

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Broadcast Date: 5 August 2001

No. T0174

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The Bible Today: The Jew and the Gentile

Can you prove that God exists? Millions of words have been written debating that question. It has been aptly remarked that proof of the existence of God, in a word or two, lies in the Jew. That statement is well worth considering. Some of the reasons for it will become clear during our talk this morning on the subject "The Jew and the Gentile".

We need to be clear, first of all, what we mean by these terms. By Jew, we mean those descendants of Abraham from the time of his call by God in Ur of the Chaldees. By Gentile, we mean all the other nations of the world. This clearly unequal division of the nations serves to highlight the very important place which the Jews occupy in the purposes of God.

It will be useful to begin by looking at the history of the Jews. Mankind, from Adam through to Noah, had signally failed to honour God in the different ways in which God had tested them. As a totally new departure in the ways of God with man, God called one man, Abraham, to leave his home and family to follow God into the unknown. This was around 2000 BC. Abraham, in total obedience to, and dependence upon, God, did just that! We read about that call in Genesis 12:1-3: "Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your kindred and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

After 24 long years of waiting, Abraham and his wife, Sarah, still had no son of their own. When Abraham was 99 years old, God renewed His promise to Abraham: "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession..." (Genesis 17:7 and 8). The next year, when Abraham was 100 years old, Sarah bore him a son, Isaac.

Some years later, when Isaac was probably a teenager, God tested Abraham's faith to the hilt by asking him to sacrifice Isaac. In that same obedience and trust which marked Abraham's departure from Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham was prepared to do just that. However, before the knife could be plunged into Isaac on the altar, God called Abraham to stop the sacrifice. Then God again renewed His promise, "By Myself have I sworn...because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed..." (Genesis 22:16-18). There are three vital elements in the promises God made to Abraham:

1. Abraham would be the father of a great nation.
2. That nation would occupy its own land.
3. Through Abraham's seed, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. History is witness to the truth of those promises.

As the years went by, Isaac himself became the father of two sons, Esau and Jacob. Jacob went on to have twelve sons and had his name changed by God to Israel. Throughout this time, no part of the land of Canaan was theirs except a piece of ground which Abraham bought for the burial of Sarah. Towards the end of Jacob's life, he with all his family went down into Egypt at the invitation of his son, Joseph, who was then prime minister of Egypt. During the 40 or so years Jacob's descendants were in Egypt, they multiplied exceedingly. When eventually, under the leadership of Moses, they left Egypt, they probably numbered more than a million people.

Under Moses, the nation was brought into covenant relationship with God on the basis of the ten commandments God gave to Moses. It was then that God made Himself known to that nation by His covenant name Jehovah, (from the Hebrew 'Yahweh', meaning 'He who is, who was, and who is to come'). Incidentally, in our English bible, Jehovah is often translated Lord, in capital letters. Moses was allowed by God to bring the people only to the borders of the Promised Land. His successor, Joshua, finally brought them over the River Jordan into the land of Canaan, around

1200 BC. Some 700 years after God's original promise to Abraham, God's people were at last in their own land, His land.

At first, God Himself led His people through Joshua, then through judges, and then Samuel the prophet. During Samuel's time, the people came to him with their request, "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5). Samuel was deeply distressed by this rejection, but God told him, "Heed the voice of the people...for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them" (verse 7). There was a united monarchy under the first king, Saul, followed by David, and then Solomon, David's son.

After the death of Solomon in 930 BC, the kingdom split in two - the southern kingdom, commonly known as Judah, consisting of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and the northern kingdom, known as Israel, consisting of the remaining ten tribes. Both kingdoms turned away from God into idolatry and its consequent immorality. The northern kingdom came under the judgment of God first and was carried away into captivity in 720 BC. The southern kingdom was subsequently carried away captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar around 59 BC. At that time, Jerusalem was destroyed. There was a partial return from Babylon of some of Judah 70 years later, as God had promised.

Did God not care for the other nations of the world when, as it seems, He concentrated all His attention on the Jews? Not a bit of it! God did not choose the Jews because they were in any way better than the other nations. Indeed, He reminded them through Moses, "The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples: but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers..." (Deuteronomy 7:7 and 8). God's purpose in choosing the Jews was, in part, that through them the other nations might see the blessings that flow from obedience to God and so come unto a knowledge of God also. Indeed, Abraham, although specially chosen by God, recognised God's concern for all nations when he pleaded with God, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25). Sadly, the Jews failed lamentably to bear witness to God and, as we have seen, were all taken into captivity.

With the Jews in captivity, the stage was now set for God to be seen publicly dealing with the Gentiles. Authority for the government of this world now passes to the Gentiles. It is significant that Nebuchadnezzar is the first Gentile monarch allowed by God to exercise universal dominion in this world. So begins that period which the Lord Jesus refers to as "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). Although allowed by God to exercise sovereignty in this way, Nebuchadnezzar had to learn the source of all true authority. So when he boasted, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built...by my mighty power and for the honour of my majesty?", God judged him, saying, "Your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field...until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses". Mighty Nebuchadnezzar spent some days as a madman, living like a beast until, in repentance, he confessed, "I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honoured Him who lives forever: for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?" (Daniel 4:28-37).

Today, we still live in "the times of the Gentiles", which will continue until the Church is taken to heaven. This period of time has witnessed the most important event in the history of this world - the coming into the world of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Earlier on, we referred to the threefold promise of God to Abraham. In the growth of the Jewish nation and their occupancy of the Promised Land, we have traced the fulfilment of the first two parts of the promise. But the final, and the most important part of that promise, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed", could only be brought about by the coming of Christ, the Saviour of the world.

It is noteworthy that the angel of the Lord, who announced the birth of Christ, said to the shepherds, "I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people" (Luke 2:10). This good news was not for Jews only, nor for Gentiles only, but for all people! Similarly, Simeon, as he took the eight day old baby Jesus in his arms, could say, "My eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel" (Luke 2:30-32).

The Lord Jesus Christ paid the price for that salvation when He died on the cross of Calvary for our sins. We come into the blessing of God, into the forgiveness of sins and into peace with God, by faith in Christ, regardless of whether we are Jew or Gentile. In a very significant statement, Paul sums up all men under three headings when he writes, "Give no offence, either to the Jews or to the Greeks (that is, the Gentiles or to the church of God" (1 Corinthians 10:32).

Our Bible is in two parts: the Old Testament (or Covenant) and the New Testament (or Covenant). The subject of the Old Testament is principally the dealings of God with His people, Israel, on the ground of the Ten Commandments, the old covenant, and, to a lesser extent, His dealings with the Gentile nations. The subject of the New Testament is

principally the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ and the consequent calling out from the nations, both Jew and Gentile, of the Church.

It is of the utmost importance to recognise the distinctive place of the Church in God's dealings with men. The Church is not an extension of Israel but is a totally new thing in the ways of God. To take promises made to Israel in the Old Testament and try to apply them to the Church today will result only in confusion.

Before Jesus went back to heaven He charged His disciples, "You shall be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Initially, the disciples seemed to restrict the preaching of the Gospel to Jews in the synagogues. In part, this was because the synagogue was a convenient meeting place. It mainly reflects the difficulty the disciples had in grasping the fact that the good news of the Gospel was for all men, Jew and Gentile, without distinction. Things came to a head at Antioch in Pisidia where the Jews not only refused the Gospel for themselves but were reluctant to allow the Gentiles to hear it. Paul then told the Jews, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you to be a light to the Gentiles, that you should be My salvation to the ends of the earth'" (Acts 13:46 and 47).

Today, all true believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, regardless of whether they are Jew or Gentile, are part of the Church. So Paul, writing to Jewish and Gentile Christians, could say, "For [Christ] Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us...that He might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity" (Ephesians 2:14-16).

Has God then given up on the Jews? This important question is dealt with in Romans chapters 9-11. The answer is, "Decidedly not". In the Old Testament, the prophet Hosea was told by God to take a wife who would later be unfaithful to him. As instructed by God, their firstborn son was called Jezreel, meaning "God scatters" and "God sows". This was a reference to the coming judgment of God on Judah. Of their next child, a daughter, God told Hosea, "Call her name Lo-Ruhama, (meaning 'no mercy') for I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel". When their next child, a son, was born, "God said, Call his name Lo-Ammi (meaning "not my people"), for you are not My people, and I will not be your God. Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, "You are not My people, there it shall be said to them, "You are the sons of the living God.""

Hosea's wife then left him and sold herself as a slave prostitute. Eventually, Hosea was told by God to buy her back to himself. We read that Hosea said to her, "You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man; thus I will be toward you." God then went on to say, "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar...Afterward the children of Israel shall return, seek the Lord their God and David their king, and fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days." In this parable of life, Hosea learned the pain in the heart of God over the unfaithfulness of His people.

After the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 by the Romans, the Jews were without their land, their temple and its worship for almost 1,900 years. Yet they survived whereas other displaced nations disappeared. Why? Because God has kept His hand over them. God always keeps His promises. His purposes of blessing for the Jews have yet to be fulfilled. Today the Jews, mainly from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, are back in their land, although in unbelief. After the Church has been taken to heaven, God will once again take up His people, Israel, all twelve tribes of them, for blessing. They will pass through a time of deep suffering and repentance. But in the millennial kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Jews will be the centre of God's purposes of blessing for the earth.

It is noteworthy that John is given a vision of the eternal state, following the Millennium. Then we read, "And [John] heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God" (Revelation 21:3). In this final condition of things, we no longer see Jehovah dwelling with the Jews, but God, the same God who in the beginning made man, dwelling with men, all men, Jew and Gentile alike!

What a great God He is!

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