

***Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas***  
***Fredericksburg Bible Church***  
*107 East Austin*  
*Fredericksburg, Texas 78624*  
*830-997-8834    jthomas@fbgbible.org*

**B0620 – May 21, 2006 – Israel: The Subservient Nation Of Israel**

We've looked at Israel, the land, a specific real estate, chosen by God out of all the galaxies to be His land and Jerusalem as His habitation. Since God is the owner of the land He has full right to give it to whomever He wishes. And God gave the land to Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and his descendants through Jacob who was re-named Israel (Gen 32:28) as an everlasting possession. We then defined an Israelite or a Jew as one who is the descendant of a male offspring of Jacob and a true Israelite or true Jew meets that criteria plus he has believed. Now, this land and this people, Israel, are crucial. The biblical definition of these terms is absolutely critical because many replacement theologians claim that the church has replaced Israel and that God is through with the Jew. In which case, the modern state of Israel is not of God but of man and they are seriously opposed to our reading of Scripture claiming it is a serious misreading. Now, I have shown you that it is not erroneous at all but completely biblical. We've even dealt with the difficult texts like Rom 2:28-29; 9:6 and Gal 6:16. Not one passage teaches that the true Israel is the Church. Now then we build on this to erect a further Israelology. And so from Jacob we have his twelve sons who wandered in the land of Canaan until famine came and they went down to Egypt, 70 souls in all (Exod 1:5). They spent 430 years in Egypt (Exod 12:40-41) during which time they grew into a population of ~2 million (Exod 12:37). In 1445BC the Exodus occurred at which time the nation of Israel was born (Exod 12:1-3) and they traveled to Mt Sinai. At which point we began our study of the history of Israel as a sovereign nation, which began in 1445 and ended in 605BC. Most of the OT is about this period of time. Now, if you are going to understand this period of time you have to understand two key covenants.

The Abrahamic Covenant spelled out God's obligation to Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob of a land, a seed, and worldwide blessing. This covenant governs the entire track of world history. Therefore, studies of historical events or people not placed within the larger framework of the Abrahamic Covenant are detached from their true meaning and significance. Further, this covenant guarantees the eternal existence of

the people of Israel and places the Messiah at the center of world history. So, no matter what Israel does, no matter how much idolatry or sin she commits, no matter what weapons, whether nuclear or human suicide bombs are used against her, she will never be exterminated. The Bible describes this permanent relationship between God and Israel as that of a Father to a Son (Exod 4:22).

Within the Abrahamic Covenant we have the Mosaic Covenant which spelled out Israel's obligations to God. Since they share a true Father-Son relationship dynamics are inherent in that relationship. So, the relationship is permanent but fellowship within that relationship could fluctuate (a typical experience among family members). Israel's fellowship was conditioned upon her obedience or disobedience to the revealed will of God in the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Law. This covenant followed the format of ancient Suzerainty-Vassal treaties. God was the great King or Suzerain and Israel was His vassal. As long as they obeyed the great King they would be blessed. However, if they disobeyed the great King they would be cursed. The blessings are outlined in Lev 26:1-14 and the five degrees of cursing are outlined in Lev 26:15ff (also see Dt 28). So, the vassal nation of Israel would be able to compare her national experience with these two chapters and know exactly where she was in her relationship with God. So, last week we walked thru Israel's history from the Exodus in 1445 to the Exile in 586 from the standpoint of the blessing/cursing motif outlined in Lev 26. And we found that many of the prophets, such as Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah were acting as the great King's prosecuting attorneys. They would call the witnesses (the angels), present the case, prove God's faithfulness and Israel's unfaithfulness, indict the nation, and then pronounce judgment. These court procedures are known as the "rib format" and several OT books such as Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah are structured according to "rib" procedures. So, the nation's history from 1445-586BC was driven by these cursings and blessings. And we saw that after the kingdom divided under Rehoboam that both the northern and southern kingdoms reached the fifth degree of cursing and went into exile, the northern kingdom in 722BC and the southern kingdom in 586BC. The question arises as to how Israel will ever be able to enjoy the land as an eternal possession in fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant with such disobedient hearts. The answer is a third covenant called the New Covenant. In this unconditional covenant God promised to give both Israel and Judah a new heart and write His law on their hearts and place His Spirit within them so that they will do all His law. This has yet to be fulfilled and we'll find out why today during the Roman Period. So, let's move from Israel's history as a sovereign nation (1445-605BC) to her time as a subservient nation, subservient to Gentile kingdoms (605BC-1948AD).

## **I. THE SUBSERVIENT NATION OF ISRAEL (605BC-1948AD)**

## A. BABYLON (605-536BC)

Now, I take it that the year Israel lost her sovereignty and became subservient to Gentile kingdoms was 605BC. I say this because Babylon had sovereignty over Jerusalem beginning in that year. Nebuchadnezzar had a puppet king set up to rule Jerusalem and when he revolted Nebuchadnezzar attacked again in 597BC and then again after another revolt in 588-586BC. During these wars Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and other royalty were deported to Babylon. While they were in Babylon **non-Temple/non-sacrificial Judaism** began. Also, the **Babylonian Talmud** was written. So, I see 605 as the year that Judah became a subservient nation. From that point forward a long string of Gentile kingdoms ruled over the land and people of Israel. Luke called this “**the times of the Gentiles**” in Luke 21:24.<sup>1</sup> They were subservient to Babylon for seventy years and then to Medo-Persia who suffered military defeat by a brilliant takeover under Cyrus the Persian.

A valid question to ask is “How long Israel will be in exile?” Put another way, “How long until the kingdom of God comes on earth?” Well, this was prophesied in the OT in Dan 9? Anyone know how long they would be in exile? 490 years (Dan 9:24-27). Why 490 years? Think about the blessings and cursings under the Mosaic Law. We want to know why Israel will be in exile for 490 years. Turn with me to Lev 26 for this determination. Now, verse 27 begins the 5<sup>th</sup> degree of cursing.

**Leviticus 26:27-46** 'Yet if in spite of this you do not obey Me, but act with hostility against Me, <sup>28</sup> then I will act with wrathful hostility against you, and I, even I, will punish you seven times for your sins. <sup>29</sup> 'Further, you will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters you will eat. <sup>30</sup> 'I then will destroy your high places, and cut down your incense altars, and heap your remains on the remains of your idols, for My soul shall abhor you. <sup>31</sup> 'I will lay waste your cities as well and will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your soothing aromas. <sup>32</sup> 'I will make the land desolate so that your enemies who settle in it will be appalled over it. <sup>33</sup> 'You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste. <sup>34</sup> 'Then the land will enjoy its sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. <sup>35</sup> 'All the days of *its* desolation it will observe the rest which it did not observe on your sabbaths, while you were living on it...<sup>43</sup> 'For the land will be abandoned by them, and will make up for its sabbaths while it is made desolate without them. They,

meanwhile, will be making amends for their iniquity, because they rejected My ordinances and their soul abhorred My statutes. <sup>44</sup> 'Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God. <sup>45</sup> 'But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the LORD.'" <sup>46</sup> These are the statutes and ordinances and laws which the LORD established between Himself and the sons of Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai.

So, here's what happened. The Mosaic Law specified that you were to plant for six years and leave the land fallow on the seventh year (Lev 25:3-4). Now, the nation of Israel did not do this for 490 years and so, since they disobeyed the Mosaic Law God cursed them, sending them into exile so the land could rest. Now, Daniel came along and Daniel was a man of God and he was studying Jeremiah 25:11 and 29:10 in the year 538BC (Dan 9:1-2) and he saw that Jeremiah prophesied seventy years of exile and since they went into exile in 605BC and it was 538 it had already been 68 years and we find Daniel confessing the iniquity of himself and his people in Dan 9:4-19 (the longest prayer in the OT). Now, why is Daniel confessing their iniquity? This is a crucial point of biblical theology (Dan 9:20). Someone needs to write a thesis on this because it's extremely important. Most people don't see the significance of Daniel's confession but Daniel knew that the kingdom of God could not come until the nation confessed. But the nation was in no condition for confession at this time and so Gabriel came to give Daniel understanding. And he said it would be seventy weeks of years or 490 years (Dan 9:24), not just 70 years. Only after the 490 years will Israel's exile be over and the kingdom of God will come.

## **B. MEDO-PERSIA (536-332BC)**

So, two years later Medo-Persia defeated Babylon and Israel was subservient to them from 536-332BC. Cyrus permitted the Jews to return and rebuild the Temple under **Zerubbabel**, who was inspired by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. After the Temple was built **Nehemiah** returned to establish some political administration and later **Ezra** returned to reform their spiritual life. Both Nehemiah and Ezra strictly forbade intermarriage and their lead provided for centuries of ethnic purity. During this time, Daniel's famous 490 year prophecy began with the **decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem** in Neh 2:1-8. That year was 444BC. Esther also describes portions of Israel's history of persecution under the Persians. They remained under Persian control until...

### C. GREECE (332-63BC)

The Persians were conquered by **Alexander the Great**, the powerful military dictator of Greece, in 332BC and he conquered a tremendous amount of territory under lightning fast military campaigns. Soon after, Alexander died, and his empire was divided in four parts and ruled by Alexander's **four generals**. Now, it is crucial to realize that the Greek empire sought to Hellenize every culture and it was successful with every people except Israel. In the north the Ptolemaic Empire ruled and in the south the Seleucid. The Seleucid's were avid Hellenizers and eventually two groups of Jews arose. Those who refused **Hellenization** were of Judah and their resistance eventually led to the Maccabean revolt. This revolt was brought on by the Seleucid ruler **Antiochus Epiphanes IV** who had the help of many elitist Jews including the high priest, Jason. They would not accept the Jews particularism, they must be Hellenized. Eventually Antiochus marched his vast army into Judea, slaughtered thousands of Jews, defiled the Temple, and outlawed sacred observance of Jewish law. In response, many Jews, under the lead of **Mattathias**, fled to the mountains and set up an independent state. When he died in 167BC his son, Judah the **Maccabee** (the Hammer) became the leader, he is considered one of the greatest military figures in history. After three years of guerilla warfare they re-claimed Jerusalem and cleansed the Temple. This great victory is commemorated in Jewish history as **Hanukkah**, the Feast of Lights. After this time Israel's history divides into two sects: Pharisees and Saducees. The **Saducees** were the wealthy aristocratic class who had control of the Temple. They rejected resurrection and angels and held that the five books of the Torah were authoritative. They rejected oral law and favored Hellenization. The **Pharisees** were not as wealthy but had the majority. A third group was the radical **Essenes**, a branch of Pharisaic Judaism. They detested the corruptness of the high priest and separated into the wilderness. They produced what we know as the "**Dead Sea Scrolls**", recently discovered in the caves of Wadi Qumran when a shepherd boy threw a rock into a cave and shattered a clay pot. This discovery was the greatest archaeological find of the 20th century. Scrolls of every OT book have been found except Esther (but Esther was a part of "the twelve" and so no book is without evidence in that sense). They take us back 1,000 years before the earliest previously known manuscripts (~900AD Masoretic texts) and confirm amazing precision in scribal copying. The Essenes had their own separatist community until 66AD when the Roman's invaded. Some believe that John the Baptist was a part of the Essene community since he ate locusts and honey and dressed in camel's hair (Matt 3:4). Another important document that came from Hellenization was the **Septuagint** (LXX), a Greek translation of the Hebrew OT. The story is that 72 translators were enclosed in separate cubicles and when they emerged

they all had the same translation. The Greek language would serve as the mode of communicating the detailed doctrinal truths contained in the NT.

#### **D. ROME (63BC-324AD)**

Eventually Greece fell in 63BC to Rome which brings us to the empire under which Christ was born. The region had been given over to the rule of **Herod**, a brutal man who murdered his own wife and sons and anyone whom he felt threatened his rule. It was Herod who killed all the baby boys in Matt 2 because Jesus, king of the Jews was a threat to his throne. It was at this time that the 490 years that had begun in 444BC were nearing their close and it was expected that when the 490 years expired Israel's exile would be over and the kingdom of God would come. Yet, what we find is that Israel did not know the time of her visitation (Luke 19:44).

##### **1. Kingdom Offered (Matt 1-11)**

So, of course, if the kingdom of God would come then the King had to be born sometime before the 490 years expired. And Jesus was born in 5/4BC and this is why Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus, tracing it from Abraham to David and David to Babylon and Babylon to the Messiah (Matt 1:17). Now, when the Messiah Jesus grew up He was preceded by a forerunner, a prophet who would prepare the way, a voice crying "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God" (Isa 40:3; Matt 3:3) and his name was John the Baptist (possibly an Essene) and he came with a very important message, a message related to Daniel's prayer in Dan 9. Anyone know what that message was? What was John the Baptist preaching? "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 3:2). The nation had to repent before the kingdom could come. It wasn't there yet but if the nation repented it would come. So, this is that key point of biblical theology that Daniel understood in the OT. It's the contingency of the kingdom. The kingdom can't come, won't come until the nation of Israel is spiritually ready. That's why it's so un-biblical to think that the kingdom is here now. The kingdom isn't here now. The Church isn't the Kingdom? If it is where's the King? This was Peter's point in Acts 3:19-21. Kingdom-Church theologies do away with Israel when in reality she's flying under the radar right now because, as we'll see in a moment, the 490 years never expired, the clock stopped after the 483<sup>rd</sup> year and seven years still remain. Now, this repentance that John was preaching was preparatory for the kingdom to come. And after John, the King came on the scene and He began to preach and what was His message? "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 4:17). Now, a real issue is "repent about what?" What was the nation supposed to repent about

so that the kingdom could come? The key is Matt 5, the Sermon on the Mount, a *locus classicus*. Let's read verses 19-20. The warning is given in verse 19, the reason is given in verse 20.

**Matthew 5:19-20** "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Now, first, what commandments is Jesus talking about? He's talking about the commandments of the Mosaic Law. Second, how would one annul a commandment? You could toss it out but the Jews wouldn't do that, the Torah was too important. So, what's another way? We could re-interpret it. We could give it a meaning that was not intended by the original author. If you do that you've annulled it. And this happened among the scribes and Pharisees on a tremendous level, they re-interpreted everything. Why? Why do you think they re-interpreted it? Why didn't they take the commandments at face value? They did this because they knew they couldn't keep the commandments as God gave them. So, they re-interpreted them so they could keep them. They brought the Mosaic Law down to a level their sinful hearts could keep and Jesus is saying, "If you do this and if you teach others to do the same then you're in big trouble". See, the scribes and Pharisees were perceived by the Jewish people as the epitome of righteousness. So, for Jesus to "say...that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" was huge. So, Jesus had a message contrary to the message they had been hearing all their life from the scribes and Pharisees. The scribes and Pharisees said, follow our interpretation of the Torah, and you will earn righteousness that will make you fit to earn the kingdom of heaven. Jesus had a different message. Jesus said, "repent". So, what would the people have to repent about? They would have to repent about "the kind of righteousness needed to enter the kingdom". If they didn't have a change of mind about that and they thought they could earn their way into the kingdom by following the scribes and Pharisees, then the kingdom would not come because the nation would not be ready spiritually for her King. Jesus was saying you need more, far more than the righteousness of these piddly scribes and Pharisees. You cannot earn the righteousness you need. And so, what Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount is a series of contrasts between the Pharisees interpretation of the Mosaic Laws and the proper interpretation of the Mosaic Laws. They only followed the letter of the law; Jesus followed the spirit of the law. They only followed the law externally; Jesus followed the law internally, teaching that it addressed the heart. For

example, **Matthew 5:27-28** “You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; <sup>28</sup> but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” The Pharisees made this all external. Jesus said the law penetrated the heart. And I think Jesus knew what He was talking about since He was God and God was the lawgiver at Mt Sinai. Who better to interpret what was meant than the author Himself! And so, when the people heard what Jesus was saying, when they heard what the law truly meant then they would know immediately they had broken it and that no one could keep it. And so, the law was a tutor to lead them to faith, not trusting in their own works as a way of earning righteousness but trusting in God’s Messiah that He would provide the righteousness through faith. This is not all Jesus did. Jesus’ message was accompanied by signs and wonders to authenticate His message.

**Matthew 4:23** Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.

**Matthew 9:35** Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

**Matthew 9:36** Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.

**Matthew 10:5-6** These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in *the* way of *the* Gentiles, and do not enter *any* city of the Samaritans; <sup>6</sup> but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

By Matt 11 it is clear that the people are only interested in Jesus’ miracles. Their hearts have not been penetrated by His message. They were spiritually dull because the scribes and Pharisees had misled them. They were like blind men leading the blind.

## 2. King Rejected (Matt 12)

The crux of Matthew hinges on Matt 12, the national rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus and of course, if the King was rejected then the kingdom would be withdrawn. So, the nation maintained unbelief and Jesus pronounced judgment on that generation (Matt 12:41-42)

## 3. Kingdom Postponed (Matt 13-28)



In Matt 13 the kingdom is postponed, there will be an intervening age characterized by judgment near the end of the age just before the King returns and sets up the kingdom. Jesus no longer teaches clearly in public but by way of parables. Jesus' disciples were stunned by this new method of teaching and asked Him why He spoke in Parables. Jesus said, so that hearing they may not hear and seeing they may not see. Jesus was no longer offering Himself and His kingdom to the nation. He was seeking to teach only those who had spiritual ears to understand. Accompanying this is a decrease in signs and wonders. And He began teaching a new body of truth concerning the Church, a new, previously unrevealed entity, neither Jew nor Gentile but one new man. So, it is clear that God's plan for Israel was postponed. Jesus even said, "You will not see me until you say 'blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Matt 23:39). And so, it becomes clear that since the King was rejected then the kingdom did not come and this is confirmed by the fact that only 483 years had expired at His Triumphal Entry, and that still leaves seven years to be fulfilled and this will not happen until after the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (Rom 11:25). And so, Christ fulfilled the Mosaic Law (Rom 10:4) and in so doing, through His death, formed the basis for a new and better covenant which will be fulfilled when Israel repents in the latter days.

#### **4. 70AD Destruction of Jerusalem**

As for the judgment that Jesus pronounced on that generation it was fulfilled in 70AD when Jerusalem was razed by the Romans under **Titus**. The siege actually began in 66AD in Caesarea when a disagreement turned into a riot between Roman soldiers and Jews. Eventually Jerusalem was captured and the Temple was burned to the ground. The Jews headed for **Masada** where they held Rome off for two more years. "When the Romans finally captured the stronghold they found that its 960 defenders had committed suicide. It was the first day of Passover. Remembering their slavery in Egypt, the Jews had preferred death to renewed captivity. Only two women and five children remained alive to tell the story of this last act of heroism."<sup>ii</sup>

#### **Conclusion**

We have marched through Israel's history as a subservient nation to Babylon (605-536BC), Medo-Persia (536-332BC), Greece (332-63BC), and finally to Rome (63BC) stopping at the final defeat of the Jews at Masada in 72-73AD. During the Babylonian Empire the key developments were non-Temple/non-sacrificial Judaism, the Babylonian Talmud, and revelation of Israel's exile of 490 years as well as the entire outline of the times of the Gentiles (Dan 2, 7,

8, 9, 11). During the Medo-Persian Empire a partial restoration of Jews to the land occurred under Zerubbabel and a new Temple was built under resistance. Nehemiah returned to restore political administration and Ezra returned to restore spiritual life. In 444BC under the Persian ruler Artaxerxes the 490 year calendar of Israel's exile began. During the Greek Empire founded by Alexander the Great Israel suffered persecution from within (the Sadducees) and from without (the Seleucid's), particularly Antiochus Euphron IV (Dan 11) who defiled the temple and forbade any temple sacrifices as a part of his plan of Hellenization. During this intense period of Hellenization came the Greek Septuagint (LXX). Later, due to the rejection of Hellenizing influences, the Essenes, a strict Pharisaic sect departed into the wilderness and from them we have preserved the Dead Sea Scrolls which were discovered in caves near Wadi Qumran in 1947. The Maccabean revolt also occurred during this period of time under Judah the Maccabee (the Hammer) in which they miraculously re-took Jerusalem, cleansed the temple and began sacrificing. Hannukah (i.e. The Feast of Lights) is the memorial for this great victory. The Roman Empire began in 63BC during which Herod the Great (yet truly terrible) ruled until 4BC during which time he murdered his wife, sons, and any others who threatened his sovereignty, including an attempt on the King of the Jews, Messiah Jesus (Matt 2). Herod also began further construction on the Jewish Temple built under Zerubbabel which was completed in 66AD just before its destruction in 70AD. The forerunner of the Messiah was John the Baptist who preached the message "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 3:2). Jesus came preaching the same message (Matt 4:17). The prophesied 490 years were nearing their completion. The question is, "repent about what?" The answer is, the nation needed to have a change of mind about the kind of righteousness needed to enter the kingdom of heaven. The coming of the kingdom was (and is still) contingent upon the nation being spiritually ready for their King. Since the nation failed in this respect the King withdrew and the kingdom was postponed until all Israel says "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matt 23:39). Thus, the 490 year calendar stopped at the Triumphal Entry when Jesus presented Himself as Israel's King. That was the 483<sup>rd</sup> year. Thus, seven years remain to be fulfilled. During this time the Church is being built up, a mystery in the OT but now fully revealed in the NT Scriptures and prophesied by Christ Himself after the nation rejected Him (Matt 16:18). When the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (Rom 11:25) then the 484<sup>th</sup> year can commence with the

Antichrist signing a peace covenant with many Israelites (Dan 9:27). And seven years later the King will return because the nation will have spiritually circumcised hearts and will call on their King, Messiah Jesus.

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<sup>i</sup> During this period of time Israel had only one short period of independence during the Greek empire under the strength of the Macabbees around 175BC. Another attempt at independence came during the Roman Empire under the Bar Kochba revolt from 132-135AD.

<sup>ii</sup> Abba Eban, *My People*, 95.

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