

Israel, Egypt and Assyria

The Old Testament provides a factual, historical account of God and His people. I also believe it to be a large, impressive shadow, an example, a parable of developments that we presently see in the church of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 10:1-13, Hebrews 4, Hebrews 8).

God's covenant with the Jews

God's covenant with the Jews doesn't only confirm them as a people, but also blesses them if they are obedient and curses them when they're not (Deuteronomy 28). This has been shown time and again throughout the course of their history. Blessing and punishment are clearly visible and evidence of that ongoing covenant. The Jews still have a covenant with God:

I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendents after you. I will give to you and to your descend-ants after you, the land of your sojourning's, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. (Genesis 17:7-8)

According to Galatians 3:7-14, this covenant between God and Abraham has been improved and extended to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ. Verse 9 teaches that "those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer." God will fulfill His promise to this people.

I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. (Romans 11:1-2)

They have a covenant with God that assures them of a glorious future in the Kingdom of God. There will be a day that God opens the eyes of the Jewish people and they will accept Jesus as Savior. A great multitude of them will enter the Kingdom of God. Paul even writes: that "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26).

When will this happen? Romans 11:25 teaches "until the full-ness of the Gentiles has come in." I believe that after a harvest sea-son, God will be satisfied with the Gentiles who have become part of His family. Then God will direct His favor towards the Jews and will reveal Jesus to them as Savior. Jews and Gentiles will become one people with one shepherd (Ephesians 2:14). They will glorify God in one body, the church. God will reveal Himself through the church, His body, to the Jews.

Many Christians think that Jews from all over the world will return to the Promised Land in the end times. They especially use Ezekiel 36-37 as a basis for their beliefs. Many consider whether Israel has to give up or can obtain land as a huge problem. However, I don't believe God is supposed to give full ownership of the Promised Land to only Abraham's natural descendants.

The promise of God fulfilled

When studying the scriptures I come to the conclusion that there still is one promise to Abraham's natural descendents that must still be fulfilled. In Romans 11:7-25, Paul says that a partial hardening has happened for a certain length of time so that the Jews wouldn't recognize Jesus as their Messiah.

However, there will be a day in the future when God will remove their blindness. Then there will be an awakening among the Jews and they will embrace Jesus as their Savior. That is the promise that must still be fulfilled:

God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not and ears to hear not. (...) And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in ... (Romans 11:8, 23)

However, the promise to take possession of the land which God gave to Abraham is not meant for the Jews alone. The land God promised to Abraham is given to all who put their faith in Jesus: Jews and Gentiles who know Jesus as their Lord. Paul made this very clear in Galatians 3:

Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. (Galatians 3:16)

God therefore didn't say that the promises were meant for Abraham's natural descendants. The promise had been made to Abraham and his descendent, Jesus Christ. Moreover, Paul explained that all who put their hope in Jesus would inherit the blessing that was promised to Abraham:

The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations will be blessed in you."

(Galatians 3:8)

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

(Galatians 3:28-29)

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Romans 2:28-29)

Who will receive the Promised Land? Who are the heirs? Everyone who set their faith in Jesus. God will not give the land He promised to Abraham to the Jews exclusively. He will give it to all His children.

This may bring some resistance from those who say that God will cause all Jews to move to Israel to take possession of the land. Today, most Jews don't live in Israel but in cities such as New York. Somehow, I don't think they all intend on moving to Israel. We must also consider the biblical promise God made to Abraham:

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates." (Genesis 15:18)

We should realize that this passage does not only refer to the land we presently know as Israel. This promise also includes areas of present-day Egypt, Saudi-Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait and Syria, all of modern-day Israel, Jordan and Lebanon. All that land would have to go to the Jews before the end of the world. That is still a lot of land that would have to be taken by force. I do not believe that it will happen this way.

Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit

God explained what would happen before the end of the world and how the promise would be fulfilled, elsewhere:

Thus the Lord will make Himself known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day. (...) In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians will come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance." (Isaiah 19:21-25)

This passage tells us that there will be a day that the people of Egypt, Assyria and Israel will worship the one true God. They will travel from one place to another so that they can worship God together.

This prophecy is almost too good to be true. The nations Isaiah mentioned have been fighting each other for generations. Egypt and Assyria (i.e. Syria, Jordan and Iraq) lie at the foundation of the Arab world and very many Arabs are Muslim. Yet Isaiah prophesied that even Arabs and Jews would worship the Lord together.

Isaiah's prophecy also reveals God's heart for Egypt and Assyria, calling Egypt "My people" and Assyria "the work of My hands". Of course God chose the Jews in the Old Testament, but it never was His intention to bestow favor upon them alone. Instead, they had been chosen to be a light to the nations.

It has always been God's heart to reveal Himself to all peoples with the same love with which He revealed Himself to the Jews. He loves the world. The Jews are not the only elected, but they were as first fruits of the earth to reveal God's heart to all nations. God has wanted to redeem the entire human race since the foundation of the earth.

Let's return to Ezekiel 36-37, which many use to try to show that the Promised Land is meant exclusively for the Jews. It is writ-ten:

For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. (Ezekiel 36:24)

You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God. (Ezekiel 36:28)

Indeed, these citations by themselves do indicate that the Jews will migrate and take possession of the Promised Land. However, when we consider these verses in relation to other parts of the scripture, we see that God wasn't addressing the Jews exclusively. He was speaking to all who come into the new covenant in His blood, which was made possible when Jesus died on Golgotha. This is clearly illustrated when we read verse 24 and 28 in context:

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within

you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

The author of the letter to the Hebrews and several other New Testament writers confirm that this passage was fulfilled when the new covenant was established by Jesus Christ (Hebrews 8:8-12). The people that receive a new heart and a new spirit are the same people that inherit the land that was promised to Abraham. Jesus Himself talked about bringing together people from all parts of the world:

I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. (John 10:16)

Jesus Christ is the one who gathers all the nations. He is the fulfillment of the promise of Ezekiel 36-37. Jesus is the shepherd referred to in Ezekiel 37:

My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. (Ezekiel 37:24)

Please understand that none of this has anything to do with re-placement theology. Replacement theology states that Christians have replaced the Jews, i.e. have taken their place. Yet it simply is about the people of the old covenant and the people of the new covenant. Besides, it's in the heart of God that everyone would become partaker of the new covenant by Jesus' blood.

Clearly, the Jews have a unique place in God's heart and they have a promise that is yet to be fulfilled. God promised to open their eyes and there will be a Jewish awakening before the end of the world. God has not fully rejected the Jews (Romans 11:1-2). Paul explained that Christians should continue honoring the Jews because of the forefathers (Romans 11:16-18). Therefore this isn't replacement theology. On the contrary, I believe in the "one new man". Christians have not replaced the Jews, but the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles has been removed:

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall (...) so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace. (Ephesians 2:14-15)

There is neither Jew nor Gentile. Christians have been grafted into Abraham's family. God doesn't have two groups of people, but one. There is one shepherd and one flock. God is fulfilling His promises today. While violence is occurring in the Middle-East, there also are wonderful testimonies about people receiving Jesus in Iraq and the surrounding area. I believe that this wall will fall and enable us to preach the gospel to all nations, just like when the wall of communism fell.

The Palestinian people will also receive Christ. When Christians think about Palestinians these days, they often imagine a group of angry Muslims, even terrorists. The reality is, however, that many of them aren't Muslim and are even said to be Christian. We do believe that there will be a Jewish awakening in the future, yet that mustn't blind us to the suffering of our brothers and sisters. There isn't anything wrong about Christians being determined to help Jews move to Israel. However, it is rather questionable if the aim of such an operation is to take possession of the land. After all, it's a spiritual matter:

Then he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel saying, ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a plain.’ Zechariah 4:6-7)

All nations in the Middle East are to experience a great outpouring of the Spirit of God. Only then will they be made one in heart, one in spirit, and they will become one new man, one flock, one region with one Shepherd.