

Hephzibah - Israel's Identity and Destiny

A. BIBLICAL BACKGROUND (INTRODUCTION)

1. To the world who had witnessed Israel's exile and even to the exiles themselves, it seemed like Israel was abandoned by her God. Her people were scattered to the nations and her land was left in ruins. Yet, it is in this context that God promised, *"You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; But you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah for the LORD delights in you and your land shall be married."* (Isa. 62:4).
2. In Biblical times, names often signify the character of a person. When God changes the name of a person, it is to establish the person's identity in Him. This can be seen in the new name given to Abraham (Gen. 17:5). There will come a day where the world will witness the delight of the Lord over Israel. She will be a precious crown of glory and a royal diadem in His hand (Isa. 62:3).
3. God is zealous for Israel to walk in the fullness of the Hephzibah promise. He is zealous for the nation of Israel to walk rightly with Him, so that she can enter into her fullness. He will give Himself no rest until her righteousness shines forth as brightness and her salvation as a lamp that burns (Isa. 62:1).

B. ISRAEL'S IDENTITY AS HEPHZIBAH

1. The name Hephzibah means "My delight is in her". This speaks of God's favour and pleasure towards Israel as a people and as a nation.
 - a. In the Bible, we see that God delights in His people. He delivers and saves His people because He delights in them (Ps. 18:19).
 - b. He also delights in His own ways, and delights in His people when they walk in His ways (Ps. 37:23; Jer. 9:23–24).
2. God's delight and favour over Israel will be shown to an extent that even the nations around will perceive His enjoyment over her. Jerusalem as a city and the Jewish people, as His covenant people, will eminently be the focus of God's delight.

3. His delight can be seen as a husband's delight over his wife. Hosea was the first prophet in the Old Testament to reveal to Israel that the God of Israel, whom they revered, was also their Husband. In Hosea 2:19–20, the prophet wrote of how God will betroth her to Himself. He has called Israel (and the Church) His Bride. Jesus the Bridegroom King will reveal His delight and affections towards Israel when the whole of Israel is saved.

C. ISRAEL'S IDENTITY AS BEULAH

1. In Exodus 19 and 20, God makes a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai (Deut. 5:2–3). This covenant is a marriage covenant (Jer. 31:32). In other words, God is married to Israel and this is a covenant that He will not break. The Jewish prophets see the marriage covenant as a covenant made to both the Israelites and to the land of Israel (Ezek. 16:8).
2. When God calls the land Beulah,¹ God is literally saying that He is married to the land.
3. In marriage, a man and a woman are joined together. They become one while still being distinct and unique individuals. Each person is co-dependent on the other. They have a common goal and purpose, and no longer live just for themselves. When God's people are married to Him, our thoughts and actions are to bring Him pleasure and glory, with the purpose of seeing His kingdom established. At the same time we lean on Him for our protection and provision.
4. When the land is "married" to God, God will bless it with fruitfulness. Israel's present geographical landscape appears desolate, with more than half of Israel being desert land. Yet, because of God's marriage covenant, there will come a time when the land of Israel will be blessed and fruitful. It will be a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:8; Deut. 28:4).
5. He also promises that the land will be fully inhabited with His Jewish people. Though many of them are scattered all across the nations, Israel will witness her children returning back from the surrounding nations (Isa. 60:4; Jer. 3:14).
6. Today, we witness the Aliyah taking place as Jewish people return to their homeland. We also see glimpses of the promise, where parts of the formerly arid desert land have now become land that bear fruit.

D. THE PREREQUISITES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

1. The fulfilment of God's covenantal blessings over Israel has always been dependent on her faithfulness and obedience to Him (Deut. 28). At Mount Sinai, she made her "vows" to the God of Israel by proclaiming that the Lord is her God, and that she will walk in His ways and His righteousness (Deut. 26:17). This also applies to the Hephzibah promise.

¹ *Beulah* (Strong's H1166) — To marry – to rule over, to possess, to own.

2. The God of Israel is a God who delights in righteousness and who hates wickedness (Jer. 9:24; Ps. 45:7). In fact, in His justice, He is angry with the wicked every day (Ps. 7:11). Though God loves all men, both believers and unbelievers, He cannot and will not delight in those who walk in sin and rebellion.
3. It is only through Yeshua and His work on the cross that the Jewish people are justified and seen as righteous before God (Rom. 1:16–17; Eph. 2:8). In other words, it is only in and through Yeshua that the Jewish people shall be called Hephzibah and enjoyed by their God. Thus, only the Messianic Jewish believers can walk in their identity as Hephzibah right now; the rest of the Jewish people who do not call on the name of Yeshua are not able to.
4. As a nation and a people, Israel needs to return to her God, call on Yeshua as her Lord and Saviour and walk in righteousness before Him.
5. Israel's sin also causes the land to be defiled. *“For all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.”* (Lev. 18:27–28). The barrenness of the land is because of the sin of the people.
6. At present, Israel is not walking in the fullness of her identity as Hephzibah, nor is her land called Beulah. The promise of Hephzibah and Beulah is her prophetic destiny. There will come a time when she will return to God with her all, turn to Yeshua and walk in God's righteousness. God will then cleanse the land of any defilement. When this happens, she will be called Hephzibah and her land Beulah.

E. THE HEART AND DELIGHT OF THE BRIDEGROOM

1. Consistently in the Scripture, God refers to Himself as a Husband, and His people His Bride (Isa. 54:5; Eph. 5:25–32). The way and the measure in which God delights in His people is that of a Husband who loves His wife deeply. This is the deepest level of intimacy and delight that can be found in any human relationship, and God chooses this to reveal the depth of His affections for His people. His heart is ravished and moved by her (Song 4:9).
2. As a Bridegroom, He is also jealous to have a Bride that is devoted and faithful to Him. Yet, throughout Scripture, we see instances where Israel has turned away from her God (Jer. 3:1,14). God cannot pour forth His delight for His people when she lives in unfaithfulness, in sin and compromise, But at the same time, He will not give up on her.

3. The book of Hosea paints a prophetic picture of this relationship between God and Israel, giving us an understanding of His heart as a Bridegroom that is committed to His covenantal relationship to her.
4. God tells Hosea to take a prostitute as his wife. Though she is married to Hosea, she goes after other lovers. Despite this, God tells Hosea to take her back. Similarly, though Israel sins against God by turning to other sources of love, confidence and satisfaction, God still wants her to return to Him. He relentlessly pursues her and does not give up on her (Hos. 11:8).
5. To cause her to return, He hedges her ways with thorns. It is in the midst of these difficulties and trials that Israel will see the folly of her ways and return back to Him (Hos. 2:6–7, 14–16). In His zeal, God refines and purifies her to remove all that hinders her from wholeheartedly loving Him. He will have a Bride that loves Him the way He loves her. He will have a Bride in whom He delights in.

F. NO LONGER FORSAKEN

1. Israel's history is filled with many wars. As a people, she has been exiled from her land three times. Today, there may be many Jewish people around the world who feel forsaken by God because of the hurt, rejection or bitterness that arose from their past crises.
2. As we approach the End of the Age, we will continue to witness attacks on Israel from the surrounding nations and even people around the world in the form of antisemitism.
3. Israel's sin (when they rejected Yeshua and crucified Him on the cross) resulted in a diaspora in AD 70. The people were scattered and their land was made barren (Deut. 29:22–25). The extent of the desolation of the land can be seen in the writings of Mark Twain,² where he referred to her as being *“rocky and bare, repulsive and dreary.”*

“For I will make the land most desolate, her arrogant strength shall cease, and the mountains of Israel shall be so desolate that no one will pass through. Then they shall know that I am the LORD, when I have made the land most desolate because of all their abominations which they have committed,” (Ezek. 33:28-29).

4. Yet, in Isaiah 62:4, God declares that there will come a time when she will no longer be termed Forsaken nor her land Desolate. He knows of the thoughts and emotions that she

² Mark Twain's writings, *“Its banks, and those of the brook are respectably adorned with blooming oleanders, but the unutterable beauty of the spot will not throw a well-balanced man into convulsions, as the Syrian books of travel would lead one to suppose.”* He continued, *“The further we went the hotter the sun got, and the more rocky and bare, repulsive and dreary the landscape became...There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country.”* *“Palestine [Israel] is desolate and unlovely.”*

has of being forsaken. His desire is to restore her, transforming her identity from "Forsaken" to "Hephzibah", and the land restored from "Desolate" to "Beulah."

5. It is this truth that will give the Jewish people hope. God is committed to see this prophetic destiny of hers become a reality.

G. CONTEXT OF THE END-TIME NARRATIVE

1. The Hephzibah promise for the nation of Israel will come to pass as we transition from this age to the next. In God's divine wisdom, mercy and faithfulness to her, He has a salvation plan for her that will ultimately unfold at the End of the Age (Isa. 62:1; Rom. 11:33). As mentioned in Romans 11:26, "all Israel will be saved". This speaks of a national salvation of the Jewish people before King Yeshua returns!
2. God's salvation plan for Israel involves His judgement of her sin, where He will refine and purify the Jewish people (Zech. 13:8–9; Mal. 3:2–3). This process has already started and will culminate in the final three and a half years. He will preserve and produce a remnant among His Jewish people who are righteous and pleasing unto Him (Isa. 6:11–13; Rom. 9:27; Rev. 12:6).
3. Just as He promised, God will pour out His Spirit of grace and supplication upon the Jewish people (Zech. 12:10–14). Through this outpouring, their eyes will be opened to the revelation of Yeshua as their true Messiah and Lord, leading to a national mourning for their sins. This will happen right at the end. The outpouring of His Spirit will lead to the Jewish people calling upon the name of Yeshua and being saved as a nation (Joel. 2:28–32).
4. At His return, Yeshua will cleanse the Jewish people of all sin and uncleanness, washing away their filth by the spirit of judgement and spirit of burning (Isa. 4:2–4). He will open up a fountain for cleansing, removing every idolatry, filthiness and unclean spirit from the land (Ezek. 36:25; Zech. 13:1–2).
5. It is only after the Jewish people as a nation are refined, saved and cleansed, that they will step into their prophetic destiny as Hephzibah. When the Jewish people are cleansed and made holy, the land will be cleansed of wickedness, no longer defiled. It is then that the people and the land will step into their prophetic destiny as Beulah.

H. THE ROLE OF BELIEVERS IN THE END TIMES

1. In God's zeal for Israel, He will raise up night and day prayer for Israel among the Gentile believers, ones who will pray for her to be saved unto the Hephzibah promise (Isa. 62: 6–7). He will raise up voices to speak to the leaders at the gates, directing them to God's righteousness and salvation in Yeshua's name (Isa. 62:10–11).

2. God will raise up voices among His believers, both Jewish and Gentile, to speak comfort to His people and to Jerusalem amid the End-Time judgements over her (Isa. 40:1–2). One of the ways to speak “comfort” to Jerusalem is to remind her of the promise of her Hephzibah destiny. The message of Hephzibah will give her hope in a time when things seem hopeless, directing her to see God’s great zeal for her, even in His judgements.

I. THE GLORY OF ISRAEL RISING AS HER IDENTITY AS HEPHZIBAH AND BEULAH

1. The final verse in Isaiah 62 captures the fullness of God’s promise for Israel — *“And they shall call them The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD; and you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken.”* (Isa. 62:12). This is the ultimate destiny of Israel, where she will no longer be forsaken, but the one in whom the Lord seeks out and delights in. God will manifest His delight over her by bringing a mighty deliverance to her (Ps. 18:19) and by causing her to arise in His glory in the Millennial Kingdom (Isa. 60:1–3).
2. While God is the One who will bring the nations against Israel to chastise her and refine her (Zech 12:2), He is also the One who will come against her enemies to defeat them completely (Zech. 9:1–8). He will bring deliverance. He will take away her judgements and cast out all her enemies.
3. God will restore Israel and cause her to sing, rejoice and be glad (Zeph. 3:14). She will be like a queen brought to the King in robes of many colours (revealing God’s favour over her) with gladness and rejoicing (Ps. 45:14–15). At the restoration, the Lord promised to give the Jewish people praise and renown in every land where they were put to shame (Zeph. 3:19).
4. God’s delight over Jerusalem can also be seen in His rejoicing over her. *“He will rejoice over her with gladness, He will quiet her with His love, He will rejoice over her with singing”* (Zeph. 3:17). God Himself will rejoice in Jerusalem and will joy in His people (Isa. 65:19).
5. God will also gather His people that have been scattered back to the land (Ezek. 36:24). They will possess the land again. He will also restore double to them because of His covenant, and the land will be productive and fruitful (Isa. 61:7; Joel 2:21–27; Zech. 9:12).
6. In the Millennial Kingdom, we will see the fullness of Israel’s blessings manifested. Jesus will reign as King over the whole earth from His capital in Jerusalem. His glory will be seen in Jerusalem and the nations will come to her glory (Isa. 60:1–3). Even the Gentiles will bless her. The remnant of Israel will be priests unto the Lord and kings to administer His kingdom in the thousand-year reign of Yeshua.

J. PRAYER POINTERS

We can also sing and prophetically declare Israel's identity as Hephzibah over her (Jer. 31:7).

1. Pray for Israel as a nation to walk into her prophetic destiny as Hephzibah, a people in whom God delights.
2. Pray for the opening of the eyes of the Jewish people to see that the righteous requirement of their Hephzibah destiny can only be fulfilled in Yeshua, and that this will lead to their salvation (Rom. 10:1).
3. Pray for the Father to reveal Yeshua to the Jewish people as more than a Messianic King, but a Bridegroom who is coming for a Bride (Eph. 1:17–18).
4. In light of the coming persecution and hardship the Jewish people will face at the End of the Age, pray for God to direct their hearts and confidence to Him as the One who keeps His covenant with them (Ps. 121).
5. Pray for the ultimate refining and restoration of Israel as a nation, that she may arise as the crown of glory reflecting God's glory (Mal. 3:2–3).
6. Pray for the ultimate promise of the cleansing of the land to come to pass, that the promise of the land as Beulah may be made manifest.
7. Pray for the Messianic Jewish people to encounter God's delight in and over them and be established in the Hephzibah identity (Eph. 1:17–18).
8. Pray for Messianic Jewish believers to be bold in declaring the gospel of Yeshua, so the unbelieving Jewish people can enter into a relationship with Yeshua and walk into their prophetic identity as Hephzibah (Rom. 16:25).
9. Pray for God to set watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem from among Jewish and Gentile believers, who will pray for Israel out of an understanding of the Bridegroom's heart and zeal for her (Isa. 62:6–7).
10. Pray for God to raise up His End-Time messengers who will speak and declare the Hephzibah promise as a comfort and hope to the Jewish people (Isa. 40:1–2).