

Israel to its previous glory. But the restoration prophesied by Ezekiel and Isaiah looked to the return of the exiles from Babylon. They would come "from north, south, east and west," figurative language, though the Jews were scattered to many lands.

Jesus told the three disciples, "Elijah comes and will restore all things" (Matt 17:11). John the Baptist came to restore things spiritual, to revive faith in men's hearts and prepare them for the coming of the Messiah Christ.

Most Jews rejected Christ's gospel, just as they had rejected their Messiah (John 1:11). Paul said that only "a remnant of Israel was being saved." Before the Day of the Lord "the full measure" of Jews would come into God's Kingdom.

FF Bruce says "all Israel (in Paul's discourse, Rom 11:26) means the Jews as a collective whole, not the numerical sum of all individual Jews" (Int'l Bible Commentary, p. 1338).

We must conclude with Paul that "Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2). This is God's day for Jews and Gentiles alike. Man's opportunity to be 'saved' is now, during God's day of grace!

"Saved" in this context must mean born again by the Spirit of God as it does in John 3:3,5; Rom 11:11 and Rom 11:14.

The question of a political future for 'converted' or a restored nation of Israel is not addressed here, nor anywhere else in the Bible.

Dr. FF Bruce comments: "At present the mass of unbelieving Jews have a dual character in God's eyes. Now they are temporary objects of His displeasure, having opposed and rejected the gospel. This was to the benefit of the Gentiles" (Rom 11:11, 32).

TALK ABOUT

1. God has done His part. What is your part? 2. Why is NOW the time of God's favor (2 Cor 6:2)? 3. Have you made the most important decision in your life? 4. Have you told your friends about Jesus Christ?

"Ye chosen seed of Israel's race,
Ye ransomed from the fall,
Hail Him who saves you by His grace,
And crown Him Lord of all!" — John Rippon

Manna Publications

www.mannapublications.org

© Copyright, 2010, Fred Morris, Manna Publications (USA) Inc.

All rights reserved 3.30.2010

The Meaning of . . .

God's Church in the World



*Written by
Fred Morris*

To the Reader: Read the verses from the Bible first. If you don't have a Bible, study the words quoted from the Bible. Try to answer the questions in the TALK ABOUT sections. Ask a friend to study with you. You will be able to talk about the questions and both of you will learn about the Bible.

A NEW WORLD RELIGION

Arabia had rich resources and traded with the great nations like Rome, Egypt and Persia. There were many restless Bedouin tribes who did not share in the traders' wealth.

Most of these wild Arabian tribes worshipped their local gods. Against that setting, a local Bedouin named Muhammad, born in 570 AD in the city of Mecca, saw how to turn this human resource into a powerful religious force.

Muhammad mixed what he had learned from Judaism with his own tribal myths and formed a creed which became known as the Koran. His philosophy of Islam appealed to the restless hordes of uneducated Arabs. His followers were called Muslims and the center of their worship was Mecca.

At first Muhammad directed these warlike tribes against Arabs who would not convert. His followers attacked caravans and killed traders. They destroyed whole villages.

The great powers like Byzantium, Persia and Egypt ignored these shabby, poorly-armed Bedouins. The Roman Empire had its own problems. It had divided and Constantine had established himself as a ruler in Constantinople in the East.

HERACLIUS (610 – 641 AD)

Heraclius was born in 575 AD and ruled from 610 to 641 AD, he was born in Africa, the son of a ruling monarch. He sailed from Carthage and seized the throne of Constantine. The Persians seized Damascus, Antioch and Jerusalem. They did not stop until they had taken Alexandria in Egypt. Heraclius prepared to counter attack.

By 629 AD "Heraclius defeated the Persians on their own territory, recaptured all the lost provinces, and returned the True Cross to Jerusalem."

A few years later, Muhammad's hordes burst out of Arabia. Islam was on the march to what they believed was world conquest. The conquest was religious and military and the barbaric hordes persecuted Christians wherever they found them.

Probably most of the churches Paul founded in Asia Minor, to whom he wrote the letters contained in the New Testament, were destroyed in this period.

TALK ABOUT

1. Why did the great nations want to control Israel? **2.** Who was Muhammad? **3.** What world religion did he establish? **4.** How did Islam

inheritance. His inheritance is a spiritual community. Jesus Christ reigns over His citizens in the Kingdom God is building. He reigns over His Kingdom now, but it is not yet complete. One day His Kingdom will be complete in heaven (Rev 21:1-6)

The Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ is built of "living stones," men and women who receive Him as their Savior and Lord (1 Peter 2:5). They are His body, the Christian Church (Eph 5:30). His Kingdom is forever (John 18:36; Dan 2:44).

TALK ABOUT:

1. What did the faith of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses reach to grasp (Heb 11:10)? **2.** What were each of these men commended for? **3.** When Jericho was destroyed, why did God save Rahab and her family (Read Joshua 2). **4.** What did the red cord in the window point to (Jos 2:17-19)? **5.** What great event are Old Testament saints waiting for (1 Thess 4:16-18)?

A NEW ISRAEL

Jesus offered men and women "the good news of the gospel" of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). Paul explained what the gospel of Jesus Christ is all about (1 Cor 15:3-4).

The Kingdom Jesus preached, the gospel offers to you and me. It is not physical. It is not a nation or a place or a future rule of Jesus Christ on the earth, but the rule of God in men's hearts, by His Spirit. It is a Kingdom of the Light of God's presence!

Paul wrote to the Christians in Colosse, "We give thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the Kingdom of Light. For He has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:12-14).

Let us take note: God's Kingdom is a Kingdom of Light. The Light is God's moral splendor (1 Tim 6:16). Those who share in the Kingdom share in the Light. It is said of them, "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father" (Matt 13:43).

TALK ABOUT

1. What does the Bible mean by the "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16)? **2.** Who will be made "one body" in the Kingdom of God (Eph 2:14-18)? **3.** Did Jesus tell of a kingdom on earth for the Jews?

A RESTORED NATION OF ISRAEL?

Many teach that there will be a restored nation of Israel. This is what the Pharisees and chief priests taught in Jesus' day. They refer to Ezekiel 36-38 and verses in Isaiah to support their claim that God will restore the nation of

TALK ABOUT

1. Was it God's will that Christ die on the cross (Luke 22:22)? 2. How could a man die for the world's sin (John 1:29)? 3. Did the Pharisees believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God?

HIS KINGDOM IS HIS GLORY

God's Kingdom is His glory. He sacrificed His only Son to gain it. He said to the subjects of His Kingdom, "You are precious and honored in My sight" (Isa 43:4-7). The subjects of God's Kingdom are His sons and daughter by faith in Jesus Christ: "Everyone who is called by My name, whom I created for My glory." He saved them by His grace and power and proclaims to the world that they are His treasured possession and His inheritance forever.

God told the prophet Isaiah, "My salvation will not be delayed. I will grant salvation to Zion and My splendor to Israel" (Isa 46:13).

The words told of time far in the future when men and women would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and come into God's Kingdom.

Though sinful and weak in their earthly condition, they are God's workmanship, created for His glory (Eph 2:10). God redeemed them at great cost and recreated them for His glory (1 Peter 1:19).

Because they are His people, He has called them by name (by His own name). "They are Mine," says the Lord Almighty, "In the day when I make up My treasured possession" (Mal 3:17).

God marked them for mercy (1 Peter 2:4). They are called by His name and bear it humbly. They will be resurrected to glory and enter an everlasting rest reserved for the people of God. Only a few in Israel entered that rest, and some will yet enter it (Heb 4:6-7).

Their dust is scattered in all the earth. At His call, the dust of their bodies will spring to life as resurrected bodies. Those who are still living and witnessing will be gathered together with them and we will all meet our Savior in the air (1 Thess 4:16 -18).

What a glorious prospect for the children of God!

TALK ABOUT

1. What is a remnant? 2. Who was Paul? 3. Paul met Jesus on the Damascus Road (Acts 9) and was.....? 4. Who was the Rock the Jews stumbled over? 5. Paul used Isaiah the prophet's word that only a remnant of Jews would be saved ___ True ___ False?

CHRIST WILL COME AND TAKE HIS INHERITANCE

King David wrote, "Blessed... are the people He (God) chose for His inheritance" (Psa 33:11). God sent the Son to earth to secure His

spread so quickly? 5. Once called the Near East because it was close to Europe, the Middle East is again the focus of world attention. Why? 6. When did Herodotus live? 7. Where did he come from?

THE ISRAEL OF GOD

The apostle Paul made a startling statement. Writing to believers in Rome he used the prophet Isaiah's words, "Though the number of Israelites be like the sand of the sea, only the remnant will be saved" (Isaiah 10:22-23; Rom 9:27). Paul said only a remnant of Jews would be born again by the Spirit of God and enter God's Kingdom.

Again he said, "They (the Jews) stumbled over 'the stumbling stone'." (Rom 31-32). Jesus Christ was the Rock that caused them to stumble. They rejected their Messiah because He did not fit their hopes. They looked for a national hero who would deliver the nation from the power of Rome which controlled Palestine at that time. Jesus was born into a humble family and brought them a message of "love your enemy and show him mercy" (Rom 12:20).

After preaching to his own brother Jews Paul said, "Israel experienced a hardening (of heart) in part until a full number of Gentiles has come in" to the body of Christ (Rom 11:25; Eph 2:13-18). He spoke of Gentiles and Jews coming into the Kingdom of God.

THE CHURCH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

At any one time in history, only a few people trusted God fully. They were distinct and different. They "loved God with all their hearts and with all their minds and with all their strength" as God had commanded (Deut 6:5).

Enoch "did not experience death; he could not be found because God had taken him away" (Heb 11:5). God spoke to Moses "face to face" (Ex 33:11). Elijah the prophet went to heaven in a chariot of fire. God spoke of all His people as "the apple of His eye" (Deut 32:10; Zech 2:8). The "apple of the eye" was the center, the most sensitive part that had to be protected.

Because the believers were always a small number among the nations, God called them "a remnant" (2 Kings 19:4-30; Isaiah 11:11; 14:22; 16:14; 37:4,31; Micah 2:12; Zech 8:12).

The remnant of godly people "feared the Lord and talked with each other" in small groups. "And the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in His presence" concerning them (Mal 3:10-11). "They are Mine," says the Lord Almighty, in the day when I make up My treasured possession."

God's treasure on earth is the Christian Church of all the men and women who "worship Him in Spirit and in truth" (John 4:24)..He has promised to gather them and add them to the believers of all ages who are already in

heaven. There all will gather around the throne in heaven and cry with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Rev 7:10).

When John in his vision looked at this great multitude of the redeemed, he saw that they came from "every nation, tribe, people and language..."

God is truly no respecter of persons. He has no favorites. He never asks, "What is your tribe or people group?" Rather He sends out His invitation for men to be saved into the world saying, "Come! Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take of the free gift of the water of life" (Rev 22:17).

TALK ABOUT

1. What did "a remnant" refer to in the Old Testament? 2. What is God's treasure, "the apple of His eye" (Deut 32:10)? 3. What did God command all men to do (Deut 6:5)? 4. Does it require faith to love God "with all your strength"? 5. When men had faith in God, He declared them? 6. After Moses received the law, did God require the same level of faith? 7. What has God promised all who believe (John 14:2-3)? 8. When will the Israel of God be made perfect?

A UNIVERSAL SAVIOR

God's promises to Israel always reached beyond them and included the Gentile nations. God called the Gentile people "aliens and strangers" (Ex 22:21), and a "mixed multitude" (Ex 12:38; Num 11:4). He loved the whole world, not just one people group and commanded Israel to take care of the aliens who lived among them (Ex 18:3; Isa 61:5). He sent the Son, Jesus Christ, to take His inheritance from among the nations. By the preaching of the gospel, God calls men and women out of every tribe and nation and gives them His Holy Spirit (Rev 7:9; Eph 1:13-14).

God said to Abraham, "Through your offspring all nations of the earth will be blessed..." (Gen 22:17). God did not say this blessing was for one nation and one people group only.

Again, God's promises always looked forward to Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ makes men and women "sons of Abraham and heirs of the promise" of eternal life (Gal 3:29).

Paul said these 'strangers' were brought into "citizenship in the Israel of God, through the blood of Christ" (Eph 2:11-18).

A UNIVERSAL GOSPEL OF CHRIST

God's voice goes out into all the world (Isa 45:22). His gospel call is still going out into the world. It will continue to do so until the end of time. Jesus said, "This gospel of the Kingdom will be preached...to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matt 24:14).

The Kingdom is a place where God rules. Because it is in the hearts of His people, it is an eternal reality and will never pass away. Daniel had a vision of this truth and said, "the God of heaven will set up a Kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms (of men) and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever" (Dan 2:44).

Jesus said to His disciples, "You are those who have stood by Me in My trials. And I confer on you a Kingdom...so that you may eat and drink at My table in My Kingdom..." (Luke 22:28-30).

At the end of time Jesus Christ, the King of God's Kingdom, will say to those who love Him, "Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Matt 25:34).

This brings us back to God's purpose in creating man. God made us for fellowship. He desires a close, personal relationship with the beings He created and all events move toward that goal.

TALK ABOUT

1. Why is the Christ's death on the cross central to all history? 2. What did Daniel say about God's Kingdom (Dan 2:44)? 3. Is this the same Kingdom of God which Jesus spoke of (Mark 1:15)?

FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION

From Genesis to Revelation, God has revealed His purpose to redeem men and women from sin. He gave the Son this commission, to redeem all who would believe. This is the goal of the "eternal covenant" which Christ sealed with His own blood (Heb 13:20).

Before Jesus went back to heaven He gave the same commission to His followers. He said to them, "All authority in heaven and in earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matt 28:18-19).

When this life is over, the same "eternal covenant" secures God's people a place in heaven. Peter said, "God the Father... in His great mercy... has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Just as life in Christ is our inheritance, so God is pleased to call those who love Jesus Christ His inheritance. When Israel sinned against the Lord, their future hung in the balance. Moses pleaded with God, "Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance" (Ex 34:9).

(Luke 2:1-3). Jesus Christ came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

TALK ABOUT

1. What is a remnant? 2. Who was Paul? 3. Paul met Jesus on the Damascus Road (Acts 9) and as.....? 4. Who was the Rock the Jews stumbled over? 5. Paul used Isaiah the prophet's word that only a remnant of Jews would be saved ___ True ___ False?

SETTLED IN THE COUNSELS OF HEAVEN

Before God created the heavens and the earth, the matter of our salvation from sin and evil. was settled in heaven. Indeed, every person's name was written down in “the Lamb's Book of Life” (Rev 13:8). God had complete knowledge of those who would become sons and daughters in His Kingdom (2 Cor 6:18; Eph 1:4).

In heaven the eternal Son spoke to the Father: “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You prepared for Me....Then I said, ‘Here am I – I have come to do Your will O God’.” (Heb 10:5-7). The law with its sacrifices and offering were not God's will or purpose. They were a stop-gap measure that pointed forward to Jesus Christ and His once-for-all sacrifice for sin (Heb 9:12).

Paul wrote to Titus about this “hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and at His appointed season He brought His word to light...” (Titus 1:2-3).

From “before the ages” the mystery of the Christian Church was settled in heaven, but “kept hidden in God” (Eph 3:9). God would take some from every tribe and nation and make them His own people (Rev 7:9). God gave Paul the task to “make known to everyone the administration of this mystery,” a mystery revealed to him by God's Spirit (Rom 16:25-27; Eph 2:11-18).

TALK ABOUT

1. Did God create the angels? 2. What did Jesus Christ come to earth to do (Luke 19:10)? 3. What is the hope of every Christian (Titus 1:2-3)? 4. Do you have this hope? 5. How can you be saved from your sins (Acts 16:31)?

GOD HAS PREPARED A KINGDOM

From eternity God prepared a Kingdom for His people. All who have faith in God's promise of a Redeemer are citizens in God's Kingdom. The Old Testament believers looked forward to the cross of Jesus Christ and all those who live in the last days look back to it. The cross of Christ is central to all history and forms its dividing line.

When men rejected God and evil took over, God sent a flood. After God told Noah and his family to go into the ark (Gen 7:7-10), God stood at the door and held it open for seven more days. But not one person more entered the ark. All were swept away and perished in the flood except Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives. They were the remnant which God saved out of that generation.

His people living in Judah and Jerusalem would not receive the word spoken through His prophet, so God said, “Through your own fault you will lose the inheritance I gave you (Jer 17:4). God sent an invader from the north (Jer 25). Nebuchadnezzar carried the people way to exile in Babylon (2 Kings 25:1-21).

Seventy years later, God brought a remnant out of Babylon. They returned to Jerusalem and built again the Temple that had been destroyed. In every age, and in the darkest times, God had a remnant of faith people who stood firm in the faith. Many centuries later Peter wrote, “He (God) is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:10)..

TALK ABOUT

1. Why the great conflict between Satan and Christ's followers? 2. Where is the ‘battle’ being fought (Eph 6:12)? 3. Paul called Satan the god of this.....(2 Cor 4:4)? 4. Tell some ways God speaks to us now (Heb 1:1)? 5. How long will the gospel be preached in the world (Matt 24:14)? 6. What will happen after all nations have heard the gospel (1 Thess 4:16-18)?

A UNIVERSAL CONFLICT

Remember what God told the serpent-Satan who deceived Eve, “I will put enmity between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel” (Gen 3:15).

In one of the greatest promises in the Bible, God set the stage for a conflict that will not end until Satan is cast into Hell (Rev 20:10). The woman's seed or offspring looked forward to Jesus Christ into the world. Paul said the woman's seed was one person, Jesus Christ (Gal 3:15), He is the head of many offspring who follow Him. Satan's seed are those who follow him (John 8:34). There will always be conflict between the two.

Jesus Christ crushed Satan's head (the center of his authority and power) when He died on the cross at Calvary. The writer said, “He, too, shared in their humanity so that by death He might him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free all those who all their lives were held in slavery by fear of death” (Heb 2:14-15).

The great conflict of the ages is between evil forces under Satan's control and God's people under Christ as Head. Paul said, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities,

against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12).

Satan is the great deceiver (2 Cor 4:4). He blinds the eyes and hardens the hearts of men, so that they do not believe the truth. So the battle is fought for the minds and hearts of the people.

Satan and his hosts fight to destroy Christ's Kingdom, but He (Christ) must reign until His enemies are destroyed.

Then He will hand the Kingdom back to the Father (1 Cor 15:24-28). When this is accomplished, the Father and the Son will be satisfied (Isa 53:10-11).

TALK ABOUT

1. How did Satan get a foothold in the earth? 2. We are all born sinners __ True _ False (Rom 3:23)? 3. Did God promise a Deliverer? When? 4. Why the conflict in the hearts of men and women, and who do Christians struggle against (Eph 6:12)?

MEN OF FAITH LOOKED FORWARD

All men of faith looked for God's 'promised land.' Abraham looked for a city whose architect and builder is God (Heb 12:10). Moses and the people of Israel marched forward to a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex 3:8). Both these nourishing foods are symbols of God's provision for His people. Grain and new wine also (Deut 33:28).

The prophet Ezekiel said, "You, O mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for My people Israel, for they will soon come home" (Ezek 36:8). He referred to their return from Babylon (Ezra 8:31-36)..

The prophet Isaiah called to the wandering people, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost" (Isa 55:1).

Jesus Christ promised all believers an "abundant life" here and now (John 10:10), and a place in the 'city' Abraham looked for. Jesus said to His followers, "I am going to prepare a place for you... I will come back and take you to be with Me" (John 14:2-3). All who love God look forward to Christ's Second Coming. They await a bodily resurrection when they will be raised in glory to live in God's city forever.

Some long to return to the land of their birth, or to Israel. Some have opportunity to do this, but it is far less important that it is to be ready to go to God's city, the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:1-6). There we will meet Abraham, Moses, Samuel, the prophets and all the great men and women of faith (Heb 11).

TALK ABOUT

1. Did God keep the promise He made to Abraham (Gen 22:17-18)? 2. Have

you left your homeland? Do you want to go back? 3. Have you left your old way of life to follow Jesus Christ? 4. What city did Abraham look forward to living in (Heb 11:10)? 5. What is the name of God's city (Rev 21:1-6)?

MEN OF FAITH WAIT FOR US

The world "was not worthy" of these heroes of faith or the beautiful lives they lived (Heb 11:38). "Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God has planned something better...." (Heb 11:39-40).

Men and women of faith wait for all those who have died since they lived and all who will die in Christ in the future. For they, with us, will receive something so much better than the Old Covenant had to offer. They wait for the better promises which came in Christ, "so that only together with us would they be made perfect." When Christ comes again we and they will rise to meet Our Savior and Lord in the air (1 Thess 4:16-18). He will present all believers (the body of Christ) to Himself, a radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph 5:27).

ISRAEL MY GLORY

Before God created the heavens and the earth, He created the angels. He asked Job, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation... and all the angels shouted for joy" (Job 38:4-7).

The angels serve God night and day, but God wanted more than perfect service. He wanted intelligent beings who would love Him freely and reflect His love. So, before time began, God planned for you and me. He had you and me on his heart. How wonderful God is!

When He prayed, Jesus expressed God's desire for fellowship: "Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am, and to see My glory, the glory You have given Me because You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

God created men and women "in His likeness" (Gen 1:27). Adam and Eve were created righteous and without sin, so that God could fellowship with them. And God walked with them in the cool of the evening in the beautiful garden in Eden (Gen 3:10).

Satan was, even then, a rebel spirit, banished from God's presence. God knew that His creation would fall into the hands of this evil tyrant. He knew Adam and Eve would not obey His command. And Adam's sin passed to every generation since that time.

God waited! At the right time, God sent the Son, born of a woman, in our likeness, to save the world from sin and evil. Christ was born in Bethlehem, in Judea, in the time of Herod. Luke pinpoints this moment in history for us