

Session 3

A Basic Foundation in Understanding Israel

A. Introduction

1. In order to understand Israel from a Biblical standpoint, we need to see the big picture of God's salvation plan for all of mankind.
 - a. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone for all people. There is no separate plan of salvation for Israel (Rom. 4:1–3).
 - b. God only has one people, one Body, one Bride, and one redemptive plan. The end of that plan is that both Jew and Gentile would be united into one new man (Eph. 2:15).
 - c. There is no distinction between a Jewish person and a Gentile person from the standpoint of the Gospel. While God maintains His election of the nation of Israel as His redemptive vehicle on the earth, He enforces no distinction between Jew and Gentile.
 - d. Even in the Old Covenant, God has always desired all nations to enter into that covenant and be grafted into His covenant people (Acts 15:9; Rom. 3:22; 10:12; Col. 3:11; Ex. 12:48; Num. 15:15, 26).
2. There are seven realities from the Bible that give a broad overview and basic foundation for understanding Israel. It is important to grasp these realities so that we can reach a deeper understanding of God's heart for the nation of Israel.

B. Reality 1: The Real Issue about Israel is the Issue of God's Sovereign Election

1. The real issue about Israel is actually not about Israel! It is about God and His sovereign right to elect (choose) a means and people through which He would reveal Himself (Rom. 9:11).
 - a. This started in the Garden of Eden where God chose a tree (the tree of life instead of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) and demanded that man honour His election.
 - b. However, man rebelled against Him, and God thus elected and chose to confine Himself to a course of action to bring salvation to mankind.
 - c. His chosen course of action was to bring Himself forth in the flesh through a woman. That woman would come from a specific lineage that God would choose. From Adam through Christ, and even until now, all of history is about God exercising His right to choose (Gen. 3:15).

2. Israel exists because God elected a gentile, pagan, idolatrous Chaldean (modern day Iraq) named Abram (Gen. 18:18)
 - a. God chose Abram, set him apart, changed his name to Abraham, and made a covenant with him. God did not choose Abraham because he was Jewish, or even righteous.
 - b. Instead, God chose a man through whom He would reveal Himself to the nations of the earth, and set that man apart to be the father of a new nation that was not a nation. God chose that salvation would come through Abraham.
3. God elected Isaac, and not Ishmael. God elected Jacob, and not Esau. It was not because of anything about the individuals, but it was about God exercising His sovereign right to choose a lineage through which salvation would be made available to all who believe. There could only be one line because Jesus was going to be human (Rom. 9:11).
4. Out of the peoples of the earth, God called forth His very own nation. It was never about Israel but was always about God creating a context to be born into and to bring salvation to the nations through. It was about God declaring Himself to the nations.
5. When we speak of Israel, we must understand that we are speaking of God's sovereign election of a people through whom He would bring the light of revelation and eventually the Light of Christ (Rom. 9:20; 11:17–22).
 - a. We must tread with reverence on the subject of Israel, knowing that we tread in the realm of God's Right to Choose.
 - b. We must not become arrogant against God and those He has chosen, nor be wise in our own estimation and question God's choice.
 - c. We must have a holy fear regarding the issue of Israel, because we tread in the realm of the kindness and severity of God (Rom. 11:22).

C. Reality 2: God is Not Finished With Israel

Scripture, especially Romans 11, makes it clear that God is not finished with Israel. He has not replaced her with the Gentile Church:

1. God has not rejected Israel (Rom. 11:1–2);
2. Israel's rejection of God in Christ is neither full nor final (Rom. 11:11);
3. Israel has experienced a partial hardening (Rom. 11:25);
4. God's calling is irrevocable (Rom. 11:28–29);
5. ALL Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:26). This is a prophecy that will ultimately be fulfilled.

D. Reality 3: Jesus is Returning to Jerusalem to Rule the Earth

1. We must understand that Jesus is coming back to the earth to rule forever from a throne, and that throne will be in Jerusalem (Acts 1:1–12; Ps. 2:6, 132:13–14; Jer. 3:17);
2. We must understand that Jesus is returning to the remnant of Israel that survives the Great Tribulation and who then repent and believe in Him. He is not returning to “the earth” in a vague way, but to Jerusalem specifically. He is not returning to “humans” in general, but especially to redeem Israel (Zech. 14:4, 16–17; Ps. 110:2; Joel 3:17).

E. Reality 4: Israel Was and Will Be God’s Vehicle of Salvation in His Redemptive Plan

1. The reason that Israel is “the chosen people” or God’s set-apart nation is not because they are special. Rather, they are special because God has chosen them as the nation through which salvation would be brought to the ends of the earth.
2. His original plan was to bring “salvation” (justice, righteousness, peace, order) to the earth through Adam and Eve and their descendants. After the fall, God once again set apart a people through Abraham and Sarah and ordained that salvation would be brought to the Earth through these people.
3. The following Scriptures point to her role as God’s vehicle:
 - a. *“You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.”* (Jn. 4:22);
 - b. *“I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.”* (Rom. 11:11);
 - c. *“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”* (Gen. 22:18);
 - d. *“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel.”* (2 Tim. 2:8);
 - e. *“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh (Jesus) comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”* (Gen. 49:10);
 - f. *“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; a star shall come forth from Jacob (Jesus), a scepter shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab (cf. Gen 3:15), and tear down all the sons of Sheth.”* (Num. 24:17).

F. Reality 5: Satan Always Seeks to Destroy Israel

1. Satan has always sought to destroy the Jewish people. He knows that God has ordained that he be cast into prison and then into the lake of fire for eternity.
 - a. His first desire is to avoid this imprisonment and unbearable eternal punishment.
 - b. From the start, he has set out to destroy Israel because Israel is God's vehicle to restore His divine order to the earth.
2. From Genesis until now, Satan has sought to stop the prophesied "Seed", Jesus, from coming forth, whether at His First or Second Coming. While this battle is inevitably futile, it is still very real (Rev. 12:3–17).
 - a. Throughout history, God has narrowed the way in which He would come, and each time, Satan has set out to destroy the people through whom Jesus would come.
 - b. At the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus, pronouncing a judgement upon the leaders of the Jewish people, declared that He would not return until they welcome Him back as the Messiah and the Son of God from Jerusalem (Matt. 23:39).
 - c. With this prophecy, Satan seeks to exploit this "prophetic loophole". If Satan can destroy all the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem, then there will be no Jewish leadership in Jerusalem to welcome Him back.
3. As we approach the return of Jesus, Satan's rage towards Israel will only escalate and intensify as he holds nothing back in his quest to destroy her.
4. However, in God's sovereignty, Satan's rage is working in cooperation with and under the sovereign leadership of God to refine and ultimately redeem Israel (Zech. 12:2–3; 14:2).

G. Reality 6: Israel is God's Litmus Test for the Church and Nations in the End Times

1. A litmus test is a crucial test which reveals something based on one factor or indicator.
2. God will use Israel as the litmus test to reveal the truth of the hearts of both the Church and the remnant of the nations in the End Times (Matt. 25:31–46).
 - a. After Jesus returns, nations will be brought before Jesus and judged on their treatment of the Jewish people during the Great Tribulation.
 - b. It is not their "works" towards Israel that will gain them merit, or their failure to stand with Israel that will condemn them, but they will be judged by what is deep in their heart, as revealed through their treatment of the Jewish people.

3. The Church will also be judged according to her stance towards Israel (Rom. 11:18–22).
 - a. Paul gave a very dire warning to the Gentile Church in Rome concerning their attitude towards the Jewish people who were then rejecting Jesus. Paul boldly stated that if these Gentile believers became arrogant towards the unredeemed Jews, they would be in danger of departing from the faith.
 - b. Some Gentile believers arrogantly compare themselves with the Jews who have rejected Christ and think that they are “better”. In doing so, the Gentile believers are standing before God on the basis of works and no longer on the basis of faith in God’s goodness.
4. The way Nazi Germany treated the Jewish people in World War II was a dress rehearsal for what is coming.
 - a. The Church in Germany, for the most part, failed to stand up for the Jewish people against the Nazis. They preferred to hold on to their comfort, status, and lives. A lack of proper understanding and passion for Israel led them to betray many Jewish people to death.
 - b. We must cultivate a theological understanding and a passion in our hearts for the Jewish people so that we will have an unyielding resolve to stand with them.

H. Reality 7: Israel is the Litmus Test of the Apostolic Heart

1. Paul’s ministry revolved around his desire to see the Jewish people come to the saving knowledge of Christ (Rom. 9:3; 10:1; 11:13–14).
2. As the End-Time Church will be apostolic and prophetic, let us remember that the heart of the apostolic ministry beats for the salvation of Israel. Paul, a leading authority in the apostolic ministry, declared this truth in his ministry.
3. Paul went so far as to wish that he himself could be condemned to eternal damnation in the lake of fire if that would bring Israel to salvation.
4. While it does not mean that we should neglect the ministry that the Lord has for us specifically (for example, feeding the poor, evangelising those around us etc.), we should evaluate whether our hearts carry the apostolic burden of God’s heart for Israel.
 - a. We can ask ourselves questions such as, “Do we recognize Israel’s importance and role in God’s Kingdom? Do we feel what God feels for Israel? Do we pray for her and prepare ourselves to stand with her in the days to come? Is there any way that I can bless Israel in my life and ministry?”
 - b. We should ask the Lord for His heart towards Israel if we find that we are lacking or deficient in this area.

I. Conclusion

1. There are seven Biblical realities for us to grasp in order to have a basic foundation in understanding Israel.
2. As these become our foundation to knowing God's heart for Israel, the Lord will increase our understanding of His heart for her and grant us His burdens towards her in a greater measure.