

16. ISRAEL'S CONVERSION

The future conversion of the entire nation of Israel is clearly stated in many Scriptures, especially by later OT prophets. The question in focus here is when and where this conversion takes place. During the millennium, the Messiah will be king, and the resurrected Church will reign with him over the survivors of the Great Tribulation from all nations. Converted Israel will continue as a nation on Earth as God's people, ruled over by their Messiah. The return was promised as early as in Moses' time (Lev 26:40-45, Deut 30:1-10, 1 Kings 8:46-51), and more recently the World Zionist Organization, established by Theodor Herzl in 1897, declared that Zionism aimed to establish, "a national home for the Jewish people secured by public law." Zionism drew on Jewish religious attachment to Jerusalem and the Land of Israel (Eretz Israel). It was not accompanied by true repentance which will not occur until the Deliverer comes from Zion and removes ungodliness from Jacob (Rom 11:25-26).

Paul

Paul's three-chapter discussion of Israel in Romans 9-11, he states that stubbornness has come upon Israel until the full number of converts from other nations come to faith. Jesus said: No one can come to the Father unless the Father who sent me draws them. Some Jews are turning to Christ during this Church age, but God is not especially drawing them at this time. They are in the time of Daniel's seventy weeks (Dan 9:24), an age of discipline where they are making atonement for their wickedness and making reconciliation for their iniquity. When the seventy weeks are finished, an age of everlasting righteousness will be brought in when all Israel will be saved, just as the prophets predicted. Their full inclusion will bring greater blessing (Rom 11:12). When all Israel, the full number of Israelites alive at that

time, is saved, the Messiah will rule the Earth for 1000 years, ruling from Jerusalem over his redeemed nation Israel, and from there his kingdom will extend to the four corners of the Earth.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel quotes the Lord as saying he would restore the fortunes of Jacob and show mercy to the *entire* house of Israel. He will not leave any of them remaining among the nations when he pours out his Spirit on Israel (Ezek 39:25, 28-29). Ezekiel makes it clear that this salvation is spiritual and involves the land of Israel into which they will be regathered. The Messiah will be king over them, and they will live according to God's rules. They, with their children and grandchildren, will live forever in the land that God gave Jacob, the land where their ancestors lived. The Lord will establish them, increase their population, and place his temple among them so that the nations will understand that he has set Israel apart from them (Ezek 37:24-28).

This is in harmony with the premillennial view that the Messiah will reign over the Earth. His throne will be in New Jerusalem (Rev 22:1-3) the glory of which will be seen above the old Jerusalem (Isa 60:1-3); the physical and heavenly realms will overlap one another.

Over centuries past there have been opposing views of the Jewish Messianic expectation. Older commentators lived in an era that preceded the return of the Jews from all over the world to form the new state of Israel in 1948 and to take control of Jerusalem again in 1967 after two thousand years of oppression. Before the return, it was difficult for the commentators to believe it could happen, and so they falsely interpreted the Scriptures as having been fulfilled in the Church. Historically, there has been a considerable anti-Semitic sentiment that badly biased some commentaries. Now, with the Jews restored to their land and with the increasing prominence of Jerusalem on the world stage, the OT promises that they would eventually be converted and that Jerusalem would become the center of the world under their Messiah are looking more plausible. Some teach that the rule of Christ in the hearts of believers has replaced the old idea of a Messianic kingdom on Earth, but that has no scriptural basis. Nowhere in Scripture does it say or imply that the Kingdom of God is simply

Messiah's rule in our hearts. The Kingdom of God is to do with world politics, not an individual's spirituality.

The prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah, a glorified Jerusalem, and the conversion of Israel are amply confirmed in both the Old and New Testaments. Israel will one day turn to the Lord *en masse*, but not before the resurrection and rapture of the Church takes place. Israel will enter the millennium as mortal survivors of the Great Tribulation, not as part of the resurrected Church. In their rejection of Christ, they forfeited their right to the kingdom, so when the Messiah rules the world with his resurrected saints, only a small percentage of them will be Jewish; those who became Christians during the Church age. The Messiah's kingdom is centered in Jerusalem. The resurrected Church will live in a supernatural dimension while ruling with Christ. They may rule over areas where they lived previously like the apostles, who were promised that they would rule over Israel. The redeemed will be a kingdom of priests who rule the Earth, mediators between God and the world's population.

Jerusalem will be glorified

The river flowing from the throne of the millennial temple in Jerusalem in Ezekiel symbolizes the regeneration of Israel, and the entire world, a renewal that the Messiah will bring about as he rules the world in righteousness, justice, and peace. The renewal of nature and the whole topology of the world will fulfill Isaiah's prophecy of new heavens and a new Earth (Isa 65:17-28).

Israel will be God's special people on Earth during the millennium as God's call is irrevocable. They will be converted after Jesus' return, and all those living among the nations will return to the holy land. God will be vindicated as the God of Israel, and the Messiah will finally rule as King of kings and Lord of lords. There will be a new temple in Jerusalem where Israel supervises the worship of the Lord, and the nations will come to acknowledge the Lord and bring their wealth as offerings.

Jerusalem will be glorified. It will be raised physically above the surrounding mountains and the light of the glory of God will shine forth from New Jerusalem in the heavenly realm. All nations will come

to worship there. Let those who say that the OT prophets knew nothing of a millennium re-evaluate what Isaiah said when he spoke about the creation of a new sky and Earth (Isa 65:17-25). Isaiah was talking about a renewal of the present sky and Earth, not a new planet. See also Isa 66:22-23, Joel 3:17-18, and Zech 14:9-10. Jesus called it the *παλιγγενεσία*, the regeneration of all things (Matt 19:28). Israel will be saved in the same way as the Gentiles are, through faith in Jesus the Messiah. The Holy Spirit will be poured out on them as it was on the young Church at Pentecost, but as their conversion occurs after Jesus' return, they will not be resurrected until the end of the millennium.

Israel and the Church

The Church is not Israel and Israel is not the Church. Israel were God's people on Earth during the OT era and will be God's people on Earth during the millennium. The Church is God's people on Earth during the present age and will be God's people in New Jerusalem during the millennium. The olive tree symbolizes God people (Rom 11) with Israel as the original branches. They were broken off to make way for the Church, and after the Church age, the original branches will be grafted back in. Only in eternity will they be united.

Jesus told his apostles (all Jews) that when he sits on his glorious throne in the renewed creation, they would also sit on twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28). The whole Church will rule with the Messiah over the survivors of the Great Tribulation. Paul told the Corinthian Christians that the saints would rule the world (1 Cor 6:2). When all Israel is saved and the Deliverer comes from Zion and banishes ungodliness from Jacob (Rom 11:26), it is not only the Jews living in Israel who are saved, but every Jew on the planet. In 2024 there were an estimated 17 million Jews in the world, 7.5 million of whom were living in Israel and 7.5 million in the US.

All Israel will be saved

After the Messiah returns to Zion and defeats the armies surrounding Jerusalem, he will pour out his Spirit on all the surviving inhabitants of Jerusalem and Israel and gather the Jews who remain from among the nations (Isa 60:4, 9). Isaiah often speaks of the return of the exiles

at this time (Isa 11:10-12, 27:12-13, 49:22, 56:8, 66:19-20). The Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people.

As these returning Jews will be unbelievers at the time of Messiah's arrival, they will not be resurrected and be part of the monarchy in Messiah's kingdom. They will be Jewish subjects in the Messiah's kingdom and will have the great privilege of being the Messiah's nation on Earth. They will serve as priests and Levites at the temple in Jerusalem.

Zechariah prophesied about the Jews who would return and live in Jerusalem. He said, there would be old men and old women sitting in the parks of Jerusalem, each one of them holding canes due to their old age. The city parks will be filled with boys and girls. They will play in the city's open parks (Zech 8:3-5). Zechariah is not talking here about resurrected people. The resurrection body will probably have an age of 25-35 years old, when people are in their prime, not old or young, and certainly not holding canes. There will no longer be in Jerusalem infants who lives only a few days or old people who do not live out their days. One who falls short of a hundred years will be considered accursed (Isa 65:20). Those who dwell in Israel during the millennium will be saved, but not resurrected. Zechariah said that after the Lord has saved his people from the countries of the East and the countries of the West, he will bring them back to live in Jerusalem. They will be his people and he will be faithful and righteous to them as their God (Zech 8:7-8).

The time of Israel's conversion

The time of Israel's conversion is important. If they were to be converted before the return of Jesus, then they would become part of the Church, as many Jews have done over the centuries. We live in the age of grace, from Pentecost to the Second Coming, wherein people of every tribe and language are invited to put their faith in Jesus Christ, to be born again, and to be united to Christ. When Jesus arrives, the door to the Church will be shut (Mt 25:11-12). While Jesus is in the air, he will send out his angels and those who died in Christ will be resurrected. They will rise from among the dead and meet the Lord in the air, and from that point on they will be forever with the Lord. No

Scriptures suggest that believers will go to be with the Lord in heaven at this time or after this time. John 14:3 says: And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, so that you also may be where I am. That place is the New Jerusalem from where the Lord will rule the Earth (Rev 21:2-3).

Israel's conversion will occur after the Lord has descended to Earth on the Mount of Olives and after his victory at the battle of Armageddon which will be of immediate concern. Israel will be desperately fighting against the nations of the world who have invaded their land and gathered against Jerusalem. After the Messiah destroys the armies of the nations, he will pour out on Israel a spirit of grace. *They will look to him* – the one whom they pierced (John 19:37), and *they will mourn for him*, as one mourns for an only son (Zech 12:9-10). Having seen the one their ancestors crucified coming in great power and glory to save them, they will respond with great mourning. They will be born again of the Holy Spirit. When John sees Jesus coming in the clouds (Rev 1:7), he says that every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all *the tribes of the land will mourn because of him*. This is what Zechariah had predicted. Each family of Israel will mourn separately, wailing in repentance, because they now realize the crime of their nation in crucifying Jesus the Messiah. The tribes who mourn refer to Israel, a quotation from Zechariah. By contrast, the response of unbelievers to these last-day events is only to curse God, not to mourn (Rev 16:9, 11, 21). They are certainly not beating their breasts in sorrow.

The book of Revelation is written to Christians, the seven churches of Asia, and Israel is rarely referred to. New Jerusalem is spoken about rather than the present Jerusalem, except where it is referred to as 'the holy city' and 'the great city that is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified' (Rev 11:2, 8).

Israel's conversion occurs after the resurrection and rapture of the elect, too late for them to be included. Paul said they would not be converted until after the full number of Gentiles comes to faith (Rom 11:25). Israel will be among the survivors of the Great Tribulation and will continue to live normal lives on Earth. At least half the population of the world will be destroyed during this terrible time when earthquakes more powerful than anything previous will cause the

world's cities to collapse (Rev 16:18-19). In the day of his wrath, God will make man scarcer than pure gold (Isa 13:12), but there will be survivors, who will live on Earth during the millennium (Zech 14:16). Together with Israel, they will be the subjects of the Messianic kingdom. The resurrected saints will reign with Christ as his huge royal family. All Israel will be saved, so the Messiah will be reigning over his people Israel for the first time as a redeemed and obedient nation.

Israel during the millennium

The survivors of the nations at the beginning of the millennium are unbelievers, but they will learn to worship the Lord.

In the last days, the mountain that of the Lord's temple
will be the highest of the mountains.
It will be exalted above the hills and every nation will go there.
Many nations will go there saying:
Come, let us ascend the Lord's mountain,
to the temple of Jacob's God.
He will teach us his ways and we will walk in his paths.
The law will go forth from Zion,
the Lord's word will go out from Jerusalem (Mic 4:2).

Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and they will become his people. He (the Messiah) will live among them (at Jerusalem) and they will know that the Lord Almighty has sent him to them (Zech 2:11). Cf. Zech 8:20-22, Isa 14:1-2.

The next generation of Jews may not all follow the Lord. And the last generation of the millennium will again be deceived by Satan and rebel against the Lord. At the last judgment, after the 1000 years are over, all those who were not resurrected at the first resurrection will be resurrected and judged according to what they have done. The unbelievers will then be consigned to hell, while those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will join their fellow saints in New Jerusalem.

The conversion of Israel in the final days of the Great Tribulation is prophesied by many of the Old and New Testament prophets. Nobody

who believes the Bible is the word of God can deny that God has a future for national Israel. For example:

Zechariah The Lord will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplications, and they will look on him, the one whom they *pierced* (John 19:37, Rev 1:7). *Then they will mourn for him, as for an only son* (Zech 12:10). At that time, *a fountain will be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness*. Two-thirds of the people living in the land will die, but a third will survive. The Lord will put this third through the fire, refining them. *They'll call on his name, and he'll answer them*. He'll call them his people, and *they'll call him the Lord their God* (Zech 13:1, 8-9).

Ezekiel The Lord is going to display his glory among the nations, and they'll see the punishment that he inflicts on them. *Israel will learn that he is the Lord their God from that day forward*. The Lord is going to restore the resources of Jacob and *show mercy to the entire house of Israel*. He'll be zealous for his reputation and his holiness. They'll forget their shame and all of the unfaithfulness by which they behaved so unfaithfully toward him. *They'll live securely in their land* with no one to make them afraid. *When he brings them back from the nations, he'll demonstrate his holiness through them right in front of the eyes of the world, and they'll learn that he is the Lord their God*, who sent them into exile and gathered them back to their land. He won't leave any of them remaining in exile. He won't hide his presence from them again *when he pours out his Spirit on Israel* (Ezek 39:21-22, 25-29)

Joel The whole book is about the Day of the Lord. Joel said that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be delivered. On Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, the survivors whom the Lord is calling (Joel 2:32). The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem. The Earth and the sky will tremble, but *the Lord will be a refuge and stronghold for his people Israel*. Then they will know that he dwells in Zion, his holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy and never again will foreigners invade her (Joel 3:16-17).

Paul God has not rejected his people whom he chose long ago (Rom 11:2). After speaking about their unbelief, Paul says that if their fall meant riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full participation mean? Stubbornness has come to part of Israel until the full number of the Gentiles comes to faith. Then, *all of Israel will be saved*. The Deliver will come from Zion and remove ungodliness from Jacob (Rom 11:25-26). The restoration of Israel to a state of favor with God to which he refers, and which is intimated by the spirit of prophecy, will be a most striking event. The fact that Israel has been preserved as a distinct people is a sign that they will again be reinstated as God's holy nation. Their embrace of Jesus as the Messiah will be an incontestable proof of the truth of the Bible.

John The two witnesses of Rev 11:1-13 are powerful Jewish Christians who preach in Jerusalem 'where *their* Lord was crucified.' They give testimony about their Lord during 1260 days of the Great Tribulation, which always refers to the last half of the seven-year period (Dan 7:25, 12:7, 11). John is told to go and measure the temple, indicating that a third temple will be built at that time. The two witnesses are called olive trees, an allusion to Zechariah 4 where the anointed ones are the governor Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua, who were responsible for building the second temple in 520-516 BC. The third temple may not be built until the first half of the Great Tribulation after the Antichrist has made a peace accord with 'many'. But then he'll break the accord halfway through and set himself up as God in the temple. The witnesses will be immune from harm until their witness is finished. When the Antichrist kills them, the unbelievers will celebrate their death. When they come back to life and ascend to heaven, there will be a *great earthquake* and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will be terrified and give glory to God. This is a harbinger of their conversion. It contrasts with the unbelievers at this time, who refuse to repent and can only curse God because of the plagues (Rev 16:9, 11, 21).