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THE HOPE OF ISRAEL

180
9-6-76
outlet

"For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain." (Acts 28:20)

These are the words of Paul the prisoner, to a group of fellow Jews in Rome. Here the apostle declared that the cause for his imprisonment was what he had been preaching concerning "the hope of Israel". Before leaving Caesarea, Paul said to Agrippa, "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come, For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews." (Acts 26:6-7) Hence what Paul preached concerning the hope of Israel so antagonized the Jews that they laid hands upon him and put him into prison. What he preached was contrary to all Jewish expectations. The Jews were looking for an earthly Messiah who would come and supply all their temporal needs and set up an earthly kingdom, and conquer all the nations of earth. But Paul did not preach that. He preached that the kingdom had already come and was not therefore futuristic. (Read Colossians 1:13-14)

What the modern prophets of premillennialism preach today concerning the hope of Israel is not contrary to the Jewish expectation. They are preaching a restoration of the nation of Israel, the very thing that the Jews of Paul's day wanted. Hence what these theological crystal gazers preach would never have caused them to be put in jail in the days of the apostles, nor in any day insofar as Jewish concept is concerned.

The premillennial theory is that when Jesus comes to earth again, the Jews or national Israel will be restored to Palestine, and that their nation will be reconstituted, the temple rebuilt, and that Jesus Christ will reign over all the earth, reigning from a temporal throne in Jerusalem, reigning through the nation of Israel for a literal period of one thousand years. It will not be denied that many Jews, in the progress of events, will return to Palestine. This they have done for years, and will perhaps continue to do. But there is a great deal of difference in a return and a restoration of the Jews in the land of Palestine. A return is not a restoration. But if national Israel is to be restored, it means that their nation will be re-established and their government again set in order. It means that the entire system of Judaism would be re-established. There can be no restoration of national Israel without a rebuilding of their temple, the re-institution of their ordinances, and the reviving of all the ceremonies and ritualism of ancient Judaism. It would be a bringing back into existence those things which Christ nailed to the cross and buried in His tomb.

Every promise in the Bible to the Jews as a nation comes in one of these three classes: First, it has been literally fulfilled; second, the promise has a spiritual application, and is fulfilled in Christ during the gospel dispensation; or, third, it was conditional, and dependent upon the Jews complying with certain conditions. In this case if the conditions were violated thus the promise was nullified.

THE PROMISES TO ABRAHAM

God made three covenants with Abraham.

First, The Seed Covenant. To Abraham God said, "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Genesis 22:18) This promise has a spiritual application and finds its fulfillment in Christ, for Paul said to the Galatian Christians, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:29) Thus we need not look for a special blessing to the Jews, as a nation, as a provision of this covenant.

Second, The Circumcision Covenant. In making this covenant with Abraham, God said to him, "This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised." (Genesis 17:10) This covenant has been abolished by the circumcision "of the heart", for Paul said, "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." (Romans 2:28-29) Hence this covenant has been literally fulfilled.

Third, The Land Covenant. In making Abraham the promise of the land of Palestine, He said to him, "For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever." (Genesis 13:15) This promise was fulfilled when God brought the Jews into the land of Promise and gave them possession of it, after their forty years of wilderness wanderings. Joshua said, "And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein... There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass." (Joshua 21:43, 45) But their remaining in possession of the land was dependent upon their meeting certain requirements, which requirements they failed to meet, and for that reason lost possession of the land.

ISRAEL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Israel had been given the promise of Canaan to dwell in, but the promise was conditional. To Israel Jehovah said, "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God, will set thee on high above all nations of the earth." (Deuteronomy 28:1) The Lord further said to Israel, "And the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers." (Deuteronomy 30:5)

But Israel failed to walk in the way of the Lord; she broke covenant with God. A covenant is an agreement between two parties. When one party breaks the covenant the innocent party is thereby released. God said of His people Israel, "They have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant." (Isaiah 24:5) What was the promise of this covenant? The land of Canaan. (Genesis 17:7-9) It was an everlasting covenant, yet it was broken. God through the prophet Zechariah said "And I took my staff, even Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people. And it was broken in that day: and so the poor of the flock that waited upon me knew that it was the word of the Lord. And I said unto them, if ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forswear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver." (Zechariah 11:10-12) So the covenant "was broken in that day". In what day? When Jesus was sold by Judas for "thirty pieces of silver". When the Jews crucified the Messiah. Therefore God nullified His part of the covenant. What became of it? Paul tells us that Jesus nailed it to the cross. (Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 2:14) Hence God through Amos said, "The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more." (Amos 8:2) Hence the everlasting covenant, the Land Covenant which God made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was broken and the "end" came upon Israel. God is no longer under obligation to Israel as a nation. They have no covenant with Him. They forfeited every right and title to the land of Canaan when they rejected and crucified the Son of God.

ISRAEL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus gives us a true picture of Israel in the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen in Matthew 21:33-46. This Parable is an absolute accord with the history of Israel. In the Old Testament God let His vineyard out to the nation of Israel; hence the husbandmen of the parable were the Jews. But they did not yield the fruits of obedience unto God. He sent His servants, the prophets, to exhort them, but they mistreated, rejected, spurned and murdered them. Then God sent His Son, but they rejected and crucified him.

Hence in the parable Jesus said, "When the Lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?" (Matthew 21:40) Ask a Pre-millennialist for an answer to this question. He will say, "God will gather them back to Jerusalem where they shall reign on earth for a thousand years with Christ on the throne of David." But what does the Bible say? "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons." (Matthew 21:41) The Jews as a nation killed Christ; hence Israel committed a national crime for which she suffered a penalty--national death. Hence there is now in the sight of God no national Israel.

RESTORATION DIFFICULTIES

God has constructed some insurmountable barriers to Israel's national restoration. Let us examine some of them:

First, The promise of Israel's possession of Canaan was based on their obedience to the law of Moses. (Read Deuteronomy 30:1-2, 5 and I Kings 9:6-9) But the law of Moses has been abolished. Paul taught that in Christ's death on the cross He "Abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace." (Ephesians 2:15) Hence the keeping of the law of Moses was a condition of Israel's possession of the land promised them, and since that law has been abolished, how could national Israel be restored in Palestine? It would require a bringing back into existence that law which has been nailed to the cross, taken away, done away in Christ.

Second, Their inheritance of the land was only through the national estate, that is according to the tribes. When Israel possessed Canaan they could not sell the land forever. Every fiftieth year was a year of jubilee. God said, "In the year of this jubilee ye shall return every man unto his possession." (Leviticus 25:13) God further said, "The land shall not be sold for ever; for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land." (Leviticus 25:23-24) The Jews observed this law in their return from Babylon under Zerubbabel, for they were commanded by Ezra to look up their family estate and establish their inheritance in order to be restored in the land. Thus it is said that "all Israel," dwelt "in their cities". (Ezra 2:70) But their genealogies today have all been destroyed. Paul said to Timothy, "Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do." (I Timothy 1:4) But a restoration of Israel in Canaan is not possible except according to tribal inheritance, hence it follows such a restoration is impossible.

Third, Then ten tribes of the northern kingdom have ceased. God said, "I will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel." (Eosea 1:4) Therefore the fact that the ten tribes of Israel have forever ceased, never to exist again, is conclusive proof that national Israel can never be restored to the land of Palestine.)

Fourth, The earthly throne of Israel is extinct. Jehovah through the prophet Jeremiah said, "Is this man Coniah a despised broken idol? Is he a vessel wherein is no pleasure? Wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into a land which they know not? O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man of his seed shall ^{not} prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah." (Jeremiah 22:28-30) "Coniah", or Jehoiachin, the nineteenth king of Judah, was not "childless" in a physical sense, for he was the father of at least one son whose name was Salathiel (Matthew 1:12), but he was childless in the sense referred to by Jeremiah--that no seed after him would sit on the throne of David, ruling in Judah, that is on the earth, for the earthly throne of David was soon to cease. The man who followed him on the throne was not his son, but his uncle, Zedekiah. Coniah of Johoiachin, is mentioned in the genealogy of Christ (Matthew 1:11-12); hence Christ came through the seed of Coniah. Therefore Jesus, being of the earthly seed of Coniah, if He were on earth, could not "prosper sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah". That puts an end to David's earthly throne; it became extinct in Coniah. Christ rules now, sitting on David's throne, but in heaven and not on earth.

THE CONVERSION OF ISRAEL

What about the Jews now? What is the hope of Israel today? Let us note some things that concern Israel, if Israel is ever converted to Christ:

First, the conversion of Israel must come within the scope of the Great Commission. The Great Commission is for all nations. (Read Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15) The Great Commission offers the same terms of salvation to the Jew that it offers to the Gentile. Hence Peter declared that God "Put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." (Acts 15:9) Furthermore the Great Commission ends with this age (Matthew 28:20); hence if the Jews do not accept the gospel in this dispensation, there are no provisions for their salvation in another age.

Second, The conversion of Israel must come within the scope of the New Covenant, or the Gospel of Christ, for Paul declared it to be "the power of God unto salvation."

(Romans 1:16) Paul said, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved". (Romans 10:1) But if salvation will be offered to Israel before, at, or after the return of Christ, independent of the gospel that Paul preached, why such anxiety in Paul's heart for them? Paul was grateful that in his generation "a remnant" of the Jews had obeyed the gospel. (Romans 11:5) However, many were blinded and stumbled. Hence he said, "That blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." (Romans 11:25) The gospel was first preached to the Jews, then to the Gentiles. Until the Gentiles were converted, that is "Until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in", the Jews were hardened in part, then it became complete. Then Paul said in Romans 11:26, "And so all Israel shall be saved...." The word "so" is an adverb of manner. Hence Paul is saying, "So in this manner all Israel shall be saved"; that is, all of them shall be saved, just like the part that had been saved--by the gospel of Christ.

Fourth, The conversion of all--Jews and Gentiles alike--must take place before the second coming of Christ. Jesus said, "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." (Revelation 22:12)

I trust that we have been able to see that the Jews possessed Canaan once. They lost possession of it because they lost their faith and devotion to God. Had they been faithful to the Lord, they would have been permitted to have remained in it. It now remains for them to lift up their eyes from the contemplation of a land desolate and bare, to a richer blessing, to the heavenly Canaan, to the celestial city, "which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Radio Sermon by Melvin J. Wise

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