

## WHY DID THE JEWS MISS JESUS?

Most people would answer the above question simply enough: The Jews did not recognize that Jesus was the Messiah; and while that would be correct, it would by no means be the complete answer. On the occasion of Jesus final conversation with his disciples, they ask him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts. 1:6). This question gives much incite into the thinking and expectations of most Jews for the past 2,600 years. Jesus did not answer their question. Why not?

I am reminded of the example of the innocent spouse who is asked, Why did you cheat on your wife? Since he is innocent, how does he answer the question? By the same token, Jesus could not answer the disciples' question because it was flawed. Their question revealed a gross lack of understanding that not only the disciples had, but nearly all Jews have had since their captivity in the sixth century B.C. The Jews have always believed that their prophets foretold that God would one day "restore" their nation to freedom and greatness led by the Messiah. Since Jesus did not fulfill this expectation, they missed him.

Let me state a plain fact: the Jewish prophets never foretold the restoration of the Jews to freedom and greatness as a nation. Not in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, not in 1948, and not in some future fanciful millennium. When God divorced His wife, the nation of Israel, that was it. She was invaded, taken captive, and deported. never again to be the "apple of His eye." The kingdom was stripped from them, never to be returned. Jesus told the Jews of his day, "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be **taken from you** and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Mtt. 21:43). Jesus' statement should be clear enough. But we need to identify just who that "nation" is.

The prophet Daniel's "seventy weeks" prophecy in chapter nine foretold the coming of the Messiah in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. That is why Simeon was "waiting for the consolation [comfort] of Israel," and the prophetess Anna was among "all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Lk. 2:25-35). But even those who understood the times thought comfort and redemption would come from a messianic king who would break the iron shackles of Rome and free the Jewish nation. The "wise men" came looking for "he who has been born king of the Jews" (Mt. 2:2). Yet when Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (Jn. 18:33), he answered, "My kingdom is not of this world" (v36). Nevertheless, Pilate labeled Jesus as "King of the Jews" above his cross.

When those who witnessed the miracle of the loaves and fishes wanted to make Jesus a king, he refused (Jn. 6:15). Following Jesus' crucifixion, two of his disciples lamented, saying, "But we were hoping that it was he who was going to redeem Israel" (Lk. 24:21). So even the faithful misunderstood, at least at first, who Jesus was. Even they missed him. Even so, Jesus was born to be a king, in fact "King of kings," but it was not to happen at his first coming.

Now, let me return to the statement I wrote about the prophets not prophesying about the restoration of the Jews. What the prophets did foretell was the restoration of **Israel!** In fact it is the major theme found throughout the prophets. That may sound like double talk when one does not understand the difference between the Jews and Israel. To most they are one and the same, yet they are most definitely not. Yes, the Jews' ancestors were Israelites, but many may not be aware that the Bible speaks of **two** very different Israels, and even two types of Jews, as well as circumcisions.

The apostle Paul wrote about these two Israels, "For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (Rom. 9:6; *NIV*). The first Israel, those "descended from Israel," are the Jews. Paul continues,

“That is, those who are the children of the flesh [Jews], these are **not** the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed [of Abraham]” (v8). The second Israel, the “children of the promise,” are the true, spiritual descendents of Abraham, and thus the children of God through faith. These are “Israelite[s] **indeed**” like the disciple Nathanael (Jn. 1:47). These comprise the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16), also called the “twelve tribes” (Acts 26:7; Jas. 1:1). It is this second Israel of whom the prophets spoke!

Of the two types of Jews, Paul wrote,

“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God” (Rom. 2:28,29).

There are physical Jews and spiritual Jews. There is both physical and spiritual circumcision. The Israelites “indeed” have had their **hearts** circumcised—the body of sin excised—and walk in the Spirit. But there is hope for the first, physical Israel, the Jews, for “God has not cast away his people” forever (Rom. 11:2). Read all of Romans 11. In this lengthy passage Paul explains that the Jews, the “natural branches” of the olive tree which were “broken off” because of “unbelief,” may be “grafted in...again,” “if they do not continue in unbelief.” The Jews, the first Israel, may all become part of the Israel of God through faith!

The prophesied restoration of Israel is found in scores of passages throughout the prophets, and it is multi-faceted. The key to understanding these facets is to recognize that most are symbolic, presented as allegories and metaphors, intended to illustrate the major aspects of Christian salvation. The literalist will stumble in his understanding of these prophecies as have the Jews, Evangelicals, and so many other Christians.

Perhaps the most important theme in the Old Testament is the story of the exodus of Israel from Egypt, since it is mentioned so often. Thus one should not be surprised to find that by far the most often repeated prophecy about restored Israel is a “second” exodus from slavery (Isa. 11:11-12:6; Jer. 16:14,15; 23:3-8). The prophets foresaw people whom God would some day free from their slavery to **sin** through the blood of Jesus, and have their sins forgiven (Isa. 1:16-18; 43:25,26; 55:6,7).

This new Israel would enter into a “new covenant” with God (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 16:60-62), wherein He would clean the human heart with the water of His Holy Spirit (Ezek. 36:24-35). These spiritual waters would flow into the barren desert of human lives and produce the abundant “fruit of the Spirit” (Isa. 32:15-17; 35:1-10; 41:17-20; 44:3,4; 51:3; 55:1). Paul wrote, “God has called us to peace” (I Cor. 7:15). And so restored Israel is described as a peaceful people (Isa. 2:1-5; 11:6-9; 65:25; Mic. 4:1-7). “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain...” God’s holy mountain is Mt. Zion (Heb. 12:22-24), which is symbolic of the “church”—the collection of the saints.

Restored Israel is a spiritual flock led by the “Good Shepherd” (Isa. 40:9-11; Ezek. 34:23-31). She is protected by a metaphorical cloud by day and fire by night (Isa. 4:5,6), reminiscent of the first Israel. The Israel of God was prophesied to one day to be the wife of God “forever” (Hos. 2:19-23). God married and divorced ancient Israel for infidelity. At present, God in Christ is engaged to His future bride—the new Israel (II Cor. 11:2).

So many Christians today mistake the identity of restored Israel, just as the Jews have always missed Jesus. Many think the Jewish nation founded in 1948 fulfills the words of the prophets. But how could

that be? Have the Jews been ransomed from spiritual slavery to sin and forgiven? Have they entered into a new covenant with God? Are they watered by the Holy Spirit? How could one of the most armed nations in the world be described as living peacefully? Are they shepherded by Christ? Of course not! That is why they are not the Israel of God. There is so much confusion concerning end time prophecy because of the ideas put forth by pop eschatologists who base their beliefs on this error that says the Jewish state's existence is fulfilled prophecy.

Be glad and rejoice at the true fulfillment of the prophets, which allows all Christians to be citizens of a new Israel, along with all of its blessings.