

What About God's Chosen People?

Part VIII



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."*

We ended our last segment by talking about how those Jews who had taken up the call by King Cyrus to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple had made it to the land, and started settling into and refurbishing certain cities of Judah in which to live. Then, they gathered to Jerusalem in the seventh month to set up the temple's altar of sacrifice in the place where it belonged and had been. This was done in spite of the fact the temple itself had not even begun to be rebuilt, and the rubble of the city still lay very much as it had been for the last several decades following the city's destruction. In this, it is very interesting to note that it was the first day of the seventh month in which they reestablished the altar and began again the sacrifices prescribed in the Law of Moses. (Ezra 3:1-6) This day is not just any day, for two distinct reasons.

First, there is the fact, the first day of the seventh month is Rosh Ha-Shana, or what we know in English as the Feast of Trumpets. When God gave Israel the Law, He instructed that two silver trumpets be made for the priest to use in calling the assembly together as well as other purposes related to the nation. (Num. 10:1-10) Trumpets were to be blown on many solemn occasions

for the sake of calling for God to remember His people. The trumpets were also used to sound an alarm and gather Israel to defend itself. These facts made the Feast of Trumpets a very appropriate day for the returning Jews to gather at Jerusalem and set up the altar in order to call upon the name of The Lord, asking Him to remember them especially in the task of rebuilding the temple in the midst of a land where there were many people hostile to Jerusalem being rebuilt in any way!

The second distinct way in which this is not just another day is that the Feast of Trumpets is now the day Jews consider the beginning of the year. When Moses was given the Law, God told him the month in which Passover takes place was to be the first month of the year for Israel. (Ex. 12:1-10) This fact made perfect sense because after the death angel passed through Egypt, killing all the first born in any house where the blood of the Passover lamb was not on the door posts, Pharaoh arose and not only let God's people go, but demanded they leave! The month in which this first Passover took place was truly a beginning for Israel as a nation. Thus, Passover has always had a clear historic meaning for the Jews. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, which begins the day after Passover and lasts seven days, and remembers the fact that as Israel left Egypt in great haste they did not have time to knead their dough and let it rise, they would eat the bread they could mix and cook on the go. The Feast of Firstfruits, which coincides with the second day of Unleavened Bread, historically has meaning because many years later as Israel entered the land of promise, this was the day the manna ceased and Israel began living off the land for the first time. (Josh. 5:10-12) The fourth feast of the year is the Feast of Weeks, better known as Pentecost to many non-Jews. It is directly connected to the time it took Israel to reach Mount Sinai and begin receiving the Law. (Ex. 19:1-6)

The sixth feast is the Day of Atonement and remembers the establishment of the tabernacle. Though the tabernacle was set up and dedicated for the first time in the first month of Israel's second year, and the Day of Atonement is in the seventh month, what happened to Aaron's sons during the dedication was a potent example of what it means to stand before a truly Holy God! (Lev. 16) This incident prompted the giving of the stipulations for re-cleansing and dedicating the tabernacle (and later temple), as well as the people, in each year's cycle. This created the Day of Atonement. The seventh and last feast of the year is the Feast of Tabernacles, which remembers Israel's long journey through the wilderness after leaving Egypt. However, the Feast of Trumpets is the fifth feast just prior to the Day of Atonement and Feast of Tabernacles. It is a day of emphasizing the fact the people always needed to call upon the name of The Lord, listen

to His voice, and await His salvation. The setting up of the altar on this day by the returning Jews of the Babylonian captivity gave this day a historic significance that would not be lost on later Jews. While it is not the Biblical new year, it is, to this day, recognized as the Jewish new year!

Some might argue this is an example of how the Jews are not the chosen nation instead of the other way around, but one should note that when the organization(s) claiming to be the Christian church, and replacement of God's nation, proclaimed holidays, they chose days important to those who served false gods. They completely ignored those days given in God's Law, even when the "church" was claiming to celebrate something specifically prophesied in the Law. For this, there is no greater example than Easter. Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits all have historic meaning for God's nation, but their true purpose was to prophesy of The Messiah's work at His first appearing! Jesus died as The Passover Lamb on Passover. He was in the grave over the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is a Sabbath regardless of if it falls on the seventh day of the week (as it did the year Jesus died) or not. He showed Himself to be risen from the dead the next day, which is the Feast of Firstfruits! Instead of placing the celebration of these events on those days laid out on the calendar God gave His chosen nation, the "church" chose to set the celebration to coincide with the pagan celebration of the spring equinox, which is part of celebrating the creature rather than The Creator. (Rom.1:24-25)

Now, the struggles we face in this world may leave scars, but God has made a way to wipe them completely clean through the blood of Jesus. Thus, the right way to handle the changes the sands of time bring to our lives here is shown again in these returning Jewish captives. They demonstrate they were not just following a set of religious rights they had derived in pagan Babylon. The events of Israel living in this world have molded things, like the fact the Feast of Trumpets is the modern Jewish new year, but they are still following a pattern set out in God's Law. All arguments to observing the new year this way being purely right or wrong aside, the point is, the Jews see their new year as the feast that is next to be fulfilled; and what calls itself the church, which should be awaiting the return of Christ this feast prophesies of, doesn't recognize it and celebrates the fulfillment of the first three feasts on days derived from pagan practices!

We are not told of the observance of the Day of Atonement, but the book of Ezra records the returning

Jews also kept the Feast of Tabernacles during this seventh month of their first year back in the promised land. In considering this, we should keep in mind the precepts of the Day of Atonement are about going into the temple and atoning for it, as well as the nation, and at this point the temple had not been rebuilt. However, the Feast of Tabernacles is the last of the seven God-given feasts, and this seven day feast is actually eight days as it ends with the day after the seventh with a solemn assembly for all the people. This last day of the feast cycle does not represent an ending but looks forward to an eternal condition all true believers long for. It is not a way of saying we are all done, but the representation that all has been completed. It prophesies of that time when we've finally made it to the eternal blessings that cannot be lost or disrupted ever again!

Everything about this was very appropriate for the returning captives. To come and restart the altar, to call upon the name of The Lord in their land once again, and recall their ancient journey to the land from Egypt, as well as recognize the fact God wants to give us eternal blessings not able to be harmed by this world, were all very fitting. It was an understanding that the Jews may not have been at the beginning of their journey as they were in coming out of Egypt, but nearer the end than when they first began. This is true not just for God's chosen nation but for all the world! This is true in our time more than it was then. Jesus has fulfilled the feast of Passover, and showed us what the Feast of Unleavened Bread truly represents. It was on Firstfruits the world came to know after crucifying The Messiah, He was no longer in the grave but had left it behind to live again! Pentecost was fulfilled that same year Jesus died as Jesus' followers waited for the promise He had told them to go to Jerusalem and wait for. This promise was the pouring out of The Holy Ghost. This was the true fulfillment that one day the Law would be written upon our hearts! (Acts 2)

Now we wait for that new beginning the Feast of Trumpets prophesies of, which is the day Jesus returns to take the reins of this world, establishing God's kingdom on this earth, and gathering all those who have served God unto Himself. The representative Law will once again be illustrated to affirm and demonstrate all these truths, and we will then await that true Day of Atonement where God shall judge all who have lived. (Rev. 20:11-15) In this time of Jesus' physical reign as King over all this earth, both Jews and all nations of the earth will be commanded to come up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. This will be done to emphasize it is not God's will any perish, but that men might someday truly

tabernacle with God in that eternal place Jesus said He left this earth to prepare for those who desire God and His righteousness. (Zech. 14, John 14:1-3, Rev. 21:1-8)

There is simply no way for any man or group of men to come up with the set of Laws the Jews recognize and make them hold so much historic as well as prophetic value. It is no coincidence that the Feast of Trumpets was the first appropriate day for the altar to be set up as the captive Jews returned, continuing and adding to the historic meaning of these precepts God gave to His nation! Again, this is why the world does not accept the Jews with open arms and sees them as an adversary to what man wants in this world. They are still the chosen nation of God, clinging to His Laws while the rest of the world desires to dispose of them. This fact shows up at this time of the returning captives probably more than it does anywhere else in the Bible.

Going back to the time of the Assyrian empire, when the northern kingdom of Israel fell, the Assyrians brought people from other places to the cities in the North after carrying away the people of God's nation that lived there. When these new people came to the land, they, of course, worshiped false gods, and because God wanted to maintain the fact this land was still His and did not belong to just whoever moved into it, these people were plagued by lion attacks. The land was no land of promise for them! The things happening to them took place in a way these people's pagan minds understood. They knew they were not just in a bad place, but that a supernatural power was working against them being there! At that time these new inhabitants asked Assyria what they should do since it was apparent they were not going to be able to live in the land if they did not understand how to acknowledge The God who was over it.

God is truly The God over all the earth, but God allows man his free will. This was an opportunity to show that while God had allowed Assyria to take a piece of the promised land, it was not truly theirs as the rest of the world might be. They were not just fighting other men. Here they were facing The One True God! Thus, a priest of God's chosen nation had to be sent to these people living in the North in order to instruct them of The One True God. (II Kin. 17:24-33) This would bring calm to the situation, and prove to these people, as well as the empire of Assyria, that in dealing with this land they were not dealing with a god derived in the minds of men who could be appeased with their made up rituals. To be clear, it is not that these people in the North turned to God with their whole heart after receiving instructions from the priest, but God had sent a clear sign to them this was not

their home. They were the strangers living in a strange land!

As we've talked about before, the Assyrians moved people around for the purpose of destroying unique cultures among men in an attempt to reestablish what man wanted at the Tower of Babel. This strategy did mix up much of the world's population, in particular those of the Middle East and edge of what we call the Far East, depending on where you want to draw the lines. God was making it clear that even among this mixture of people, He still intended to maintain His chosen nation and show there was still a geographical location on the earth that belonged to them. However, the fact these new people had to acknowledge the land was not theirs but God's did not cause them to fear God in the end. Leave it to man to turn from fearing God as they had when seeing they needed to, to being arrogant, even thinking themselves to be special, the minute things got better!

Now, it would be in the second month of the year after the Jews' return that the Jews would finally be ready to begin to build the temple itself. They would lay the foundation, and while they had been offering the prescribed sacrifices on the altar ever since the seventh month of the first year, they would now also set in place the kind of daily worship at the temple location that King David had prescribed even before his son Solomon built the first permanent structure known as the temple. All this activity would raise the suspicion of those in the North, which, of course, were the descendants of those originally brought to the land. This was likely because they recognized the true nation of God had begun to come again into the land. They would go to the Jews and claim they too were people who served The True God of heaven. This should have been true, but one way or another what was not true is that they still were not of the nation God appointed to do this work.

This takes us directly back to our question about the Jews still being the nation that God chose. These people in the North should have learned to love God and respect His ways, just as all people over all the earth should. However, because God wanted to strip people of their ritualistic practices in order to find a true personal relationship with Him, God established a specific people to be the ones who would do the representative work of the Law. These rituals were/are something pagan-minded people can relate to but are not intended to perform. From this, both Jew and non-Jew could learn the ways of righteousness. The simplest way I know to put it is to say, by looking at the fact God limited the ritual to one nation, the Jew should have realized the Law was only a teacher

and not the true path of salvation. God loves all the children of the world, not just the Jews. Thus, God's true plan of salvation is obviously not limited to just Jews or even those who come to live as one of them.

By seeing that the rituals of the Law were limited to the Jews, the non-Jew should realize these practices were/are not the path of true salvation as well. If we all sit back and consider the facts, we see the Law is clearly telling us to each seek, not to appease an angry God through rituals, but a personal relationship with a loving God who wants to raise us in the ways of righteousness just as a loving parent raises their child. (Matt. 7:7-12) The misunderstanding of this basic truth is why a question such as the one we're discussing here even comes up. There's no reason to doubt or debate who God's chosen nation is on this earth. Knowing exactly who is of the nation is only a matter for individuals from the aspect the Jew has a ministry work to do which the non-Jew is not called to do.

The truth of this fact is seen in this story about the Jews who were to begin again those direct rituals of the Law, which are accomplished by having the temple. The people of the North may not have tried to say the Jews were not God's chosen nation, but they came to the Jews who were rebuilding the temple and said they should build along with them. Of course, there truly is the aspect they were saying the Jews were not God's chosen nation or could be replaced in that their real intent was not to help rebuild the temple but inhibit it. One might argue if the Jews had allowed them to take part, these people would have felt differently, but their intent in helping build the temple would still not have been to see the Jews have the temple again. They would have desired to practice the rituals along with, if not instead of, the Jews; and no doubt they would have also desired to incorporate their own pagan thoughts into the rituals. This kind of activity is something the Jews had gotten in trouble for doing in the first place. In any case, the northern people would have been just as angry, or more so, if they had helped rebuild the temple only to be told they were not allowed to administer its rituals or dictate them. This is all seen in their statement of, "...Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither." Ezra 4:2

The Jews understood these people, no matter how much they thought they knew how to worship God, were not to be involved or that, at the very least, their offer of help was not genuine. The Jews even sighted the fact they had specifically been sent back to do this work

because they were the ones King Cyrus recognized as needing to do it. This brought out the true feelings of the northern people, which was that they really did not want to give up any part of the land to the people God had already proven were the true owners of it. If people do not want to destroy the Jews altogether, they are, at the very least, desirous to take their position in this world. This is why men who claim to be Christians today love to form organizations with their own made up rituals which are said to be of God, and make the argument the Jews are not who they claim to be and/or if they are, they no longer matter!

By the time of Christ it is easy for us to look at the people living in the north of the promised land and judge the Jews for their contempt of these people. However, I'm reminded of the words of Martin Luther King Jr. who said, "Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." Sinful man's desire to continue hate instead of doing what they can to bring it to an end is why we do not often study the stories of Ezra and Nehemiah which show us, while not an excuse for the Jews' contempt at the time of Christ, there was a foundation for the Jews to, at least, be very leery of these people and their intentions. That being said, despising Jews for their piousness is being no better, nor acting differently than what we're judging as wrong. It is not understanding and showing the love Jesus came to demonstrate all the way to the giving of His life, even for those who hated Him. The cycle has to stop somewhere, and in this world, it only ends when individuals choose to put a stop to it in their lives!

Now, in telling those of the North it was not their place to do this work, the Jews were correct. If it had been their place they could have done it without the Jews returning to the land, and/or before the Jews returned. The simple fact is, it was not their place. This is something non-Jewish Christians have found distasteful for a very long time, and much of this has to do with our utter infatuation with all things physical! If many people who call themselves Christians today were in the same shoes as those in the North at this time, they would have felt the same way, and likely have done just what these people did. The northern people knew they could not write to the very king who had sent the Jews back in order to get the work stopped, so they inhibited it in all the ways they could. They probably did things like close off their roadways to the Jews' delivery of materials, and/or commandeered the materials in an attempt to bankrupt the Jews' efforts. They also used political tactics to

convince others not to do business with the Jews. All these things are very much like what happened at the time Hitler was accomplishing the Holocaust, and very much in our news again today. Many so called churches and church organizations have considered and even adopted measures to boycott Israeli products, Israeli financial institutions, etc.

At the time of the return, these tactics did keep the Jews from accomplishing the work of rebuilding the temple for a time. The Bible tells us the northern people weakened the hands of the Jews while they waited out the change of kings sitting on the throne of the empire. They did this until they believed a king who did not know the more recent records of his predecessors might be directed to even older records about how much trouble it had been for the Babylonians to gain control of Judah. This plan eventually worked out and they received a letter back from the king ordering them to do what they wanted all along, which was go up and completely stop the work of rebuilding the temple and Jerusalem even if they had to use force. The Jews became frightened at this and did, in fact, completely stop the work for around seven years. This condition continued until God rose up prophets to direct the Jews away from the thoughts of their minds and into the truth of what was truly important! (Ezra 5:1-2)

You see, the boycotts against the Jews and work to generally hinder them had succeeded in the Jews being unable to obtain what they wanted to have in order to rebuild the temple. However, then came the words of the prophets about not fearing the people around them more than they feared not accomplishing God's work, and the obvious answer to their seeming dilemma in obtaining supplies. "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD." Haggai 1:7-8 It didn't matter that the new temple was not everything they wanted it to be in comparison to the one Solomon had built. What was important was that the temple exist! God was telling them to go into the local hills which they had control over and bring the wood to build with, instead of worrying about getting revered woods from places such as Lebanon. God would respect their effort to build Him a house more than He would their doing nothing but tending to their own houses, waiting to be prospered enough to build the temple they wanted!

This jump-started the building of the temple, and it would be completed even in the lifetime of those leaders who had started it. In emphasizing how much the temple's practices were only important in demonstrating

the truth and not the actual truth itself, the prophecies of this period are just full of metaphors about how much the priest, the secular leader, and the temple foreshadowed things God would bring to pass in the future! When the prophets spoke of how the priest and the throne of David would be lifted up, they were not talking about that time, but the fact one day The Messiah would come and accomplish all and much more than they desired. The people are reminded that just as their fathers before them, who were dead and gone, had served in the time and capacity their circumstances made possible, so should the people of that time. Truly we are to do the work of The Lord not judging our progress or success on how glorified or prosperous our work may be or become, but we are all to live and work in our own time and circumstances. God will take care of the fact this world is on a downhill slide. Just as Noah walked onto the ark and when the time came God sealed him and his family safely inside, without which all Noah's efforts in building the ark would have been in vain, so too there is coming a day when God will walk this earth once again and take care of the fact there is only so much we can do on our own.

The Jews would finally complete the new temple in spite of the fact there were continued attempts to get the king of Persia to bring it to an end, as well as those even of the Jews who did not look at it favorably due to its lack of grandeur in their eyes. However, in direct relation to our question, it should be noted that during the ceremony to dedicate the temple there were twelve sin offering rams sacrificed that day to represent all twelve of the tribes of Israel. (Ezra 6:16-18) This was not done to just symbolize the fact there had been twelve tribes but the truth there still was, and this was the temple of all Israel. Certain tribes may have lost their individual distinction for the most part, but God's nation was still intact. God's promise and work for them was still intact. The temple they were dedicating may not have had the grandeur the temple before it had or that those returning from Babylon desired it to have, but it was complete, operational, and so was the nation of Israel in spite of the fact they too were smaller in number, possessed less of the land than they once had, and known only as the Jews!

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

