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B0621 – May 28, 2006 – Israel: The Subservient Nation Of Israel 70AD-1917

Last week we followed Israel through the times of the Gentiles beginning in 605BC when they fell subservient to Babylon, then to Medo-Persia, Greece, and finally Rome where we stopped in 70AD with the destruction of Jerusalem. Now, the general framework of this history is the subject of much prophecy in the Book of Daniel. Daniel 2 and 7 outline the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman Empires as well as a future Revived Roman Empire. Daniel 8 prophecies of the Greek Empire in particular, Alexander the Great's defeat of the Persians and the break-up of his empire into four divisions. Daniel 11 also outlines much of the times of the Gentiles. Other OT books are replete with references to Israel during the Medo-Persian Empire (e.g. Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, Esther, Malachi, and Nehemiah). Under these kingdoms several important developments in the Jewish world took place. For example, when the Seleucids pushed Hellenization on the Jews, seventy-two Hebrews translated the OT Scriptures into Greek resulting in the monumental Septuagint (LXX) ~ 250-200BC, a document we can use to gain a deeper insight into how the Jews of that time understood certain OT Hebrew words. Other important documents arose out of a Pharisaic sect known as the Essenes who lived in a separatist community called Qumran around 150-175BC until 66-68AD. They left behind the Dead Sea Scrolls, first discovered in 1947, and comprise the greatest archaeological discovery of the 20th century. They pre-date our earliest OT manuscripts by over 1,000 years and show remarkable precision in the preservation of the OT text. Many think John the Baptist was from an Essene. We also learned that during the Medo-Persian Empire a great prophecy of 490 years began in the year 444BC. It predicted the length of Israel's exile which corresponds to the length of time until the kingdom of God comes. As such, when the King was born in 5/4BC the 490 years was nearing expiration. To prepare the way came a voice crying in the wilderness, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God" (Isa 40:3), John the Baptist. Both John and Jesus came with the message "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 3:2; 4:17) and yet the people did not repent. They continued to think that the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was adequate to enter the kingdom. As

such, the nation followed its leaders, leaders who led them down a path to reject the prophesied Messiah. And thus, Jesus pronounced judgment on that generation said, "For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, ⁴⁴ and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:43-44). This was fulfilled in 70AD. And so, Jesus went on to fulfill the OT Mosaic Law (Rom 10:4) so that we are no longer under the Law of Moses but the law of Christ. "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom 10:4). And so, by keeping the Mosaic Law Jesus generated space-time righteousness that is imputed to all who believe in Christ so that God is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom 3:26). As a result, boasting is excluded (Rom 3:27; Eph 2:8-9). Now, with the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law and the death of Christ on the cross the foundations were laid for the Church, a new entity composed of believing Jews and Gentiles. This entity is distinct from Israel and began fifty days after the crucifixion on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Israel's 490 year calendar had stopped at the 483rd year so that we have what is called an "intercalation", a break in Israel's calendar, sometimes called a "parenthesis". So, there is a gap of time, of unknown duration between the 483rd and 484th year of Israel's calendar. During this gap of time God is building His Church. So, most histories Christians read about this period of time beginning in 33AD and extending to our present year, 2006, are not very concerned with the people of Israel. However, that is our interest.

F. Rome 63BC-324AD

5. 33AD The Church

So, the church began on the day of Pentecost with the baptizing work of the Spirit which places the believer in the body of Christ. Now, when you read Acts 2 you will discover that the Church had a distinctly Jewish origin. It was not until several years later in Samaria that Samaritans were first added to the Church. And it was not until seven years after the day of Pentecost that the first Gentiles were added to the Church (~40AD). So, Christianity has deep Jewish roots; it's based on the death of the Jewish Messiah, it began when the Jewish Messiah sent the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost to the Jewish city of Jerusalem in the Jewish Holy Land and 3,000 Jews believed on that day. So, from these distinctly Jewish roots Christianity began to spread in accordance with the theme of Acts (cf 1:8).

6. 70AD Destruction of Jerusalem

Now, the church had been growing for thirty-seven years in the Roman Empire when one of Christ's prophecies was fulfilled. Jesus had pronounced judgment on that generation of Jews because they had rejected His Messiahship, they did not know the hour of their visitation. And the judgment would center upon the city of Jerusalem.

Luke 21:20-24 "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. ²¹ "Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; ²² because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled. ²³ "Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people; ²⁴ and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

This was fulfilled in 70AD when Titus and the Roman armies razed Jerusalem destroying the Temple (also see Dan 9:26).ⁱ This sets the tone for a study of the Diaspora, that is, Jews in dispersion. Part of the prophecy was that they would "be led captive into all the nations". And so, we enter into the miraculous survival of a nation without a national homeland. How do a people maintain their identity while living among other nations for 2,000 years? Now, I think the answer is basically because of the Abrahamic Covenant. I mean, I think that is undergirding the entire history of the nation of Israel and ensuring their survival. So, the first wave of dispersion began in 70AD, the second occurred after the Bar Kochba revolt.

6. 135AD Bar Kochba Revoltⁱⁱ

In the years 132-135AD a Jew named Bar Kochbaⁱⁱⁱ led a Jewish revolt against the Romans in an attempt to gain independence. Bar Kochba's revolt was so successful that the prominent Rabbi Akiva considered him the Messiah. After three years of tumultuous battle with great cost to Emperor Hadrian, the Romans put down the revolt. The aftermath for the Jews was devastating; the land had been ravaged, most of their cities and villages had been abandoned or destroyed, the Jewish population was decreased significantly. Emperor Hadrian erased the name Judah (i.e. Judea) from the land and re-named it "Palaestina" after Israel's ancient enemies, the Philistines.^{iv} Jerusalem was renamed Aelia Capitolina and Jews were banned from coming to weep at the ruins of the Temple. All that remained was the western wall, the ancient retaining wall at the foot of

Mount Moriah. More than 500,000 Jews were sold as slaves in the final act of Roman oppression. Following this the Romans oppressed Jewish intellectual and religious life by decreeing no circumcision, no keeping of Sabbaths, no observance of Jewish law. To ordain a Rabbi was punishable by death and many, many Jews were murdered under Emperor Hadrian's decree. As a result, a second wave of dispersion began.

7. Jewish Schools

Three years after the Bar Kochba revolt, Emperor Hadrian was replaced by Antonius Pius (138-161AD) who repealed all the anti-Jewish decrees, and exiles began returning to the land. A Jew named Johanan ben Zakkai held the idea that since political independence was not possible at this time he would unite the Jewish people by way of spiritual and intellectual learning. The learning of ideas would hold the nation together and ensure their survival until they had enough strength to revolt and win their independence. Thus, many schools developed in Jerusalem and Babylon (where a large community of Jews lived).

a. The Mishnah (170-217AD)

It was during this time that the Mishnah was completed by Judah, known simply as "Rabbi". The Mishnah is the codification of the Oral Law (a.k.a. *halakhah*). During the OT, Jews had handed down Oral Law from generation to generation which went alongside the Written Law. It was basically commentary on the Torah and it was meant to answer legal questions that were not covered explicitly in the Torah. IN other words it would tell a man what to do and what not to do in any given situation. It formed voluminous "case law".^v

b. The Gemara

After this period of time many Jews began to migrate from Israel to Babylon where Jewish life was flourishing. Since the Mishnah pertained to life in Palestine it did not fit the life of the Jews in Babylon so a group of Jewish scholars felt the necessity for further modification. In studying the Mishnah they realized that Judah had not included all the legal material and since his time many additional laws (*halakhot*) had accumulated. Therefore, they codified this other material and it became known as the Gemara.

c. The Talmud

Now we reach a most important Jewish document, the Talmud, which is the Mishnah and Gemara together, an immense commentary on ten centuries of Jewish life. The Talmud was studied and added to by scholars in Jerusalem and Babylon who corresponded with one another. However, the Babylonian Talmud developed into a much more complete and important volume. The basic reason: because Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in 313AD (at The Edict of Milan). Why did Constantine's declaration of Christianity as the official religion of Rome cause the Babylonian Talmud to develop and not the Jerusalem Talmud? Because of two doctrines of the infant Roman Catholic Church which we'll get to in a moment. Suffice it to say now that these two doctrines caused Rome to see the Jews as enemy number one and so they persecuted the Jews and many dispersed, some to Babylon where they could live freely.

E. 324-638AD BYZANTINE PERIOD

Now, I must admit that I was thoroughly surprised in my historical research at this point. I had expected fully to arrive at Islam in the 7th century and find that Islam had been the major persecutors of the Jews but that is not what I found at all. What I found was that the most extensive persecutions of the Jews during the Church Age had been carried out by the Roman Catholic Church. I had not expected this. Now, let's get to those two doctrines. When you study the eschatology of the early church fathers one thing you find was a staunch *chiliasm* or "millennialism", a staunch believe that God has a future for Israel. Now, that lasts until you get to a man named Origen. There's no doubt that Origen was brilliant but Origen liked to allegorize Scripture. Reading his interpretations of the Bible is like reading "fantasy unlimited". One thing Origen did was allegorize Israel to mean Church. So, everytime you read Israel you just replace it with Church and move on. Now, this leads to the idea that there's no need for a millennium on earth for Israel (amillennialism). This doctrine was basically systematized by Augustine in the fourth century (e.g. his book *The City of God*). Now, the second doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church that fueled persecution against the Jews also came from Augustine. In Augustine's later years his theology became very deterministic, probably due to the influence of his earlier Manichaeism which was a fatalistic pagan philosophy. Now, whenever you add determinism to theology you get force, forced conversions, or attempts to force people to choose conversion or death and that's what happened to the Jews under the Roman Catholic Church. So, Christians went to Israel and began to force Jews to be baptized and converted. If they refused baptism then they would not enter into all the rights of the state. So, you can see there would be a tremendous pressure to be baptized. And some Jews did and then when the pressure lifted they would turn back to their

Judaism. So, these people had to develop cryptic ways of practicing Judaism because of the persecution or they just had to flee. So, this determinism of Augustine which was adopted by the Roman Catholic Church and enforced by the State resulted in the method of “force”. Now, I fully expected to find “force” as a method in Islam but I did not expect this in Roman Catholicism. This surprised me, but, it’s what I found. So, disillusioned by this many Jews emigrated. Meanwhile, the Christians began taking relics from the Holy Land, for example, they dug up the bones of Joseph in 395AD and moved them to Constantinople. They also built churches over many of the burial sites of prophets and saints. So, it was a very difficult time for the Jews in the land. They were, of course, in mourning. One ancient author described the situation as follows, “...women whose strength had left them because of old age; they are unkempt and their clothes are torn, they look pale and weep. While the men blow the *shofar* on the ashes of the Temple, the Roman soldiers ask for more money, before they agree to their desire to weep for a while longer. All this happens under the golden crosses of the Church of Burial, and of the crosses of Mount Olive.” And this is why the cross is so despised by Jews. They only know it as the symbol under which they were persecuted. There is more to this period but let’s jump to the Arab Period or the Age of Islam.

F. 636-1099AD ARAB PERIOD

Now we come to the time of a new religion, Islam which means “submission” to Allah. It’s founder was Muhammad who was born in 570AD in Mecca. He had humble beginnings but rose to be the leader of a traveling caravan. His caravan did business with Jews and Christians and through interaction with them he became aware of some of the Bible’s teaching. He also claimed to possess prophetic power and occasional visitations from heaven. In 610, at the age of forty, he claims to have had a visitation from the angel Gabriel who told him to memorize the verses sent to him from God. These verses supposedly make up the Qur’an, the Muslim holy book. Muhammad and Muslims today view the Qur’an as a correction of Jewish and Christian scriptures, and a final revelation. The basic message of this new religion was that there is One God^{vi} and there should be One Community of believers. So, he adopted the monotheism of Judaism and rejected the Triunity^{vii} of Christianity and he began to teach these beliefs and secretly convert people. In 620 he claims to have miraculously traveled in one night to the most distant mosque where he ascended to heaven and talked to the prophets Abraham, Moses and Jesus (whom he did not consider God). Although there is not a shred of evidence for it, Muslims believe that Muhammad went to Jerusalem and ascended from the Temple Mount that night. Thus, the Temple Mount is considered the third most holy site in Islam (Mecca and Medina are their other holy sites) and the Dome of the Rock was built there

in 690AD^{viii}. This site is the most holy site in Judaism and thought to be the place where Abraham offered his son Isaac on the altar (Gen 22:2). When Muhammad took his message to Mecca he met strong opposition and fled to Medina with a small group of followers in 622. This date is known as the *hejira* (the migration) and marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar (which is a lunar calendar). Now, in Medina he had high hopes for converting Jews and yet he met with stiff opposition. This angered Muhammad so much that Jewish hatred followed him the rest of his life. Since the theology of Islam is one of determinism where everything that happens is the will of Allah, to gain followers, Muhammad used two forceful methods. First, most of his converts were won on the field of battle where the defeated were given the option of conversion or death. This is one form of *jihad*. Modern day fundamentalist Muslims who use this form of *jihad* argue that they are following their founder. Second, if his victims refused to initially accept him as a prophet then he would impose special taxes on them to keep them in subordination. Both of these methods were used on Jews and Christians. If one does not convert to Islam then he is called a *dhimmi*, an infidel. Now, eventually, after enough forced conversions, Muhammad gained enough followers to return to Mecca, wage war, and attain victory. By the time of his death in 632 the new religion of Islam had become an Arab Empire and expeditions had been sent to Syria and Palestine to expand the Empire. Eventually the Arab Empire covered Egypt, North Africa, Mesopotamia, Persia and Iberia and ruled over the land of Palestine until 1099AD.

That being said, I should hasten to add that the Jews actually flourished under Muslim rule. They rose to high government positions and actually progressed intellectually and philosophically (e.g. the great poet and philosopher Yehuda Ha-Levi). Intermarriage was forbidden so this preserved their national identity. So, although there were cases of extreme persecution the general trend is that they have been treated far better under Muslim rule than by Roman Catholic rule.

G. 1099-1291AD CRUSADERS

In the 11th century Christians began pilgrimages to the Holy Land. And reports were coming back to Europe that Muslims were attacking them. As a result, all out war was declared against the Muslims. Several waves of Crusaders were unsuccessful and eventually, seeing Jewish wealth on the way they began to think it unnecessary to go all the way to the Holy Land to destroy God's enemies. One saying among the Crusaders was "Kill a Jew and save your soul." Thousands of Jews were killed and many were burned alive. Jerusalem fell to the Crusaders in 1099. In 1187 the Muslim Saladin attempted *jihad* against Christendom and recaptured Jerusalem. This set the stage for

another Crusade lead by Richard the Lionheart in 1189. It was unsuccessful and Jerusalem remained in Muslim hands. Eventually the Crusaders were driven out of the Holy Land by the Egyptian Mamelukes in 1291AD.

H. 1291-1516AD MAMLUKS

During this period not less than 100,000 Jews were killed in Eastern Europe and many, many besides this in other places.

I. 1516-1917AD OTTOMAN TURKS

Under Ottoman rule a period of prosperity began. Great scholars arose, particularly those of the mystical Kabbalist schools. With them came a deep messianic yearning and a mystical belief that the homeland as a spiritual center of sanctity was a necessary precondition of universal redemption. Some of the leaders of this time (e.g. Joseph) proved to be forerunners of great Zionists such as Theodor Herzl who dreamed of Jewish independence and yet was respected by non-Jews for their excellence. So, it was during this period that mysticism and messianism were revived and led to the deep longings for a return to the Holy Land as a sovereign people. Interestingly, according to the Kabbalah, Catholic Babylon, i.e. Rome, was destined to perish before the arrival of the Messiah. Jewish Messianic thought says, “the days of the Messiah will reveal themselves as follows” The sins of Israel will bring final retribution on the Day of judgment. This retribution, in the form of ward, destruction, exile, humiliation, and cataclysmic change in the order of nature, will represent the “birth pangs of the Messiah.” After the Day of Judgment will come repentance, which in turn will be followed by redemption. At the time of the redemption only a “remnant of Israel” will have survived—a small group of the upright, the blameless, and the humble among the sons of Israel. After the redemption Israel will gain political strength to equal that of other nations, but her spiritual strength will surpass that of other nations. Thus will Israel attain an exalted position among all peoples. Material prosperity (improvement and progress) as well as spiritual welfare (human perfection) will accompany the redemption.”^{ix}

“Normally, a people lives by its geography; the most enduring element in any national history is the ground which nature provides as a home. This is not so with the Jews; and yet they endured. Lacking a political homeland of their own, dispersed among the lands of the earth, they nevertheless took with them into the Diaspora a priceless cultural and religious heritage which ensured a community of spirit and a unity of purpose that were to sustain them despite the loss of their

sovereignty. Their loyalty went forth not to temporal rulers, but to an idea, a way of life, a Book. When Israel went into dispersion, its culture already had a coherent character, shaped by the lofty themes and moral imperatives of the Bible.”^x

ⁱ “There are two conflicting sources regarding the responsibility for the destruction of the Temple. Josephus, who is a highly prejudiced historian, maintains that Titus had given orders to save the Temple, but was disobeyed by his soldiers. The other source, Julianus, who was one of the members of the Roman war council, reports that Titus had announced his policy for the destruction of the Temple.” (Abba Eban, *My People*, 95.)

ⁱⁱ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/revolt1.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/Kokhba.html>

^{iv} The term Palaestina was first applied to the land of Israel by Emperor Hadrian in 135AD. The word was derived from the ancient Philistine people (Hamites, cf Gen 10:6ff), Israel’s most hated enemies who were crushed by the Assyrians. In the Latin Palaestina is *Filistina* from which we get the English, Palestine. The first people to be called Palestinians were the Jews after 135AD. The Jerusalem Talmud, written between 199-279AD was even known as the Palestinian Talmud. In 638AD the Arab’s took control of the land of Palestine and built the Mosque on the Temple Mount. Yet, even when Palestine was under Arab control the Jews continued to be called Palestinians. The first time Palestinian was applied to non-Jews was ~1900AD when it was applied to the Arabs (Semites) by British journalists.

^v The Mishnah underwent further development and codification by the *Tannaim* (teachers).

^{vi} This monotheism is absolute, not relative or pluralistic in any sense of the word. God is described in the Sura al-Ikhlās, (chapter 112) as follows: Say “He is God, the one and only. God, the Eternal, Absolute the Self-Sufficient master. He begetteth not, nor is he begotten. And there is none like unto Him.”

^{vii} Muslims reject the Christian doctrine of the Triune God claiming it is polytheistic. Quoting from the Qur’an, Sura An-Nisa (4:171): “O People of the Scripture! Do not transgress the limits of your religion, and do not say about God except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, was only a messenger of God, and His word that He had sent to Mary, and a revelation from Him. Therefore, you shall believe in GOD and His messengers. You shall not say, "Trinity". You shall refrain from this for your own good. God is only one God. Be He glorified; He is much too glorious to have a son. To Him belongs everything in the heavens and everything on earth. God suffices as Lord and Master.”

^{viii} Muslims love to build on and desecrate other religions holy sites. When the Jordanian Arabs controlled Jerusalem from 1948-1967 they used the graveyard on the Mount of Olives as a latrine.

^{ix} Abba Eban, *My People*, 245.

^x Abba Eban, *My People*, 231.

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