ISRAEL AND THE END TIMES

The Bible is a Christ-Centered Book – National "Israel" in God's Plan

How long do the "Forever" Promises of the OT Last?

Israel in the New Testament

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Some of the problems associated with studying the "end times" arise from different understandings of the place and purpose of national Israel and the intended nature and place of the "kingdom of God" in God's program. Various presuppositions about the importance and place of a Jewish nation and some glorious, final earthly Jewish kingdom have persisted in many minds since before the first coming of Jesus. The following are some quotations that demonstrate the basic presupposition of many dispensationalists on the "key" to understanding prophecy.

I begin with the Jew, because this is God's time-piece and key that unlocks every door into prophecy.

There are scores of passages that make it emphatically clear that the regathering and re-establishment of Israel in her ancient homeland occurs when Messiah is ready to return to this earth. And we're witnessing it at this hour, indicating that the coming of Christ is very near.

All prophetic truth revolves around the Jews.

If one begins with this presupposition, then you have to have something going on with a Jewish political state for any fulfillment of prophecy and Christ's return. Back in the 1970's, in his book The Late Great Planet Earth, Hal Lindsey started with this premise and did all but set the date,

asserting that “one generation” (40 years, Matthew24:32-34) would see everything finished. Thus, Israel’s 1948 restoration as a political entity was the starting point, the “rapture” would occur in 1981, the “7-year tribulation” would rage until 1988, and Christ would come to earth in power that same year to end the “Battle of Armageddon” and set up a Jewish millennial kingdom. I bought this program in my ignorance, but it is now more than 15 years past 1988 and there has been no “rapture/tribulation/Battle of Armageddon/glorious Return of Christ/etc.” so far and Lindsey’s scenario seems no closer to fulfillment than it did then. Such schemes of prophecy interpretation are exciting and sell paperback books (generation after generation), but they continue to come and go without fulfillment and each new generation of gullible and ignorant believers buys the newest version and then later struggles with the same disillusionment. Unless such basic issues as this can be clarified, confusion will continue. Let’s begin by surveying the Biblical material concerning Israel in God’s plan.

The Bible is a Christ-Centered Book!

First of all, the issue of what is ‘central” in God’s program must be dealt with. In the quotations above, it is obvious that Jack van Impe and his sort have based their interpretation of prophecy on the presupposition that national/Jewish Israel is the center of God’s program and the key to understanding everything. I disagree with this assertion strongly and will now offer my reasoning.

Messiah is Central – My first objection to the “Israel” obsession is that Scripture itself argues that the Messiah was the central focus of God’s program from the beginning. In response to the first sin, God promised the Serpent that He would send a single “seed of woman (He)” to wound the serpent’s head,

And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between

your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel. (Genesis 3:15)

In a sense, you could say that this establishes the basic plot of the entire Biblical story – God will send a rescuer for humanity who will be wounded, but victorious in a future encounter with the Serpent. The main issue then becomes identifying this promised Messiah/Christ. As we shall see, God marked out a genealogical lineage "credential" for the Messiah and that is why Matthew 1 and Luke 3 contain evidence that Jesus satisfies this credential. In the Law of Moses, it was promised that a prophet like Moses would arise and God would speak through him, with dire consequences for any who refuse to listen to him,

'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 'And it shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. (Deuteronomy 18:18-19)

Accordingly, identifying the Messiah and "Prophet like Moses" is central. Daniel provided prophetic historical guidelines for identifying the "time" of the Messiah's appearance and this is part of the reason that Eastern wise men, undoubtedly familiar with Daniel's predictions, came looking at the right time (Matthew 2:1-2). Jewish leaders from Jerusalem asked John the baptizer if he was the Christ or "the Prophet" and he denied that he was, but he proclaimed that the one they waited for was coming soon and, through his baptism, identified Jesus as the one promised (John 1:29-35). Then Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel identified Jesus as the One promised in the Law and Prophets (John 1:40-49). After following and learning for awhile, Peter stated his belief that Jesus was the awaited Messiah (Matthew 16:13-20). After feeding the 5000, a number of people concluded that Jesus was "the prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6:14), a fact which the Apostles declared to be the fact in Acts 3:18-26. The focal

point of the Apostles' preaching in the book of Acts is that Jesus is the promised Messiah (Acts 2:36; 3:19-20; 4:10-12; 5:42; 9:22; 10:42-43; 13:32-33; 17:3). The Apostles' teaching was that Jesus is the central focal point of God's program,

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:18-23)

And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. (Colossians 1:15-18)

And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. ***For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy****.* (Revelation 19:10)

Although they have missed in their identification, some Jewish scholars still had the general gist of the Old Testament Scriptures right, for in the Talmud it was written,

All the Prophets have prophesied only for the days of the Messiah.

Old Testament Prophecy focused on Christ's First Coming – While I believe that Jesus will return, I am convinced that Old Testament prophecies were, primarily, focused on preparing people for Jesus' first coming. Let's hear Jesus and His Apostles on the matter.

Although the rejection and suffering of the Messiah were adequately predicted (Genesis 3:15; Psalm 2; 22; Isaiah 52:13 -53:12), the earthly-minded popular expectations of men made it difficult for the Apostles to understand Jesus repeated predictions that He had come to die (Matthew 16:21-23; Luke 9:44-45). Jesus knew that He had come to offer His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28), headed for Jerusalem "resolutely" (Luke 9:51), and told the Apostles that they were heading for Jerusalem where "all things which are written through the Prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished" (Luke 18:31-34). Jesus knew that He had come to be crucified (John 12:27). After His resurrection, Jesus told the men on the road to Emmaus that His suffering and then entering glory were what had to happen and used this as the springboard to explain everything about Himself in the Old Testament (Luke 24:25-27). Later, to the Apostles, Jesus explained all that was written about Him in the Old Testament and summarized it all upon His suffering, resurrection, and that the message of these things was to be spread to all nations (Luke 24:44-48). In Jerusalem, Peter cited the prediction of the "prophet like Moses" and the prediction of the international blessing to come through Abraham's seed by saying that "all the prophets . . . announced these days" (Acts 3:22-26). In his first letter, Peter again summarized the prophets as looking ahead to/predicting Jesus' suffering and the glories to follow, referring to the things proclaimed in the Gospel (1Peter 1:10-12). If I have to choose between Jesus' Apostles, who declared that OT prophecy was "first

coming/Christ suffering" oriented and modern speculators who claim Jesus came intending to establish an earthly Jewish monarchy, failed, and had to postpone that until the second coming, I will side with the Apostles. Did the Apostles emphasize national/Jewish "Israel" having something different and special yet to come after the Church age? Aside from premillennial obsession expressed in their own writings, where can you find such an emphasis in the New Testament writings? You can't!

Daniel 9:24-27 – Those who attempt to make Old Testament prophecy "2nd Coming" oriented are forced to distort Scripture to do so and I believe the "gap" approach to Daniel 9:24-27 is a good example of this. In answer to Daniel's recognition that the 70 years of Babylonian exile were finished and prayer that Jews could now return to the land (Daniel 9:1-23), God responded with a prediction of a 490 year period within which time God would finish His special dealings with the Jews and Jerusalem (v. 24). The prophecy divides the 70×7 (everyone takes the time units to be years) period into three units: the starting point will be a decree to restore/rebuild Jerusalem (following the 586 BC destruction) and then you can click off 7×7 + 62×7 (or 483 years) years until the Messiah appears (v. 25). Cyrus' decree (Ezra 1) was issued in 538 BC, but 483 years brings us down to 55 BC and that doesn't jive with anything remotely close to a fulfillment. However, Artaxerxes issued a decree in 457 B.C. (recorded in its Aramaic original – Ezra 7) and 483 years brings us to 26 AD, when John the baptizer claimed to be presenting Israel's Messiah to them in Jesus (John 1:29-35). At this point, some folks disconnect the prophetic speedometer and drive for 2,000+ years in the belief that Jesus failed to establish the kingdom He intended and that the final 7 years of this prophecy await a still future fulfillment as the "7-year tribulation" period.

I've got a better suggestion – let's assume that 490-year prophecies do NOT need a 2,000+ year "gap inserted in them,

Jesus and the Apostles were right, Jesus did exactly what He came to do, and the 490 years clicked off and all the items in v. 24 were accomplished within that period. Messiah's appearance marks the beginning of the final 7 years, the Messiah is "cut-off/killed" sometime during the final seven years, and this would be followed by another destruction of Jerusalem (Rome in 70 AD). Jesus established a new covenant (Matthew 26:28; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24) and ended the value of the Temple offerings (by His death) in the midst of the final 7 years (after a 3.5 year ministry), after which Titus and His legions came in to demolish the Temple within a generation (as Jesus predicted – Matthew 24:1-34).

From my examination of the entire Bible, I am convinced that Jesus the Messiah is the central focal point of the entire Biblical story. He accomplished His task, was exalted by His Father to the highest place of authority and sits there NOW (Ephesians 1:18-23; 1Peter 3:21-22; Revelation 1:5-6; 3:21). Daniel predicted that during the fourth empire from His time (Rome), God would establish His kingdom (2:44; 7:19-22), and that the Son of Man would return to heaven in the clouds with authority over all mankind such that they should all serve Him (7:13-14). At His first coming, Jesus portrayed Himself as a nobleman going away to receive a kingdom, to be served in His absence by those willing, and later return (Luke 19:11-27) and He claimed to hold all authority over mankind (Matthew 28:18). Paul declared that Jesus humbled Himself to the point of crucifixion, but was then exalted to the highest place and that it is now proper that all should bow to Him (Philippians 2:5-11) and asserted that following His resurrection Jesus rules UNTIL the 2nd Coming, when the saints are raised and death is finally defeated (1Corinthians 15:20-26). The Messiah has come, suffered as predicted, and been exalted to the place of highest authority in this universe. Paul stated that the Gospel is the only means for anyone to be saved – Jew and Gentile (Romans 1:16-17) and Jews who reject the Gospel have condemned themselves (Acts 13:46)! I can find nothing in the

New Testament to lead me to believe that there is something separate and special for the fleshly Jewish people in the future apart from the Gospel hope! So, if that is true, then the next question might be, "What is the place of Israel in God's plan?"

The Biblical Place/Role of "Israel"

A Step rather than the goal – To understand the place of "Israel" in God's program, we must return to the Messianic genealogical issue. Following the promise of a Savior in Genesis 3:15, God began to mark out the lineage of this promised Messiah and His selection for this lineage was NOT based on any merit in the individuals, but "election" to this lineage was solely by God's sovereign choice (Romans 9 – Calvinists mistakenly confuse this and blend it into their conception of "election" to salvation). The lineage from Adam to Noah is marked out in Genesis 5, while Genesis 11:10-27 takes the line from Noah's son Shem down to Terah, the father of Abraham. In Genesis 12:1-3, God promised Terah's son, Abraham, that he would receive special blessings, his descendants would become a nation in the promised land, and finally, that an international blessing would come through His seed. The lineage is later passed on to Abraham's son Isaac (Genesis 26:1-4) and then to his grandson Jacob (Genesis 28:10-14). It is with Jacob that "Israel" enters the story.

Origin of "Israel" – Get out your concordance and look up "Israel." You may be surprised to find that "Israel" did not begin as a nation, but as an individual – Jacob. Because he had "wrestled" with God, he was renamed "Israel" (he who strives with God),

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome. (Genesis 32:28)

God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer

be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." So he named him Israel. (Genesis 35:10)

To this day they persist in their former practices. They neither worship the LORD nor adhere to the decrees and ordinances, the laws and commands that the LORD gave the descendants of Jacob, whom he named Israel. (2Kings 17:34)

The new name of the patriarch was eventually transferred to his descendants and we find the nation called "Jacob" (Numbers 23:7; Deuteronomy33:10; Psalm 59:13) as well as "Israel." So, from the one man Jacob, renamed "Israel," a physical nation came into being through his 12 sons (Genesis 35:22-26). Before Jacob/Israel died, he identified the Messianic lineage as going through Judah (Genesis 49:10). Eventually, the final step of prophetically revealed Messianic lineage proceed through David (2Samuel 7) and this is why both Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38 link both Mary and Joseph back to David. After becoming slaves in Egypt, God called "Israel…My first-born son" out of Egypt as though it was personified as one individual (Exodus 4:22,23; Hosea 11:1). Keep this "one man/a nation of people through 12 sons" image in mind when we examine the New Testament picture later on.

Historical Realities – It is unfortunate that many believers are ignorant of the history of the Israelite nation, for this is crucial information for understanding this whole issue. The nation of "Israel" developed from one man, Jacob/Israel, through his twelve physical sons, born thru four different women (Genesis 29:31 – 30:24; 35:18). These twelve boys all married and had children and from them the "12 tribes of Israel" developed," with a total number of 70 people entering Egypt under Joseph's protection around 1876 B.C. We know they eventually had troubles (Exodus 1), but God raised up Moses to deliver them and then lead them to Mt. Sinai to receive a Covenant/Law system to govern them as a nation in Canaan (Exodus – Deuteronomy, ca. 1446 BC). This generation rebelled at Sinai (Exodus 32) and soon doubted that God would deliver

Canaan into their possession (Number 13-14), so God punished them with wandering in the wilderness until all above the age of 20 had died (ca. 1445-1405 BC). Forty years later, Joshua led the second generation in conquering Canaan (1405-1398 BC), but pockets of Canaanite culture were left in place and this became a source of trouble during the era of the Judges (ca. 1360-1051 B.C.). As God already knew they would do (Deuteronomy 17:14), Israel eventual wanted an earthly monarchy like their neighbors had and requested such from Gideon (who refused – Judges 8:22-23) and then Samuel (1Samuel 8:1-9), at which time God told them this was really a rejection of Him as Israel's king and an evil thing (1Samuel 10:19; 12). Israel had a number of problems under Saul (1051-1011 BC), military security under David (1011-971 BC), and economic prosperity under Solomon (971-931 BC). However, David's sexuality and family troubles were not good, neither was Solomon's polygamy, which led to idolatry being established in Judah (1Kings 11). After Solomon died, the kingdom split into two kingdoms and idolatry was officially established in the northern kingdom of "Israel" (1Kings 12) as it had already been in the southern kingdom of "Judah." The two kingdoms deteriorated because of covenant unfaithfulness and the evils of human politics until "Israel" was dismantled and exiled into oblivion by the Assyrians (722 BC – 2Kings 17), with "Judah" lasting another century and then going into Babylonians exile for 70 years. While the northern 10 tribes, the kingdom of "Israel," disappeared forever after God wrote them a "bill of divorce" (Jeremiah 3:8), about 50,000 people from Judah returned from Babylon and restored Temple worship and a national existence under Persian, Greek, and Roman rule until the coming of Jesus. Let's examine God's faithfulness to Judah.

Why God worked with Judah – Remember the central Messianic theme of the Bible and the lineage that God marked out? From the tribe of Judah, God promised to bring the Messiah through the lineage of David. God preserved Judah through Babylonian

exile because the Messiah was coming through Judah and God is faithful. In fact, the key to understanding God's workings with the Jewish people is the messianic promise in the Garden (Genesis 3:15), later focused upon the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The nation of "Israel" was usually rebellious, so why did God continue to work with them for 1400 years of turmoil and covenant unfaithfulness? The answer is stated many times in the Old Testament – God had promised the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – that He would bring the international Messianic blessing through their lineage and God was fulfilling His promise to them. Before He departed, Moses told the Israelites point-blank that they were NOT receiving the Promised Land because they were more numerous or more righteous than the Canaanites – in fact they had been very stubborn and rebellious – but because God was keeping His promises to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Deuteronomy 7:7-8; 9:4-6).

"Israel" a mixed multitude – Contrary to popular belief, Old Testament Israel was not limited to Abraham's bloodline or Jewish birth, but rather on obedience to the covenant. This is dictated by several pieces of evidence. First, **Genesis 17:9-14** tells us that circumcision in the flesh was, from the beginning, a covenant sign for all of Abraham's sons and his servants (including foreign born servants, vv.12-13). Exodus 12:38 informs us that a "mixed multitude" was delivered from the Egyptian bondage, enjoying the blessings of God's deliverance along with those of "Jewish" background. Exodus 12:42-49 goes on to tell us that participation in Israel's "Passover" was limited not by fleshly birth, but by obedience to the covenant requirement of accepting circumcision. Although "circumcision" was in the flesh, it was incomplete unless in the heart also (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4). Second, while the fleshly descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the basic family of Israel, the "nation" was intended to include all those who would obey the Lord. The Israelite nation was never a racially pure people and the

"fleshly" identification of Israel has always been wrong, for many gentiles were included with God's approval: Tamar (Genesis 38), Rahab (Joshua 2; 6:25; Hebrews 11:31; Jas. 2:25), the Gibeonites (Joshua 9; Nehemiah 3:7; 7:5,7,25), Ruth (Ruth 1:4; 4:13-22), and, possibly, Bathsheba. Not only were believing Gentiles made a part of Israel, but Rahab and Ruth were in the Messianic lineage (Matthew 1:5). The purity of Jewish blood also suffered with the many occasions in which Israel inter-married with foreigners (Judges 3:5,6; 1Kings 11:1-3). Third, Old Testament Israel in the wilderness is called the ***ekklesia*** (Greek for "called out/church") in Acts 7:38. Fourth, Old Testament Israel "broke" the Sinaitic covenant and God promised to start all over and make a "new covenant" with the house of Israel/Judah (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Thus, the way for change is opened because a "new" covenant will require that new covenant parties, terms, promises, and oath-swearing be defined.

All Israel – "All Israel" does not mean all of those who are descended from Jacob, but of those whose heart belongs to God. When he was complaining that he was the only faithful person left, Elijah was told that 7,000 had not bowed the knee to Baal (1Kings 19:18) and this referred only to those who "acted" like they were God's people (1Kings 20:15). "All Israel" does NOT define a physical group, but a spiritual group of covenant-keepers (Exodus 12:38,42-49; Jeremiah 31:31ff; Psalm 73:1; Romans 9:6-8; 11:1-32). Those who were disobedient, such as the generation that came out of Egypt, were excluded from the promises (Exodus 32; Numbers 14 & 16; Romans 11:16-24). The covenant with Jacob's descendants was dependent on their obedience[8] more than their bloodline. There were four times when God was just about ready to destroy the whole nation and start over with Moses (Exodus 32:7-14; Numbers 14:12; 16:21,45). God reminded the children of the generation that died in the wilderness for unbelief that God was now maintaining a covenant with them for one reason – to keep the promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

(Deuteronomy 7:7-8; 9:4-6; 2Kings 13:23). Finally, based on Isaiah 5:1-7, Jesus told the parable of the vineyard (Matthew 21:33-46) to show that unbelieving Israel had once before lost its national existence (to Assyria and Babylon) and was going to again – permanently! In this case, Jesus said that Israel was losing its national claim on the "kingdom of God" (Matthew 21:43), but rather than a future restoration it would be replaced this time by a "new nation" which would produce the spiritual fruit God desired (1Peter 2:5,9-10; Revelation 1:5-6). Once the promised Messiah had come through national Israel, the place of a land-centered nation (Genesis 12:1-2) ended so that the international phase (Genesis 12:3) could begin (Ephesians 2:11 – 3:11).

As the apostle Peter came to realize, God's plan has always been to bless all nations (Genesis 12:3; Acts 10:34-35) through Messiah. The Old Testament prophets foretold that the Messianic age would NOT be a "Jewish" age, but would be international.

How long do the "Forever" Promises of the OT Last?

Some try to make a case for the prophetic need of an end-time Israelite nation on the basis of "forever" promises in the OT, but the physical marks of national distinctions were as temporary as the national covenant (Galatians 3). The institutions of the nation were said to be ***olam***, which has been commonly translated into English as "forever," "everlasting," or "throughout your generations." A more accurate definition would be "perpetually" or "as long as the covenant continues". The word *olam* was used in reference to such covenant-specific elements as **the land of Canaan** (Genesis 17:8), which was but a shadow of something better (Hebrews 11:16); the Passover (Exodus 12:14,17,24), which was fulfilled in Christ's blood (Matthew 26:28) and replaced with a new meal; **the Sabbath day** (Exodus 31:12-17), which is no longer a legal requirement (Romans 14:5,6; Col. 2:16,17; Galatians 4:9-11); **the Aaronic priesthood** (Exodus 40:15), which was

superseded by Christ (Hebrews 7); **the Atonement Day** (Leviticus 16:29), which was finished by Christ (Hebrews 10:1-22); **the Jerusalem temple** (1Kings 9:3; 2Chronicles 7:16), which came to an end in Christ (John 1:14; 2:19-21; 4:20-24; Ephesians 2:19-22); and the **physical nation of Israel** (2Samuel 7:24), which was replaced by the New Covenant people (Matthew 21:33-45;1Peter 2: 5-10).

The main reason some believe that God has some "unfinished business" with national Israel is that they believe there are some prophecies concerning Israel that have yet to be fulfilled. First of all, there is the belief that OT Israel never possessed all of the land that God promised to Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 15:18; Exodus 23:31; Deuteronomy 1:7-8). However, the Scriptures declare that God did fulfill this promise and OT Israel did possess all of their promised land (Joshua 11:15-17; 21:45; 1Kings 4:21,24). It was prophesied that Israel would be numerous – as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5) and the sand on the seashore (Genesis 22:17) and both were fulfilled during the Old Testament era (Deuteronomy 1:10; 1Kings 4:20). Prophecies concerning the "kingdom" will be dealt with separately.

Second, there were a number of prophecies of Israel being dispersed from their land for covenant unfaithfulness and later restored to their land.[11] Those who are building their eschatologies around a restored Israel towards the end of the church age do so by ignoring/downplaying the Babylonian exile/return (609-400 B.C.) and applying the OT prophecies of Israel dispersed from the land to the Roman conquest of 70/132-135 A.D., the period of dispersal to the church age, and the restoration to the 1948 A.D. creation of the Israelite state. This appears to be "Biblical" except for the fact that little attention is paid to the fulfillment of these prophecies in the exile to Assyria and Babylon followed by the restoration under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. The OT fulfillment is ignored because it cuts the feet out from under

the dispensational theory, although it does fully satisfy the predictions and the commentary by Daniel in which he declared the Babylon exile and return/restoration to be the predicted exile and return. Just by plotting the sources/dates for the OT predictions of the dispersal and restoration of Israel to their land you can find powerful evidence for the Babylonian captivity being the intended exile, for every one of those prophecies was uttered prior to 586 B.C. when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple of Solomon and took the last of the captives to Babylon. When we consider the prophets that spoke after 586 B.C., we find that they said nothing about Israel being dispersed from their land and regathered in the future! The prophet Daniel, who was a participant, plainly said that the Babylonian exile was the one that had been predicted (Daniel 9:1-9) in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. . . . All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. “Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you. You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem. Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us, yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth. The LORD did not hesitate to bring the disaster upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him. (Daniel 9:2,11-14)

Along with Daniel’s commentary on the Babylonian exile and restoration as the fulfillment of the OT predictions, so also Jeremiah looked on it as Israel’s predicted dispersion among the nations (Lamentations 1:3). The Prophet Zechariah (520 B.C.) prophesied at the time of Israel’s return to the Land

and he viewed the Babylonian exile/return as the accomplishment of the earlier predictions (7:8-14; 8:1-15). In the mid-fifth century B.C., Nehemiah looked upon the exile to Babylon as the one promised and prayed that God would let him participate in helping Israel with their return to the land (Nehemiah 1). In all of the NT references to the approaching Roman destruction of Jerusalem and Temple, the only OT reference for such is Daniel 9:26 (Matthew 24:15) rather than any of the predictions between Genesis and Daniel and there is no promise of another national restoration. I am convinced that the Israelite nation that came into existence in 1948 A.D. was the work of the Zionist movement and the United Nations, not the fulfillment of OT prophecy. Due to their loyalty to their end-time scenario, the fact that modern "Israel" has no interest in Jesus as Messiah doesn't seem to bother most dispensationalists very much. The return from Babylon and events in the Intertestamental era far better fulfill the OT predictions than the 1948 event and what has followed.

Israel in the New Testament

In the Old Testament, "Israel" began as a single individual, Jacob (with a name change – Genesis 32:28; 35:10), whose physical seed produced a nation through twelve patriarchal sons. The refugee nation emerged from Egypt by God's deliverance, was tempted in the wilderness, received a mountain-top message and experience at Sinai, were miraculously fed in the wilderness,struggled for survival in Canaan, died as a nation (Assyrian/Babylonian exile), but then returned to life (return and restoration from Babylon).

Matthew introduced Jesus by citing Hosea 11:1 (Matthew 2:14-15) to convey the idea that Jesus is, again, the single personification of "Israel . . My first-born" who is called out of Egypt (Exodus 4:22,23). Jesus, also, was then tempted in the wilderness (Matthew 4), delivered a mountain-top message and experience (Matthew 5-7 & 17:1-9), had twelve

“Apostolic” sons (Matthew 10:1-5) whose spiritual seed would produce a new nation (Luke 8:4-15; Matthew 21:43) and they would be its “patriarchal heads” (Matthew 19:28), miraculously fed a Jewish multitude in the wilderness (Matthew 15:32-39), struggled and died in Canaan, and then came back to life! The Great Commission sent the Apostles out to the nations of the world, because it had always been God’s plan to bless all nations through the Messiah (Genesis 12:3; Acts 10:34-35; 15:1-19).

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, some very strong things were said concerning the inherent value of national Israel. John warned Jews coming for baptism that they should not put much trust in their bloodline/physical lineage to Abraham (Matthew 3:9-10), for the “axe” of divine judgment was ready to fall. Jesus compared the faith of Gentiles favorably with that of Jews (Matthew 8:5-12; 15:22-28) and downplayed the physical, national identification of God’s people (Matthew 12:46-50). He even declared that hostile Jews were children of “Satan” (John 8:31-44). Picking up Isaiah 5:1-7, Jesus added to it the element of the prophets and then the Son being killed and claimed (v. 43) that Israel was losing its national claim on the kingdom of God (Matthew 21:33-46). He followed that with a similar parable of the marriage feast, those who are invited and refuse to come will have their city destroyed and then the invitation will be offered to whoever will come (Matthew 22:1-14). Jesus predicted a long-postponed judgment was about to fall on national Judaism, to “this generation” that heard Him (Matthew 23:29 – 24:34). Steven accused the Jewish leadership of always resisting God’s Spirit (Acts 7:51-53), Paul said that wrath had finally come upon the Jews (2Thessalonians 2:14-16), and John drew from Isaiah and Jesus’ designation for unbelieving Jewish leaders (John 8:37-44; cf. Isaiah 30:9) who were persecuting the Christians as he referred to them as “synagogues of Satan” (Revelation 2:9; 3:9).

Circumcision – If national/Jewish "Israel is still the focal point of God's program, how could circumcision be denigrated as no longer having any spiritual purpose? Concerning circumcision, the Apostle Paul gave up his valued "Jewishness" (according to the flesh) to be a member of the international New Covenant people (Philippians 3:2-9). He said that fleshly circumcision was only of value to those who "kept the commandments of the Law" (Romans 2:15-19). Paul said that being a "true Jew" was not dependent on fleshly circumcision, but rather "circumcision of the heart" and faith in God (Romans 2:25-29; cf. Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4). The Jerusalem council declared that circumcision of the flesh was no longer the "covenant sign" (Acts 15) and Paul went even further in his explanation. Those baptized into Christ participate in a higher and better form of circumcision directly from the Messiah (Colossians 2:10-12)!

Paul to the Romans – In writing to the saints at Rome, Paul was writing both to those who"knew the Law" (Romans 7:1) and to those who were Gentiles (Romans 11:13) and presented a balanced explanation of OT national Israel's place and purpose. While the members of the OT Israelite nation had some definite advantages (Romans 3:1-2; 9:1-5), physical lineage alone does NOT make one a member of "all Israel" (Romans 9:6-8).

Later (11:17-32), Paul explains the seriousness of Jews rejecting Jesus – unbelieving "Israelites" (according to the flesh) are cut-off from God's "true Israel" vine, while believing Gentiles are "grafted into" the vine. One's standing in the true "Israel" is determined by faith in God and His Messiah (11:13-24), which then brings us to one of the worst mutilations of Scripture that I am aware of. Warning his Gentile Christian audience against arrogance toward unbelieving Jews (11:13,18,25), Paul notes that some Israelites (according to the flesh – 11:7) will remain hardened perpetually (11:25) and "thus all Israel will be

saved" (11:26). However, when Paul said that "all Israel being saved" (Romans 11:25-26), he did **NOT** say that " *after*" all of the Gentile believers are brought in a deliverer will come to save Israel. The word "thus" (Romans 11:26) does NOT mean "afterwards," but the Greek word *houtos* means "in the manner described," referring back to Romans 11:17-24. The prophecy citation in 11:26-27 comes from Isaiah 59:20-21 and is predicting the future but noting OT prophecy fulfilled what had already occurred with Christ's first coming (Matthew 1:21; 20:28; Hebrews 9:26; 10:10-22). It is in Christ's first coming that sin is taken away and dealt with and that is why Paul went on to emphasize that God's mercy towards both Jew and Gentile is being offered **NOW** (Hebrews 11:30-32)!

Forget this "some special salvation for Jews later" notion and read the New Testament – Paul said that God's mercy and salvation are being offered "NOW" (Romans 11:31) through the Gospel to all, Jews first (Romans 1:16; 16:25-26; cf. Acts 3:17-26)! Jews who reject the Gospel are judging themselves unworthy of eternal life (Acts 13:46).

Who are "Abraham's Children"? – Elsewhere, the New Testament writers teach that"Abraham's children" are those with his "faith" rather than his bloodline and that "circumcision in the flesh" no longer matters. Paul taught that the nation-creating Mosaic covenant was temporary and had not replaced the earlier international messianic promise to Abraham (Galatians 3:15-19). He, then, proceeded to chastise those trying to cling to the Mosaic covenant somehow with an allegory that compared nationalistic/Mosaic covenant Israel with Hagar and Ishmael, who were "cast out" (Galatians 4:21-31; cf. Genesis 21:10,12) and did not inherit the promises to Abraham. Sadly, many have missed (due to pre-conceived blindness) the apostolic doctrine that the church age Gospel is how "Israel" is to be saved (Romans 1:16) and if Jews reject the Gospel then they have "judged themselves unworthy of eternal life" (Acts 13:32-46). It is God's purpose

to have “one redeemed people” rather than two. Under the Mosaic Law men from any nation could become a part of “Israel” (Genesis 17:9-14; Exodus 12:42-49) and under the Gospel men from any nation can be “in Christ” and, thus, become “Abraham’s children” (Matthew 28:18,19; Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 2:11 – 3:11). This ancient principle was what God was trying to teach to Jonah (Jonah 4:10,11) and which Peter discovered in Cornelius’ home (Acts 10:34,35). Who did Paul think were the “true Jews/true circumcision” now – it was not determined outwardly, but inwardly (Romans 2:28-29; Philippians 3:2,3).

To try and maintain a separate place and plan for a physical Israelite nation (according to the flesh) creates unnecessary problems for the readers of the New Testament. God has fulfilled His covenant promises to Israel and it is they, not Him, who have caused a problem (Romans 9:27 – 10:4; 11:1-14). It is Christ, not the physical Israelite nation, which is the “watershed” of prophecy (Revelation 19:10). God has one body of children and I am persuaded that, without Christ (John 5:23; 1John 2:23), the fleshly nation of Israel (restored in Palestine or not) has no special place in the “end times.”

Those who continue to place a “Jewish nation” with rebuilt Jerusalem temple and throne at the center of God’s future plans have missed the point (Philippians 3:18-21) in the same way as the earthly-minded Jewish people missed the fulfillment of prophecy centuries ago (Acts 13:14-41). The Israelite nation had the advantage of Scripture (Romans 3:1-2) and covenant with God (Romans 9:1-5). Despite their disobedience, the nation of Israel is the blessed channel through which Messiah came (Romans 11:28-29), because God promised this to the patriarchal Fathers. However, the advantages also make the Jews more responsible (Amos 3:1-2; Luke 12:47-48; Romans 2:1-29) and their national election for service in the preparations for Christ does not guarantee them any continuing special role in God’s program after the Messiah arrived. Now,

they have the same individual responsibility to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah as do people from any other nation or race (Acts 17:30-31; Romans 1:15-16; 10:1-4).