

Israel in History and Prophecy

The name "Israel" today is one of international prominence, and has been for a number of years. It is also prominent in the Bible, appearing in the sacred record more than two thousand times. Prof. Strong interprets it to mean, "He will rule as God." This name first appears in Genesis 32:28, where it was given to Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, by the angel with whom he had wrestled through the night. The angel said, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."

From then on "Israel" became the national name of the descendants of Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob, applying to all the twelve tribes of Jacob. The only exception to this was for a time after the division of the nation into the northern and southern kingdoms, when the ten-tribe segment occupying northern Palestine was known as Israel, and the two tribes in the south as Judah. This continued from the death of Solomon until the captivity in Babylon. Those who returned from this captivity, regardless of the tribe to which they belonged, were again known as Israelites, or the people of Israel.

This was a name the descendants of Abraham used among themselves, and of which they were proud, for they believed, and rightfully so, that it had been given to them by their God, Jehovah. Predating the conferring upon this historic people of the name Israel, they were known as the Hebrew people; and indeed they are still frequently referred to as Hebrews. This name first appears in the Bible in Genesis 14:13, where we have the expression, "Abram the Hebrew." Abram, or Abraham, was a direct descendant of Eber. -- Genesis 11:14-26

The name Hebrew signifies "crossed over," or "the other side." Abraham and his family seemed to have been called Hebrews -- partly at least -- to express a distinction between the ancient races east and west of the Euphrates River, Abraham having "crossed over" to the west on his journey to the land which God had promised him. Generally speaking, we might say that outside nations referred to Abraham's descendants as Hebrews, but Israel became the name more especially used and loved within the nation. The name "Jew" is a derivative of Judah.

The Promise to Abraham

God's special dealing with this people began with Abraham, their father. The first recorded promise made to Abraham reads, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." - - Genesis 12:1-3

Three points should be noted in this promise. (1) Abraham's posterity was to become a great nation. (2) He was to have a "seed" which would be a channel of (3) blessing to all the families of the earth. In Galatians 3:8 the Apostle Paul refers to this promise and uses the word "nations" instead of "families." Actually there is little or no difference in the meaning of the words "families" and "nations," as viewed by Abraham, for the "nations" of his day were large family, or tribal, groups.

In the 7th verse of this 12th chapter of Genesis, the Lord added, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." And in chapter 13, verses 14 and 15, we read in a promise by God to Abraham, "Lift up

now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever." Here, then, is a fourth aspect of the promise made to Abraham; namely, that the land of Canaan was to be his and his children's for an everlasting possession.

Not Unconditional

In the light of the Bible's testimony it is clear that in his promises to Abraham God revealed his plan for the ultimate blessing of all the families of the earth with peace and health and life. This divine purpose was arbitrary, and was certain to be carried out. On the other hand, it is equally clear that those who would be used by God in the implementation of this purpose must qualify for this high position in the divine plan by proving their worthiness through obedience to God's will.

This was true from the very start of God's dealings with Abraham. "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: and I will make of thee a great nation," the Lord said. Had Abraham not left his own people and his father's house and gone to Canaan, the promise to make of him a great nation would not have been fulfilled.

This principle is revealed in connection with the name Israel itself. Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, was the twin brother of Esau. Esau was the firstborn, and according to the prevailing custom of the time, the family right of inheritance belonged to him. But the Lord chose otherwise. Before the children were born, the Lord said to their mother Rebekah, "Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger." -- Genesis 25:23

The "younger" referred to here was Jacob and his descendants. God had chosen him in preference to Esau even as he had previously chosen Abraham, but it still was necessary for Jacob to prove worthy of this choice. He had to make his calling sure. The fact that he did is highlighted in connection with the changing of his name from Jacob to Israel. As the angel with whom Jacob wrestled all night explained, he had prevailed with God; that is, he had proven his worthiness, and was now given a name in agreement with this fact.

God's selection of those who were to represent him had previously been shown in regard to Isaac, the son of Abraham, and father of Jacob. Abraham had another son, Ishmael, whom he considered qualified to be his heir. He said to the Lord, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" But God replied, "Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him." (Genesis 17:18,19) Later God said to Abraham "In Isaac shall thy seed be called" -- Genesis 21:12

The Lord established this choice of Isaac as the progenitor of the promised seed at the time when Sarah, his mother, demanded that Ishmael, Abraham's son by his Egyptian bondmaid, be cast out of the home. However, Ishmael's life was spared, and he became the titular head of the Arab race, or Arabians, who are also so prominently in the news today. Ishmael persecuted Isaac, and even now hatred still exists between the descendants of these two boys. Esau married one of Ishmael's daughters, and his descendants, the former Edomites, became more or less intermingled with the descendants of Ishmael, the Arabs.

In Egyptian Bondage

Through an intriguingly interesting sequence of circumstances, including the selling of Jacob's young son, Joseph, into slavery in Egypt, all the Hebrew people found themselves serving as slaves in that country. The Lord overruled in the experiences of Joseph and he became virtual ruler of Egypt, especially with respect to the food supply during a seven-year famine. It was in connection with his position of high favor in the Egyptian government that his father, Jacob, and the remainder of the family, moved to Egypt.

Their number was small at the time, but increased rapidly. Jacob, or more properly, Israel, died in Egypt. Before he died he blessed his twelve sons, conferring upon all of them some recognition of the fact that God would deal with them. (Genesis 49) It was at Jacob's death that his sons became the nucleus of the nation of Israel. Thenceforth, God dealt with them, not as individuals, but as a family; a family which, according to the standards of the time, was to become "a great nation."

When Israel and his family first moved to Egypt they were treated well. Joseph was highly placed in the government, and the then reigning Pharaoh, due to what Joseph had done for the country, was kindly disposed toward them. But this Pharaoh died, and Joseph died, and the Israelites became an oppressed people and they longed for deliverance.

Moses

It was after many years of oppression that Moses, by the Lord's overruling providences, was raised up to deliver them. The circumstances were unusual. In order to prevent the Israelites from becoming too numerous and a menace to the safety of Egypt, a decree had been issued ordering the destruction of all male Hebrew babies as they were born. The mother of Moses chose to disregard this decree, and hid her child in a basket placed in the bulrushes in the shallow edge waters of the Nile River.

Moses' sister concealed herself nearby to watch. Soon Pharaoh's daughter came to the river to bathe, and the baby was discovered. She had compassion on it and decided to take the child into the royal household to be reared. The sister then came forward and offered to secure a nurse for baby Moses. The offer was accepted, and Moses' own mother was thus chosen to be the nurse.

In this manner Moses became a well-educated man, and well equipped to be a great leader of his people. At the age of forty he became distressed over the difficult plight of his people and endeavored to do something about it. But the Lord's due time had not come for their deliverance, and Moses was obliged to flee from Egypt into the land of Midian, where he remained in seclusion for forty years.

The Lord spoke to Moses at the "burning bush," and commissioned him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, and to freedom. Some of the most outstanding miracles recorded in the Bible were performed under the direction of Moses in connection with this deliverance. Altogether there were ten plagues brought upon the Egyptians to obtain Pharaoh's consent for their release, the tenth being the death of Egypt's firstborn. Israel's firstborn were spared, being under the protection of the blood of the Passover lamb. The Israelites to this day continue to commemorate this miraculous event in their national history.

There was also the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, and the falling of the Manna from heaven -- the food which sustained the lives of the Israelites during their forty years' wandering in the wilderness of Sinai. There was also the sweetening of the bitter waters, and the obtaining of water

from a rock. During that forty years' wandering their shoes did not wear out -- another miracle. The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob was caring for them because they were his people.

The Law

Soon after Moses led the Israelites through the Red Sea, and into the wilderness, he was used by God to give the nation his Law. This was at Mount Sinai. The Law was epitomized in the Ten Commandments. The giving of the Law was a most significant event in Israel's experience. God promised that anyone who could and would keep the Law inviolate would live thereby (Leviticus 18:5; Nehemiah 9:29; Ezekiel 20:11) What this meant was that such a one would not become decrepit and finally die, as did all other people.

In a New Testament reference to the significance of this, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression." (Romans 5:14) Adam sinned willfully, and brought upon himself the penalty of death. All his children since have died because of his transgression.

The Law served to prove the inability of the fallen human race to obtain life by their own righteousness. While the test was made with but this one little nation, the results would have been the same with other nations and races. All are imperfect and sinful. All are dying and need help from God if they are to gain life.

The Law served still another purpose with respect to Israel. Through Moses, the Lord said to the people, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." -- Exodus 19:4-6

As we have noted, Israel means one who rules with God, that is, as his representative. The thought is that the people to whom God gave this name were chosen to represent him in the earth -- to teach, and to rule, and to bless, in keeping with his promises and plan. But this was not an arbitrary selection. In order to enter into this heritage of prominence in the divine arrangement, the children of Jacob must first prove their worthiness by their sincere and determined efforts to obey the voice of the Lord and to be faithful to the covenant into which they had entered with him -- the Law Covenant.

Six Phases

Beginning with the Exodus and the giving of the Law, Israel passed through six phases of national existence before the nation was destroyed and the people scattered throughout the earth.

(1) The first of these was the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Because of their rebellious attitude, displayed particularly in rejecting the minority report of the spies as to their ability to conquer Canaan, the Lord decreed that all the males of the nation who were twenty years of age or older when they left Egypt must die in the wilderness. The only exceptions to this were the two faithful spies, Caleb and Joshua.

(2) Upon the death of Moses, Joshua became the leader of the nation, and under him they crossed over Jordan into the Promised Land of Canaan. This began another phase of their national experience. It had to do mostly with the division of the land among the twelve tribes, and the

conflicts involved in possessing the assigned portions. Joshua was a faithful leader -- faithful to his people and to the Lord.

(3) After Joshua's death there followed the period of the judges, when the nation was not ruled by a central government, and everyone was free to do as he wished, subject, of course, to his own sense of responsibility to the terms of the Law given at Sinai. The deportment of the people under this arrangement was far from salutary. When they became too engrossed in sin, particularly the sin of idolatry, the Lord would punish them through the invasion of the surrounding nations, such as the Midianites, and others. Then, when they cried to the Lord for help, "judges" would be raised up by the Lord to deliver them.

(4) The last of the judges was Samuel, who also served as prophet. During his tenure of office, the people clamored for a king. They wanted to be like other people. The Lord told Samuel to warn the Israelites of the difficulties they would encounter under the rulership of kings. But they still insisted upon having a king, and the Lord instructed Samuel to anoint a king over them. Their first king was Saul, who became notorious because of his wickedness and was rejected by the Lord, and ignominiously died as a suicide.

David was chosen to succeed Saul. God spoke of David as a man after his own heart. (Acts 13:22) The Lord chose the Davidic family as the one through which would come the great Deliverer of Israel and of the whole world -- the Messiah. Referring to David's son Solomon, who succeeded him on the throne of Israel, the Lord said, "My mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee: thy throne shall be established forever." -- II Sam 7:15

This promise is referred to in the Bible as the "sure mercies of David." (Isaiah 55:3) It is thus described because its fulfillment called for the exercise of mercy. Not only Solomon, but other successors in the Davidic line were gross transgressors of God's law, yet he did not remove the kingdom from this family. The wonderful manner in which the Lord protected David's heirs to the throne throughout the period of the kings makes interesting and faith-strengthening reading.

After the death of Solomon there was a division of the kingdom. Rehoboam was the rightful heir to the throne, but under the leadership of Jeroboam, ten of the tribes broke away from Judah and Benjamin, and thereafter the Davidic line of kings ruled over these two tribes only. But this did not change God's original purpose concerning the great King and Messiah whom he promised to send; for this One of destiny was to come from the tribe of Judah. -- Genesis 49:10

Without exception the kings of the ten-tribe segment of the nation were wicked, and in due course they were conquered by the Assyrians and taken captive to Assyria. Some of the Davidic line of kings who ruled the two-tribe kingdom were faithful to the Lord, and some were not. The last of these is referred to in Ezekiel 21:25 as a "profane wicked prince of Israel," and the declaration is made that the "day is come, when iniquity shall have an end."

This was in the year 606 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, completed his conquest of the Holy Land, destroyed Jerusalem, and took the king, Zedekiah, and the people, captive to Babylon. At first glance it would appear at this point that God's promise that the "scepter" would not depart from Judah and that the Davidic line of kings would be preserved had failed. But not so. The Prophet Ezekiel said, "It shall be no more, until he come whose right it is," implying that the kingdom was merely suspended for a time, and that later it would be restored. -- Ezekiel 21:27

(5) The next phase in Israel's national existence was the period of captivity in Babylon. This lasted for seventy years. The nation was not destroyed, although it had lost its national independence. And when the captivity ended and the people were given their liberty to return to Palestine, the nation did not regain its full freedom. It continued to remain a vassal nation.

One of the outstanding personalities in Israel's history came into prominence during the Babylonian captivity. This was the Prophet Daniel. Not only did Daniel serve God faithfully as a prophet, but he became prime minister of the empire, second only in control to the king. This high position in government was continued by the king of the Medes, who conquered Babylon. It was Daniel's refusal to obey the edict of this king that caused him to be cast into a den of lions, where his life was miraculously protected.

(6) It was at the conclusion of the seventy years of captivity that King Cyrus issued a decree permitting the Israelites to return to their land, and authorizing the rebuilding of their temple in Jerusalem. In 2 Chronicles 36:22 and Ezra 1:1 we are told that the Lord "stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia" to issue this decree. Since Daniel lived over into the reign of Cyrus, it was probably through him that the Lord aroused Cyrus to take this action so favorable to the Israelites.

In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah we have a fairly full account of the first ten years after the captivity officially ended. In this record there appear the names of Ezra, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, and others used by the Lord, in rebuilding first the temple and then the city of Jerusalem and its walls, which had been destroyed when the nation was taken captive to Babylon.

Under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah there was a rededication of the people to God, the Law being read to them by Ezra. (Nehemiah 8) In Nehemiah, chapter 10, is recorded a solemn covenant into which many of the people entered, under the direction of their leaders. This went somewhat beyond the demands of the Law, and some scholars believe that it was the small beginnings of what later became the Talmudic writings which are so influential in the lives of many Israelites even today.

Beyond the experiences pertaining to the rebuilding of the temple and the city and walls of Jerusalem, the Bible contains virtually no information relating to the nation from then until the birth of Jesus. The Apocryphal books of the Maccabees tell of the heroic efforts of the Maccabean family to throw off the Assyrians as oppressors of the Israelites. Kings were established in Jerusalem for a short period, but this short-lived dynasty was brought to an end by the conquering Romans.

The Birth of Jesus

When Jesus was born, the nation of Israel had been without any special manifestation of favor from God for several centuries. Malachi was the last of the prophets, and he served during the time of Nehemiah. But despite this lack of special prophetic instruction, many in Israel maintained their interest in the Word and Law of the Lord, so much so that when John the Baptist began his ministry the people wondered whether or not he might be the promised Messiah. -- Luke 3:15,16

It is reasonable to suppose that the priests and doctors of the law in Israel were acquainted with the prophecy recorded in Daniel 9:25 in which a period of sixty-nine symbolic weeks is mentioned as marking the time for the coming of Messiah. In prophetic time this was a measurement of 483 years. It was to begin with the decree to rebuild the city and walls of

Jerusalem, 454 B.C. If the religious rulers of Israel had any understanding of this prophecy at all, they would know that they were living in the very time when the Messiah was to appear.

An angel of the Lord said to Mary, the mother of Jesus, "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." -- Luke 1:31-33

Should there be any doubt as to how, and by whom, the promises of God concerning the perpetuation of the throne of David were to be fulfilled, here we have the answer. And this statement of the angel to Mary confirms the truth set forth in a prophecy of the birth of Jesus, which reads, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this." -- Isaiah 9:6,7

Messiah -- The "Anointed"

The word "Messiah" means "the anointed." So does its New Testament counterpart, "Christ." Jesus became the Anointed One at the age of thirty, when he was baptized in the River Jordan by John the Baptist. The Old Testament custom of anointing kings and priests into office by use of holy anointing oil was typical and was now to be superseded by its antitype, the anointing of the Holy Spirit. At Jordan, John the Baptist was given an outward demonstration which proved to him that the Holy Spirit, or power of God, had come upon Jesus.

Soon after this, Jesus visited a synagogue in Nazareth, his home town. Given the Scriptures to read, he opened to the 61st chapter of Isaiah, and read, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he [Jehovah] hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." -- Luke 4:18, Isaiah 61:1-3

Jesus went throughout Palestine proclaiming this message of the Gospel, or good news. It was the good news of the kingdom; that is, the good news that the kingdom, or government, which God had promised was actually to be established and that through its agencies the sick were to be healed, the dead raised, and peace and security established for Israel and for all nations. He was assisted in this ministry by his twelve apostles, and later by seventy others called evangelists.

Together these labored for more than three years in that little country of Palestine. In addition to their oral message of good news, they demonstrated the practical meaning of what they said by miracles of healing, even raising the dead. These were the blessings promised to come to the people through the messianic kingdom; and the miracle-working power bestowed upon Jesus and his co-workers was, or should have been, a convincing witness to the fact that he was the Messiah of promise.

But few of the nation accepted Jesus as the Messiah. The religious rulers particularly were antagonistic toward him. John wrote, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." (John 1:11) It became necessary at times for Jesus to plan his course of action so as not to come

into too close contact with those of Israel who were opposing him. But toward the close of his ministry, when Jesus realized that the due time had come in the divine plan for him to die as the world's Redeemer, he returned to the Judean district where the opposition to him was strongest, and in these closing days he made some very revealing statements. One of them was:

"Behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." -- Matthew 23:34-39

It must be admitted that Jesus was a true prophet of what was to befall the nation of Israel within the lifetime of the generation to which he ministered. It was less than forty years after Jesus uttered the prophecy just quoted that Jerusalem was destroyed and the people of Israel scattered through the world, marking the beginning of what is known to the Israelites as the Dispersion.

This also marked the end of the sixth phase of their national history as recorded in the Bible. It began with the return of the exiles from Babylon and ended in A.D. 70-73, when the severest and longest-lasting of all their national calamities came upon them. Beginning with the Dispersion, the Bible continues to describe many of the experiences of this chosen people of God, not as history, but prophetically; or, if you wish, history in advance.

But meanwhile another feature of the divine plan for human redemption and recovery from sin and death unfolds; one in which the name Israel continues to be prominent. When John wrote concerning those who rejected Jesus, that "his own received him not," he added, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power [margin, the right, or, privilege] to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Today the expression "son of God" is used in a rather loose manner. Many claim that the entire human race are children of God. It is true that the human race is God's creation, and indeed Adam is referred to in the Bible as the "son of God." (Luke 3:38) But this relationship was lost through sin.

However, John had much more in mind when he said that believing Israelites were given the privilege to become "sons of God." In the Bible the sons, or children, of God are those chosen to be members of God's ruling house, his kingdom family. Paul wrote, "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." -- Romans 8:17

Individual Israelites who accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah and became his footstep followers, were the first "sons" to become joint-heirs with him. The apostles were among these. On the Day of Pentecost three thousand believed, and there were many others. But the number of believing Israelites was not sufficient. Revelation 7:4 and 14:1 reveals that this ruling family of God was to contain 144,000 children, those who would have the Father's name written in their foreheads; but the number of Israelites who believed came far short of this.

Then, for the first time, God turned to the Gentiles. In Acts 15:14 it is referred to as "visiting" the Gentiles "to take out of them a people for his name." So it was not long before the Early Church was an admixture of believing Israelites and converted Gentiles.

"An Holy Nation"

As we have noted, God promised the Israelites shortly after leaving Egypt that they could be a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." (Exodus 19:5,6) This was conditional upon obedience to him and his Law. This condition was not met, and when the nation failed in its final test Jesus said, "Your house is left unto you desolate." (Matthew 23:38) It was Israel's "house" that was left desolate, or destitute of any further claims of being God's "kingdom of priests," his "holy nation."

Jesus had previously said concerning Israel, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." (Matthew 21:43) The Apostle Peter identifies this new "nation" for us. He wrote, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people;... which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God" -- 1 Peter 2:9,10

The language here used by Peter is very similar to that employed in God's promise to the Israelites, and he is saying that a people who had been aliens to the promises of God had now become the people of God to whom these kingdom promises belonged. Here, then, is the "nation" mentioned by Jesus, to whom the kingdom had been given when taken away from Israel.

The Commonwealth of Israel

In writing to the Church in Ephesus, made up of both Israelites and Gentiles, Paul said of the Gentile converts, "Ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise." And again, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." -- Ephesians 2:12,19

Thus Paul explains that the promises of God which once belonged exclusively to the natural descendants of Abraham were now shared by believing Gentiles. God had not made a new arrangement for the Gentile converts, but was inviting them, through belief in Christ, to share the "commonwealth" of Israel, to become a part of the "household" of God, his ruling family, Israelites indeed.

Broken Branches

In the 11th chapter of Romans Paul presents a lesson pertaining to the Israelites in which he uses and olive tree and its branches as an illustration, the unbelieving Israelites being as branches broken from this tree. The reason for the illustration is to show that God's original purpose pertaining to Israel had not changed, but that Gentiles had been given an opportunity to share in that purpose.

In verse 2 Paul says, "God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew." This is not out of harmony with Jesus' statement to Israel, "Your house is left unto you desolate." Jesus' reference was to the exclusiveness of the nation of Israel as God's ruling house. No longer could the natural descendants of Abraham, known as the nation of Israel, claim to be God's ruling nation.

But this did not mean that God had cast away Israel as a people, nor that he had taken from them as individuals the opportunity to qualify as heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. To prove this Paul uses the experience of Elijah as an illustration. Elijah felt that in his day all Israel had rejected Jehovah and had bowed the knee to Baal. But he was wrong. The Lord said to him,

"I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal." -- vs. 4, 1 Kings 19:18

Applying the illustration, Paul says, "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." (vs. 5) This remnant was made up of those mentioned in John 1:12, who had accepted Jesus, and had been given the privilege of becoming the sons of God, members of his ruling house. It also included the three thousand who accepted Christ on the Day of Pentecost. Indeed, it includes all the natural descendants of Abraham throughout the age who have accepted Jesus.

This surely proves, as Paul argues, that God had not cast away his people, or discriminated against them in any way. He had simply removed the exclusiveness of their opportunities. In verse 7 Paul adds, "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded." All Israelites were the elect people of God, but the remnant, the believers among them, had secured their election by their belief and faithfulness. These "obtained" what they were seeking for; namely, a place in God's family, or ruling house.

"And the rest were blinded," Paul explains. Their blindness, their unbelief, resulted in their being broken off from the Israelitish tree, and in their places believing Gentiles were grafted in. In verses 8-24 of this remarkable chapter Paul emphasizes the necessity of belief and obedience in order to have a part in God's arrangements. While believing Gentiles benefited greatly because the breaking off of the natural branches made room for them, they should remember that unbelief on their part would also result in their being severed from the tree.

In verse 24 Paul states that the grafting of wild Gentile "branches" into the Israelitish tree was "contrary to nature." When branches of fruit trees are grafted onto other varieties -- "wild" or cultivated -- they bear the same variety of fruit as the tree from which they were severed. According to nature the sap and nutriment of the tree onto which they are grafted does not change the characteristics of the ingrafted branches. But with the ingrafting of Gentile branches onto the Israelitish tree it is different. The result is contrary to nature, for in this case the branches are changed. They become like the tree that bears them; that is; they become Israelites.

This is why in Revelation 7:4-8 the ruling family of God, his kingdom household, are described as coming from the twelve tribes of Israel; the point being that the name Israel continues to be associated with those whom God is calling, selecting, and proving during the present age to live and reign with Christ. All the original ones of this family were natural descendants of Abraham, and the remainder become Israelites by virtue of being grafted into the Israelitish tree.

The "Seed" of Blessing

As we have noted, God promised Abraham that through his "seed" all the families of the earth would be blessed. Ishmael was Abraham's son, and there were other children by his second wife, Keturah. But the Lord said to Abraham, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." Paul refers to this in the 9th chapter of Romans and explains its spiritual significance, He speaks of having great "heaviness and continual sorrow" of heart over the fact that all Israel had not accepted Christ, and thus made their calling and election sure to joint-heirship with Christ.

Then he adds (6th verse), "Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect." This does not mean, in other words, that God's plan through Israel had failed. How could it? God's Word never returns to him void. (Isaiah 55:11) Then Paul explains why this was true in connection with the

case in point. We quote, "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called."-vss. 6,7

Isaac was in reality a faith seed, and used, as Paul indicates, to typify the faith seed of Abraham during the present age of faith. In Galatians 4:28 Paul wrote, "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise." In verse 7 of the same chapter he wrote, "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son: and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ," a member, that is, of the divine ruling house.

And then again, in Galatians 3:27-29 we read, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." What could more conclusively prove the fact that when God made the promise that Abraham's seed would bless all the families of the earth he was speaking of the faith seed of the Gospel Age, made up of Jews and Gentiles, and that the matter of being one or the other has no bearing on one's acceptability for this high position in the divine arrangement?

A Spiritual Ruling House

In order for those divinely chosen to rule in the messianic kingdom they must be raised from the dead. This was true of Jesus, who, after his resurrection, said to his disciples, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." (Matthew 28:18) When Jesus was raised from the dead he was highly exalted "above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." -- Ephesians 1:21

This exaltation was not only in authority and in power, but also in nature. He was no longer human, having given his flesh for the life of the world. (John 6:51) He is now the "image of the invisible God," which means that he possesses the divine nature. (Colossians 1:15) From this high position of glory and authority Jesus said, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in this throne." -- Revelation 3:21

In the 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians Paul speaks of those who will be exalted to this high position as then having "celestial," or heavenly, bodies. In this chapter Paul speaks of Christ's kingdom, saying that he must reign until all enemies are put under his feet. (vs. 25) The resurrection of those who are to reign with Christ is essential to the establishment of this kingdom, and in the resurrection these are to be given "celestial," or spiritual, bodies. -- vss. 39-44

This divine plan for a spiritual, invisible ruling-house of sons on the divine plane of life is not one that was suddenly developed as an alternative when the nation of Israel failed to accept Jesus and thereby to qualify to be God's "kingdom of priests" and his "holy nation." This had been God's plan from the beginning, but it was not the due time to reveal it until the Messiah came.

God also planned from the beginning that believing Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the kingdom glory with believing Jews. It was simply that previously it had not been made known -- "Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel." -- Ephesians 3:5,6

"Out of Sion"

King David established his government on the hill of Zion in Jerusalem. God accepted this kingdom of Israel as his kingdom, and used it as a type of the real messianic kingdom of promise. Thus in the prophecies of both the Old and New Testaments, "Zion," or "Sion," symbolizes the rulership of Christ and his joint-heirs. In Revelation 14:1, they are shown together on "mount Sion."

In Micah 4:2 and Isaiah 2:3 we are told that in the kingdom of the Messiah, when the ruling "house of the Lord" is established, the Law shall go forth out of "Zion." It is this same symbol of the spiritual phase of the kingdom that is referred to in Romans 11:26 and 27, where we read, "All Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins."

As Paul explains earlier in this 11th chapter of Romans, only a "remnant" obtained what all Israel sought for, that is, joint-heirship with Christ, the Messiah of promise, and "the rest were blinded." But this does not mean that God ceased to love these blinded ones in Israel. It is merely that they failed of "the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:14) Blindness "happened to Israel, [only] until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in"; that is, until sufficient Gentile believers should prove their worthiness to fill the places of the "natural branches" which were broken off. And then, after this, "all Israel shall be saved." -- vs. 25,26

When the "fullness of the Gentiles" is "come in," it will mean that the spiritual Sion class is completed, and exalted to heavenly glory. And then, from "Sion" will begin to flow the blessings of the long-promised kingdom, and these blessings will first come to "all Israel," in keeping with the covenant which God made with them to take away their sins.

"As concerning the Gospel," Paul continues, "they are enemies for your sakes" -- that is, as a result of the enmity toward Jesus and his Gospel of the kingdom, Gentile believers received an opportunity for the great prize of joint-heirship with Jesus -- "but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." -- vs. 28,29

The word "election" in this text is interesting and revealing. Abraham was elected by God to be the father of natural Israel, and to inherit the land of Canaan. His natural seed was to be typical of the faith seed of the Gospel Age, which was to be exalted to glory, honor, and immortality, and be the promised channel of blessing to all the families of the earth. But Abraham had to make this election sure. The first test was his willingness to leave his own country and his father's house. He obeyed. (Hebrews 11:8) His final test was the giving up of his son Isaac as a burnt offering to the Lord. In this also his faith triumphed.

Through Moses, God covenanted with Israel to make of them a "kingdom of priests, and a holy nation," but there was a condition: "If ye will obey my voice." (Exodus 19:5,6) By virtue of his foreknowledge, God knew that the Israelites as a people would not obey his voice in a real and continued sense. After this became apparent, the Lord promised to make a "new covenant" with them. This covenant was phrased during the time when the nation was divided, one part being principally designated as "Israel" and the other as "Judah." God wanted them to know that he loved all Israel, so the promise reads:

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more." -- Jeremiah 31:31-34

It is to this promise that Romans 11:27 refers -- "This is my covenant with them, when I shall take away their sins." It is to this covenant that Paul refers, when he wrote, "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance," or change. (Romans 11:29) The previous covenant, as God himself declared, had been broken. Israel had failed to qualify for what that covenant provided. God had not changed, but they had failed to meet the conditions and the covenant to make of them exclusively a "kingdom of priests and an holy nation" became null and void.

So God, in his love, promised to make a "new covenant," a covenant which provided life, but not rulership and glory. And, as Paul explains, this covenant is due to be made with Israel as soon as the "fullness of the Gentiles be come in." And then, the principal agency in making the "new covenant" with Israel will be the divine Christ, constituting the spiritual phase of the kingdom -- "Out of Sion" shall come the Deliverer, and "shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob [whose name was changed to Israel]"

The Time Is at Hand

Our interest in Israel, and in all that the name Israel implies, is heightened today by world events - - events which reveal with increasing clearness that we have reached the end of the Gospel Age and are even now in the final period leading to the establishment of Messiah's kingdom. Important among these events are the developments in Palestine -- the fact that over two million Israelites have gone there, that they have their own government, which is a free, independent state, a nation among the nations of the world.

The prophecies of the Bible reveal that preparatory to making the promised "new covenant" with Israel this scattered people would first be gathered back to the Promised Land and that there God would fulfill his promise to them -- his promise to write his Law in their "inward parts." This purpose of God is clearly and beautifully stated by the Lord through the Prophet Ezekiel. We quote:

"I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen [Gentiles], whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen [Gentiles], whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen [Gentiles], and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall

dwelling in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God." -
- Ezekiel 36:21-28

The prophecy of Jeremiah 30, verses 3 and 5, indicates that the returning of the Israelites to their Promised Land would not be without difficulties. We quote, "Lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it...For thus saith the Lord; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace." It was the hope of the Israelites that the establishment of the new state of Israel would bring them peace; but instead of being blessed with peace they have been plagued by fear.

In this prophecy the Lord states that he would "cause" his people to return to their land. In chapter 16, verses 14 to 16, we are informed that the Lord would send "fishers" and "hunters" among his people to impel them to return to the land which he gave to their fathers. Another very vividly stated prophecy conveying a similar thought is Ezekiel 20:33-38. It reads:

"As I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you: and I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there I will plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord God. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: and I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the Lord."

A number of interesting points appear in this prophecy. First, the Israelites were to be uprooted from the countries wherein they sojourned by the Lord's "fury," denoting troublous circumstances which would bring about their departure. Our generation has witnessed these circumstances.

Next, instead of at once being brought into a state of peace and security, they were to find themselves in what is described as the "wilderness of the people." This suggests that this modern Exodus and return to Canaan (Palestine) would be at a time when the world at large would be in a condition of insecurity and apprehensiveness such as was the experience of the ancient Israelites when they left Egypt and crossed over the Red Sea into the wilderness. Surely today the world is in such a "wilderness," and the Israelites are sharing the fear that fills the hearts of all as they look ahead to the things coming upon the earth.

Further, the Lord says that he would "plead" with his people as he pleaded with them in the "wilderness of the land of Egypt"; also that he would cause them to "pass under the rod." We may understand from this that the difficulties through which the returned Israelites have passed, and are still passing, are designed by the Lord to be disciplinary in nature, and for the purpose of preparing them to enter later into the "bond of the covenant"; that is, the "New Covenant."

And lastly the Lord tells us that he would "purge" out from the Israelites those who were rebels; that is, those who refused to enter into the "bond of the covenant," when given every opportunity to do so. Concerning these the Lord says, "I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel."

The Hebrew word here translated "enter" is one which, according to Prof. Strong, means "to go or come (in a wide variety of applications)." In Numbers 31:23 it is translated "abide." The reference

is to certain metals that would "abide" in fire and be purified thereby, and not be destroyed. This evidently is the thought intended in the prophecy under consideration.

The "rebels," as the Lord calls them, return to the Land of Promise together with the others, but they do not prove to be worthy to remain there. They do not "abide" the fiery tests which the Lord, in "pleading" with his people, permits them to experience. Instead of being brought to the Lord by these experiences, and into the "bond of the covenant," they refuse him and the loving provision he has made for Israel and the world, and are destroyed. Peter said, "It shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that Prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people." -- Acts 3:23

Steps of Progress

The 37th chapter of Ezekiel is another prophecy assuring us of the restoration of natural Israel. In this prophecy the house of Israel is depicted as a valley of dry bones. In the vision given to Ezekiel he was commanded to prophesy, and he says,

"As I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then he said unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army." -- vss. 7-10

While the promises of God given abundant assurance that there is to be a resurrection of the dead, both for Israel and the whole world, this prophecy is not one of those promises. However, when we see the beginning of its fulfillment we may know that the resurrection is near. Paul wrote, "What shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" that is, the restoration of Israel, once begun, will continue until even the dead are restored to life and given an opportunity to participate in the blessings of Messiah's kingdom. -- Romans 11:15

In Ezekiel's picture of gradual restoration, from the first rustling of the "bones" until there is "flesh" and "skin" on them, and life-giving "breath" is provided, we are told of a "noise," a "shaking" and the blowing of "four winds." This seems again to suggest that the restoration of Israel takes place during a time of great disturbance in the earth, a "time of trouble" which is climaxed by "four winds." The life-giving breath is said to come from the "four winds," or during the time they are blowing.

To Ezekiel God said, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts." The fact that the "bones" say this indicates that it is not a picture of actual death, but of the withered hopes of Israel. However, the Lord promised that this condition would be changed. "Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel." -- vss. 11,12

The "graves" in which Israel had been buried during the centuries of the Dispersion are evidently the different countries, or nations in which they have been domiciled. "We are cut off for our parts," they say, which has been true. Some have been in one "grave," and some in another, but all have been "dead" insofar as their national hopes were concerned.

But already most of the national "graves" have been opened, and the Israelites have poured forth from them to the number of more than six million, and have been brought into the land of Israel. As yet, however, very few of them realize the significance of what is taking place. They do not know that what has happened has been done for them by the Lord, nor will they know this until the last phase of the restoration is accomplished; that is, until they receive breath from the four winds," or as explained in verse 14, the Lord puts his Spirit in them and they live.

The opening of their "graves", their return to the Promised Land, and their receiving of the Lord's Spirit are all necessary before they recognize that the Lord has performed this great thing for them. Then they will know and rejoice. Then the nations generally will also know that the Lord has been working for Israel. Then they will dwell in their land with peace and safety, and the antitypical David, even their Messiah of promise, will rule over them as king. -- vss.24-28

Aggression from the North

Following, in chapters 38 and 39 of Ezekiel, we are given some of the details of the trouble through which Israel passes before the Spirit of the Lord is received. In chapter 38 an assault against Israel is there described as coming from the "north," under the leadership of one called "Gog." Under his direction there are such allies as Persia, Ethiopia, Libya, Gomer, and Togarmah. These are ancient names, and it may not be possible to accurately identify their counterparts today. This is not essential in order to understand the main point of the prophecy.

This attack describes the final cataclysmic trouble upon Israel, at which time there will be divine intervention. When this deliverance comes by the power of God, it will be clearly recognized as such by Israel and by all nations. After the destruction of the invading hosts, the prophecy states: "Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the Lord." -- Ezekiel 38:23

But when that time comes the final aspect of Israel's experiences under the Lord's "rod" will begin. The prophecy reads, "Thus saith the Lord God: in that day when my people of Israel dwelleth safely [Hebrews confidently], shalt thou not know it? " This is addressed to Gog, indicating that this mighty force from the "north" would know of the real helplessness of Israel's position. The prophecy continues:

"And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses[a highly mobile army], a great company, and a mighty army: and thou shalt come up against my people Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen [Gentiles] may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes." -- Ezekiel 38:14-16

"Surely in that day, there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel," the prophet says. (Ezekiel 38:19) This is doubtless the "shaking" which occurs as the "bones" come together and flesh appears on them, as mentioned in chapter 37:7. It will be a most distressing time for Israel, perhaps worse than anything through which they have yet passed in connection with their repossessing the Promised Land. But the Lord will intervene on their behalf. He says:

"I will call for a sword against him [Gog and his armies] throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord God: every man's sword shall be against his brother." (Ezekiel 38:21) This suggests the development of a state of confusion among the various allies who join in this final assault against Israel. In view of the crisscrossing of purposes and objectives among the nations of the earth

today, it is not difficult to see how serious conflicts could arise in connection with this aggression against Israel. The Lord continues:

"I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the Lord." -- vss. 22,23

We may not be able interpret the symbolisms here used. However, they describe divine intervention on behalf of Israel at a time so critical that, left to their own resources, they would be completely defeated and probably even driven from their land. It is not necessary that we understand just how this will be done. It is enough to know that it will be done, and that by this mighty display of miracle-working power the eyes of many nations will be opened to recognize the hand of God in the affairs of his ancient people.

The first six verses of the next chapter (39) reveal the devastating results of divine intervention against the enemies of Israel. Then the next verse reads, "So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One of Israel."

This will be a remarkable time for Israel and for all nations. Up until this time Israel's eyes are blind to the real significance of what is taking place. The spirit of nationalism and the desire for economic security will have been the motives for many of them going to Palestine to live. Others will have gone there because, uprooted from "graves" in other countries, there simply was no other place they could go.

Whatever their motives for being in Palestine, they will have witnessed the animosity of their neighbors against them, and the poorly concealed determination of the Arabs to destroy them and to repossess the land which they claim does not belong to Israel. Israel will have endured repeated terrorist bombings, and, from the United Nations which they had joined for security, the pressure to give up land for peace.

Through all of these harrowing experiences they will have witnessed little to convince more than a handful of them that they could depend upon anything else except their own shrewdness and military might. Finally, having enjoyed a short season of peace and safety, and feeling probably that at last they have conquered the obstacles in their path to security and happiness, they will suddenly be confronted with the most ominous threat of their existence as a new and struggling nation. Fear and despair will take over.

And then the miracle -- the "pleading" of God on their behalf with the symbolic pestilence, great hailstones, and fire and brimstone (perhaps not too symbolic at that). What an enlightening experience it will be! Thus will the Lord make his holy name known in the midst of his people Israel.

The closing verses of this chapter (23-29) summarize the facts set forth in chapters 36 to 39. And then in the last verse comes the final assurance to Israel. The Lord says, "Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord God."

The Kingdom's Earthly Phase

The miraculous deliverance of Israel will mark the beginning of kingdom blessings flowing out to Israel and the world. From then on the kingdom will be functioning, and in full control of the affairs in Israel, quickly spreading its sphere of influence and control throughout the world. It will be then that the human representatives of the spiritual Christ, the "Zion" of the prophecies, will put in an appearance.

And who will these be? Jesus answers this question. He said to the Israelites of his day, as recorded in Matthew 8:11,12 and Luke 13:28, 29, that the people from the east, west, north and south -- the world over, that is -- would sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom, and that the "children of the kingdom" would be "cast out." This means that the worthy ones of the past will then be raised from the dead.

During all that long period of time, beginning with Abel, and ending with John the Baptist, God was testing and training these Ancient Worthies for the responsible positions they will occupy as the human representatives of the kingdom. In the 11th chapter of Hebrews we are given an account of their trials, and of how they faithfully endured, inspired by the hope of a "better resurrection."

In Psalm 45:16 these faithful ones of the past are referred to as the "fathers" who will become "children," and be made "princes in all the earth." They will be the "children" of the divine Christ because they will receive life through him. They will not reign as kings, but will be constituted "princes." In a reference to the spiritual Israelites of the present age, and comparing their reward with the reward of the Ancient Worthies, Paul wrote that God had provided some "better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." -- Hebrews 11:40

The "better thing" attained by the followers of Jesus is their spiritual inheritance of glory and honor and immortality -- the honor and glory of reigning with Christ, and the immortality of the divine nature. (Romans 2:7, 2 Peter 1:4) When these have all proved faithful "unto death," and have been raised from the dead in the "first resurrection," and made a part of the heavenly, or spiritual, phase of the kingdom, then will come the resurrection of the Ancient Worthies to represent the kingdom on earth.

It seems reasonable to conclude that this mighty miracle will take place about the time the Lord intervenes to save the people of Israel from destruction by their enemies, or very soon thereafter. Since the defeat of their enemies by divine intervention will open the eyes of the Israelites to know the Lord, they will be amenable to, and will need instruction and direction in, the ways of the new kingdom; and the Ancient Worthies will be on hand to do this work.

"Zion" and "Jerusalem"

Jerusalem was the capital city of ancient Israel, but as we have noted, the government was located on mount Zion in Jerusalem. Just as the Lord uses "Zion" to symbolize the spiritual phase of the kingdom, so he uses "Jerusalem" to represent the earthly phase, which will be under the control of the Ancient Worthies. So we read that the "law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (Micah 4:2) Yes, the "word of the Lord," the interpretations and instructions as to the proper applications of the laws of the kingdom, which will emanate from "Zion," will be given by the Ancient Worthies.

This is what Jesus meant when he said that in the kingdom the people from every part of the earth would "sit down" with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets. The purpose of thus "sitting down" with the Ancient Worthies in the kingdom is revealed by Jesus' further statement that the "children of the kingdom" would be "cast out." The conditional promise to Israel was, as we have seen, that they would be a "kingdom of priests"; instructors and blessers of the people. They failed to meet the conditions, and while they will not lose the opportunity of attaining life under the kingdom laws, their coveted position as teachers will be in the hands of the Ancient Worthies.

"Making" the New Covenant

The experiences of Israel during the present transition period leading into the kingdom are preparing them for the blessings of the promised New Covenant. The Lord wants them in their own land when the time comes to make that covenant with them, for in the divine arrangement they are to be the first to have the blessings of the kingdom offered to them. We may assume, therefore, that the making of this covenant will begin very soon after that mighty miracle by which they are delivered from their enemies.

But let us keep in mind the nature of this covenant. The Lord said that it would not be "according to the covenant" which he made with them when they left Egypt. God's laws never change. The laws of the New Covenant will not be different. The difference will be in the way the covenant is made.

The laws of the former covenant were written on stone, and the people agreed to obey those laws, while God promised to bless them if they were obedient. The writing of the law and the agreements in connection with it, constituted the making of that covenant. But the making of the New Covenant will not be done in that manner, for the promise is that its laws will be written in the hearts of the people, and in their "inward parts." -- Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:24-28

This cannot and will not be accomplished in a few hours, or a few days. It will require much time, much instruction, much discipline, and much application. The writing of God's law in the hearts of the people -- all the people, even those who have died, and will then be raised from the dead -- will, in reality, be the work of the entire thousand years of Christ's reign. This is a work of "restitution," for when God's law is written in the hearts of the people it means they will have reached perfection, the perfection that was enjoyed by Adam before he transgressed God's law.

The fact that the Israelites in Palestine will suddenly, and as the result of a miracle, have their eyes of understanding opened to know the Lord, does not imply that the law of the New Covenant will thus suddenly be implanted in the hearts and in their "inward" parts." The prophecy states that the Gentile nations, even those who will fight against Israel, will also have their eyes opened by the same miracle; but with these too it will be but the first step toward coming fully into harmony with the kingdom, and having the laws of the kingdom engraved in their hearts.

The Jew First

The Apostle Paul, in referring to the punishments God metes out to mankind, and the blessings he bestows, wrote, "Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile; for there is no respect of persons with God." -- Romans 2:9-11

So when the blessings of the kingdom begin to flow out to the people they will go to "the Jew first." But the same blessings will quickly reach the Gentile world also, for as Paul wrote, "There is no respect of persons with God." As the Israelites come into harmony with the righteous laws of the kingdom, and those laws become, as it were, a part of them, they will have the opportunity of co-operating with the Ancient Worthies in the great project of "restitution." So also will the Gentiles.

This assurance is given to us by Jesus in his Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. (Matthew 25:31-46) In this parable "all nations" are before the "Son of man" when he sits "upon the throne of his glory." The people of all nations are separated "as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." To the "sheep" on his right hand the "Son of man" says, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

This is the kingdom, or dominion, that was given to our first parents -- a dominion over the earth. Jehovah is the Ruler of the whole universe, and he constituted man his representative to exercise dominion over the earth. Thus man, in his original perfection, ruled as or for God. This kingdom is to be restored finally to the willing and obedient of all nations, and so all these will rule with God. Since this is the meaning of the word Israel, it indicates that all who gain everlasting life on earth will be Israelites.

And upon what basis will they attain this position of honor in the Lord's arrangements? First, of course, by accepting the provision of life through the redemptive work of Christ Jesus; and by obedience to the laws of the kingdom. But it will have to be more than an outward obedience. The law will need to be in their "hearts" and in their "inward" parts.

All the laws of God reflect his glorious character of love, of unselfishness, of sacrificing interest in others. So those of all nations in the parable who as sheep hear the welcome words, "Come, ... inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," qualify for this blessing by the fact that they help to care for the needy. In other words, they show an interest in others besides themselves. They co-operate in the work of the kingdom; a privilege, as the parable shows, which will be enjoyed by all nations.

Restoration

In Acts 15:14-18 we are given a summary of God's plan for reconciling the world to himself. Verse 14 reads, "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name." This, as we have seen, was to fill up the foreordained number of those who were to live and reign with Christ in the spiritual phase of the kingdom. These, together with the remnant of natural Israel who accepted Christ, become spiritual Israelites -- "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."

Verses 15 and 16 read, "To this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up." The original and typical tabernacle of David was built under unusual circumstances. During the latter part of the period of the judges the Ark of the Covenant -- originally kept in the tabernacle built by Moses -- fell into the hands of the Philistines. This was understood to mean that the "glory of the Lord" had departed from Israel, the ark being a symbol of God's presence with them and his favor upon them.

The presence of the ark among the Philistines brought trouble upon them, and they returned it to the Israelites. Little attention was given to it during the reign of Saul, Israel's first king, but when

David came to the throne he built a tabernacle to house the ark, and had it returned to his seat of government and placed therein. There was great rejoicing in Israel over this, for it meant that now the presence of God was properly represented among them.

David's throne was not set up in this tabernacle, although a prophecy evidently pertaining to the antitypical throne of David, which is occupied by Christ, states: "In mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness." (Isaiah 16:5) This seems clearly to be a prophetic reference to the "tabernacle of David" which is built "again," (Acts 15:16) with its former purpose used to symbolize returning favor to natural Israel through the messianic kingdom.

The Scriptures definitely affirm that Christ, in his kingdom glory, sits upon the antitypical throne of David. The angel said to Mary concerning Jesus, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David." (Luke 1:32) In Isaiah 9:7 we read concerning Jesus that he will sit "upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever."

In Ezekiel 21:26, 27 Jesus is referred to as the One "whose right it is" to re-establish the divine rulership which was represented in the Davidic line of kings. In this passage the "diadem" and "crown" are said to be "removed" and "taken off." This happened when Zedekiah, the last of the Jewish kings, was overthrown. The Lord then said, "It shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him."

It is at the conclusion of the Gospel Age, when the needed number from among the Gentiles have been selected to make up God's "holy nation," his divine ruling house of sons, that this One "whose right it is" is established upon the "throne of David." With him will be his joint-heirs from among both Jews and Gentiles. And it is the establishment of this divine authority in the hands of the antitypical David class, that results in the return of God's favor to the "residue" of Israel.

It is this that seems to be symbolized by the king establishing his throne in the "tabernacle of David," "that the residue of men" -- or "the" men, as it is in the Greek text -- "might seek after the Lord." This is a quotation from Amos 9:11,12. The full statement in the prophecy is, "that they may possess the remnant of Edom." This ("remnant of Edom") is the "residue" of which James speaks. And who are these?

The Edomites are the descendants of Esau, who sold his birthright. In Romans 9:8 Paul explains that in Israel there were two classes. First, "the children of the flesh." These he explains, "are not the children of God" -- not of those who believed and were given authority to become the "sons of God." Then there are "the children of the promise," who he explains, "are counted for the seed." That is, these are the seed promised to Abraham, through whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed.

Paul then relates these two classes to God's foreknowledge and overruling in the affairs of Israel which, he indicates, were illustrated by his dealings with Jacob and Esau. "It was said unto her [the mother of these twins], The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." (vss. 12,13) In the parallel thus drawn by Paul the "residue" of Israel who did not accept Christ are shown to be those represented by Esau -- the Edomites in the prophecy of Amos.

Returning to James' presentation it therefore seems clear that the "residue" he mentions, who at the close of the age are given an opportunity to seek after the Lord, are all of the Israelites who at the first advent and since have not accepted Christ. With these given the first opportunity to seek after the Lord, "all the Gentiles" will then be given a similar opportunity, James affirms.

And James adds a further thought -- "all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called." Just as the witness was given specially to the Jewish nation at the first advent, it has also gone out to the Gentile world throughout the age. But this has not constituted their only and final opportunity to believe and receive God's promised blessings. As with the Jews, so with the Gentiles, a further opportunity is to be given to them during the reign of Christ.

And when they seek after the Lord they will find him. Isaiah 60:1-3 reads, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come [margin, be enlightened; for thy light cometh]; and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, [prior to this] the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."

Simeon spoke of Jesus as a "light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." (Luke 2:32) Yes, Jesus, that "true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" will, during his reign, dispel the darkness that has blinded both Jews and Gentiles. It will be then that the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

Simeon's statement is in part a quotation from Isaiah 42:6,7. The 7th verse of this prophecy says that this "light of the Gentiles" will not only "open the blind eyes," but also bring out the "prisoners from the prison." This is a reference to the prisoners of death. The enlightenment and restoration of Israel and of the Gentiles would come far short of the divine purpose if it did not include those who have died. Even those who rejected and persecuted Jesus are to be raised from the dead, and they will say of him, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." -- Matthew 23:39

The restoration of God's favor means that ultimately death will be completely destroyed -- "There shall be no more death" when the "tabernacle of God is with men" -- that is, when God's favor is being showered upon Jews and Gentiles through the reigning Christ. "Neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." -- Revelation 21:4

Consummation

With the preponderance of those first receiving the blessings of the kingdom being the natural seed of Abraham, living in Palestine, the people of the other nations will recognize that the Lord is blessing his ancient people. They will note also that the Lord's blessing is upon the Israelites because they have made themselves subject to the authority of Christ's kingdom as will then be vested in the hands of the resurrected Ancient Worthies. Seeing this, they will want to follow the same course. The Lord foretold this, saying,

"It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you." -- Zechariah 8:20-23

This does not imply that the people of all nations will literally travel to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. The thought is, rather, that in their minds and hearts they will recognize the kingdom authority of the Lord emanating from there through the resurrected Ancient Worthies, and will give their allegiance to it, happy to share in the rich blessing of restitution which they will see being showered upon the Israelites.

Gradually the opportunity to share those blessings will be universal. In Zechariah 14:14-21 we have a sort of final picture of what is to result from the establishment of Messiah's kingdom. First, it reminds us of those who "came against Jerusalem: as described in detail in Ezekiel, chapter 38. These also are to have the opportunity to "go up" and worship the Lord. Indeed, this will be the only way to receive the blessings of the kingdom, for we read, "It shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain."

"In that day," Zechariah says, "shall there be upon the bells [margin, bridles] of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD." What a glorious consummation of the divine plan for all nations! "In that day there shall be no more the Canaanite," nor Asians, nor Europeans, nor Africans, nor Americans, for by then all will be Israelites. -- Zechariah 14:20,21

With the law of God written in their "inward parts," the people will have the dominion of earth restored to them. Together they will share in the responsibilities of that kingdom, ruling with God in this earthly domain of the great universe of which he is the Emperor supreme and everlasting.

This is the final destiny of Israel and of all nations -- those who are living now, and those who, throughout the centuries, have fallen asleep in death. But the inheriting of this destiny will depend upon belief in the atoning work of Christ, and obedience to the laws of his kingdom. Thank God, however, that all are to have this opportunity to believe and obey.

What a glorious solution this will be for the problems of the whole world!