GDOP ISRAEL

ASCENSION John 20

Ultimately it is God’s name that is at stake in Israel’s story. As Samuel Whitefield writes “Israel’s story is ultimately about Israel’s God, and His glory is at stake in her story” (Whitefield, 10).

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, thus says the Lord God; It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act but for the sake of my holy name”

God’s honor is at stake in saving Israel – a salvation that is only found in the name of Jesus. Our God is a covenant keeping God! He always fulfills his promises and keeps his word!

1. **Pray for the Latter Rain of the Spirit to fall upon Israel**

**The Plan of Israel in the Great Commission**

In Acts 1:6-8, Jesus shares his heart with the disciples. He had taught them about the Kingdom of God for forty days after his resurrection and then the disciples ask him a question, ‘will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” First, Jesus didn’t correct their understanding of a ‘restored’ Israel but rather spoke to their expectations of timing – it would take time for this to come to pass. Second, Jesus connected Israel’s restoration with the Great Commission – to take the gospel to the Gentile nations, to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. If the disciples wanted to see the salvation of Israel, they would have to go to the nations! Jesus tells them to wait for the outpouring of the Spirit to empower them to be his witnesses to reach both Jews and Gentiles through the power of the Gospel!

The prophetic promise of the Spirit was Israel’s inheritance (Isaiah 32:15, 44:3, Joel 2:28-29, Ezekiel 36:26-27, 39:29). In Acts 2 at Pentecost the Spirit was poured out on Jewish believers just as God had promised throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. The events of Acts 2 did not shift God’s plan from Israel to the nations. Instead, it invited the nations into Israel’s story. As Samuel Whitehead writes, “Acts 2 is not the end of Israel’s story; it is a significant step towards the fulfillment of Israel’s promises.” (Whitehead, 43).

“ ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ (Acts 2:17-21).

The context of Joel’s prophecy suggests that the “all flesh” spoken of is “all Jewish flesh.”  On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out on some Jewish flesh, but it was only a down-payment of something that was reserved in full for the day when ‘all Israel will call on his name and be saved.”

The prophecy spoken to in Joel was not completely fulfilled on the day of Pentecost because the other signs did not take place.  In other words, we have not yet seen the outpouring of the Spirit on all Jewish flesh. Gentile believers need to understand that the Spirit was given them as a down-payment and a foretaste of the fulfillment that would come later upon all Jewish flesh.

In fact, we see this in Joel’s prophecy that Peter shares in Acts 2. Ancient Israel had ‘early rains’ and ‘late rains.’

“Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given the early rain for your vindication; he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain, as before.” (Joel 2:23).

The early rains began the growing season, and set the stage for the late rains which would bring in the big harvest. Acts 2 was an early rain where a remnant of Jews were saved but the late rain of God’s Spirit would bring in the full harvest, where all Israel will be saved,

“And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Act 2:21, Joel 2:32, Zechariah 12:10-12).

Peter is saying that the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2 will result in the day when all Israel will be saved as they ‘call on the name of the Lord.’

The Lord is even now calling the Jews back to her homeland in Israel because there is soon coming a glorious revival in the land of Israel. In Acts 3, Peter spoke about the future fulfillment of the promises given to Israel.

“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, **20**that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, **21**whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago” (Acts 3:19b- 21).

There would be a time in the future when God would ‘restore all things.’ Peter was referring primarily to Israel’s promises. Not all the promises were fulfilled in Jesus’ first coming. The word that Peter used for restoration is the same word translated in the Septuagint for the future return of the Jews in the nations to the promised land, Israel. Many Jews did not return to the land of Israel after the Babylonian exile. In fact even today only about half of the Jews in the world live in the land of Israel, which tells us that the exile has not entirely ended because the Jews have not yet been fully ‘restored’ to their land. The restoration of Israel requires that all the exiles in the nations be regathered in the land of Israel, and for the purpose of a mighty late outpouring of the Spirit that will bring them to salvation (Ezekiel 39:25-28, Isaiah 11:11-12, 43:6-7, 66:20, Zechariah 10:6-11).

In Romans 11:25-26, Paul gives the clue to the timing of this late rain outpouring of the Spirit upon all Israel,

“Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. **26**And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob’; ‘and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’”

Paul prophesies this mystery that when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, a remnant of Jesus followers among every nation (people group), then all Israel will be saved! This is why Paul had such passion to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

And how will all Isreal be saved? God will use Gentile believers to provoke Israel to jealousy!

“So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous (Rom. 11:11).

The Spirit of God will remove the veil, this partial hardening that had come upon Israel, she will see her Messiah - the one whom she had pierced (Zechariah 12:10-12), call on his name and be saved!

However, in order for this to come to pass, a remnant of whole-hearted Jesus followers, disciples of Jesus, must be represented among every remaining unreached people group! The free gift of salvation offered to the Gentiles is not the end of Israel’s story nor the fulfillment of his promises towards Israel but rather the means by which God will bring Israel into her full inheritance! Israel will hear the good news about her Messiah from Gentiles obeying the Great Commission! The sooner the gospel reaches every ethnolinguistic people group, the sooner the fullness of the Gentiles will come in, and the stage will be set for the full salvation of Israel.

In conclusion, the Great Commission is not a shift away from Israel’s importance but rather the fulfillment of God’s promises to both Israel and the nations. The Church’s mission to make disciples of all nations is intimately tied to Israel’s eventual restoration and salvation. God is faithful to His covenant with Israel, and the gospel to the Gentiles serves as a means to provoke Israel to jealousy and bring about the day when “all Israel will be saved.”

**Pray for a Gift of Tears**