

Israel

Opening Hymn: #41 — Awake from thy Sadness

How many different meanings do you think are associated with the word "Israel" in scripture? I found six. Perhaps there are more.

#1: There is the literal meaning of the word. It is Hebrew word #3478: "he will rule as God" [Strong's] or "God rules" [Companion Bible].

#2: The name God gave to Jacob, one of Isaac's sons.

[The next scripture is the first occurrence of this word in scripture.]

Gen. 32:28 And he said, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel."

#3: The nation formed of 12 tribes headed by Jacob's [Israel's] 12 sons.

Ex. 5:2 And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?

#4: The 10-tribe northern kingdom (as contrasted with Judah, the 2-tribe southern kingdom) after the kingdom divided following the death of Solomon.

2 Kings 17:21 For he rent Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king; and Jeroboam drave Israel from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin.

#5: All 12-tribes following the return of Jews from their exile in Babylon.

Ezra 10:5 Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites,
and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word.

Acts 2:22 Ye men of Israel [NOTE: not "men of Judah"] hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

#6: A spiritual "people of God" (as contrasted to natural Israel).

Rom. 9:6 For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:

Gal. 6:15-16 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

It is entirely appropriate that we as Bible Students emphasize this sixth definition. That's because when God accepts our consecration, we become new creatures and are accepted as His sons. We become part of the "Israel of God" [an expression that occurs only here!] even though we may not necessarily be natural descendants of Jacob. But what about natural Israel? Jesus said unto them [in Matt. 23:38]: "Your house is left unto you desolate." Does this mean they have no place in the outworking of God's plan? Of course not!

Rom. 11:15 For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?

Promises to Israel PRIOR to the Kingdom

One of the most important promises that Israel received from God has been fulfilled within our very lifetimes. It is that they will be reconstituted a nation and returned to the land from which they were driven out:

Ezek. 37:1-6 The hand of the Lord . . . set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones . . . and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. [verse 10] and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel.

Amos 9:14-15 And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God.

But as remarkable as this regathering has fulfilled the wonderful promise that Israel will once again possess the land of their forefathers, there is one very dark cloud on their horizon. The phrase "Jacob's trouble" describes it, a phrase that occurs only once in scripture:

Jer. 30:3 For, 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. [verse 7] Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of **Jacob's trouble**; but he shall be saved out of it. [verse 11] For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished. [verse 14] All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of thine iniquity; because thy sins were increased.

Note that the Lord here says he is going to make a "full end" of all the other nations. What does this mean? We suggest that it means the arbitrary divisions into nation-states that has produced such rivalry and distress will be dissolved. But interestingly enough, not Israel's. It is as though there will be a continued awareness even into the kingdom of those who are part of the nation of Israel.

This scripture is not yet fulfilled. Israel still has some "lovers," notably the governments of Great Britain and the United States. But this prophecy says that a time will come when these supporters

will withdraw their support and Israel will stand alone. It is then that God is able to show his mighty hand and fight for them as He did in days of old:

Ezek. 38:11 And thou [Gog] shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land. [vs. 15] 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 great company, and a mighty army: And thou shalt come up against my people of 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 may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes. [vs. 21] And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord God: every man's sword shall be against his brother. And 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.

Promises to Israel IN to the Kingdom

The covenants are important to Bible students. We all know about the original law covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. And we know that Israel agreed to keep their part of it, but they failed. What about the New Covenant? With whom is it made? The scripture is very clear:

Jer. 31:31-33 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.

Now in spite of this very clear statement, many of our Christian friends believe that the new covenant is made between God and believers in Christ. They "spiritualize" the word "Israel" [and overlook the word "Judah"]. But that is definitely NOT the correct thought. It was not the Apostle Paul's thought in Romans when he talked about natural Israel and the covenant to be made with them.

Rom. 11:12 Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles [definitely natural Israel, not spiritual]; how much more their fulness? [verse 27] This is my covenant toward them, WHEN I SHALL TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.

When does the new covenant go into effect? This scripture says when God takes away natural Israel's sins. Has he done that yet? No he has not? But he will do it when the new covenant arrangement is inaugurated with a "better mediator" than Moses, The Christ, head and body.

Israel receives kingdom blessings first

The Bible uses the word Zion and the word Jerusalem to talk about what is to happen in the kingdom. The city of Jerusalem was built on several mountains the highest of which was named Zion. Zion is used as a symbol of the heavenly phase of the kingdom. Jerusalem, however, describes the earthly phase.

Psa. 2:6 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

Zech. 8:3 Thus saith the Lord; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the Lord of hosts the holy mountain.

Isa. 2:2,3 And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

The "law" of the kingdom comes from on high—from Zion. It is broadcast to "all nations" from Jerusalem. Whether or not this means the earthly seat of government will be located in the literal city of Jerusalem or not is debatable. I personally think that would be the best place for it to be.

Zech. 8:22-23 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.

The number ten in scripture shows human perfection [or completion]. Examples: ten camels carrying gifts for the bride of Isaac, ten commandments for God's chosen people, a ten-stringed harp, ten virgins, ten servants to whom was delivered ten pounds. In the Zechariah citation, "ten men" represent mankind [complete].

Zech. 14:16-17 And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And 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.

Almost everyone expects that nations will come up against literal Jerusalem in the final phase of Jacob's trouble. If Jerusalem is literal in the first part of this scripture, then it follows that it

would be literal in the second part of the scripture. It is the place where the "word of the Lord" goes forth, where worship is appropriately rendered. Whether or not "rain" means literal rainfall can be argued. Certainly Californians are very much concerned about what no rain may do to their economy and life style. When drought seized the land of Palestine, the people suffered. Thus the lack of rain is an apt symbol of the lack of blessing. There is even a scripture that implies that Israel itself is this "wetness" from heaven:

Micah 5:3 . . . then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. [verse 7] And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a **dew** from the LORD, as the **showers** upon the grass.

Thus we see that the blessings of the kingdom flow to the world of mankind through the nation of Israel. They are the first to receive these blessings. Here's familiar words from Volume 1, page 297:

"Let us remember that though the future blessings, like the past, will be to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile, it will be in the matter of time only that the Jews will have the precedence to divine favor."

Unfortunately some have overemphasized this phrase "in the matter of time only" that the role of Israel as a conduit of blessing has been minimized. The expression "blessor nation," to describe their role in the kingdom was once used. But few use the expression today. Although there is no scripture that uses that phrase, there are several that say that is exactly the role Israel has in the kingdom. To be sure, real earthly power will be vested in the Ancient Worthies. It will be the Ancient Worthies who will be "princes in all the earth," will be the leaders of restored Israel. Favor is shown to Israel so that it may flow to everyone else:

Zech. 8:13 And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, **and ye shall be a blessing:** fear not, but let your hands be strong.

The word "blessing" is Strong's #1293 and means *benediction; by impl. prosperity*. It has been translated *blessing, liberal, pool, and present*. (In Isa. 39:1 the king of Babylon sends letters and a *present* (#1293—blessing) to Hezekiah.) The many scriptures that use this word clearly show that it has the usual meaning we think it has in English.

Isa. 19:24 In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, **even a blessing** in the midst of the land:

The contrast is between the state of Israel and Egypt/Assyria (who jointly picture the other nations of the earth). But notice: it is Israel that is to be the blessing, not Egypt, not Assyria. Here is how Knox translates the Hebrew:

Isa. 19:23-25 [Knox] There will be a high-road, then, between Egypt and the Assyrians; either shall visit other, and Egypt under Assyria be at peace. And with these a third people shall be matched; who but Israel, source of the whole world's happiness? Such blessing the Lord of hosts has pronounced upon it, Blessed be my people in Egypt,

and the home I have made for the Assyrian to dwell in; but Israel is the land of my choice.

The Septuagint renders this "Israel, blessed in the land." There is a tremendous difference in meaning between *being blessed*, and *being a blessing*. Each of us must determine for ourselves just what this scripture really means in the original Hebrew.

Gen. 28:14 [here God speaks to JACOB, not Isaac] And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth **be blessed**.

All the families of the earth are to be blessed in JACOB and JACOB's seed. We all agree that **Isaac** pictures The Christ, head and body. Gal. 4:28 says that we, like **Isaac**, are the children of promise. So whom does Jacob picture? Can we possibly think that he pictures a heavenly seed, the same as Isaac? The numberless "stars of heaven" picture the church and the Great Company "which no man could number." That was God's promise to Isaac. But the numberless "dust of the earth" is something quite different. Jacob pictures the earthly phase of the kingdom. He himself pictures the ancient worthies. "His seed" pictures the literal nation of Israel, Jacob's literal descendants. This promise says that it will be through Jacob and Jacob's seed--the Isaac seed is of course, directing the blessing from heaven—that all the families of the earth will be blessed. This is what makes Israel a blessing nation.

God regathers Israel to her land. He does this to fulfil the promise he made to Abraham that he would give him the land, a promise that had not been fulfilled when Abraham died. Nations come against her with the intent of wiping her off the face of the earth and God fights for her so that his name may be glorified. Then what? Is that the end of it? Not at all. The blessings flow first to Israel, and through Israel to all the families of the earth. The objective is that the entire world joins itself to Israel, becomes part of Israel, and constitutes the numberless earthly seed. All other nations disappear as nations. Only the nation of Israel remains.

Israel's special status is shown in the Chart of the Ages. A large pyramid rests on plane N [real or reckoned perfection] in the Messianic Age. It is the last pyramid on the Chart and represents the completed work of restoration. The two top sections represent the Church and the Great Company. Below that is one section representing restored Israel and, under them, the rest of the world of mankind. The idea that the Gentiles actually become Israelites is well supported in scripture:

Isa. 14:1 For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob.

Isa. 44:5 One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.

It should not be surprising that everyone must give up his own nationality and become an Israelite. That is, after all, exactly what has happened to you and me. Paul used the analogy of

taking branches out of a [wild] tree [referring to Gentiles] and making them a part of a good olive tree [Israel's promises]:

Rom. 11:24-26 For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to [natural] Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all [natural] Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer [The Christ, head and body], and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob [natural Israel].

Why Israel?

Why has God designed His plan this way? Why should he work exclusively with this one nation instead of with all mankind collectively? One reason is His love for their forefathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and His faithful prophets):

Rom. 11:28 As concerning the gospel, they [natural Israel—the Jews] are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.

His original relationship with Israel was not because they were so much better than others. We know from the record that the vast majority was unfaithful to Him. They were "stiff-necked." But Israel became the instrumentality God used to deal with the wickedness of the other nations:

Deut. 9:5-6 Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them Out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiff-necked people.

For over 3000 years the Jews have maintained their uniqueness, their separateness based on their law covenant relationship with God. That's probably what non-Jews find so irritating. They want others to conform to their standard, their mode of behavior. Even when Jews try to accommodate to this pressure, they have failed. They are different:

Num. 23:9 For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the **people shall dwell alone**, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.

Think of the prejudice that rages around the world: in Northern Ireland the Catholics hate the Protestants; Turks hate the Greeks; Serbs hate the Croats; Azerbaijanis hate the Armenians; but almost everyone hates [or if not hate, certainly resents] the Jews! Prejudice against the Jews exists even in the United States. On rare occasion one may even hear prejudicial words against Jews from one in our fellowship. One of the first lessons to be taught to all nations will be to confront and overcome their prejudice of the Jew. It will be hard. Initially some won't come up,

won't come to Jerusalem. And upon those, there will be no "rain." Eventually they will learn that prejudice has no place in a perfected human heart.

Brethren, the Lord is developing us now, in advance of the world. There is no place for prejudice in our characters, whether it be prejudice of Jews or non-Jews, whether it be of anyone in the world or among the brethren. Whenever we see evidence of prejudice in our characters, let us cut it off. Otherwise it may keep us from reaching the prize for which we run.

Isa. 40:1-2 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

Psa. 122:6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.

Closing Hymn: #267 — The Beauty of Holiness

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