

Israel's Place in the Plan of God

Many have wondered what place the modern state of Israel has in the Plan of God, and many theories have been suggested. It is well that we go back and examine what the scriptures say about the past, present and future of Israel.

First, we must identify that nation by a name. I have learned from past experience that if I use the term "Jews" I get informed that Jews are not Israelites. If I call them Israelites, I am told that Israelites only define the Northern Ten-Tribe Kingdom. If I call them Hebrews I am informed they are not really Hebrews, they are imposters from Edom called Kazars. I am aware of all these definitions which serve to confuse the reader. Each of these definitions, of course, identify that race of people at different times in their history.

Prior to the time they left Egypt they were called Hebrews. When Jacob was returning to Canaan, to be re-united with his brother, Esau, he fought with an angel who told him that his name would be changed to Israel. During the reign of Saul, David and Solomon, they were united, divided, and united again; and after Solomon's death they were finally divided into two kingdoms – Judah and Israel – and finally, during the time of the exile they were called Jews.

Being aware of all this, by what name will we use for simple definition of that race of people whom God separated and called His own? I can go back and keep re-defining terms to fit the dates, but that would be burdensome and confusing. So let's just use one term, and have it apply to that race of people at all stages of their History, keeping it simple, even though at different times in their history, the name would not be politically correct. For this study I will choose the name "Israel" to define that nation and people, who descended from Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel.

I think it best to begin with the fact that God chose Israel to be His special people. Why?

Deuteronomy 7:6-9:

"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh

king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.”

Deuteronomy 9:5 “It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of the land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the Lord your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

Obviously God’s reasons for selecting Israel and giving them the land was two-fold: 1) because He had promised it to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and 2) because those people who had been inhabiting the land were so very wicked.

The basic principle here is God’s integrity. When He makes a promise He keeps it. Here is the promise He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Genesis 12:1-3 “The Lord had said to Abram, leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on the earth will be blessed through you.”

In Genesis 15 God entered into a covenant with Abraham – it was, in reality, a Royal Land Grant.

Genesis 15:18 “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates – the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadomites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.”

This was a huge tract of land. Today the present nation of Israel occupies a very small portion of it. But the promise of God was from the river of Egypt all the way eastward to the Euphrates. Actually, it is well to note that at no time in history, including the present time, has Israel ever occupied all the land that God promised to them in this Royal Land Grant. Did God speak words of truth to Abram when he promised him all this land? God always speaks truth and He always keeps his promises. This tells us that this Royal Land Grant will indeed be the possession of Israel. It doesn’t tell us “when” but it indeed assures us it will be accomplished.

And the promise to bless all the peoples on the earth “through” Abraham and his seed will be accomplished because God promised it. Obviously the “seed” meant

was the Royal Seed – Jesus Christ.

So – if that promise has never been fulfilled, then we must look to the future for its fulfillment.

Jeremiah has been called the prophet of doom because God gave him an insight into the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Here is a portion of what God told Jeremiah to tell Zedekiah.

Jeremiah 24:9-10 “I will make them (Israelites) abhorrent and an offense to all the kingdoms of the earth, a reproach and a byword, an object of ridicule and cursing, wherever I banish them. I will send the sword, famine and plague against them until they are destroyed from the land I gave to them and their fathers.”

It was fulfilled just as God spoke. From that point on until A.D. 1948 Israel has never been a sovereign nation – she has always been the subject of a foreign power. She has gone into Babylonian captivity, Persian captivity, Greek captivity, Roman captivity and the great diaspora. She was driven “*from the land that I gave them and their fathers*” and sifted like in a sieve through all the lands of the earth, to be assimilated and lost forever as a people.

Amos 9:9 “I will give the command, and I will shake the house of Israel among all nations as grain is shaken in a sieve.”

It is important to note that it was the land that had been given to the fathers – the Royal Land Grant – that they were driven from. And it is the land given to their fathers – the Royal Land Grant – that will be restored to them. They have never yet in history owned or occupied all of that land. But the promise is that they will.

Amos 9:15 “I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them.”

The land he had given them was the Royal Land Grant, which they had never ever occupied fully. That is why Amos described it as “their own land.”

Ezekiel 20:39-44 “As for you O house of Israel, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: Go and serve your idols, every one of you! But afterward you will surely listen to me and no longer profane my holy name with your gifts and idols. For on my holy mountain, the high mountain of Israel, declares the Sovereign Lord, there in the land the entire house of Israel (all twelve tribes) will serve me, and there I will accept them. There I will require your offerings and your choice gifts, along with all your holy sacrifices. I will

accept you as fragrant incense when I bring you out from the nations and gather you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will show myself holy among you in the sight of all nations. Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the land I had sworn with uplifted hand to give to your fathers. There you will remember your conduct and all the actions by which you have defiled yourselves, and you will loathe yourselves for all the evil you have done (repentance). You will know that I am the Lord, when I deal with you for my name's sake and not according to your evil ways and your corrupt practices, O house of Israel (all twelve tribes), declares the Lord.”

Here again God is promising to Israel (all twelve tribes) that they are to be replanted into the land that He promised to Abraham – not to some other land somewhere else on this globe. God gave to Ezekiel these beautiful prophecies while he was in Babylonian captivity. The ten tribes had previously gone into captivity to Assyria, and now, all that was left of the two-tribe kingdom had been taken to Babylon. The Israelite people were obviously in a seemingly hopeless condition. But these promises given to Ezekiel were not just for the return to their land (they did that under the edict of Cyrus), but God's promised return to the land includes their conversion and the acceptance of their Messiah. God told Zechariah “*They shall look upon him whom they pierced and mourn for him as for an only son.*” They have never done that yet, as a nation. But God does not make false promises.

Ezekiel 36:24-28 “For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all impurities from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your detest-

able practices. I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign Lord. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, O house of Israel! This is what the Sovereign Lord says: On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say; this land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited. Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the Lord have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it.”

It is obvious here that God is not talking about a “New Creation” (the faithful church). He is talking about a restoration of something that they had had in the past – the Royal Land Grant, which they had never fully occupied as their own.

Then God continues with the description of restored Israel with the vision of the Valley of Dry Bones: chapter 37. After Ezekiel saw the bones come together and given breath, then God plainly identifies who the bones are. He says:

Verse 11 *“These bones are the whole house of Israel (all twelve tribes).*

Verse 16-17 *“Take a stick of wood and write on it ‘Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him.’ Then take another stick of wood, and write on it ‘Ephraim’s stick, belonging to Joseph and all the house of Israel associated with him.’ Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand...I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land (the land promised to Abraham). I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel (not in the United States). There will be one King (Jesus, the King on David’s throne) and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms.”*

“My servant David (Jesus, the antitypical David) will be King over them, and they will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your father’s lived (not the United States). They and their children and their children’s children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever. I will make a

covenant of peace (a new marriage covenant) with them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

Prior to the prophecy that God gave to Ezekiel, that Israel will return to the land that had been given to Abraham, God gave a similar prophecy to Jeremiah. It is recorded in his 30th chapter.

“This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you. The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave to their forefathers to possess.”

Then in verse 18 God spells out exactly where they will be restored to:

“I will restore the fortunes of Jacob’s tents and have compassion on his dwellings; the city (Jerusalem) will be rebuilt on her ruins (not newly constructed in the United States) and the palace will stand in its proper place.”

In 721 B.C. the northern kingdom of Israel was taken into Assyrian captivity. In 586 B.C. the southern kingdom of Judah was taken into Babylonian captivity. From that time until 1947-48 there has never been a sovereign nation of Israel, under that name or any other name. God had told Jeremiah that in order to persuade the people of Israel to return to their land, He would send “fishers” and “hunters” to first lure them back, and then to drive them back. The Zionist movement served to “fish” them with lures, and caused many to return. The work of the hunters was more severe. If Hitler had had his way, there would be none left to return to the land that had been promised to them.

But the return to the land was not synonymous with their return to God. As a nation, they have not yet fulfilled the prophecy given to Zechariah that they would “look upon Him whom they pierced, and mourn for him as for an only son.”

In all of Israel’s past history, when they have returned to God and repented, and asked for His protection from their enemies, God has always saved them. But he never saved them when they were in unbelief and rebellion.

John, at the beginning of his gospel, said “He came unto his own, but his own received him not.” “His own” were fellow Israelites, sons of Jacob. However, by this time they were a mix, most of them descendants of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin. But history and the scriptures tell us there were others. The priestly

tribe of Levi was among them; and there were those, like Anna, who was in the temple when they brought in the baby Jesus, who was of the tribe of Asher.

There were also others, foreigners, such as Edomites, who in the time of John Hyrcanus, desired to legally become Israelites and were circumcised, according to the laws given to Moses – legally they became Israelites. There were those who had intermarried with the Greeks during the long years of Greek domination. But, according to the law given to Moses, if a foreigner desired to live among the Israelites, and be circumcised, and keep the law, they were considered one of them and no difference was to be made between them.

These were the people Jesus came to – His own fellow Israelites, but they would have none of it.

At that particular point in history it has to be realized that coming to the land of Israel did not mean that he came to the world's population of Israelites. Only 1/8 of the Israelite population of the world lived in the land of Israel at that time. It was only a small representation. At the time of Jesus' first advent there were more people of Israelite descent living in Alexandria than in Jerusalem. Yet, it was to that little nation called Israel – a vassal subject to the power of Rome – that Jesus said:

Matthew 23:37-39 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who killed the prophets and stoned those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

He did not say this to other Israelites all over the world – he said it to Jerusalem. Jerusalem has not yet said "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*" That nation which became a viable entity in 1947-48 has still rejected their Messiah.

A representative people have returned to the land, just as the prophets foretold. The "*hunters*" (Zionism), and the "*fishers*" (Nazi Germany), did a very thorough job in giving them the incentive to return. But they have not yet said "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*"

Psalm 118 prophesies of the time when Israel wakes up from her unbelief and recognizes their Messiah. In this Psalm it is Israel speaking ... they say:

"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, it is marvelous in our eyes. (Israel will recognize the One they had rejected.) This is the day the Lord has made; let us be

glad and rejoice in it. O Lord save us; O Lord grant us success (Israel is asking to be saved from the Gentile enemies who come to wipe them off the face of the earth.) Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

The prophet Zechariah spoke eloquently of that day when Israel comes to believe:

Zechariah 12:10 “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the One they pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.”

Zechariah follows with a description of the battle to save Israel.

“Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations as He fights in the day of battle.”

He describes it as the time when:

“The Lord will be King over the whole earth.”

Then Zechariah specifically tells what will become of Jerusalem.

“But Jerusalem will be raised up and remain in its place, from the Benjamin Gate, to the site of the First Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepresses. It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure.”

The Inheritance of Abraham’s Other Children

But what about Abraham’s other children? He had a son by Sarah’s handmaid, and he had six children by his concubine, Keturah. Do they share in the Royal Land Grant? Do they receive an inheritance?

For the scriptures dealing with this question, I will use the King James Version because the language is more familiar to the reader than those of the NIV which I have been using in this article.

Genesis 12:1-7 “And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed I will give this land; and there builded he an altar unto the Lord who appeared unto him.”

Genesis 13:14-15 “And the Lord said unto Abram... 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.”

Notice, it is Abraham’s “seed” that is to inherit the Royal Land Grant.

Genesis 15:18 *“In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.”*

Abraham had children by three women – Sarah, Hagar (Sarah’s handmaid), and Keturah (his concubine). Because Sarah was barren, she willingly gave her handmaid, Hagar, to Abraham in the hopes of having the son that God had promised them. Abraham loved the boy, and desired to pass the inheritance to him, for he pleaded with God: *“O that Ishmael might live before thee.”* This was when God had repeated the covenant to Abraham, and before the conception of Isaac.

Then God clarified His intentions to Abraham and told him that Ishmael would not inherit the Royal Land Grant, but that He would indeed bless Ishmael. This is when God told Abraham that Sarah would bear a son and would call his name Isaac. It reads like this:

Genesis 17:19-21 *“Then Abraham fell on his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is a hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?”*

“And God said, 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.”

In this exchange between Abraham and God, Abraham is pleading with God to accept Ishmael as the heir to the covenant. But God says “No – the covenant will be inherited by Isaac.” God answered Abraham by saying:

Verses 20-25 *“As for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.”*

This was apparently difficult for Abraham to accept. He loved Ishmael. And when Sarah asked him to cast out Hagar with Ishmael, he was greatly troubled. Then God spoke to him and told him to do as Sarah had asked, and cast out the bond-woman and her son, Ishmael. Then God added, *“for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.”*

God was making it clear to Abraham that the Royal Land Grant would be inherited by Isaac, and not by Ishmael.

Later, after Abraham's death, God repeated the promise to Isaac.

Genesis 26:3-4 "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham, thy father; and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

Later, Isaac conferred the Royal Land Grant upon his son Jacob:

Genesis 28:3-4 "God almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people: and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham."

Later, God confirmed this to Jacob and repeated the promise:

Genesis 35:11-12 "And God said unto him (Jacob), I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; and the land which I gave to Abraham and to Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land."

Thus it is made very clear in scripture that the Royal Land Grant was to pass to Isaac and then to Jacob.

But during Jacob's lifetime he was forced to leave the land that had been given to him because of famine. The only place in that part of the world that had food was Egypt, because Jacob's son, Joseph, had stored the abundant supply of grain during the seven years before the famine. So Jacob and all his family went to Egypt and took up residence there. The rightful owners of the Royal Land Grant no longer lived in the land.

After the death of Jacob, and after the death of Joseph, God spoke to Moses (a descendant of Jacob through Levi), and told him to bring the people back to the land that had been given to them. God promised that if the people (Jacob's descendants) would believe and obey, He would bring them back into the land, and they would dwell there. God even took Moses up to the top of Pisgah and showed him all the land that they were to inherit. Of course, from the top of Pisgah Moses could not see all the way from the Nile to the Euphrates, but he saw a representative part of it.

And for many generations to follow, Jacob's descendants did indeed occupy the portion of the land that Moses saw. During the time of David and Solomon the borders of the land were greatly expanded, but never have they occupied all the land that was included in the Royal Land Grant that had been given to Abraham.

But God's promises never fail: the land – all of it – will indeed be given to the chosen “*seed*” to occupy it as rightful owners. Ownership of the land was never given to the offspring of Hagar; and ownership of the land was never given to the children of Keturah. It was given to the “*seed*” – and God specifically said “*In Isaac shall thy seed be called.*”

But what about the other children of Abraham? Are they left without an inheritance? No! They each received an ample inheritance.

To Hagar's son Ishmael, God told Abraham:

“Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation.”

That is an abundant inheritance, but it does not include the “land” given to Abraham.

What about the other children of Abraham, by his concubine, Keturah? The account given to us in Genesis 25 appears to tell us that after Sarah died, Abraham took another wife, Keturah, and had six children by her. That's what it appears to say, but upon closer consideration, it may have been otherwise.

The suggestion has been made – and it is a reasonable one – that Keturah had been Abraham's concubine while Sarah was living; and that perhaps those six sons were born to him before Sarah bore Isaac. And the suggestion continues, that after Sarah's death, Abraham took Keturah as his legal wife. Let's look at that suggestion for a moment.

When God told Abraham that Sarah would have a son, Abraham argued with God and even scoffed at the idea of himself becoming a father at age 100. It appears that Abraham knew that his ability to beget a child was no longer, because he was 100 years old, and so he argued with God and essentially told God this was not possible. Then, in reply, God added another apparent impossibility by saying that Sarah (90 years old) would bear this child. Abraham scoffed at it again and reminded God that Sarah was no longer physically capable of conceiving a child.

We tend to think the miracle of the conception of Isaac was with Sarah, because long before the age of 90 she would no longer have any eggs. But Abraham clearly told God that he (Abraham) was no longer physically capable of fathering a

child. Yet God obviously performed a miracle with both of them. This was when Sarah was 90.

Sarah died at age 127. This would be 37 years after the birth of Isaac. Isaac was born when Abraham was 100, thus Abraham would be 137 years old when Sarah died. If Abraham had told God that he was not physically capable of fathering a child at age 100, how could he possibly be able to beget six children between his ages of 137 and 143 (at least that)? Not a very reasonable scenario!

A far more humanly possible scenario would be that Abraham had those six sons by his concubine Keturah sometime during the lifetime of Sarah; and after Sarah died, then he took Keturah as his legal wife, making the six sons legal heirs. By this time the six sons would be grown men.

So what kind of inheritance did they receive?

Genesis 25:5-6 "And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac, but unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham sent gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country."

It does not say what the gifts were, but it is logical to suppose that he gave each of them ample goods and livestock with which they could make their own way successfully in a new land.

It is a reasonable analogy that Hagar represents the covenant through which Israel was called: Sarah represents the covenant through which the Bride of Christ was called; and Keturah represents the covenant through which the entire world of God's human family is called during the Millennium. All the children of Abraham receive an abundant inheritance.

When Abraham made that heart-felt plea to God: "*O that Ishmael may live before thee,*" God was listening from the heart. Surely all the other children of Abraham will receive abundant blessing.