonders. There will be supernatural provision and protection like Israel experienced in the desert with Moses
- **Israel will see** that Christians are the only trustworthy friends the Jews have
- **Israel will see** Christians that are meek, mature and pure, loving the enemies who are persecuting and killing them
- **Israel will see** Christians supporting Jews as brothers, giving them shelter and protection

***And so they will be provoked to jealousy!***

Understanding the place of Israel in God’s end time plan is vitally important because it affects how we live now. How we view what will happen in the future will determine how we live today. One important thing we must do is to pray for Israel. Psalm 122:6 tells us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. We need to uphold Israel as a nation before God and pray for her salvation. She may be an apostate nation right now, but many are receiving the revelation of Yeshua as their Messiah, and God has a remnant as always who remain faithful to him. There is a spiritual principle that says what you consistently pray for you grow to love. They are still God’s covenant people, and God has not broken his covenant with them. We at New Forest House of Prayer stand together with our brothers and sisters in Israel, and our heart cry is that they will receive the revelation that causes them to cry out “Baruch ha ba b’shem Adonai” – Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

