

Israel – a special nation

The subject of Israel may seem an unusual topic to include in a basic discipleship course, but the Bible teaches us so much about Israel and the Jewish people that our conclusion must be – this subject is of vital importance to God! Today there are a growing number of Christians worldwide who are waking up to their responsibility not only to pray for Israel and the Jews but also to support them in many practical ways. You too can be amongst them as God opens your eyes to see what so many Christians today fail to recognise.

It is the common experience of all believers counted in that number that:

“I will bless those who bless you ...” (see Gen. 12:1-3)

We should seek the blessing of God actively in our lives and the evidence shows that whether a nation, a group, or an individual blesses Israel by praying for them, honouring them and supporting them in practical ways, they experience the reality of God’s blessing upon their lives. Not that we would do it for this reason alone! We bless Israel because we understand God’s focus is on this little nation and we know that every one of His promises will be fulfilled regarding Israel.

In this short study we will look at Scriptures from both the Old and New Testaments which support this challenge to become active in blessing God’s chosen people.

A time for decision

At the beginning of the 21st. century we are daily seeing Biblical prophecies concerning Israel being fulfilled. It is clear that the growing turmoil in the Middle East is a sign that we are living in the ‘end times’ which Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24. This chapter speaks of a great tribulation, a time of extreme distress for the Jewish people, and, to a lesser degree, for all nations. At this present time, anti-semitism is on the increase where Jews are scattered amongst the nations. We, as Christian believers, should be active in both understanding and sharing God’s Word regarding Israel, ready to speak out for God’s truth.

Here is a quote from a well-respected Bible teacher and supporter of Israel: **”It is wise for believers to avoid the presumption of passivity towards Israel, since the evidence of all history, is that God has not forgotten His people.” (Jack Hayford; see Romans 11:23, 24)**

We can be active in prayer (Psalm 122:6) and in giving (Romans 15:26-27) and also in speaking out for the truth concerning Israel when so many lies abound.

Israel – the Holy Land

In these days many Christians as well as non-believers take a wrong and dangerous view of Israel, namely that the land of Israel does not belong solely to the Jews but must be carved up to allow a Palestinian state alongside Israel. The very name ‘Holy Land’ seems outdated to many but in previous generations ‘holy’, or set apart, special, is how most Christians viewed the Land of Israel. It is, in fact, God’s Land! He has chosen to give it to the people of Israel forever as you can see from these verses:

“He remembers His covenant forever...the covenant which He made with Abraham... To Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, ‘To you I will give the land of Canaan as the allotment of your inheritance.’” (Psalm 105:8-11)

The world and much of the church today actually despise Bible –believing Christians as ‘Christian Zionists’. However, it does seem from this and many other Scriptures (150 in all) that God Himself is a Zionist!

For further reading: Gen. 17:8; Ezekiel 11:17; Jeremiah 30:3

A special people

In Genesis 12 we read how God revealed Himself to Abraham and promised that He would make his descendants into a great nation, whom He would bless. God also said that He would make the nation of Israel a blessing to the world:

“In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Gen.12:3)

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What an amazing statement this is! If we look at **Romans 9:4-5** we can begin to understand the ways in which God would fulfil this far-reaching promise.

From these verses, can you list the ways in which Israel is marked out as a special people? What do you consider is the greatest blessing of all that we have received from the Jewish people?

The fact that Jesus Himself was born a Jew clearly fulfils the Scripture that we read from Gen. 12 – all may receive the blessing of salvation through faith in a Jewish Messiah! Let's also remember with grateful hearts the fact that the Bible was written in totality (as far as we know) by Jews. We who believe in and trust Jesus as our Saviour receive the blessings which God gave to Abraham, in response to his faith.

Read Hebrews 11:8-12 and Galatians 3:10-14

The Olive Tree

The apostle Paul, in **Romans 11**, shows us that Israel, meaning Jews in general, are in God's sight like a cultivated, holy (special) olive tree (**v.16**). Because of their unbelief some (but not all) of the branches were broken off, and we, as believing Gentiles like a wild olive tree, have been 'grafted in' to the cultivated olive tree. Therefore we share the richness (of the root and sap) of the olive tree. Paul then warns Gentile believers not to boast against the branches which have been broken off, as we could experience a similar fate if we do not continue in God's goodness, extending grace to all, especially His covenant people.

Read Romans 11:17-24

What about unbelieving Jews?

This is a commonly-asked question and we need to look carefully at God's Word for an answer. Many of the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah, though large numbers of Jewish people received salvation and were filled with the Holy Spirit – in fact 3,000 in one day on the day of Pentecost! (**Acts 2:41**)

In the first 12 chapters of the book of Acts we can read about how the apostles preached largely to the Jews and how the Jewish church flourished. At the same time there were many, mainly religious Jews, who persecuted the early followers of Jesus. Today, we can engage in Biblical discussion with sincere, God-fearing Jews who are totally closed to the truth that Jesus is their Messiah. Why is this?

Romans 11:25 gives us a clue to this strange phenomenon amongst 'unbelieving' but sincere Jews:

"Lest you be self-opinionated, I do not want you to miss this hidden truth and mystery, brethren: a hardening has temporarily befallen a part of Israel until the full number of the ingathering of the Gentiles has come in."

The truth of the matter is that, were it not for the 'hardening' of the Jews towards our Saviour, we would not have been 'gathered in' to His salvation plan. This is a very good reason why we must avoid any traces of arrogance towards those Jews who do not yet believe.

God's glorious outcome for His people, after all their trials and tribulations (some of which have been due to their stubbornness of heart) is found in the next verse (**26**):

"And so all Israel will be saved. As it is written, the Deliverer will come from Zion, He will banish ungodliness from Jacob."

And so what to us as Christian believers will be that glorious second coming of Jesus, for those 'hardened' Jews will be the appearing of their long-awaited Messiah.

"Even so, come Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20)

