

# What About God's Chosen People?

## Part VI



By Philip E. Busby

**Question #21** - *“Is it true that the Jews are God's chosen people? I have a Christian friend who says the Jews were not God's chosen people.”*

In our our last segment, we really began to cover how Israel came to be known by just one tribe's name; and thus, the term “Jews.” We did this by covering the history of God's chosen nation leading down to the threat that even Jerusalem would fall to the Babylonians. We ended by talking about how a third son of king Josiah, named Zedekiah by the Babylonians, was put on the throne by that empire after they had removed the previous king of Judah, and how surely this king would turn to God in order to spare what was left of the nation still living on the land God had given them!

Now, we have talked a lot about the fact God was not interested in simply using whomever the people chose to be just because they were of the right bloodline, and this might be harder to see as the history moves into these more desperate times. The fact this sometimes is hard for people to see is what often causes some to think Israel was, at some point, totally rejected, or even had to be rejected as God's chosen nation. However, we need to understand that God had, by this time, established them as His nation. The challenge was no longer one of finding those in the bloodline for which to establish the nation, but the finding of those who could and would

maintain it. This meant not just looking for those individuals out of all the nation who could be used at each point, but using them in the capacity those individuals as a group made possible. This brings us back again to the fact that the chosen nation reflects us all. It's difficult in a sin-filled world to maintain a group of people of any size who can build and hold something as predominate as God wanted to through the Law and its establishment of the temple. This is where we should see there is a more basic truth of holiness. Just as we have discussed God not accepting just any person who was of the right bloodline, God could also not just accept whatever the established nation interpreted or was willing to perform as the Law.

That being true, the maintaining issue turned to not just looking for the individuals who could be used at the particular time, but, if that's what it took, maintaining the nation and waiting for those individuals who lived at future points in time who could be used. This issue is why we see the nation being narrowed down until they were known mostly by just one tribe's name; but even after that, we see what God was saying in Amos 9:8-10 about how He would sift the nation. The commitment to this people had been made. The promise and prophesy for David's line had been laid out. God says what He will do so all the world will know where to look to find the truth. God does what He says, and only God could know who to choose and what actions to take so as to accomplish all this in spite of man's sinful choices! That is an important point to remember, for the foundation of our understanding of why the Jews are God's chosen nation is that after the nation's full establishment, it was/is imperative the nation be maintained in order to be available for what God had prophesied their ultimate goal and gift to the world would be.

To insert a point here, if we believe that purpose was completed with the first appearance of The Messiah, then we are as misled by our Biblical ignorance as those who crucified Jesus. The only real difference is that at Jesus' first appearing, they believed Jesus was not The Messiah because He did not come as the powerful King of Israel the religious leaders believed The Messiah should be. Those who believe the nation's purpose ended, or was completed by Jesus' first coming as a humble servant to offer Himself for that position, are missing the fact His crucifixion is why prophesy does, in fact, tell us The Messiah will one day come as the powerful King of Israel. (Zech. 14) This is a terrible irony for a church whose entire existence was to be the proclaiming of the fact The Messiah has come and will return!

Getting back to the maintaining of the chosen nation, to do this, God would plead with the people to hold on and seek Him through all the turbulence their lack of following Him had created, and all the trouble mankind as a whole had chosen to create for the world. It was and/is God's desire to bless His chosen nation in every way, but maintaining them to do His work, which He called them to do, was more important than their comfort. This should stand as a lesson to all people all over the world as they study Israel's history. Our comfort is less important as individuals than the ultimate salvation of our souls!

One should remember God had sent prophets all through this process to give the people clear guidance as to what to do and how to get it right under whatever the current circumstances held. This is evident in maybe no more obvious way than looking at the work of the prophet Jeremiah, who faithfully continued to instruct of God's Words for each moment throughout all this turbulence of Judah and Jerusalem being under threat of destruction! Jeremiah's words would not end even after Jerusalem fell; for yes, even king Zedekiah would fail to follow the instructions of God that the nation should not care about the fact Babylon was a secular ruler over them, but they should care about maintaining God's Word and the representation He called the nation to fulfill!

God would allow not just Judah, as the last remaining portion of the nation on its land, to fall and be carried away, but specifically Jerusalem would be razed to the ground by the Babylonians. Most of those left of Judah would go into a captivity prophesied to last seventy years. Though it is true I almost can't help but weep every time I cover this part of the history, which tells us of how Jerusalem itself was destroyed, one of the greatest points in all this is that Jerusalem was truly turned to rubble! That might sound odd, but what this meant was that the city would not be left in debate as to whose city it was after the captivity. For all the strangers running to and fro in the land during the nation's absence, Jerusalem would not be one of those places inhabited by any of them. This was a good thing!

To insert yet another very relevant point to our question, some might argue this truth raises some questions about the Jews truly continuing to be God's chosen nation because this kind of protection did not take place when the temple, which stood during Jesus' time, was destroyed. This concept should become more clear as we go forward in this study. However, for now, suffice it to say that human history gives us a clear

record, available even to the common man who has eyes to see and ears to hear, that not only at that time but ever since that time, there has been a concerted effort to destroy the Jews, keep them out of Jerusalem, or at the very least, from rebuilding the temple. (Rev. 12:1-17) This raises the simple question of, why? Who would choose to do such a thing to one specific people for such a prolonged period of time, spending massive resources over several generations to see it through to the best of their ability? Who would continue such an effort even to this very day, after the Jewish people have not only survived as a people, but risen to rule over some of the land again, winning major wars almost no one thought they could win, to the extent of repossessing Jerusalem itself? Have we not passed a major threshold that would tell these enemies the Jews are not going away, and the effort it has and will continue to take to hold them back has been and apparently will be so draining it just can't be worth it? Would it carry on as it has and does if it were not backed by the devil himself and the realization by so many individuals who, like those going all the way back to the Tower of Babel, fear and hate having the things of God in this world? In the end, is it not simply the fear of what the Jews' survival, and especially the rebuilding of the temple, has and would accomplish in solidly reestablishing the Jews as indisputably God's chosen nation?

God will continue to maintain His chosen nation and use those who would serve Him in every place and in each time period through our human history. Some have and will serve, others never will, but the chosen nation is still the chosen nation! This, again, should emphasize to us that being of God's chosen nation is not God's plan of salvation for all men nor has it ever been, but that does not affect the simple truth - they are and will be the people through whom God has and will continue to reveal to the world that saving plan for all of us. If God turned back on this plan every time man chose not to do everything exactly right, how would we know God's real plan apart from the many false religions, as well as corrupted practices, man has chosen to create and the devil desires to foster?

Now, once again, getting back to our point of historical study about the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the Jews, two important points belong to this period which we should look specifically at. One is the fact that it is during this time God really uses His chosen nation to influence world affairs in a very up close and personal way. Jeremiah even prophesies to those carried into captivity that they should not fight to be free, but to hold on to the promise God would, in time,

bring them home. For the time being they were to build houses, plant gardens, marry their sons to daughters of their people. (Jer. 29:1-14) In other words, they were to establish their presence in the empire as a specific people. They were not to be lost, but work to maintain their unique way of life which God had given them through His Law. They were no longer a demonstrative people in a far land, but a demonstrative people in the village, if not the house next door, to others of this world. The fact many many of God's chosen nation became this is shown to us very predominantly in the story of Esther.

Esther's story demonstrates the point, as king Ahasuerus' right-hand man named Haman hated a specific Jew named Mordecai. Haman was jealous of God's blessing upon Mordecai, and Mordecai would not honor this man as a godlike figure, which those in rulership positions expected, and the common citizen did. However, there was more to this than the hatred of just this one man. There was a realization that this one Jew was an example of what all Jews, at the very least, should have strove to be like. This fact made all those willing to hold on to their identity of being part of God's chosen nation (a Jew) very identifiable among all the people of the empire. While many individuals of Israel were truly lost into the world's population, many would begin to hold on to God's Word and Laws more than they ever had before. This made these individuals distinct even from all the other varied cultural peoples of the empire. This made it easy for Haman to go to the king and argue there was a strange people throughout the empire who had strange laws and traditions. (Esth. 3:8) Because of this, targeting the Jews could and would be arranged. This is part of that fact we just talked about seeing to this very day.

Now, at the time, the work of Esther, by the hand of God, would turn a scheme to destroy God's chosen nation from among the world, into a situation which escalated their presence and predominance! This historical event is why Jews, and those who stand with them, enjoy the celebration of Purim every year. It's not one of the God-given feast laid out in the Law, but it is truly an act of God worthy of shouting and joy as we see God still using His chosen nation in whatever circumstance they found themselves in. (Phili. 4:11-13) If this could be true even at a time when they were off their land and held captive by one of the greatest world empires there has ever been, we know God can make it true anytime any place!

The second point to remember in all this time period of even Jerusalem laying in ruin is that God had,

in fact, left a remnant of Jews on the land who were to maintain their presence in the land. These, sadly, would not end up following God's instructions through Jeremiah about staying on the land, but they would go to Egypt where God would send Jeremiah with them to continue to instruct of God's words in spite of their disobedience. Jeremiah's prophesy and actions would also serve as a rebuff against a later emergence among the Jewish religious leaders who believed the Jews themselves should take the steps to reinterpret God's Law to more of a form, fitting with the rest of the world's thought pattern. Lord willing, we will get back to this point later in this study; but the point is that God always intended to leave a group of His nation on the promised land. Had they followed God's instructions, there would have been a significant community of the nation still on the land ready to greet and reestablish the nation when those of the captivity began to return. We simply never know the blessings of God we pass up when we do not have the courage to trust God and stand our ground. Maybe we die, maybe we live, but to live is Christ and to die is gain for those who serve The Lord and are called according to His purpose! (Rom. 8:28, Phili. 1:20-21) This is true anytime, anyplace. Always has been and always will be!

Looking more directly at the captivity for those specifically carried to Babylon, we see the great way in which those willing to serve God were used to affect world affairs and other cultures in general. Right off, there was Daniel and his companions who were taken there because they were considered the best and brightest. The king of the empire believed these kind of captives could truly be an asset to the empire, but oh how he had no idea! One of the first stories tells us Daniel and those who truly served The Lord would refuse to eat the kings meat because they had no way of knowing, not to mention the likelihood was high, if it had been offered to idols, and in other ways not allowed by God's Law to be eaten by God's nation. Daniel would propose a test of God's Law in that the Jews would be allowed to eat a diet of those things available that were not offered to pagan idols and allowed by God's Law. This meant they would basically eat only the original diet God gave to mankind by eating fruits, including some things we now categorize as vegetables. This test was proposed because the servant the king had put in charge of grooming these men was not sure he could allow the Jews their diet. He feared they would become weak and it would cost him his head. However, at the end of the test period, these men of God would not be the weaker of the men but those in better health. This is about the greatest example of why God gave these eating laws to Israel that we

might ever see, and the end result of this would be the king's servant decided all the men in his care should eat this way! (Dan. 1:3-16)

Later on, three of Daniel's Jewish companions would one day refuse to bow to an idol the king had made and ordered everyone to worship or suffer the consequence of being thrown into a fiery furnace. These three would be put in a furnace stoked so hot the men who throw them in died from the heat. However, later the king would see not three but four men alive and walking in the fire. The king would be amazed as at his beckoning the three he had thrown in would step out of the fire without even so much as the smell of smoke on them. In refusing to break God's Law these men did not get to go home to glory, but they did get to meet The Messiah in that fire, and they gave God the opportunity to prove how much The God of Israel was/is The True God and no other! (Dan. 3)

After Daniel had proven how much wisdom serving God can provide, he eventually rose very high in the governmental system of the empire. During the time of the empire which took over the Babylonians, Daniel would have a plot against him by men who were jealous of the wisdom God had given him and the position it had led him to. These men would talk the king into a law making prayer to anyone but the king illegal for a time. They knew Daniel prayed only to God; and in spite of this law, Daniel would continue to pray three times a day just as he always had. In spite of the fact the king regretted making the law once he found it would be Daniel who would be punished for it, the king would have to have Daniel thrown in the den of lions. Among the Medes and Persians the law was the law once it was made. Not even the king was to override it. Daniel would be thrown in the lions' den and left all night. However, he also would not get to go home to glory. He would be there alive and well to answer the king's call the next morning, who was wondering if Daniel's God was greater than the king's own decrees! Daniel would confirm God is The True God; and not only would the king dispose of the evil men who wanted the law, by having them meet the fate they intended for Daniel, but he would send a letter into all the world telling how The God of Israel was The One True God. (Dan. 6:4-28)

All these events show us even when God's chosen nation was not on the land God had wanted them to possess, they were still His chosen nation. Just as Joseph, so many centuries earlier, had been placed in the king's palace of Egypt to play a part in God's plan, so too was Esther, Daniel, and through time only God knows

how many others were used in much the same way. This should convince us all, that God was and is serious about maintaining His chosen nation, not rejecting them or working on a plan to replace them! However, here is another critical junction along our path of understanding the people we know as Jews are God's chosen nation. Now, I'm not going to argue with others about all the scholarly thoughts around this issue, but the simple point could be made that here in the Babylonian captivity came the birth of what we would call the Jewish religion, or Judaism!

The reason I talk about scholarly points is that there are many who would argue or take issue with this statement, and some with very good reason. Many might argue different points and views on when Judaism truly began and where. Let me say the one I would most easily agree with is to say true Judaism began when Moses led Israel out of Egypt and Passover took place, or more specifically at Mount Sinai where God gave Israel the Law. This is by far the best answer to when the Jewish faith - as we might refer to it - as given by God, truly began. It is the most logical place to say God gave His chosen nation religious ceremony which to adhere to. However, that's why I want to point out, I'm not attempting to be a technical historian of Judaism as a religion. What I wish to point out is that for almost two millennia now God's chosen nation has been without a tabernacle or Jerusalem's temple. A very important addendum to this is the fact the reason they have been without is the same reason which existed during the Babylonian captivity time period.

As we have at least touched on already in this series, there were times in Israel's early history when the tabernacle was not truly functioning as it had been in the wilderness, after Moses got it all together according to God's instructions. There were also times after the temple was built in Jerusalem when it was not being administered according to God's commandments. One could even make the argument that after the death of Moses, this condition was more often true than it was not. It is almost certainly true if you want to be very technical about exactly how it needed to be ran to be in full compliance with God's Law, as it was meant to be as God showed Moses - but I digress. The point here is that during the captivity the entire chosen nation had to, for the first time, deal with the fact there simply was no tabernacle to be built which could go with them. The temple was built to replace the tabernacle, and the temple was built where it was because there God chose to place His name among Israel. Again, this speaks to that fact you cross thresholds of no turning back. God had not

only established who His chosen nation was but where their center of worship belonged. This means the temple belongs exclusively in Jerusalem, and even in a specific spot and nowhere else!

The Jews, at this time, were also very much scattered among the world without the freedom of movement that would have allowed them to go to such a place had there been one, even if it could have been mobile. No doubt such a structure would have been vehemently attacked at every chance, as well. This truth is why even in the wilderness the tabernacle was placed right in the middle of the camp of Israel. It's not to say God couldn't easily protect this structure, but, again, establishing such a thing and maintaining its ordinances was given to the chosen nation exclusively. God will certainly intervene to help them with what they can not do on their own, but acting against their desire to not maintain it was not a step God intended to take. The promise has always been that if God's people would humble themselves before Him, then He would hear from heaven and heal their land. (II Chron. 7:14)

All this means that just as has been the case for most of the past two millennia, circumstances at the time of the captivity dictated the temple could not be rebuilt until God opened a path. This forced, at the very least, the beginning development of what we see as Judaism today; which in many of its facets is a way of being a follower of God's Law for those of His chosen nation, without the existence of the temple and the ability to carry out the Law's ordinances as prescribed in the beginning. It also is something that can be observed without a significant group of the people living cohesively and/or on their land! So, I say again, this captivity was in many ways the birth of the Jewish religion. A religion that would not, or should not, exist in a form which differed from what was established in the wilderness at Israel's beginning, if it had not been for this time, and which solidified the whole chosen nation being defined as "Jews."

To be clear on this point, I want to cover a couple more points, (only one of which we have the space to begin in this segment). The first is that there were already those of the northern kingdom who had been carried away by the Assyrians many years before the fall of Judah. As we talked about, there were those who escaped this captivity by moving to the South and joining Judah, and there were no doubt those who escaped from where they had been displaced, who made it back to Judah. However, there were many of these who stayed in the places they were carried off to, several of

whom were simply lost into the general population of the world. At the same time, there were those who, just like the ones carried away by Babylon, began to take their heritage more seriously than ever. These communities, groups, families, or just individuals would also have begun a process of holding the Law in the ways they could without the temple.

However, in this there is one very important point which must be remembered by the modern observer of history! Many of these individuals from the North had been corrupted by the false religion started by Jeroboam as a way to keep the people from going to the South. There may have been plenty of them who, after the fall of the North, realized what a fallacy these things were, or who wished they had never stayed in the North till it came to this point. However, most of them would not have been in tune with the true ordinances as they should have been. We understand this especially when we consider how true this was even for those of Judah! What would have greatly inhibited the correction of all this is one very crucial fact - they did not have copies of the Law as we might today.

Books, as we know them, did not exist at the time, and there certainly were no printing presses. Writing was done by hand onto scrolls which were made of materials that did not necessarily endure for very long time periods without being kept in the proper environment. This fact is why there developed people known as scribes, who show up predominantly during the time of Jesus. These men were responsible for copying the Law over and over. This would ensure there were fresh scrolls to take the place of old ones, and as many copies of the Law as needed. However, this practice, along with other factors, did not mean the common man had access to a copy of the Law. Thus, those carried away by an empire such as Assyria, the point of which displacing people was to dismantle diversity, were not likely to have any more of the Law go with them than could have been carried in the minds of those who knew what they knew of it. (Ps. 119:11) While this brought about various practices concerning God's Law, it came from a much more disadvantaged state than those in Babylon had!

Until next time, may we each continually choose to be the people God wants us to be!

