

WALKING OUT HIS WORD EACH DAY
THE 1 THESSALONIANS SERIES

COMMENTARY
ON MESSAGE #15

May 20th, 2018

In this edition of our commentary on I Thessalonians we will look at a brief overview of the history of Israel. Why would we do such a thing when we are studying a New Testament letter written to a church? It is because I Thessalonians deals with eschatology, and eschatology inevitably includes Israel's past and Israel's future. Remember, the word eschatology is based on the Greek word "eschatos", which means last or end. Eschatology is the study of last things.

Q1: Do you think you have a good understanding of Israel's history or is it confusing for you?

Before we head to the book of Genesis where we learn about the birth of Israel, I recommend you read Romans 11. Do not be discouraged if there is much in Romans 11 that you do not understand, for it is one of the most complex chapters in the Bible. Bible teachers and theologians often disagree over what Paul was teaching but at least one thing is clear: Israel is a central topic in the Bible and it is frequently encountered in the New Testament. We can't just say "Well, Israel mattered in the Old Testament but in the New Testament all that matters is the church." I will not delve into the particulars of Romans 11 here, but I did want you to see that even though we are Christians living in the church age, Israel continues to be an important topic.

So where do we begin? While it would certainly be acceptable to begin with the story of Abraham, it is perhaps best to go back even further, to the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 10-11. Genesis 10 is a record of human history in the immediate aftermath of Noah's flood.

*"This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japeth,
Noah's sons, who themselves had sons after the flood."*

Genesis 10:11

At this point in history the average life span began to decrease and fall into the range we are more familiar with in our own modern day. Nevertheless, it would still take several generations for that to happen, and in the meanwhile having very large families was still normal. It was during this time that the world's population grew rapidly.

In the aftermath of the flood, God had re-issued the command to multiply and fill the earth (Genesis 9:1, 7). But Noah's descendants were still sinners and they chose their own path.

*"Now the whole world had one language and a common speech.
As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there."*

Genesis 11:1-2

Q2: Have you read the story of Babel lately?

The people of that day refused to spread out, and it wasn't long before false religion distorted the true worship of God (11:3-4). Finally, God dealt with them by confusing their language. God simultaneously divided people by giving them many different languages (and it would be a long time before people learned how to become multi-lingual). Because of God's judgment at Babel people ended up in groups where there was a common language among the members of that particular group. Families and small clans were not divided but there were now several distinct groups and each group migrated to settle other parts of the world. This was the origin of nations.

Now, begins the story of Abraham ...

Q3: Please read Genesis 11:27-32. What was the name of Terah's son?

Abram's name would not change to Abraham until Genesis 17:5. The name Abraham means "Father of a great number." Based upon information found in other parts of the Bible we estimate that Abram was born in approximately 2165 B.C. God singled out Abram to create a new and unique nation, distinct from all the other nations of the world.

4,000 years have come and gone since God placed His call upon Abram.
And 4,000 years later, what tiny nation still dominates international news headlines?
Israel.

Q4: If you had to come up with a short list of the most "important" verses in the Bible (yes, we understand that all verses are important ☺), what verses would you choose?

Although Genesis 12:1-3 doesn't usually spring to mind when we think about important verses, it is not too much of a stretch to say that upon these three verses the entire rest of the Bible depends.

*"The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people
and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.
I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you;
I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'"*
Genesis 12:1-3

Over the next several chapters in Genesis, this passage would be amplified and explained. We call Genesis 12:1-3 **THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT** because God entered into this relationship with Abraham **unconditionally**. God will keep every promise He made to Abraham even though the nation that came through Abraham, Israel, has often rebelled against God, even to the point of rejecting Jesus.

This is a good time to consider what the Abrahamic covenant says about Jesus. Verse 3 says, "... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." When God first made that promise to Abraham it was in the form of a tiny seed. Initially, Abraham probably had only a tiny inkling of what this promise meant. But consider this:

*"A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David,
the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers ..."*
Matthew 1:1

The first verse in the New Testament mentions both Abraham and Jesus Christ. It was through Abraham and through Israel, that Jesus, the **Savior of the world**, would be born!

KEY: No nation in history has been attacked as frequently and threatened with literal extinction as much as the nation of Israel. In recent history Adolph Hitler and the Nazi party of Germany unleashed the holocaust upon the Jews of Europe as Hitler's "Final Solution". To this day Israel is surrounded by nations that would celebrate her destruction. Why is this? Ultimately it is due to Satan. Because of Israel's critical role in the unfolding of God's plan, Satan constantly seeks to influence and deceive other nations to destroy Israel and overturn God's plan for the ages. The battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:13-16) will be driven by Satan.

The Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 12:1-3 contains promises to Abraham made by God that are still influencing world affairs. As you just saw in Matthew's account of the genealogy of Jesus, Abraham's great-grandson, Judah, was the tribe of Israel that would bring forth the Messiah King.

Q5: Please read Genesis 49:8-10. In verse 10, what did Jacob prophesy would be the distinguishing trademark of Judah?

The scepter and the ruler's staff are the instruments of a king. In the Old Testament, Israel's greatest king was David of the tribe of Judah. Of the twelve tribes of Israel, it is to the tribe of Judah that the legacy of Kings is given. But a greater king than David is in view in this passage, for this king would rule over all the nations and His Kingdom would prosper.

Q6: Now read Revelation 5:5. What is Jesus called?

It was Judah's younger brother, Joseph, who was sold into slavery by Judah and his other brothers. The story of Joseph occupies a big portion of Genesis (chapters 37-50). Joseph ended up in Egypt as a slave. But it was this very tragedy that meant Jacob's other sons, including Judah, would, several years later, find the food in Egypt which preserved Israel and kept them from starvation. Joseph and his brothers were also reconciled to each other.

*His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him.
We are your slaves, they said. But Joseph said to them,
"Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?
You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good
to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.
So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.
And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.
Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father's family.
He lived a hundred and ten years.
Genesis 50:18-22*

Q7: Please read Genesis 50:24-26. What did the promised land of Israel mean to Joseph personally?

The Jewish descendants of Joseph and his brothers long made their home in Goshen in the land of Egypt. In the course of time a new dynasty of Egyptian Pharaohs rose, and so began the epic story of Exodus.

Q8: Please read Exodus 1:6-14. Why did the new Pharaoh turn against the Jews and enslave them?

The book of Exodus tells the story of God calling Moses to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt and to return to the land promised to Abraham (Israel). The three most significant Jews in the Old Testament are Abraham, Moses and David. Moses received the Law from God (the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Law of Moses), and to this day the world continues to be affected by this momentous event. Carved into the building of the Supreme Court of the United States building is an image of Moses and the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments!

Moses died and it was Joshua who actually led Israel across the Jordan River back into the Promised Land (in those days it was known as the land of Canaan). After Joshua came a period of rule called the time of the Judges (1380 B.C. – 1050 B.C.). After the time of the Judges, Israel became a monarchy. This means they were ruled by a "monarch", (a King). Saul was the disastrous first King of Israel, the consequence of the people of Israel being out of step with God. After Saul came David, and he was far and away Israel's greatest King. Just as God had made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 (the Abrahamic Covenant), so God made a covenant with David (the Davidic Covenant).

Q9: Please read the Davidic Covenant found in II Samuel 7:12-16. According to verse 16, how long will the throne of David endure?

There are parts of the Davidic Covenant that pointed to David's immediate Son, Solomon. We know that because it is said that the King will be a sinner. But the covenant clearly also looks beyond Solomon or any other mere human king. One will come who will occupy David's throne eternally, making it become as the throne of God. That is why Jesus was often called "Son of David".

Okay, let's jump 1,000 years of history in a single sentence! In the final days of Jesus' life upon this earth, He entered Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. Many people thought that this "triumphal entry" meant that Jesus, as the Messiah (the Christ), was about to declare Himself King (see Luke 19:11, 28-39). What they did not understand was that although Jesus was **the Lion of the Tribe of Judah**, He also came as the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world. He died on the cross to pay for our sins.

We serve a risen Savior! Three days after the cross Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to His disciples. In the following days Jesus spent more time with them but it wasn't long before it was time for Jesus to ascend back to Heaven.

*"He appeared to them over a period of forty days
and spoke about the Kingdom of God."*

Acts 1:3B

Notice that in their final conversation with Jesus, the final opportunity to ask Jesus a final question, this is what they asked:

*"So when they met together, they asked Him,
'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?'"*

Acts 1:6

Jesus did not tell His disciples (remember, these men were Jewish) that they were wrong for still expecting that Israel would be restored as a Kingdom and that Jesus would rule as King. He simply said it was not for them to know the time. For now, they were being given a new and wonderful assignment:

BUILD THE CHURCH!