

THE CHURCH OF GOD



LESSON NO. 16

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LESSON NO. 16

ANCIENT ISRAEL — WHY GOD'S "CHOSEN PEOPLE"?

Why does the Bible talk about Israel so much? What is the connection between God's "chosen people" and Spirit-begotten Christians Today? Exactly how does ancient Israel fit into God's plan of salvation?

God is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). Yet He selected the ancient nation of Israel as His "chosen people." Why?

Most people have heard that God raised up ancient Israel to be His *special* people. Yet almost no one understands that He denied them His Holy Spirit and eternal salvation, except for their prophets and a few select others. Why?

Ancient Israel was God's chosen people—selected not for special favors, but for a special PURPOSE preparatory to the ultimate establishment of the Kingdom of God!

BIBLE: A BOOK ABOUT ISRAEL

It may surprise you to learn that the Bible is primarily concerned with the nation of ancient Israel, and that most other nations are mentioned only as they came into contact with Israel. Why?

As we learned in our previous studies, the Creator God is reproducing Himself in and through man. Man's awesome potential is that of being born into the universe-ruling Family of God. God's plan is breathtaking beyond words! And the establishment of the ancient nation Israel was an *integral part* of God's plan.

It is important that we understand God's purpose for the ancient nation of Israel, for without this vital knowledge one cannot *fully* appreciate and understand the real purpose and incredible potential of mankind!

So now let's begin the intriguing story. We will start by retracing the unfolding of God's great Master Plan from Adam and Eve to the founding of the nation Israel. Then on to the establishment of the New Testament Church of God—"spiritual Israel" today. Finally, we'll see what part the peoples of Israel will play in God's plan during and after the Millennium.

But before we begin, be sure to get your Bible—if you haven't done so already. It is very important to look up and read each scripture given in answer to the questions. And why not write out these scriptures, just as the kings of ancient Israel were instructed to write out God's laws? (Deut. 17:18-20). This will help you understand and remember the vital truths you will be studying.

Now let's begin this important subject.

FROM ADAM TO ABRAHAM

God created the first humans physically perfect. Yet they were but *unfinished* pieces of

God's workmanship. The spiritual character of God was yet to be built into Adam and Eve and all those who would spring from them. And in the character-building process, humans must perform their own vital part.

As we learned in Lesson 14, Adam and Eve rejected God as Revealer of spiritual knowledge. In rejecting God they also rejected His government—the way of His Law of love. They chose instead Satan's "get" way of life—the self-centered way of vanity, covetousness, envy and jealousy, competition leading to strife, violence, destruction and rebellion against authority.

Consequently, God shut the first humans and their descendants off from His Holy Spirit and spiritually revealed truth. From then on, spiritual knowledge and salvation would be offered only to those relatively few God would specially call—until Christ, the second Adam, begins His reign on earth and the minds of *all* people are opened to God's spiritual truth.

As men began to multiply on the earth, all of Adam's sons, except one, followed in his Satan-inspired course of human nature. Prior to Abraham, only three men are specifically mentioned in the Bible as following God's way of life.

1. Which of Adam's sons did Jesus Christ call a "righteous" man? Matt. 23:35. Who are the other two men who "walked with God" prior to Abraham? Gen. 5:22; 6:9.

2. From which son of Noah is Abram (who later was renamed Abraham by God) descended? Gen. 11:11-27.

COMMENT: Shem was a direct ancestor of Abram. He may have continued for some time in the knowledge and perhaps worship of God. But there is no biblical record of his or anyone else "walking with God" from the time of Noah until Abram. God specially called Abram to have a function preparatory to the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

3. Did God tell Abram to leave the land of his kindred and go to a land He would show him? Gen. 12:1. What did God promise him if he would obey? Verses 2-3.

COMMENT: Notice there were *two phases* to the promises God made to Abram. The first part—that his flesh-born descendants would become a great nation—is purely *material* and national (verse 2). The latter part of the promises is *spiritual* and individual—the promise of the Messiah and salvation through Him (last part of verse 3).

4. Did Abram obey God's instructions without protest or question? Verse 4. Where did God lead him? Verses 5-7.

5. Did God later expand these physical, national promises to Abram? Gen. 17:1-8.

COMMENT: God promised that from Abraham would descend nations and kings, and that Abraham's descendants would be prolific. God also promised to Abraham and his descendants "all the land of Canaan."

6. Were these promises later made unconditional? Gen. 22:15-18.

7. Did God reconfirm the same promises to Isaac, Abraham's son? Gen. 26:1-5. And to Jacob, Isaac's son? Gen. 27:26-29; 28:13-14; 35:9-12. What was Jacob's name changed to? Gen. 35:10.

COMMENT: God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob included both the "birthright" promise of national prosperity and the "sceptre" promise of eternal salvation to come through Jesus Christ.

8. Did Jacob (Israel) pass on the blessings of Abraham to his children? Gen. 49:1-2. Who received the "sceptre" promise? Verse 10. And to whom did the "birthright" blessings go? Verses 22:26; I Chron. 5:2.

9. Did Jacob *adopt* Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh? Gen. 48:3-5. And did he pass on the birthright—the material promises—to them? Verses 15-20.

COMMENT: The physical, material promises were passed from Jacob to his son Joseph and his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. (Originally there were 12 sons of Jacob and

they became known as the tribes of Israel. But since Ephraim and Manasseh represent Joseph, there were in reality 13 tribes.

ISRAEL BECOMES GOD'S "CHOSEN PEOPLE"

As previously mentioned, Israel (formerly Jacob) had 12 sons. His favorite son, Joseph, was sold into slavery by his brothers. Joseph was taken to Egypt and eventually became a ruler second only to Pharaoh. A great famine caused the patriarch Israel to send his sons to Egypt to buy food, where they became reacquainted with Joseph.

1. Did Israel, at the request of the Pharaoh and Joseph, move his family into the land of Egypt because of the famine in the land of Canaan, where he had lived? Gen. 45:9, 17-18. Where did they settle? Gen. 46:28.

2. Did God promise to eventually bring Israel back out of Egypt? Gen. 46:2-4; 50:24.

3. While in Egypt, did the children of Israel multiply exceedingly? Ex. 1:7.

4. After Joseph's death, did another Pharaoh who did not know Joseph make slaves of the children of Israel? Verses 8-14.

5. Did the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob see the affliction of the Israelites in Egypt? Ex. 3:7. Did He promise to deliver them from slavery and bring them back to the land He had promised Abraham? Verse 8.

6. Who did God call to lead the nation of Israel out of Egyptian slavery and into the Promised Land? Ex. 3:1-6, 9-10.

COMMENT: God chose Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. He had previously caused Moses to be specially trained for this mission by having him reared as a prince in the palace of the Egyptian Pharaoh (Ex. 2:1-10). God also commissioned Aaron, his brother, to assist Moses by being his spokesman (Ex. 4:10-16).

7. Did God plan to send plagues against Egypt if Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites leave? Ex. 3:19-20.

COMMENT: In the ensuing plagues God brought upon Egypt, God turned the Egyptian gods and objects of worship against them to show that these were not living, active gods who could help Egypt.

8. What was the last plague that finally caused Pharaoh to let the people go? Ex. 12:29-33.

COMMENT: The Israelites left Egypt at Pharaoh's urging. But once they were gone, he changed his mind and led his army in pursuit of Israel.

Upon reaching the Red Sea, the children of Israel were stopped in their tracks. They appeared to be trapped. Before them was a broad expanse of water and behind them was Pharaoh's army in hot pursuit. There was nothing they could do. They just stood there—*helpless!* At that point they *had* to rely on God.

9. How did God rescue the Israelites? Ex. 14:21-22.

COMMENT: In Egypt God had caused Israel's release from slavery by a series of supernatural plagues. Now God miraculously caused the waters of the Red Sea to roll back to form a wall of water of either side, causing a wide, dry path on the sea floor between. The Israelites walked through.

10. Did Pharaoh's entire army attempt to pursue Israel through the Red Sea? Verse 23. What happened to it? Verses 24-31.

COMMENT: Once on the opposite shore of the Red Sea, the Israelites looked back and saw Pharaoh's army entering the same path they had traversed. When all the soldiers were between the towering walls of water, God allowed the waters to suddenly collapse, drowning the Egyptian army.

The Israelites then proceeded toward Mt. Sinai where God had them set up camp.

11. At Mt. Sinai, what proposition did God make with the children of Israel through His servant Moses? Ex. 19:3-6. Did the people agree to God's covenant? Verses 7-8. Thus what did Israel become in God's sight? Lev. 26:12; Deut. 29:13.

COMMENT: God offered Israel a special relationship with Himself. The people wanted to become a "peculiar [not odd, but *special*] treasure" unto God. They desired to be a "kingdom of priests" and a "holy nation." They consented to come under God's theocratic rule and thus become God's *chosen people*.

Through Moses, God proposed to the children of Israel a covenant agreement which centuries later came to be known as the "Old Covenant." (The Covenant with Israel at Sinai was a type and forerunner of the NEW COVENANT. The latter will be made with the New Testament CHURCH, which is *spiritual* Israel. The subject of the Old and New Covenants will be covered in-depth in Lesson 17).

12. Once the covenant was ratified, what material blessings did God promise Israel—if they would obey His commandments? Deut. 28:1-14; Lev. 26:1-13.

13. Did God also promise that Israel would become a great nation if they obeyed Him? Deut. 4:5-8. Would Israel thus have been an *example* for all nations on earth to follow? Same verses.

COMMENT: If Israel kept God's commandments, every imaginable material blessing would have been theirs. And other nations would have seen their example and blessings, and would have wanted to obey God too!

14. But what *curses* would result if Israel disobeyed God? Deut. 28:14-68; Lev. 26:14-39.

15. Was Israel commended to *choose*—material blessings and long life on the one hand, or curses and death on the other? Deut. 30:15-20.

COMMENT: God laid everything out before Israel. He gave them His Law, which they were to obey, and detailed exactly what would happen if they chose to obey or to disobey. If they would obey His laws and submit to His government, He would prosper them, making them the wealthiest and most powerful of nations.

But notice in all this that God promised *only national and material blessings*. There was *no promise of eternal life*. He did NOT offer them spiritual salvation!

ISRAEL MAKES THE WRONG CHOICE

Now let's look at what the Israelites did once the knowledge of God's way of life was given to them and they agreed to obey God.

1. After the covenant between God and Israel was ratified, God called Moses up to Mt. Sinai, where he stayed for 40 days. What did the Israelites request of Aaron while Moses was gone? Ex. 32:1. How did Aaron respond? Verses 2-5.

COMMENT: Soon after Israel entered into a covenant relationship with God—promising to obey Him—they *forgot* the God who had spoken to them directly and who had miraculously delivered them from slavery in Egypt! They built a golden calf and worshiped it, breaking the first and second commandments!

2. What was the result of Israel's sin? Verse 35.

COMMENT: God's anger waxed hot against Israel (Ex. 32:10). Nevertheless, Moses interceded for them to God as they would not all be destroyed (verses 11-14).

3. In the second year after leaving Egypt, when Israel had reached the wilderness of Paran, God commanded Moses to send out 12 scouts to Canaan. What were they to do? Num. 13:17-20.

4. What kind of report did the scouts bring back? Verses 25-28, 32-33. As a result, did the people of Israel complain against God and want to return to Egypt? Num. 14:1-4.

COMMENT: Because Israel refused to go forward in faith to possess the Promised Land, God sentenced them to wander in the wilderness 40 years, until everyone 20 years of age and over (except the two faithful scouts, Joshua and Caleb) died (Num. 14:11-38). Hence that generation of Israelites was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. But their children entered the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, Moses' successor.

5. Did God bless the next generation of Israelites, as He had promised He would, for their obedience? Josh. 21:43-45.

COMMENT: God was faithful in His covenant with Israel. He prospered them abundantly for their obedience under Joshua's righteous leadership.

6. Did the people of Israel continue to obey God after Joshua's death? Judges 2:8, 10-13.

COMMENT: A new generation turned away from God and reaped the curses they had been warned about. But in mercy God sent judges to Israel to rescue them from oppressors. Yet, as soon as the judge died, the people returned to idolatry (verses 18-19). This happened repeatedly.

In the days of Samuel Israel committed an even greater sin. They rejected God as their King—demanding a human king, to which God consented (I Sam. 8:4-8).

Still, God dealt with Israel. Under the later reigns of David and his son Solomon, God prospered the nation greatly. However, because Solomon committed idolatry (I Kings 11:1-8), after his death God divided the nation in two—the House of Israel in the north and the House of Judah in the south (verses 29-38).

Throughout the reigns of many kings, God pleaded with His people Israel and Judah through His prophets—admonishing them to return to His way. But for hundreds of years they refused to learn the lesson that experience should have taught them.

Finally, just as He warned He would, God sent the House of Israel into Assyrian captivity, with Judah going into Babylonian captivity over a century later.

WHY THEY BROKE THEIR PROMISE

Why did Israel fail to keep the covenant they made with God, even though God revealed to them His laws, established His government over them and they agreed to obey Him? To answer this question, we need to understand God's *purpose* in choosing Israel to be His people.

1. What was the reason God made Israel His chosen people? Deut. 7:6-11; 10:15.

COMMENT: God chose Israel above all other nations on earth to be His own nation because of His love for and promises to *their forefathers*—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As God's chosen nation, Israel was to set an *example* of obedience to God for all the other nations to follow (Deut. 4:5-8).

But instead of assuming the leadership role among the nations by keeping God's commandments, they followed the ways and customs of the pagan nations around them! They utterly failed to become a "kingdom of priests" and a "holy nation" (Ex. 19:5-6), and an *example* for the world to follow.

But why? Wasn't it possible for them to obey God? The answer to this question brings us to the crux of this lesson!

2. What is the heart, or mind, of man described as? Jer. 17:9. It is possible for carnal man, without God's Spirit, to submit to God's Law? Rom. 8:7.

3. And is it at all possible for one without God's Spirit to really understand *spiritual* knowledge—which includes the spiritual principles of God's laws? I Cor. 2:9-11, 14.

COMMENT: Man's nature can be very sinful without God's Spirit (Gal. 5:19-21). This, as we learned in previous lessons, is because Satan, the god of this world, "broadcasts" His

nature—His attitudes of sin—to the minds of all people (II Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2).

Israel as a whole was not offered God's Spirit. Only their prophets and divinely appointed leaders were given the Holy Spirit (Num. 14:24; I Pet. 1:10-11). Thus the Israelites did *not* resist Satan and did not submit to God.

Ancient Israel did not realize their lack of God's power when they agreed to the terms of the Old Covenant. They desperately needed spiritual help, but didn't realize it. They even had great difficulty in keeping the letter of the law!

Without God's Spirit, Israel was also limited to the acquisition and understanding of *material* knowledge, even though God gave them knowledge of His spiritual laws. Thus they could not comprehend, let alone obey, the *spiritual intent* of God's Law!

Recall that Adam and Eve had also been instructed by God in His way. But they too rejected it, and turned to the way of self-centeredness—of vanity, lust and greed—of jealousy and envy—of competition and strife.

4. Did God realize, when He made the covenant with Israel, that the people would not be able to keep it? Deut. 5:28-29. Did God give them the spiritual perception to understand the lessons they should have learned from their 40 years of wandering in the desert? Deut. 29:4. Did God know Israel would not obey Him after they entered the Promised Land? Deut. 31:20.

COMMENT: God *knew* Israel would break the covenant He made with them. But He wanted to teach mankind a valuable lesson through Israel's experience and horrible example.

The multiple generations of Israel and Judah proved once and for all that *without the Holy Spirit* from God, man's mind is incapable of receiving and utilizing knowledge of God's spiritual way of life as defined by His spiritual Law—the Ten Commandments. Thus God demonstrated through Israel that the mind of man, with the human spirit but without the addition of God's Holy Spirit, *cannot submit to God nor solve human problems and evils that are spiritual in nature*. Carnal man simply cannot come to grips with and cure the spiritual problems that beset humanity!

God used ancient Israel to write in the pages of history these indelible lessons, which He intends all mankind to learn when the time comes for spiritual understanding to be opened to all—not only to those ancient Israelites, but to every human being who has ever lived!

SPIRITUAL ISRAEL BEING CALLED TODAY

The promises made to Abraham were twofold—material and spiritual. Even so, the Holy Spirit and eternal salvation were not offered to ancient Israel as a whole, except to those few called by God to carry out a special mission preparatory to the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

Let's now trace the *spiritual* phase of the promises from the time of Abraham to this present day.

1. What, exactly, was the second part of the promises God made to Abraham? Gen. 12:3, last part.

COMMENT: The second phase of the promises—"in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed"—refers ultimately to the Messiah and salvation through Him. This promise was passed on through Abraham's son Isaac, and then to His son Jacob, as was the material part of the promises (Gen. 26:1-5; 35:9-12).

2. To which of Jacob's 12 sons was the spiritual promise passed? Gen. 49:10; John 4:22.

COMMENT: The "sceptre" was the promise of a kingly life springing from Judah and culminating in Jesus Christ and eternal life through Him.

3. Does Luke 3:23, 34 prove that Jesus was a direct descendant—a “seed”—of Abraham? Did He clearly come from the tribe of Judah? Verse 33. Also notice Hebrews 7:14.

COMMENT: Luke records Jesus’ genealogy through His mother Mary. Joseph, mentioned in Luke 3:23, was actually the son-in-law of Heli, the father of Mary. And so Luke shows that Jesus was directly descended from Abraham (verse 34).

One of the reasons Christ came to earth as a human being nearly 2,000 years ago was to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to a remnant of Israelites who were then living in Palestine. He commanded them: “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15).

But notice that God did not remove the spiritual blindness which still covered these descendants of Israel at that time.

4. Why did Jesus speak to the multitudes in parables? Mark 4:10-11. Was it to make His teaching clearer? Verse 12. Wasn’t this a fulfillment of a prophecy found in Isaiah? Isa. 29:10, 14.

COMMENT: God did not intend to grant spiritual understanding and repentance to the descendants of Israel as a whole when Christ first came. Israel’s opportunity for salvation is still ahead, as we will shortly see.

5. Recall from previous studies that no one can come to Christ and be truly converted unless the Father *calls* Him (John 6:44). After three-and-one-half years of preaching, how many did the Father *call* to be disciples of Christ? Acts 1:15.

COMMENT: Of the many thousands who had heard Jesus proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God, only about 120 believed!

6. Had Jesus previously promised to send the Holy Spirit to His disciples? John 16:7; 14:26. Where did Christ tell them to wait to receive God’s Spirit? Luke 24:49.

7. When did God fulfill the promise of sending His Holy Spirit? Acts 2:1-4.

COMMENT: On Pentecost, A.D. 31, just 50 days after Christ’s resurrection, God sent the Holy Spirit to beget and empower Christ’s disciples.

8. Who stood up to speak to the multitudes of Jews gathered from various nations on that day of Pentecost? Acts 2:14. As a result of his sermon, how many more did God call? Verse 41. What did they do to receive God’s Spirit? Verse 38.

9. Once these new converts received God’s Spirit, what did they automatically become part of? I Cor. 12:13. What body is Paul talking about? Verse 27; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18.

COMMENT: In I Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul has drawn an analogy between the human body and God’s Church. In verse 13 he is speaking about being “baptized”—*put into*—the spiritual “body” or Church of God. Thus when one receives God’s Spirit, he automatically becomes a Spirit-begotten member of God’s Church. (If you have any questions about whether God has called *you* to put you into His Church, don’t hesitate to request a visit by one of our ministers to counsel you about this important spiritual matter.)

But those God called into His Church on that memorable day of Pentecost were Jews, or Jewish proselytes (Acts 2:5, 14). There were no Gentile (non-Jewish) converts at that time.

10. When and how did God finally open up salvation to the Gentiles? You should read all of Acts 10, noticing especially verses 34-35. Also see Acts 28:28.

COMMENT: About ten years after God started His spiritual Church, He began to call Gentiles to repentance and salvation. But the promises of salvation were made to Abraham and his descendants! How, then, could a Gentile also become an heir to these promises?

11. How does one who is *not* a direct descendant of Abraham become an “heir” to the spiritual promises made to him? Gal. 3:27-29.

COMMENT: Paul shows that the only way Gentiles can become *heirs* to the promise of salvation made to Abraham was by becoming children (“seed”) of Abraham by *spiritual sonship* through Christ! Thus people from every nation may become “heirs” of the spiritual

promises God made to Abraham by becoming his "seed" through Christ.

We also read in Galatians 3:7, "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the *children* of Abraham." If you are a Spirit-begotten Christian, regardless of race, Abraham is your "father" in the faith, and you become eligible to inherit the spiritual promises!

But what about Israelites? Is it enough to be an Israelite by natural birth? Or must they also become Christ's to receive these promises?

In Romans 11, Paul illustrates *spiritual* sonship through Christ by the analogy of grafting branches onto an olive tree.

12. Does Paul show that the Israelites, represented by the branches of an olive tree, have been *spiritually blinded*? Rom. 11:7, 25. Why? Verses 20, 32.

COMMENT: God has allowed Israel to be spiritually blinded to fulfill His plan. And that plan includes the salvation of the world, including Israel!

13. Has Israel's being broken off the olive tree made possible the Gentiles being grafted in? Verses 17, 24.

COMMENT: Paul pictures Israel as a natural olive tree whose branches were broken off because of unbelief—disobedience to God. This made possible God's grafting in of the wild olive branches—Gentiles.

14. But can Israel—though now "broken off"—be grafted back in? Verses 23-24.

COMMENT: Ancient Israel's blindness will not remain forever. Their time of understanding and participation in God's plan of salvation has not yet come (verse 26).

But in the meantime the comparatively few Israelites *whom God has called* have become "spiritual Israelites." Through Christ, both they and Gentiles have become members of the spiritual household of God (Eph. 2:19) and are unified into *one spiritual body*—the Church of God! (Gal. 3:28).

15. Ancient Israel did not have access to God's Spirit. Yet what are they called? I Chron. 13:2; Acts 7:38.

COMMENT: Israel was called the "congregation of Israel" and a "church" because these people were the *physical type* of the spiritual Church Christ began to build at His First Coming (Matt. 16:18). This is another example of the duality principle in God's plan.

God is preparing the Kingdom of God in *dual stages*. First was Old Testament Israel. They were carnal-minded, without God's Holy Spirit. They were the *carnal* Congregation or Church of Israel. In New Testament times, Spirit-begotten children of God are the *spiritual* Church of God, composed of members of all nationalities who have become "spiritual Israelites" through Christ. (This DUALITY in God's plan is illustrated by the Old and New Covenants, to be covered in the next lesson.)

The New Testament Church of God has received the Spirit of God. And those in God's Church are being prepared by God through His Spirit to be born into His ruling Family, which will restore His government on earth at Christ's return!

16. Are those in the body or Church of Christ a part of the spiritual household of God? Eph. 2:19. Who constitutes the foundation of this building? Verses 19-22.

COMMENT: Paul here compares God's Church to a building. The Old Testament prophets—along with the New Testament apostles—form the *foundation* of the true Church, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone.

17. Did the patriarchs and prophets of antiquity—those whom God called before Christ established His New Testament Church—have access to the Holy Spirit? I Pet. 1:10-11.

COMMENT: Notice that "the Spirit of Christ...was *in them*." God gave His Spirit only to those whom He called to perform special tasks. Those few had the Holy Spirit and will be born into God's Kingdom, as we're clearly told in Hebrews 11.

Likewise, those called into God's Church today also have a great work to perform. Christ has commissioned His Church today to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to the entire world! (Matt. 28:19-20; 24:14).

18. Are those in God's Church also in training for responsibilities in the World Tomorrow? Rev. 2:26-27; 5:10; 20:4.

COMMENT: Spiritual Israel today is being trained to rule with Christ as a spiritual "kingdom of priests" when He returns. They will help Him restore the government of God over the entire earth and teach the nations God's wonderful way of life!

But what about ancient Israel and their descendants? Did that carnal nation fail totally? Will it yet have a chance to set an example for the rest of the world to follow?

GOD'S MODEL MILLENNIAL NATION

God reveals He has not forsaken His chosen people. He has not forgotten His covenant with ancient Israel. God will yet give Israel's modern descendants an opportunity to live by His laws even though their forefathers failed for thousands of years. This time they *will obey!* Let's understand how God will bring this about in the very near future.

1. Did God know Abraham's descendants would forsake Him and His way? Deut. 31:16. How would God punish them? Verses 17-18; Deut. 4:25-28.

COMMENT: Ancient Israel did forsake God, committing grievous sins, as He knew they would. As punishment for their disobedience, God caused them to be taken captive and scattered among the nations. Today only a small minority of their descendants, mainly from the tribe of Judah, now live in the modern state of Israel—part of the "Promised Land" of ancient Israel.

2. Because of their continued national sins, will the modern descendants of Israel be scattered all over the earth? Isa. 11:11-12. Will they turn to God in their tribulation in the *end time*? Deut. 4:29-30. (Notice especially the words "latter days" in verse 30). Will God then remember the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Verse 31.

3. Will God bring His captive people back to the land He promised Abraham? Deut. 30:1-5. What is the time setting for the regathering of the remnant of Israel? Isa. 27:12-13.

COMMENT: The blowing of the "great trumpet" refers to the "last trump" signaling Jesus Christ's return to earth as King of kings (I Thess. 4:16; Rev. 11:15). At His return, Christ will seek out and bring back the remnant of Israel from this modern captivity. Those still alive after the soon-coming great tribulation will be brought back to the land of Palestine, where all 13 tribes will be settled after their former estates.

4. Will this coming exodus of Israelites from captivity around the world be much greater than their former exodus from Egypt in the days of Moses? Jer. 16:14-15; 23:3, 7-8.

COMMENT: Jeremiah's God-inspired prophecy of this future exodus was written about 600 B.C. The first exodus was only a *lesser* type or forerunner of a second and *far greater* exodus to come!

Notice that these regathered Israelites are not changed to immortality when Christ returns, but rather *restored* to the Promise Land of ancient times as physical human beings.

5. Once back in the land promised to their forefather Abraham, will God reunite the nations of Judah and Israel? Ezek. 37:16-22. Who will be their king? Verses 24-25.

COMMENT: At Christ's return, David, who ruled as king over all the tribes of Israel during his mortal lifetime, will be resurrected to immortality. And as God promised long ago, David will once again become Israel's king after God unites the modern-day descendants of ancient Israel.

6. Will God cause His reclaimed people to see themselves as He sees them and to

loathe themselves for their wickedness, granting them repentant attitudes for the first time? Ezek. 20:42-44; Jer. 31:8-9; 50:3-5. Will God then cleanse them from sin? Ezek. 36:24-25; Jer. 33:7-8. Will He also give them His Holy Spirit so they can obey Him? Ezek. 36:26-27; 11:19-20.

COMMENT: The modern Israelites will repent bitterly of their wickedness, which caused God to temporarily forsake them and allow them to go into captivity—to wake them up! They will then truly seek God, repent of their sins, receive God's Holy Spirit, and enter into a "perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten" (Jer. 50:5). This was not possible during the days of the Old Covenant, when the nation as a whole was *without God's Spirit*.

Recall that without the Holy Spirit ancient Israel did not have the "heart" to obey God (Deut. 5:29; 29:4). But once God gives His Spirit to His chosen people, they will remain obedient, not departing from His way of life (Jer. 32:39-40). It is God's Holy Spirit that will make the difference! Israel will be able to understand God's way and obey Him from the heart!

7. Will God proceed to teach repentant, spirit-begotten Israel the knowledge and *understanding* of His way of life? Isa. 54:13; Jer. 3:15. Will this ultimately lead to their being born into the ruling Family of God? Isa. 45:17; Rom. 11:26-27.

8. Will God cause the laws of nature to function for the benefit of His *obedient* people during the Millennium? Isa. 41:18; Ezek. 34:26; Mal. 3:10-12. Will there be great rejoicing over the abundance of crops and cattle God will bestow upon them? Jer. 31:12. Will there be a superabundance of foodstuffs? Amos 9:13.

COMMENT: During the Millennium, God will bestow obedient Israel all of the great material blessings He promised to give their ancestors had they obeyed (Lev. 26; Deut. 28).

9. Abraham's offspring were prophesied to become extremely numerous (Gen. 13:16). Will Israel's population reach its zenith in the Millennium? Ezek. 36:10-11; Isa. 60:21-22. How does God describe this future explosive spread of Israelites into every part of the globe? Isa. 27:6.

10. Will Israel inherit the *whole world*? Isa. 54:2-4. Thus will all nations be blessed because of Abraham's "seed"? Gen. 28:14. But how? Isa. 61:9; 62:1-2, 7. Will the Gentiles therefore want to learn God's way and become obedient to Christ? Isa. 2:1-3.

COMMENT: Israel was intended to be a blessing to the rest of the world both materially and spiritually. The Gentiles similarly will be blessed as they follow Israel's *outstanding EXAMPLE of obedience to God!* And they too will be blessed spiritually by becoming Abraham's "seed"—spiritual Israelites—through Christ (Gal. 3:28-29), becoming Spirit-begotten and finally Spirit-born into the very Family of God!

In the Millennium, Israel will truly become God's *model nation*—the leader all nations will want to follow.

But what about those ancient Israelites who died in their sins long ago? Will they also have an opportunity to repent, receive God's Spirit, obey God, and become members of His ruling Family?

ANCIENT ISRAEL TO BECOME A "HOLY NATION"

"God hath not cast away his people [Israel] which he foreknew," wrote the Apostle Paul (Rom. 11:2). Ancient Israel will also have a chance to receive God's Holy Spirit and obey God from the heart. But how is this possible? These Israelites have been dead for thousands of years! Exactly where do the people of ancient Israel fit into God's wonderful Master Plan?

1. It is God's will that all mankind come to understand the truth about His Master Plan? I Tim. 2:4; II Pet. 3:9. Will *all* Israel therefore be given an opportunity to receive spiritual

salvation? Rom. 11:26.

2. Is a resurrection to *physical* life prophesied to occur after the Millennium? Rev. 20:5 (first part), 11-12.

COMMENT: All those who have ever lived and died since Adam and who were *without* the knowledge of God's plan of salvation will be resurrected and given an opportunity to understand! This resurrection to physical life will occur *after* the Millennium (Rev. 20:4, 6). Those resurrected at this time will, as the Bible indicates, live for 100 years (Isa. 65:20).

These physical mortals will have their *first genuine opportunity* to receive God's Holy Spirit, *grow* in God's holy, righteous character and be born into the universe-ruling Family of God! They will be taught God's way of life and be judged by the Word of God (Rev. 20:12)—just as those in God's Church are being judged today (I Pet. 4:17). (The surprising truth about this coming time of judgment will be the subject of a future lesson.)

3. Will ancient Israel come up in the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20? Ezek. 37:1-11. Notice especially verse 11. What will the resurrected Israelites say when God restores them to physical, mortal life? Verse 11, last part. How will God answer? Verse 12. What will God give them? Verse 14. Will ancient Israel then know the true God? Verse 13.

COMMENT: There is no injustice with God. He will deny no one an opportunity for spiritual salvation. Everyone is to have his full chance, including all those ancient Israelites who died *without* ever having an opportunity to know God's plan. They will be resurrected and *given their chance*—and without a devil to tempt them!

The vision of the "valley of dry bones" in Ezekiel 37 shows the whole House of Israel—those spiritually blinded who lived and died without ever having an opportunity to understand—resurrected back to mortal life. It shows their understanding being opened—the knowledge of God's way of life coming to them for the first time as a result of receiving God's Holy Spirit.

Then ancient Israel will finally become Abraham's *spiritual* children, and heirs to the promise of eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Finally, as God inspired Paul to write, "all Israel shall be saved." Israel as a whole will have fulfilled her God-ordained purpose! She will have become the "holy nation" God originally intended (Ex. 19:6).

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