

HISTORY OF JEWS SERIES – PROPHECY

“Formation of the Nation” (Exodus 1:5-7; 12:37-38)

The nation of Israel emerged from the land of Egypt. The descendants of Jacob were “*seventy souls*” (Exod. 1:5) that entered Egypt with the aged Patriarch. But in Egypt they had flourished, “*and the land was filled with them.*” (Exod. 1:7) By the time of the Exodus they were around 600,000 men above the age of twenty, “*And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children. And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle.*” (Exod. 12:37-38; cf. 38:26). When the numbers of children and women are factored in then there might have been more than 2-3 million of them. This was not coincidental but was part of God’s sovereign plan. He had given covenantal promises that they would multiply greatly (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; 15:5; 17:2; 22:17). Indeed, He had promised Jacob that his descendants would become “*a great nation*” there (Gen. 46:3).

Not all who made the Exodus were Hebrews. There was a “*mixed multitude*” from Egypt who identified with the people of God. However, not all from this group proved to be a blessing to the people of God. In Numbers 11:4 some of the mixed multitude initiated a spirit of discontentment among the Israelites for the desires of Egypt. Some of the mixed multitude left Egypt physically but the spirit of Egypt never left them! Along with the spoiled jewels, the former slaves had much livestock, “*and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle.*”

The Lord had also promised Abraham that his descendants would abide in Egypt where they would be treated badly and that He would deliver them,

And He said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. (Gen. 15:13-14)

This promise would be fulfilled in the book of Exodus. It demonstrates once again that the Lord can be trusted always to be faithful to all of His promises. The Pharaohs of this world come and go. They change their views of God’s people. But God alone never changes. This is a good reminder that we should never put our trust in men and circumstances because those things constantly change.

OCCUPATION OF THE LAND

God called out His people from Israel for His purpose of making them a channel of great spiritual blessing to the world. The Book of Joshua is the story of how Israel entered the land promised to them hundreds of years before. After 400 years of slavery in Egypt and 40 years in the wilderness, they would receive the Promised Land. God promised Joshua on the border of Canaan,

Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. (Josh. 1:3-4)

Joshua was able to reiterate these promises to the people, “*And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and bear the words of the LORD your God. And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites.*” (Joshua 3:9-10)

The Book of Joshua describes the military triumph of God’s people through faith and obedience. Everything God promised to the patriarchs was fulfilled. The conquest of Canaan was a wonderful example of the faithfulness of God to His promises to Israel. At the end of Joshua’s life, he called the nation to him and reminded them that it was all God’s grace and power, “*And ye have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the LORD your God is He that hath fought for you*” (Joshua 23:3). He then publicly testified,

And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof. (Joshua 23:14; cf. 21:45; 1 Kings 8:56)

Israel’s *ownership* of the land was unconditional under the Abrahamic covenant, but *occupation* of the land and blessings associated in the land was conditional upon faith and obedience. Joshua repeated the principle of blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience that was also specific part of Israel’s covenant with God,

Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all good things are come upon you, which the LORD your God promised you; so shall the LORD bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you. When ye have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed yourselves to them; then shall the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you. (Joshua 23:15-16; cf. Lev. 26:1-46; Deut. 28:1-68).

The word of God is a two-edged sword – it can bless and it can chastise. Our God can be trusted to fully keep His promises to judge sin, as He had been to bless obedience. As the Lord had kept every one of His promises to Israel, He has the right to expect that Israel keep their promises to the Lord.

SEEDS OF APOSTASY

The children of Israel followed the Law of God during the days of the first generation of leaders who conquered Canaan, “*And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel.*” (Judges 2:7). However, it did not take long before they began to rebel in the land. A new generation took on new values and a new faith,

And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works

which He had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. (Judges 2:10-13)

The root problem of the apostasy is found in these verses, *“and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel.”* The new generation knew about God but did not know Him personally. Head knowledge had not become heart knowledge. They were racial Israelites but not spiritually Israelites. That is what the Apostle Paul meant in Romans 9:6, *“For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.”* This true Israel are those Jews born not just by physical descent from Abraham, but are children of the promise by faith. So any Jew who rejects God’s Word does prove that God is unfaithful to His promises. All he does by his rejection is to prove that he is not of the true elect of Israel. Jesus Christ made a similar distinction in John 8. Although the Master accepted these rebellious Jews were Abraham’s children by physical descent, *“I know that ye are Abraham’s seed”* (v37), He pointed out they were not truly Abraham’s children by faith as, *“If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham”* (v39). Christ then points them to their real spiritual ancestry, *“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do”* (v44).

The principle of Romans 9:6 explains the great apostasies of Israel. It also explains how men like Absalom, Jeroboam, and Ahab acted the way they did. Indeed, it explains why God had to send both Israel and then Judah into captivity. Great spiritual privileges and ancestry do not guarantee you salvation. Esau had Jacob as his twin brother, Isaac as his father, and Abraham as his grandfather but still went to hell.

This new generation took God’s blessings for granted and did not acknowledge Him. They had not heeded the warnings of Moses,

And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth. (Deut. 6:10-15)

I believe there is an implication in the phrase that they knew not, *“the works which He had done for Israel”* that their parents had failed to teach them of God’s goodness. A constant heart of thankfulness for the goodness of God in the past and present is a powerful antidote to backsliding. That is why today we have the Lord’s Supper regularly, *“this do in remembrance of me...For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till He come”* (1 Cor. 11: 24b; 26). Maybe the first generation assumed that salvation would automatically pass to the

next generation or maybe they were so consumed with cultivating and enjoying the land that they did not take the time to do so. The great tragedy is that the people possessed the Scriptures but simply chose to ignore it. The first generation had seemingly failed to follow the specific instruction of Joshua to teach their children,

And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever. (Josh. 4:20-24)

There is a warning here for us all. A nation, church or a family is just one generation of leaders away from apostasy! Each generation must not only follow the Lord but also seek to teach the next generation the things of God.

Israel did not simply forget God but we are told they, *“followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them.”* In particular, we are told they, *“served Baal and Ashtaroth.”* These Canaanite gods promised health and wealth. The forms of worship associated with these gods were particularly sensual and immoral. Male and female prostitutes were an integral part of the religious experience. It was a seductive combination to the carnal mind. Everything about this pagan worship was a marked contradiction of true worship. It was the worship of hell. R. K. Harrison explains of the Canaanite worship,

...its sordid and debased nature stand in marked contrast to the high ethical ideals of Israel. The absolute lack of moral character in the Canaanite deities made such corrupt practices as ritual prostitution, child sacrifice, and licentious worship the normal expression of religious devotion and fervor. In consequence there could be no compromise between the morality of the God of Israel and the debased sensuality of Canaanite religion.

GOD’S RESPONSE

Previously, God had judged them severely for following after false gods like Baal (Num. 22:41; 25:1-18; Deut. 4:3-4). God never allows His people to sin successfully. Just as He promised to chastise them, so we find His intervention,

And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed. (Judges 2:14-15)

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Cornerstone Church Bible Class

God's anger is not some petty emotion but it is a reflection of His holiness and hatred for sin. Israel made their choice to sin and now they had to take the consequences. The law of sowing and reaping must now take effect. The Lord surrounded them with trouble, "*Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil.*" There is nowhere to hide from God's hand. Israel's enemies eventually became their masters! The people they should have subjugated were able to conquer them.

This began a "merry-go-round" of the hundreds of years of the period of the Judges with sin, punishments, repentance, and deliverance happening in a cyclical manner. Repeatedly Israel painfully suffered because they refused to commit themselves to God alone. Their attempts to be free from God only made them slaves to sin and brought misery. The old maxim is very true:

*SIN will take you further than you ever meant to STRAY,
Will keep you longer than you ever planned to STAY,
Will cost you more than you ever dreamed that you'd PAY!*