

Israel: Past, Present, and Future #3

John 1:11

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In 70 a.d., the city of Jerusalem lay in ruins by the Romans. The temple was completely destroyed. The Jews in Jerusalem that were killed by the sword or starvation (during and after the 7 month siege of the city) were estimated to have been over 1 million with most survivors taken into slavery. Throughout Judea was devastation upon all the land. Jesus had prophesied this terrible divine judgment to fall upon Jerusalem and the temple about 40 years earlier (Matthew 24:1-2,34; Luke 21:20-24). But why would God bring such unimaginable judgment upon His people whom He had chosen out of all the nations of the world?

Our text in John 1:11 summarizes the reason for God's judgment. Israel rejected the Messiah and joined with the Romans in plotting and consenting to the crucifixion of Jesus, the seed of Abraham and David, that came to save them from their greatest enemies (greater than the enemy of Rome)—sin, death, and Satan. In so doing, Israel as a people/nation made themselves the enemy of God (as Paul says is presently the case in Romans 11:28). Israel is presently God's enemy—not God's friend. Israel is presently a covenant-breaking nation (as in the Old Testament, but now even to a more aggravated degree).

We must be very careful that we avoid either of these extremes: on the one hand, blessing the nation of Israel as if she is presently God's friend; and on the other hand, hating the nation of Israel as if she is not yet God's chosen people that will in the future be brought to Christ and into His Church to show forth the wondrous mercy and grace of God.

Let us consider today how Israel became God's enemy and how God's righteous judgment fell upon Israel and to this present day remains upon Israel as God's enemy. Our main points are these: (1) Israel's Rejection of Christ; (2) God's Judgment upon Israel.

I. **Israel's Rejection of Christ.**

A. **The Ministry of John.**

1. As John the Baptist appeared in Israel preaching as the forerunner of the long awaited Messianic King, the multitudes in Judea and Galilee gathered to hear him (Mark 1:1-5). The Jewish leaders questioned him if he were the Messiah (Luke 3:15).

2. The timing of the Messiah prophesied in Daniel 9 was right on target—that after 69 prophetic weeks (483 actual years) from the decree of Artaxerxes in 458/457 b.c. the Messiah would appear unto Israel. That was the precise time when Jesus was baptized by John (26/27 a.d.). There was a Messianic savor in the air as John declared, "Behold the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

B. **The Ministry of Jesus.**

1. The Lord Jesus fulfilled all of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Messiah: the seed of David (2 Samuel 7); born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2); performed wondrous miracles (Isaiah 35:5-6; Matthew 11:4-5); suffered for the sins of His people by crucifixion (Psalm 22:16; Isaiah 53; Zechariah 12:10); rose again from the dead (Isaiah 53); and ascended into heaven to reign as King at God's right hand (Psalm 110:1). His disciples were sent by Jesus specifically to Israel to announce the coming of the kingdom—and not to the Gentiles (Matthew 10:5-7).

2. Jesus declared to Israel that He was the Messiah (the Christ), and He received worship as the divine Son of God throughout His ministry. He forgave sins which only God can do. Even when He faced death, he would not deny that He was the Messiah, the Son of the living God. He declared to Israel that only through faith in Him was there everlasting life—in fact, He was life and the only way to the Father was through

Him (John 14:6). Jesus prophesied His death and made His resurrection three days later to be the evidence of all evidence that all that He taught and said about Himself was true (Matthew 12:38-40).

3. Yet He was rejected by Israel collectively as a people and nation—though a remnant was saved (as Paul says in Romans 11:5). Israel not only rejected Jesus as their Messianic King and Savior, but demanded that He be crucified—even calling upon themselves and their children the guilt of the sinless Son of God (Matthew 27:22-25). This was not a personal guilt to the children, but was a covenantal guilt that fell upon the nation as a whole—a covenant-breaking nation (Romans 11).

4. Though Israel in the Old Testament had rebelled against the Lord, rejected Him, served other gods, despised His commandments, at the time of Christ they rebelled, rejected, and despised the Lord face-to-face and even delivered Him over to be crucified by the Romans (they meant it for evil, but God meant it for good, Genesis 50:20). He came unto His own and His own received Him not (John 1:11). Though Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promise to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, to Moses, to David, to all of Israel, they rejected Him—they followed Him for His miracles, but despised Him when popular opinion shifted against Him (as so many do today).

5. Even after Jesus arose from the dead, the Jews chose to spread a lie and to believe it rather than the truth (Matthew 28:11-15).

C. The Ministry of the Apostles.

1. Did Israel (whether in the land or dispersed in the nations) treat the apostles/Christians who proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ any better than Jesus? Absolutely not! They brought them before the Sanhedrin, beat them, and commanded them not to teach in Christ's name (Acts 4-5). They persecuted them relentlessly in Jerusalem (Stephen becoming the first recorded martyr) and pursued them into surrounding nations (as did Saul of Tarsus). After Saul's conversion, the message of the gospel which he took throughout the Roman Empire was taken first to the Jews in those cities, who stirred up the people and he was left for dead after being stoned in Lystra (Acts 14).

2. The Romans did eventually become the arch-persecutors of Christians, but until the time of Nero it was Israel (it was the Jews) that chiefly persecuted the followers of Christ (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16). Even when the Romans persecuted Christians, it was often at the insistence of the Jews. Through all that Paul experienced by way of persecution from his fellow Jews over the gospel of Christ, he did not despise them, nor did he arouse the Romans against them to destroy them—he so desired their conversion that he could wish to be cursed if it meant their salvation (Romans 9:3-4). Was Paul a Jew-hater? Clearly not! Would that I had the same depth of desire to see Jews, Palestinians, Muslims, or even my own family members to come to Christ as Paul did. God help me (and us all).

3. Through this brief survey, we can clearly see that Israel rejected and preferred a murderer (Barabbas) over Jesus, the promised and realized Messiah—the very one who had entered into covenant with Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, and Israel. He who entered into a gracious covenant with Israel to save them as a people was despised and slain at the insistence of Israel (Acts 2:22-23; Acts 5:29-31). This was the sin of all sin which led to God's most severe judgment upon Israel, and yet the apostles continued to take the gospel of Christ to the Jews.

II. God's Judgment upon Israel.

A. Before Jesus was crucified, He wept over the great judgment that God was to bring upon Jerusalem through the Romans (beginning with 70 a.d.)—Matthew 23:37-38. As one continues reading into Matthew 24, the terrifying description of God's judgment is continued. As was mentioned at the beginning of the sermon, the devastation by God through the Romans upon Jerusalem at its destruction in 70 a.d. (and of the temple) is almost unspeakable.

1. What is often not mentioned in historically detailing God's righteous judgment that fell upon Israel is that after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 a.d., God brought further

judgments upon Israel through the Romans.

2. There was a second Jewish War (115-117 a.d.) in which the Romans once again decimated Jewish resistance to Roman rule.

3. There was a third Jewish War (132-136 a.d.) in which a Jewish messianic figure by the name of Bar-Kokhba led again Jews to revolt against the Romans, and once again the Jews were destroyed.

4. There was even a fourth Jewish War (351-352 a.d.) in which the Romans crushed a Jewish independence movement in the area of Galilee. In other words, God continued to bring judgment upon Israel/Jews for their rejection of Christ as their covenant Savior and King. As a result of all these judgments, few Jews were left in ancient Israel. Jerusalem was rebuilt as a Roman colony in 129-130 a.d. and renamed Aelia Capitōlina—a temple to Jupiter was built over the ruins of the temple. After the revolt of Bar-Kokhba (132 a.d.), Judea was re-named by the Romans “Palestine” in order to deride the Jews in calling the land by the name of their ancient enemy, the Philistines.

5. It should also be noted here by way of God’s present judgment upon Israel that various attempts to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem have failed after its destruction in 70 a.d. Bar-Kokhba (132-136 a.d.) planned to rebuild the temple, but this was crushed by the Romans. Likewise, the Roman emperor, Julian, gave permission to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, but it was devastated by an earthquake in 363 a.d. No attempts have been made since then, and will not have God’s blessing if that is attempted in the future—Jesus has fulfilled all of those shadows of the law (priesthood, sacrifices, temple, ceremonies, holy days).

6. The reason for the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d. was clearly Israel’s rejection of Christ (Matthew 23). It would follow that until Israel repents of this grievous sin and turns in faith and repentance unto Christ, Israel remains an enemy of God and under the judgment of the Lord—The Parable of the Landowner and the Vineyard (Matthew 21:43). This is what Paul describes in Romans 11 in God cutting off the natural branches and grafting in the unnatural branches (Romans 11:22).

7. Though God has raised up the Romans and many others throughout history to bring judgment upon Israel, the hatred of those nations and the desire to exterminate Israel is in no wise justified (Isaiah 10:5-7,12; 2 Kings 19). Israel is God’s chosen nation that is yet loved by Christ for the sake of the covenant He made with the fathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David) according to Romans 11:28. There is yet a future time of blessing God will bring upon Israel when God turns the collective, national heart of Israel to trust in Christ as Savior/Messiah, to repent of her sin and rebellion, and to love and obey the Triune God.

8. Israel is presently a covenant-breaking nation that is not blessed by the Lord—it is God’s enemy. The establishment of Israel as a nation by the United Nations charter in 1948 ought not to be construed as an indication of God’s covenant blessing upon them as if they have returned to the Lord. Israel will yet be overcome by the nations around them (Zechariah 14; Revelation 16), but will turn to the Lord Jesus whom they pierced (Zechariah 12:10). Scripture teaches that Israel is under God’s judgment until she turns to Jesus Christ as Messiah and becomes a member of Christ’s Church.

B. Israel needs the gospel of Jesus Christ. Present Judaism is a false religion (as is Islam). Judaism is not the continuation of the religion of the Old Testament—actually, Christianity is (as Jesus and the apostles taught). Present Judaism is the Pharisaical Judaism which condemned Jesus and which Jesus taught against.

1. Christian Zionists that falsely claim that Jews who presently follow the law and die without Christ will enter heaven are false teachers. That is not love. That is cruelty of the worst degree. That is to take away from Jews the only hope they (or any of us) have of eternal life in Christ. It is not to send them to heaven, but is to send them to hell.

2. Nothing I have said in outlining Israel’s rejection of Christ or God’s judgment upon Israel should be construed to mean that we are to hate Jews (or Palestinians). They all need Jesus. Our certain hope is that all nations will be brought to Jesus and into Christ’s Church to be brothers/sisters in Christ where there is neither Jew nor Palestinian. Remember Paul’s words (Romans 11:28; Romans 10:1). God grant us Paul’s zeal to pray for our own covenant-breaking nation, for family/friends/enemies. Paul’s heart was broken. Is ours?

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