

~Are the Jews Still the Elect of God?~

Still Chosen?

By Kurt Simmons

“No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” Jn. 14:6

I am always astonished when I encounter Christians who harbor the idea that the Jews are still God’s chosen people. It is a common belief among many Christians that there is a natural affinity between Jews and Christians; that we are somehow serving the same God and are equally acceptable to him. Many Christians even believe that Christians are obligated to support the Jews as a nation and people; that America’s foreign policy must be pro-Israel, and that in “blessing them” we will in turn be blessed by God.^[1] When I pointed out to someone recently that God destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70 in vengeance for the Jews’ murder of Christ, rejection of the gospel, and persecution of the church, and that they therefore could not still be God’s chosen people, I was called “anti-Semitic.” Thus, it would seem there is a need to see what the Bible says about the Jews and whether they are still the elect of God.

God’s Purpose in History

It is important at the outset to establish the fact that whatever God does in history it is always for the express purpose of saving mankind. When we say “mankind” we do not mean “all men,” for it is clear that some men will refuse God’s offer of grace and salvation. Rather, by saving mankind we mean providing the means of man’s redemption so that all who are willing can receive it. Thus, two fundamental truths emerge at the very outset: God works all things for man’s salvation, but not all are willing to accept the free gift. Those who accept receive eternal life; those that refuse suffer wrath. *“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (Jn. 3:36)*. This is precisely where we find the Jews: grace is offered in Jesus, but they have persisted in unbelief and therefore will die in their sins. Jesus told the Jews this very thing himself. *“I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (Jn. 8:24)*. A little later in the same chapter, because they rejected his word and sought to kill him, Jesus told the Jews they were of the devil. *“If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham...Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (Jn. 8:39-44)*. Although we are getting ahead of ourselves a bit here, without even traversing the history of redemption and the Jews’ place in it, we find it already an established fact that unbelieving Jews were\are of

the devil, under wrath, and die in their sins. And these are the people some would have us believe are still the elect of God? But let us proceed.

The Promise to Adam

When our first ancestors fell, God promised to save the couple. Sin and death, as symbolized by the serpent, would be defeated by a promised Seed and Kinsman redeemer: *“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel”* (Gen. 3:15). Death would bruise Christ’s heel (inflict a venomous wound) at the cross; but Christ would have the victory and destroy the power of sin and death (crush the serpent’s head) by his atoning sacrifice and resurrection.

This promise was made before there was any distinction between Jew and Gentile, and was sure to the whole race of mankind descended from our common ancestor, Adam. But as the work of redemption required that the Godhead (or some part of it) be made flesh, it was necessary that our Lord be born into some race or nation. The question therefore is should he be born randomly into a pagan nation with no understanding of sin and which knew not the true God, or was it necessary that he be born into a nation that had maintained knowledge of God, man’s fallen condition, and the need of a Redeemer? Clearly, the latter is the correct choice. If Christ had been born into a pagan nation that worshipped idols, that condoned sin, knew not God, and did not have the holy scriptures, Jesus could not accomplish his mission, for the very significance of his life and death would be lost upon such a people. But, if born into a nation whose institutions had for millennia taught them to look for a Saviour, whose institutions kept before them the fact of their fallen nature and the need of blood sacrifice for sin, a nation whose sacred writings long foretold the suffering sacrifice of one who would be bruised for their transgressions, and who would defeat the power of sin and death, then and only then could the life and death of Christ fulfill its mission to the world. Therefore, the promise of God to the first couple implied more than the simple birth of a Savior, it entailed the *active government of God over the nation of people and their sacred institutions to which he would be born.*

Conditional Nature of Election and the Flood

Sacred history relates that offspring of Adam began to quickly fill the earth. However, like weeds that overtake a garden, choking out the tender herbs, so the wicked quickly outstripped the righteous and threatened the existence of a righteous seed in the earth. Scripture relates that the proximity and close association of the righteous with the wicked caused the former to soon abandon God in favor of their lower appetites: the “sons of God” (righteous descendents of Seth) saw that the daughters of unbelieving men were fair and made affinity with them in marriage (Gen. 6:1-4). God therefore divinely intervened, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly, a universal deluge to destroy mankind, including the apostate “sons of God,” preserving a righteous seed in Noah (Gen. 6-9). It is to these “sons of God” that Peter almost certainly refers when he mentions the “angels that sinned” who were cast down to Tartarus when the flood was brought in (I Pet. 3:19, 20; II Pet. 2:4, 5). From this early history

we learn that the elect, in this case the sons of Seth, must abide faithful or they too will be severed from God and suffer his wrath (Jn. 15:1-6; Rom. 11:17-21). And if this was true of the descendents of Seth, may it not also be true of the Jews? Can any man, regardless of race and descent, live in rebellion and disbelief and find grace with God? John the Baptist would therefore warn the Jews “think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able, of these stones, to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matt. 3:9, 10).

The Tower of Babel and Call of Abraham

The purpose of God to bring Christ into the world through the descendents of Seth was not lost because generations of faithless children grew up in the place of their parents. God preserved a righteous seed in Noah so that his purpose to save mankind would continue. However, we find that shortly after the flood the righteous were again quickly threatened with extinction by too close association with the wicked: men lived in a single socio-political union, joined by a common tongue. Within 101 years after the flood, God was forced to divinely intervene a second time to preserve a righteous seed. God confused the language of man and scattered him across the face of the earth, and men assembled themselves into nations according to their several tongues (Gen. 10, 11).

This bit of history is included in the Bible for a very important reason. God’s confusion of man’s language and the origin of the nations serve to introduce us to Abraham. The flood narrative closes with an account of the descendents of Shem, introducing us to Eber, the father of the Hebrews (Gen. 10:21-24). The Babel narrative closes by introducing us to Abraham, the descendant of Shem and Eber (Gen. 11:10-32). In Gen. 12:1, 2, God calls Abraham to leave his kindred, promising to make of him “a great nation,” saying that, in him, all families of the earth would be blessed (v. 3). This refers to Christ, who God chose to bring into the world through Abraham. As already noted, although there were hundreds of nations in the world, it would not do for the promised Seed to be born just anywhere, into just any family or nation. It was necessary that the Messiah be born into a nation especially molded and preserved by God; a nation whose sacred writings foretold the Redeemer’s coming; a people whose religious ceremonies and institutions were all calculated to show man his sin and reveal his Savior. Thus, Abraham becomes the conduit through whom God will bring his purpose to save mankind into effect. God will give seed to Abraham, though his wife is sterile, and his family go forward, gradually increasing into a nation, which God will lead out of slavery in Egypt and settle in Canaan.

It is important before we continue to note that Christ was the overarching purpose of God in Abraham’s call. The formation of his descendants into a nation had no other purpose, and once that purpose was fulfilled, the promises of God regarding their special place in the divine plan would terminate. All families of the earth would be blessed by the Savior that came into the world through them. The work was God’s; the Jews were merely the vessel. He formed the nation for a particular purpose, fulfilled that purpose, and moved on to the business of

saving all nations of men. The Jews, like every other race of people, were invited to share in that salvation, but none are forced or compelled. The nations that will not serve the Son are accursed. *“Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile” (Rom. 2:9).*

Possession of the Land and Obedience to the Law

No nation can exist as a separate people without its own land and territory. Any race or tribe that dwells intermingled among other peoples sooner or later will lose its separate identity, language, customs, and institutions. Since it was necessary that the descendants of Abraham keep their separate identity until the gospel was sent into all the world, God gave the land of Canaan to Abraham and his seed as an “everlasting possession” (Gen. 17:5-8). Some have interpreted this to mean that the Jews have an eternal claim upon Palestine, and therefore seek to justify the existence of the modern state of Israel and its robbery of Palestinian lands and oppression of the Palestinian people. However, this is sorely mistaken. The land promise to Abraham’s seed was, first and foremost, *provisional*, to bring Christ into the world and give the gospel a place from which to spread abroad, like a spring to irrigate the earth. *“Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk. 24:46, 47; cf. Zech. 13:1; Ezek. 47:1-12).* Moreover, the land promise was always *conditional*. Moses made very clear that possession of the land was conditioned upon obedience to the law, and that the nation would be uprooted and scattered to the wind should it refuse and rebel.

“And it shall come to pass, that as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to naught; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. The Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from one end of the earth even unto the other...” (Deut. 28:63, 64).

It is worth noting also, that possession of the land was premised upon obedience to the rite of circumcision. At the time God made the promise to Abraham to give his seed the land of Canaan, he imposed as a condition the covenant of circumcision, and called it an “everlasting covenant” (Gen. 17:8-19). Thus, before Joshua was permitted to bring the Jews in to possess the land, the nation was told to circumcise all the males in token of the covenant given to Abraham (Josh. 5:2-9). This is important. The land was given to the Jews as an “everlasting possession” but it was predicated upon obedience to the Law of Moses and the rite of circumcision as an “everlasting covenant.” Like the dietary restrictions and other laws of the Jews, the purpose of circumcision was to separate the Jews from their pagan neighbors. Because they could not give their daughters in marriage to any that were not circumcised, and because none would consent to be circumcised that were not willing to convert to become Jews, the nation would forever be separate from the Gentiles by this mark in their flesh. But the Law of Moses is now abrogated and annulled, and the rite of circumcision abolished. Paul even warns that to obey circumcision is to be “cut off” from Christ and to fall from grace (Gal. 5:2-4). Thus, possession of the land was premised upon obedience to the law, but the

law has been annulled by Christ; and since to obey the law is to deny Christ, and to deny Christ is to be under wrath, there can never be a Biblical basis for possession of the land. The land promise, like the Old Testament itself, terminated in Christ.

Return of the Captivity and Resettlement of the Land

The history of national Israel was marked by cycles of obedience and blessing, followed by apostasy, captivity and subjugation by foreign powers, followed in turn by spiritual repentance, and national renewal and revival. This is nowhere more apparent than the book of Judges, which traces the history of the nation over approximately 400 years, cataloging its spiritual cycles and national vicissitudes. It is also the topic of several Psalms, which look with longing for the time when God would return the captives of Israel (Ps. 14:7; 53:6; 85:1; 126:1, 4). It is probable that the Psalms all speak to the interim captivity Israel suffered under its neighbors, including the Moabites and Philistines. However, the great captivity occurred under the Assyrians and Babylonians. The northern tribes were carried into captivity by Assyria, Judah and Jerusalem by Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, who destroyed the city and burnt the temple (586 B.C.). This was done by the express will of God, because the Jews had strayed so long and refused to repent though continuously urged and warned by the prophets (II Chron. 36:15-21).

However, as before, the purpose of God to save mankind did not depend upon the faithfulness of the Jews. Although the people were carried into captivity and the political institutions and temple service completely ceased, God promised to bring the nation back from captivity and to resurrect its political institutions so that Jesus could be born in Bethlehem and die upon a Roman cross. The prophet Daniel records that God determined 490 prophetic years upon the nation, to bring in the Messiah and his salvation, and then the nation would be destroyed for all time (Dan. 9:24-27).¹²¹ The end would come like a flood, bring desolation upon the capital city where the blood of the Savior was shed. The captivity returned under Zerubbabel, Joshua, Ezra, and Nehemiah, but the cycle of apostasy and rebellion was never fully broken; its end was inexorably fixed.

The Last End of Biblical Israel

The prophecies of God's full and final divorce of the nation, in place of which he has now taken the Christian church as his bride, are found in almost every book of the Bible, from Genesis (Gen. 49:1) through Joel, Zechariah, and Malachi. Indeed, the Old Testament canon closes with the words of Malachi, warning of the coming day of the Lord's judgment against the sinful nation (Mal. 4:1-6). But even at this extremity, God's wrath would be preceded by the prophet "Elijah" (John the Baptist, Matt. 11:14), who would precede the Messiah and issue in time of national, spiritual restoration before its destruction. The New Testament thus opens with John the Baptist warning of the coming judgment of fire upon the nation, urging it to repentance. Sadly, John's warnings went largely unheeded; only a remnant obeyed the gospel and was saved. Jesus, too, prophesied of the coming destruction of the city and temple in highly charged language, which was intended to signify the momentous events that would

overtake the nation at its end (Matt. 23, 24). The Jewish historian Josephus records the awesome events that witnessed the nation's final destruction. Over 1.1 million Jews starved to death in Jerusalem alone, where they were shut up by the Roman armies, during celebration of the Passover, an apostate feast whose observance stood in very denial of Christ, the true Passover Lamb which took away the sins of the world.

The Jews were not alone; divine wrath would be poured out upon the entire Roman world for its persecution of Christ's bride under Nero and the Jews, in which nearly the whole Christian population was extirpated by the most cruel and exquisite tortures perverse minds could imagine. Made spectacles for the mob in the circus where they were burned and crucified and thrown to wild beasts, at length even the Roman people, that calloused and sanguinary nation, were nauseated by the display and their sympathies turned toward the Christians. Nero would be declared a public enemy by the Senate, he would die by his own hand to escape justice, and the nation be thrown into a series of civil wars (A.D. 68-70) during which the empire suffered enormous convulsions as Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian each contended for the throne, Italy was destroyed, and the Roman capital burned.

Paul described the Jews' fall from grace in his letter to the Romans under the image of an olive tree, saying the Jews were broken off, and the Gentiles grafted-in in their place (Rom. 11:13-21). Jesus prophesied this same thing when said "the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). And more especially when confronted with the faith of the Roman centurion he said,

"I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:1-12).

Conclusion

There is not one particle of scripture to support the notion that a people whose national and religious existence is based upon denial of Christ is or ever can be God's chosen people or enjoy his favor and grace.

^[1] If anything, I am of the opposite opinion and that there is a natural antagonism between the gospel and Judaism, and that in aligning ourselves with a nation or religion that denies Christ, we are in danger of courting apostasy and in danger of divine wrath.

^[2] The present state of Israel is purely secular and has no religious pretensions and does not claim, nor can its members prove, any physical descent from Abraham. To the contrary, the present inhabitants of Palestine are almost exclusively Europeans with no Semitic blood at all. Israel today is a political state with a Biblical name and nothing more.