

The Israel Story

Chapter 4 – Significance

“The creation of the Jewish people as a distinct people group, the choice of them to be His people, and the promise to give them the Land of Canaan as their inheritance were entirely God’s ideas from the beginning. God deeply committed Himself to the fulfillment of these purposes by His promise, His Word, His covenant, and His oath. In doing so, He connected His honor, character, and reputation to their fulfillment. Therefore, regardless of Israel's failures, God will fulfill His commitments because that is who God is.” (Myers)

1. The Bible is God’s Story. Myers says, “This is God’s story. It is about Him, for Him, through Him, and to Him.” You cannot separate God and Israel from the Bible. They are His chosen people from Abraham to today. If you believe that the Bible is the Word of God, then you have to accept that the Jews were and still are important to God.
2. There were times in Israel’s history that God deemed it necessary to punish Israel for their disobedience. The prophet Daniel understood that God’s forgiveness was necessary for them be reconciled back to Him and it would follow God’s timing. He also understood that above everything, it impacted God’s reputation.

“Daniel was aware of Jeremiah’s prophecy and therefore knew when the time had drawn near for Judah’s return to their land and to the city of Jerusalem. The beginning of chapter 9 in the book of Daniel records Daniel’s prayer for Judah’s return, and starts with Daniel’s confession of all of Judah’s sins while living in their land. Then Daniel makes his appeal to God to bring the children of Judah back to their promised land. We find in Daniel's appeal the answer to our question.”

Daniel 9:18–19 says, “*18 Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. 19 Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.*”

3. Having been to Jerusalem and having seen the remnants of the Temple laying beside the temple mount, from the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. I can see how devastated Daniel and the others that were taken to Babylon would have felt looking back at what God allowed them to do to Jerusalem and the Temple. Seeing that rubble that the Temple had become impacted me. Daniel says, “Look at what they have done to your city and to your Temple!!”



Stones and Rubble from 2nd Temple

- David Guzik calls Daniel a patriot to Judah and to God. Charles Spurgeon says, “To us, Christian patriotism means love to the Church of God.”
4. Military leaders and politicians would say “It was for the greater good. Judah had to be put back on the right road, in spite of themselves.” In Daniel’s prayer, he points out that the remnant wants God to see what they have done and act, not because God’s people are righteous but because God is merciful. When is that last time that you prayed where you couldn’t say the same thing? We always rely on God’s mercy. “We messed up again, please help us!”
 5. In John 12:28 when Jesus said, “*Father, glorify your name!*” Then a voice came from heaven, “*I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.*” Jesus is saying,

what Daniel is thinking. “What will other people think about the God of Israel if you don’t do something?”

6. Casting Crowns had a song a few years back that summed up what Daniel prays, “Not because of who I am But because of what You've done Not because of what I've done But because of who You are.”
7. Do you remember that justice says, “You get what you deserve.” Mercy says, “You don't get what you deserve.” But Grace says, “You get what you don’t deserve.” Justice means that the people of Judah get punishment for 70 years. They wanted mercy which meant they would go on as they were, unpunished. Sometimes God says, “You need a course correction to come back to me but you still have my salvation which is my grace.”
8. God kept his promises but He also keeps His warnings. He sent the prophet Jeremiah to warn them to get back on the right track. 2 Kings 17:13 says, *“The Lord warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: “Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your ancestors to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets.”*
9. In Pastor Brian’s sermon series on Revelation, what attributes of God stand out most to you? Love, mercy and just.
10. Jeremiah 25:11 tells us what they were told, *“This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.”* How much plainer could God have warned them? What did Jeremiah get for sharing the message from God? He was imprisoned, cast into a cistern, and eventually went to Egypt with other exiles, where he continued his ministry. Hebrews 11:36-37 explains what happened to God’s prophets. *“36 Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated.”*

11. This wasn't the only time that God had to punish His chosen people. It happens again in 70 AD. They were dispersed and scattered from their land for approximately two thousand years. God sent a warning then by the prophet Ezekiel. He told them what would happen if they didn't turn from their wicked ways. *Ezekiel 36:20 – When they came to the nations, wherever they went, they profaned My holy name—when they said of them, “These are the people of the Lord, and yet they have gone out of His land.”* The Germans went even further than this warning.

“Do you see it? Because this whole story is about God, His idea, His promises, His covenant, His oath, and His name, when all these things appear to be unfulfilled, He is the One who looks bad. It is His reputation and His honor that are at stake.”
(Myers)

12. In 1948 when Israel became a country again, the world may not have seen it but God fulfilled His promise. God didn't bring them back together because they deserved it. He didn't do it because they had done anything amazing. Many had faith and they endured. Does that Casting Crowns song come to mind, “Not because of who I am, But because of what You've done, Not because of what I've done, But because of who You are. . . I am yours.” Consider your salvation, same idea. It is not about you, it all about Him.

13. Read Ezekiel 36:16–22. It essentially tells us about Israel's disobedience and their subsequent punishment. He is saying, “Ultimately I, God will restore Israel both physically and spiritually.” Physically, like 1948 when God brought them back into the Promised Land. Who gave them their land back? God. Men may have been involved but it was all God.

14. Some believe the spiritual restoration will be a future event connected to the 144,000 “*from all the tribes of Israel*” in Revelation 7. In Ezekiel 36:22 God says, “*22 “Therefore, give the people of Israel this message from the Sovereign Lord: I am bringing you back, but not because you deserve it. I am doing it to protect my holy name, on which you brought shame while you were scattered among the nations.”* Father, glorify thy Name!

15. Read further in Ezekiel 36:23–28. Verse 23 says that first God will restore His Name. Verse 24 says God will restore His people to the land. Verses 25 through 27 - The spiritual restoration will spiritually restore them to Himself but first He will put a new heart in them. And finally, He will live with them. Verse 28 ends with “*You will be my people, and I will be your God.*” Where have we heard these words? Revelation 21:7
16. When we visited Israel, we were told that about 20% of the Jews in Israel are religious Jews. The rest are secular Jews or Jews by birth. Many of the secular Jews are marginal Jews which are kind of like those people that call themselves Christians but attend church on Christmas and Easter.
17. God’s plan for the salvation of the Jews is not unlike our salvation. It comes through the saving grace of God through faith in Jesus. And how long will God keep the eyes of the Jews blinded? Romans 11:25-26a says, “*25 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, 26 and in this way all Israel will be saved.*” Until all of the Gentiles have come to salvation through Jesus.

Discussion Question:

We see clearly in this episode that what happens to Israel and the Jewish people impacts God’s name, His character, His reputation, and His honor? Did you understand this before? If not, how has it changed your perspective?