



GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE

QUEST LESSON G-3

The Problem: Dispensationalists are Christians who, to a greater or lesser extent, follow the teachings of J. N. Darby (1800-1882), one of the leaders of an English religious group known as the Brethren. Darby made numerous overseas lecture tours during which he succeeded in convincing leading and influential adherents of other denominations that his Biblical interpretations were correct. An outline of Darby's teachings is given in the introduction to Lesson G-2.

Darby's modern counterparts believe as follows on the question of Israel and the Christian Church:

1. The establishment of the nation Israel in 1948 began the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies in regard to the return of the Jews to their own land a short time before the second coming of Christ. Hal Lindsey wrote in his book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*: "The one event which many Bible Students in the past overlooked was this paramount prophetic sign: Israel had to be a nation again in the land of its forefathers." (Zondervan, 1970, p. 43). John F. Walvoord, a recent leader of the premillennial dispensationalists, wrote: "All the major prophets and practically all the minor prophets have Messianic sections picturing the restoration and glory of Israel in this future kingdom." ["The Historical Context of Premillennialism," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 108 (1951), 154.]
2. One of the terms of the Abrahamic covenant was the unconditional promise of God that Israel would have everlasting possession of the land of Palestine. In his book, *Israel and the Nations in Prophecy*, Richard W. DeHaan wrote: "The descendants of Abraham were given the land of Canaan in a free, unconditional, and unchangeable grant from God." (Zondervan, 1968, p. 93). Dispensationalist interpreters of the Bible regard the Mosaic covenant as conditional, by contrast with the Abrahamic covenant which is unconditional. Hence, the promise of the land through Moses was subject to the condition of obedience to God. But the promise of the land to Abraham was unconditional, so that, irrespective of Israel's spiritual failure and rejection of the Messiah, the land of Palestine will, at the end of time, be fully restored to the Jews, and all the covenant promises to them as a chosen nation will be fulfilled. (See John F. Walvoord, "The Abrahamic Covenant and Premillennialism," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vols. 108, 109, 1951, 1952)
3. When Jesus was on earth, He offered the earthly kingdom to the Jews. Since they rejected it, the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies in regard to their rulership of Palestine and predominance over the nations could not be immediately put into effect. Of necessity there came a gap of centuries during which the Christian Church has played a separate and distinctive role designed by God. But this role is not a spiritual fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies regarding Israel. The period of Christian Church history is a parenthesis, not foreseen by the Old Testament prophets, and not designed to fulfill their forecasts. This period of the Church will come to an end when the Christian saints are secretly raptured seven years before the glorious appearance of Christ in the clouds of heaven.
4. The last seven years of this earth's history before the glorious second coming of Christ are the final week of Daniel's 70 week prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27). This has been discussed in the preceding lesson (G-2). During this 7 year period will occur the great tribulation predicted by Daniel and Christ.
5. For the first 3 1/2 years of the 7-year tribulation, the Jews will have a covenant with the Antichrist and will be permitted to carry on their religion unmolested. DeHaan explains: "He [Antichrist] will make a seven-year pact with Israel... The Jews, at least a representative group, will be in the land of Palestine, and they will feel secure in this agreement with the wicked prince, who is the Antichrist. He will honor this contract for about three and one-half years. During that time, a temple will be built by the Jews, and they will set up some form of worship.

Suddenly, however, this world dictator will turn against them, and on the very wing of their temple he will erect an image which he will insist they must worship... Other Scripture passages... indicate that an image will be erected by the coming Antichrist, and that refusal to worship this idol will trigger a period of dreadful persecution, primarily for the Jews, but for all the other inhabitants of the earth as well." (Israel and the Nations in Prophecy, pp. 88-89).

6. During the 7-year tribulation a literal 144,000 Jews, who have been genuinely converted to Christianity, will evangelize the world and win a multitude of converts to the faith. DeHaan continues: "The great tribulation, which will follow the rapture of the Church, will be the means of Israel's conversion and this will precede the glorious second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth. During the tribulation, the world will experience its most grievous time in history... The brighter side of the picture can be seen in chapter 7 of Revelation. God seals 144,000 Jews who apparently turn to Him in genuine faith early in the tribulation, and they become His witnesses. God supernaturally 'protects them, and they boldly proclaim His message. As a result of their ministry, a great multitude from every nation, kindred and tongue are saved (Revelation 7:9), many of whom will die in that day of trouble (Revelation 7:14). God, however, will preserve a remnant of saved Jews who will enter the millennium. The 144,000 who are sealed in Revelation 7 are still intact when we see them in Revelation 14. This is the nucleus of a godly remnant who will welcome our Lord when He comes to reign." (Israel and the Nations in Prophecy, p. 99).
7. The Jews and other peoples who refuse to accept Christ during the 7-year tribulation will be put to death, either during the tribulation or at the glorious appearance of Christ. They will not be raised to enjoy the millennium with Christ on this earth. During the millennium (1,000 years) Christ will reign from Jerusalem, and the Old Testament prophecies regarding the full and complete restoration of Israel will be finally fulfilled. Israel as the chosen nation will be the center of the earth, and all other nations of the saved will give their allegiance to her. "The temple is to be rebuilt and the sacrifices re-instituted. The relation of this sacrificial system to the death of Christ is 'commemorative,' not anticipatory. By temple ritual and a system of sacrifice Israel is to commemorate the wonders of the death of Christ, even as she unknowingly did by way of anticipation in the Old Testament." [Clarence B. Bass, Backgrounds to Dispensationalism (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1960), p. 44].

It will be observed that the whole scenario depends upon the idea of the unconditional promise of the land in the Abrahamic covenant and the unconditional promise of complete restoration of the Jews after the period of Babylonian captivity. The northern ten tribes were taken captive by Assyria in 722 B.C., and Judah was taken captive in three invasions by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (605, 597, 586 B.C.). Old Testament prophets predicted that, though God's chosen people were thus punished for their sin, they would once more be restored to the promised land and would be given national greatness and glory. The Dispensationalists regard these prophecies as unconditional. They are certain to be fulfilled literally, despite the Jews' rejection of Christ and the giving of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

The question must be settled by a careful study of the Scriptures. What does the Bible say about the Abrahamic covenant? Was it the same covenant given through Moses? Was the promise of the land conditional or unconditional? Did Israel fulfill the conditions laid down by the Lord? Did Jesus Christ offer the Jews an earthly kingdom or a heavenly one? What happened to their chosen nation status after they had rejected Christ? Were they still regarded by heaven as the chosen people for whom the Old Testament promises would be literally fulfilled? Or were they rejected as the chosen people? Is the period of Christian Church history an unforeseen parenthesis? Is it God's plan to restore Israel to national greatness, or are Jews in the Gospel age promised a part in the heavenly kingdom on exactly the same basis as other believers, by an individual acceptance of Christ as Savior and Lord? These are the questions that we must address in this study.

Objectives

First, we note the Scriptural teaching that the promises of the Abrahamic covenant were conditional upon the faithfulness of the people.

Second, it will become apparent that God's promises to restore the land to Israel after the captivity were conditional.

Third, we shall see that Israel failed to fulfill God's conditions and sealed her doom by rejecting Christ as the Messiah.

Fourth, we discover that the Christian Church is spiritual Israel which has replaced literal Israel as God's chosen people.

Fifth, the promises of the Abrahamic covenant are fulfilled to Christian believers, both Jews and Gentiles

I. The Promises Of The Abrahamic Covenant Were Conditional

There is no Scriptural basis for the argument that the Abrahamic covenant promises were unconditional while those of the Mosaic covenant were conditional. The terms which God offered Abraham are identical to those which He offered Israel at Sinai. Therefore, the blessings promised to Israel at Sinai on condition of their obedience to the covenant, and the curses promised on condition of their disobedience all apply to the Abrahamic covenant just as surely as they did to the Mosaic covenant. The promise of the land to Abraham applied to his literal descendants only on the condition that they remained true to God. The loss of the land resulted from their disobedience. As we turn now to the Scriptures, we shall note that these thoughts are well substantiated.

The Word

1. What did God call His covenant with Abraham? Who in the future were to be offered the same covenant? Genesis 17:7, 13, 19.
2. What promise in regard to the land was given to Abraham and his descendants? What land was Abraham really looking for? Genesis 15:18; 17:8; Hebrews 11:8-10.
3. What did Abraham do that resulted in the temporary loss of the everlasting covenant blessing? What kind of covenant was he then living under? Galatians 4:22-31.
4. Which covenant did the Lord offer the children of Abraham at Sinai? What were the conditions for the continuance of the divine blessings? Exodus 19:4-6; Galatians 3:16-18; 1 Chronicles 16:14-18; (compare Psalm 105:8-11).
5. Why was God's everlasting covenant changed into an "old covenant"? Jeremiah 31:31-33; Hebrews 8:6-12.
6. What would happen to Israel's land if they did not continue to maintain the everlasting covenant? Deuteronomy 29:9-13, 22-26; 28:15, 33, 38-39, 49-52, 63-67.

Explanation: We will list the main points that emerge from a study of the above passages as follows:

1. God's approach to Abraham as recorded in Genesis 17 suggests that there were conditions to the promises He made. The covenant could only be everlasting to Abraham and his descendants if they were loyal to these conditions. God said to Abraham, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. 'And I will make my covenant between me and thee....' (Genesis 17:1-2). After giving the promise of the land for an "everlasting possession" (vs. 8), the Lord added the condition: "And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations." (vs. 9). Then the Lord gave the command that every male in Israel was to be circumcised. It is clear that circumcision was to be the outward sign of the heart relationship between Israelites and their God. What God really wanted was that they be circumcised in heart (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6), a spiritual experience that is taught in the New Testament just as clearly as it is in the Old (Romans 2:25-29). Abraham and his seed could not walk before God and be perfect merely by practicing outward circumcision. The Lord was looking for a heart relationship with His people, of which the practice of circumcision was to be the outward sign. Paul gives the real meaning of circumcision when he says: "And he [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all those that believe, though they are not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also" (Romans 4:11).

Two chapters before Genesis 17 we are told: "And he [Abraham] believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). Then is recorded how God made the covenant with Abraham (verses 7-21). Suppose Abraham had not believed in the Lord and received the gift of His righteousness, would God have made

the covenant with him, giving him the promise of the land? Of course not! And suppose Abraham had refused God's command that he should be perfectly obedient to His will (Genesis 17:1), would the Lord have restated His promises and given him the sign of circumcision? Since circumcision was the sign of a spiritual experience already enjoyed by Abraham, we can only conclude that, if he had not had that experience, the Lord would never have commanded him to practice the sign. And suppose Abraham or his seed had refused to keep God's covenant (Genesis 17:9), would the promises of God have been fulfilled for them? The suggestion in Genesis 17 is obviously that everything depended on the faithfulness to God of both Abraham and his descendants. Therefore, the promise of the land of Palestine was conditional upon the faithfulness of the Israelites.

2. When Abraham had a son by Hagar, he spoiled God's plan of miraculously demonstrating that salvation is by faith not by human works. Paul refers to this as Abraham's lapse from the everlasting covenant relationship (Galatians 4:22-31). Only by breaking off the relationship that was opposed to God's will could Abraham renew his covenant standing with God and become again the heir to the divine promises.
3. The evidence that the Lord offered Israel at Sinai the same covenant relationship that He had given Abraham is very clear:
 - a. The Lord offered them "my covenant" (Exodus 19:5). This is the same "my covenant" spoken of 9 times in Genesis 17. There is no evidence that it was anything different.
 - b. The New Testament teaches that the Abrahamic covenant applied to Israel at Sinai. "And this I say that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of no effect" (Galatians 3:17). So the giving of the law at Sinai did not change the terms of the covenant; salvation by faith.
 - c. God commanded His covenant "to a thousand generations" (1 Chronicles 16:15). This is the covenant "which he made with Abraham, and of his oath unto Isaac; and hath confirmed the same to Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant" (verses 16-17). Israel was given the same everlasting covenant that was given to Abraham.
4. Although God offered the Israelites the same righteousness by faith relationship that he gave Abraham, they did not make a genuine heart response. They said, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8; 24:3, 7), but their hearts were not in their words (Deuteronomy 5:29). They broke God's covenant (Jeremiah 31:32) by refusing the experience of Deuteronomy 6:4-6, and by turning to their own man-made gods. God found fault with His chosen people (Hebrews 8:8), "because they continued not in my covenant" (verse 9). The faulty covenant of man's own works, in which he is separated from a faith-grace union with God, is called the "first," or "old" covenant (Hebrews 8:7, 13), by contrast with the "new" covenant (verse 8) which is the Abrahamic or everlasting covenant of righteousness by faith in Christ.

(Note: In the New Testament the ceremonial law is sometimes included in the first or old covenant (Hebrews 7:21-22; 9:1, 11, 15) not because it was to be the means by which Israelites earned salvation, but because it was necessary in view of the people's dismal failure to maintain faith. The people's old covenant experience necessitated a simple visual aid to faith in the ceremonial law. This was an imperfect analogy of the future ministry of Jesus Christ. It was to be performed by faith, but since it was necessitated by the people's spiritual failure, and since it was an imperfect foreshadowing of the Messiah's work, it was regarded as part of the first or old covenant. As such it was done away with at the Cross.)

5. If Israel, who inherited the Abrahamic covenant promises (1 Chronicles 16:14-18), did not continue to maintain their covenant relationship with God, they would be cursed physically and materially, and expelled from the promised land. The message of Deuteronomy 29:9-13 is that "this covenant" (verse 9) given to Israel was the same one "sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (verse 13). Faithfulness to it would result in great blessings (Deuteronomy 28:1-14), but unfaithfulness would bring upon them terrible curses (verses 15-

64). The Lord could not have been more explicit; rejection of His presence in the heart and of obedience to His commands would result in expulsion from the land of promise (verses 63-64).

6. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary outlines simply and beautifully what might have been for Israel as a nation if only they had continued in God's covenant:

"In the prophetic picture God is represented as gathering the nations to Jerusalem (Joel 3:1, 23; Zeph. 3:6-8; cf. Eze. 38:16, 18-23; 39:1-7). He has a controversy with them because they have rebelled against His authority (Jer. 25:31-33), and He will judge (Joel 3:9-17) and destroy them there (Isa. 34:1-8; 63:1-6; 66:15-18). Any 'nation and kingdom' that would 'not serve' Israel was to 'perish' (Ch. 60:12). "Those nations that rejected the worship and service of the true God, were to be dispossessed' (COL 290), and Israel would 'inherit the Gentiles' (Ch. 54:3).

The earth would thus be rid of those who opposed God (Zech. 14:12, 13). He would be 'king over all the earth' (vs. 3, 8, 9), and His dominion 'from sea even to sea,' even to 'the ends of the earth' (Ch. 9:9, 10). In that day 'every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King the Lord of hosts' (Zech. 14:16; cf. Ch. 9:73 Isa.

Continued obedience was necessary to the continuance of divine favor, whereas persistent disobedience must inevitably culminate in the rejection of the Jewish nation as God's chosen instrument for carrying out the divine plan (Deut. 28:15-68). Owing to the failure of the Jews as God's chosen people, many of the prophecies of the Old Testament, such as those affirming the worldwide mission of Israel and the ingathering of the Gentiles (see Gen. 12:3; Deut. 4:6-8; Isa. 2:2-5; 42:6-7; 49:6; 52:10; 56:6, 7; 60:1-3; 61:9; 62:2; Zech. 2:11; 8:22, 23; etc.), those pointing forward to the eternal rest in Canaan (Isa. 11:6-9; 35; 65:17-25; 66:20-23; Jer. 17:25; Eze. 37; 40-48; Zech. 2:6-12; 14:4-11), and those promising deliverance from her enemies (Isa. 2:10-21; 24-26; Eze. 38; 39; Joel 3; Zeph 1; 2; Zech. 9:9-17; 10-14 etc.), have never been and can never be fulfilled to them as a nation." (Vol. 4, pp. 30, 34)

Relevance: The promises of the Abrahamic covenant could have been fulfilled to Israel, and she could have become the predominant nation on earth, used of God to preserve His truth and to disseminate His love. But the original promises to Abraham, repeated through Moses, were conditional upon the continuing faithfulness of the people. This is why there remains no divine purpose in the restoration of Israel to the land of Palestine.

II. God's Promises To Restore The Land To Israel After The Captivity Were Conditional

Dispensationalists use the predictions made by the prophets regarding Israel's restoration after the Babylonian captivity as unconditional divine promises. Once again we shall discover the Bible teaching that all such promises were conditional upon the faithfulness of the people.

The Word

7. Under what conditions did the Lord promise to restore Israel to their own land after a period of captivity? Deuteronomy 30:1-10.
8. What kind of people did the Lord wish the Israelites to be after they had been in captivity and then returned to their own land? Ezekiel 36:24-33; 37:21-28.
9. After the restoration from captivity, did the Israelites obey God? What was Nehemiah afraid would come upon them? Nehemiah 13:15-18.
10. What kind of covenant with God would have established Israel as His people forever? Jeremiah 31:31-36.

Explanation: The condition under which the Lord would return His people from the land of their captivity is stated quite simply: "And shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; that then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee." (Deuteronomy 30:2-3). Having been restored to the promised land, Israel would be prospered if they would obey the commandments of the Lord (verse 10). God visualized a faithful, obedient people who had learned the lessons of history so thoroughly that they would not wish to depart from His service again. They were to be cleansed from sin, filled with His Spirit, and in conformity with the requirements laid down in His law (Ezekiel 36:24-33). "Neither

shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with any of their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions" (Ezekiel 37:23). Then the Lord would make an "everlasting covenant" with them, dwelling perpetually among them, and blessing them with spiritual and national superiority (verses 26-28).

Shortly after their restoration to Palestine, the Jews began breaking their covenant with God, failing to observe His Sabbath day, and living contrary to His will. Nehemiah expressed his concern that God's wrath would once again be brought upon Israel (Nehemiah 13:18), and he took very decided steps to ensure that the people would reform their ways (compare verses 23-25).

The covenant that Jeremiah declared would be made with Israel after the captivity was a repetition of the everlasting covenant given to Abraham (Jeremiah 31:31-36). It contained both conditions and promises. God's law was to be written on the people's hearts, so that they would know Him and serve Him (Jeremiah 31:33-34). This was the condition that would result in Israel never being rejected as the Lord's faithful people (verse 36-37). But what if the people refused to allow the Lord to come into their hearts by His Spirit, to obey His law, and walk only in His ways? Of course, His promises could not then be fulfilled. Just as the curses of Deuteronomy 28 were fulfilled when Israel and Judah were taken captive by the Assyrians and Babylonians, so once again His unfaithful people would be rejected and scattered.

During the Babylonian captivity, Daniel actually predicted that, because of their rejection of the Messiah, probation would close for Israel as a nation, and it would be dismembered by its enemies (Daniel 9:24-27). As we shall see, there was no promise of restoration after Daniel's 490-year prophecy came to an end in A.D. 34.

Relevance: The same conditions and promises are for us today as for ancient Israel. If we are willing to live for God, allowing His Spirit to abide in our hearts, He will preserve us for eternity; even though in this life we may have suffering, sickness, and calamity. But if we reject Christ, and live according to worldly ways and standards, we can only expect ultimate eternal loss. Such was the experience of ancient Israel.

III. Israel Failed To Fulfill The Conditions

The centuries after Israel's return from Babylonian captivity were notable for increased apostasy, deepening moral and spiritual degradation, along with growing national pride and political corruption.

The Word

11. Writing after the captivity, what did Malachi say about Israel's failure to accept God's plan and obey His will? Malachi 1:6; 2:2, 8, 9, 11, 17.
12. How did Jesus regard the Jewish leaders of His day? Mark 7:6-9.
13. What great sin sealed the doom of Israel as God's chosen nation? John 1:11; 19:15.
14. How did Jesus predict God's irrevocable rejection of Israel as the chosen nation? Matthew 21:37-43; 23:37-38.

Explanation: Malachi forcefully denounces the moral and spiritual corruption of restored Israel. There can be no doubt that in the centuries before the time of Jesus the nation descended to the depths of spiritual perversion, so that the Lord could not bless His chosen people. Jesus referred to the arrogance, legalism, and hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders. Man's laws had taken the place of God's laws, and religion had degenerated into a means of self-aggrandizement and money making.

Finally, the nation rejected Jesus Christ as the Messiah, claiming, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). Little did the Jewish people realize that when they asserted, "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matthew 27:25), they were inviting heaven's final rejection of their nation as the chosen people and a repeated outpouring of the divine curses stipulated by Moses (Deuteronomy 28). Jesus' prediction came true: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:43). "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:38).

No assurance of reinstatement as God's chosen people was given to Israel after they had rejected Christ. Daniel's predicted period of probation finally came to an end with the stoning of Stephen (A.D. 34), and the Christian Church assumed its role as the international custodian of the oracles of the faith.

Jesus never offered Israel of His day an earthly kingdom, as the dispensationalists claim. He emphasized the spiritual nature of the kingdom. "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight" (John 18:36). The kingdom of grace in human hearts would merge at the end of history into the kingdom of glory (Matthew 25:34). When the people tried to take Him by force and make Him a king, He determinedly refused (John 6:15). Had the Jews accepted Him, undoubtedly they would have been retained as the chosen people to make known His salvation in the earth and to prepare the world for the eternal kingdom. But Jesus' purpose was not to establish an earthly kingdom at that time.

[Note: The dispensationalists' distinction between the "kingdom of heaven" as the earthly Israelite kingdom planned by God, and the "kingdom of God" as the heavenly kingdom for all who believe is quite unbiblical. George E. Ladd comments: "It is to be noted at the outset that the two expressions seem to be quite interchangeable in the Gospels. . . A few illustrations must suffice. In Matthew, Jesus begins his ministry with the announcement that the kingdom of heaven is near (Matt. 4:17), but in Mark he announces that the kingdom of God has come near and men are to repent and believe in the Gospel (Mark 1:15). In Matthew, the twelve offer the kingdom of heaven to Israel (Matt. 10:6-7), but in Luke they offer the kingdom of God (Luke 9:2). If in Matthew the Sermon on the Mount announced as the law of the kingdom of heaven is the law of the future earthly kingdom (Matt. 5:3), in Luke it is announced as something else, the law of the kingdom of God (Luke 6:20). According to Matthew the parables portray the mystery of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13:11), but in Mark (4:11) and in Luke (8:10), it is the kingdom of God. If in Matthew a Jewish remnant is to announce at the end of the age the good news that the earthly kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, is about to be set up (Matthew 24:14), then Mark says something quite different that the gospel must be preached first to all the nations (Mark 13:10)." Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God [Grand Rapids Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1952], pp. 107-108)].

Relevance: Israel's failure permanently disqualified it as the chosen nation of God. Is there any danger that Christians today might repeat Israel's failure and find themselves disowned by heaven?

IV. The Christian Church Is Spiritual Israel Which Has Replaced Literal Israel As God's Chosen People

This fact is very clearly taught in the New Testament

The Word

15. Who are Abraham's seed now, the inheritors of the promises made to him? Galatians 3:9, 27-29; Romans 9:6-8, 23-26.
16. Who does God consider to be the acceptable "Jew"? Romans 2:27-29.
17. What does Christ do for both Jews and non-Jews? 1 Corinthians 1:23-24.
18. What people have been chosen in place of Israel to fulfill God's purposes on earth? 1 Peter 2:9-10.
19. How many nationalities of the earth may now be included among God's chosen people? Acts 10:34-35; 11:18.

Explanation: We will say a brief word about each passage in turn:

Galatians 3:9, 27-29: Those who have Abraham's faith receive the Blessings promised to him. Jews and non-Jews who have received Christ as Savior and Lord are counted as Abraham's "seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Romans 9:6-8, 23-26: The birth of Isaac was a miracle of God. His represented the fact that salvation is by faith, not by human effort. The true Israel of God are those who have faith in Christ, not those who are the natural children of Abraham. God has called all believers; "not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles" (verse 24). Now Hosea 2:23 is fulfilled; Christian believers of all nations have now replaced literal Israel as God's chosen people.

Romans 2:27-29: The "uncircumcision" refers to the Gentile Nations. If they obey God's law by faith in Christ, having His Spirit living in their hearts, they are counted as "Jews" and numbered among God's faithful ones. Jews who do not have the same spiritual experience are not acceptable to God.

1 Corinthians 1:23-24: The message of "Christ crucified" is Power and wisdom to both Jews and non-Jews who believe. The method of salvation is identical for both classes.

Peter 2:9-10: Peter was writing to faithful Christian believers in Gentile countries (1 Peter 1:1-2). Christian believers of all nationalities are now God's chosen people, even though formerly this was not the case. Peter could not have been more specific in his terminology: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people."

Acts 10:34-35: Because of the vision he had received from God (verses 9-16), dramatizing that the Lord receives believers of any nationality, and the manner in which the Lord led him to the household of Cornelius, Peter was convinced that "in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (verse 35).

Relevance: There is no suggestion in the New Testament that the promises to Israel as a nation were unconditional and, therefore, will be literally fulfilled in the future. The message emerges repeatedly that the Christian church, comprising all genuine believers in Jesus Christ, has replaced Israel as the chosen nation, and that spiritual "Jews" are believers in Christ irrespective of their national heritage.

V. The Promises Of The Abrahamic Covenant Are Fulfilled To Christian Believers, Both Jews And Gentiles

The fact that the Abrahamic covenant is the one under which all Christians are to live is a prominent New Testament teaching.

The Word

20. What covenant does Christ offer to all peoples of earth today? Compare Hebrews 8:6-12 with Jeremiah 31:31-33 and Deuteronomy 6:4-6. Compare Genesis 15:6 with Romans 4:23-25.
21. What spiritual experience, which is the essence of the everlasting covenant relationship, is assured to both Jews and non-Jews? Romans 10:9-13.
22. How does Paul emphasize that salvation is still available for individual Jews who choose to believe in Christ as Savior and Lord? Romans 11:1, 2, 5, 7, 14, 20, 23, 25, 26.
23. During the millennium, where are the saved who have survived the tribulation, in an earthly kingdom or a heavenly one? Revelation 7:9-10, 13-15; compare 11:19; 15:5; 20:4.

Explanation: The heart of the covenant offered to all Christians is stated simply in Hebrews 8:10: "I [the Lord] will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." This is the same covenant promise that was given to Israel through Jeremiah (31:31-33). In fact, Hebrews 8:10 quotes Jeremiah 31:33. The same experience of God's law being written on the believer's heart because of his covenant relationship with Him was the very essence of the covenant between God and the Jews (Deuteronomy 6:4-6). Since by faith Abraham obeyed God's law (Genesis 26:5), we can only conclude that the same experience of righteousness by faith was the very heart of the Abrahamic covenant. This conclusion is validated by a comparison of Genesis 15:6 and Romans 4:23-25. Because Abraham believed God, righteousness was imputed to him (or bestowed upon him). Paul's message is that, if we believe as Abraham did, we too will have righteousness imputed to us. How is it imputed? The presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is Christ's presence, and this divine indwelling is righteousness in the heart (Romans 8:9-10).

Abraham's covenant experience is to be that of every believer in Christ, whatever his nationality. The same truth is re-emphasized in chapter 10 of Romans. Righteousness is God's gift to the believer in Christ (verse 10). This identical experience is for Jews and non-Jews, for, in this respect, "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek" (verse 12).

The logical conclusion is that, although Israel is no longer God's chosen nation because this status has been transferred to the Christian Church, individual Jews can be saved from sin and given eternal life on exactly the same basis as all Gentiles, by accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This is the message of Romans chapter 11. The attempt to make the chapter teach that the nation Israel is still God's chosen nation is quite futile. Space forbids a detailed interpretation of the chapter. But note a few major points: (i) Some faithful Jews who believe in Christ are counted among the elect of God (verses 5, 7); the rest of the nation are blind. (ii) All but the believing remnant have been cast away (verse 15). (iii) The majority of unbelieving Jews are likened to branches that have been broken off from a parent olive tree (verse 17-20; compare John 15:5. The parent stock is Christ). (iv) The only way rejected Jews can be acceptable to God again is by believing in Christ (verse 23). (v) Believing Jews are grafted back into the parent stock again in the same way as believing Gentiles (verse 24). (vi) "All Israel" that will be saved (verse 26) is not a reference to the literal nation Israel. Not even the dispensationalists believe that the entire nation Israel will be saved. In the context of the chapter, "all Israel" refers to those Jews who are elect because "they abide not still in unbelief" (verse 23), and those Gentiles who, because of belief in Christ, have been grafted into the parent olive tree. "The fullness of the Gentiles" (verse 25) refers to the total number of Gentiles who will become believers in Christ before the end of time. These Gentiles plus the Christian Jews comprise "all Israel," in the New Testament sense of spiritual Israel which has inherited the promises to Abraham.

During the millennium the saved of all ages, including faithful Jews who lived before the Cross and believing Christians who have lived since then, are all in the heavenly Kingdom. Revelation 7 represents them as "before the throne of God," serving "him day and night in his temple" (verse 15). The temple of God is in heaven, not on this earth (Revelation 11:19; 15:5). Not until the end of the millennium does the holy city, New Jerusalem, descend from heaven to this earth (compare Revelation 21:2; 20:9). During the millennium all those who have died believing, including those who have passed through the great tribulation caused by the beast and his image, are sitting upon thrones in the heavenly temple judging lost men and angels (compare 1 Corinthians 6:2-3).

Relevance: The idea that the literal nation Israel will be completely restored at the end of history, so that during the millennium the Old Testament promises to Israel will be literally fulfilled, is an unbiblical teaching. Because the Jews rejected Christ, they lost their chosen nation status, lost the promise that the land of Palestine would be theirs forever, and forfeited their privilege of being the teachers of the Gospel to the unbelieving world. Our Lord bestowed upon His Church in all the world these covenant promises. The land will indeed belong to His people, but it will not be limited to Palestine. It will be first the heavenly Canaan during the millennium, followed by the earth made new at the end of the 1,000 years. Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).

Whatever your national or racial heritage, salvation is for you if you believe in Christ. Do you accept Him just now as your Savior from sin? Do you trust Him to fulfill for you individually the eternal promises made to true believers?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. The promise of the land to Abraham was unconditional.
 - b. The Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants are not the same.
 - c. The nation Israel today exists as a fulfillment of prophecy regarding restoration of the Jews to the promised land.
 - d. Jews and Gentiles today are on exactly the same footing with God. If they believe in Christ they are saved; if they do not believe, they are lost.
2. In the light of our study, examine the passages in the book of Revelation that speak of Jews. Consider how contrary to New Testament teaching and unrealistic a literal interpretation of these passages would be. (See Revelation 2:9; 3:9; 7:4-8).