



## How the Children of Israel fit into God's Plan - Part 2

READINGS FOR THIS LESSON - Deuteronomy 28; Zechariah 8.

### Between the Old and New Testaments

The Children of Israel became known as the Jews. They had come back to the land of Israel from Babylon after 70 years of being held captive. Encouraged by the prophets, they rebuilt the Temple of God and Jerusalem. The last three books of the Old Testament - Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi - were written during these days.

Then there was a long period of time - 400 years - during which the Jews had no direct message from God. The prophet Amos had prophesied of this time. In Amos 8:11 we read,

*"the days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, 'when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.'"*

This period of 400 years comes between the last book of the Old Testament and the first book of the New Testament. No wonder that when John the Baptist appeared, there was a great excitement among the people. After hundreds of years of silence, God had spoken again to His people.

### The greatest Jew



But John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare the way for someone even greater. God was about to send His own Son to save His people. So, in the land of Israel, a little over 2,000 years ago, the Lord Jesus Christ was born. We sometimes forget that Jesus was a Jew.

You probably know what happened to Jesus. After hearing his words, and seeing the wonderful things he did, the Jews rejected Jesus.

They told Pilate to crucify him. When Pilate took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd

*"I am innocent of this man's blood," he said "It is your responsibility!" All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:24-25).*

They could not have committed a worse crime. They had shed the innocent blood of God's own Son! Yet, by the powerful preaching of the apostles, God gave them the opportunity to repent. But most of them refused God's offer of mercy, and punishment had to come. What a terrible punishment it was!

### A people without a home

Forty years later, the Roman army came and fought against those men and their children. You may remember they had said,

*"Let his blood be on us, and on our children".*



It was a time of terrible suffering for the Jews. The horrors of that war are among some of the worst in history. The Romans destroyed the city, and those Jews who survived, were scattered among all the nations of the earth.



God had warned the Jews long ago that this would happen if they departed from His ways. In Deuteronomy 28:64, we read,

*"Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods — gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known."*

Then for nearly 2,000 years, the Jews had no land of their own. Worse than this, they have suffered many terrible persecutions, and the dreadful curses of Deuteronomy have been brought upon them.

Some of these persecutions have happened during the Second World War of 1939-1945.

You may have heard of the concentration camps of Hitler, and his persecution, in which over six million Jews were killed with a cruelty that shocked the world. Read again Deuteronomy 28:64-67, and you will be amazed that these words, written by Moses over 3,000 years ago, have come to pass in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

*"Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. In the morning you will say, "If only it were evening!" and in the evening, "If only it were morning!" — because of the terror that will fill your hearts and the sights that your eyes will see."*

It is a very sad story, and yet it is not ended. We feel glad when we read from the Word of God that the ending will be a happy one.



**Auschwitz  
Concentration Camp**

## Back to their own land at last

Turn to Ezekiel 37:11–14, and read the words of God to the Jews,



*"Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off." Therefore prophesy and say to them: This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD."*

Also in verse 21

*"This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land."*

And now, after nearly 2,000 years, God is re-gathering the nation of Israel. In 1917 the Balfour Declaration was signed. This was a promise that the British Government would help make the land of Palestine (now called Israel) a national home for the Jewish people.

Since that time, the Jews have been going back to the land of Israel in great numbers from many countries. There was more progress in 1948, when Israel became a state.



## Jerusalem - the future capital of the world

There has always been trouble in the Middle East. The little Jewish State has had to fight for its survival against great difficulties. Even now, surrounded by powerful and well-armed enemies, its future appears uncertain.

We read in Zechariah 14:2,

*"I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city."*

When the last great day of battle comes - and we can learn from the world news that it cannot be far away - the Jews in Israel will be in a desperate position.



At that time, the Lord Jesus Christ will come back again.

*"Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south." (Zechariah 14:3-4)*

He will save the land of Israel, and - at last - the Jews will recognize him and accept him. In Zechariah 12:10 the prophet tells us,

*"...They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son."*

Under Christ, their King, the Jews will be the number one nation in the world, and the prophecy of Zechariah 8:22-23, will be fulfilled,

*"And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD Almighty and to entreat him. This is what the LORD Almighty says: In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you."*

## This little table may help you

1. 3,500 years ago      God brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt. He gave them the land of Israel to live in, and taught them His ways.
2. 3,000 years ago      The Children of Israel departed from following God's ways. Instead of showing the surrounding nations how God wanted them to live, they copied the evil ways of those sinful nations.
3. 2,500 years ago      God at last punished them by allowing them to be taken captive. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was brought back to the land of Israel after 70 years, but they still continued to disobey God.
4. 2,000 years ago      After the crucifixion of Jesus, the Jews were driven out of the land. For nearly 2,000 years they were homeless and persecuted.
5. Today                  God is again bringing them back to the land of Israel, and will shortly make them *"The head (of the nations), and not the tail"* (Deuteronomy 28:13).