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**B0619—May 14, 2006 – Israel: The Sovereign Nation Of Israel**

Today, I want to look specifically at the history of Israel while she was as sovereign nation. So, aside from a few introductory remarks, we will focus on the time from the Exodus in 1445BC until the Exile in 586BC. Now, I don't want to just go through the historic events of Israel's experience during this time. What I really want to do is impart to you the key principles in understanding why Israel's history during this period took the route it did. So, I want you to understand the "why" of Israel's history, not so much the "what" of Israel's history. Now, I imagine that when many believers try to read the OT they are deeply confused. This makes it very difficult to keep reading. One of the problems is people just jump in and read, say Ezekiel, and that's just going to confuse. It's like starting a novel on page 454. So, what I want to do is help you gain an understanding of the OT doctrines that will shed light on the OT.

**I. HOW CAN I MAKE SENSE OF THE OT?**

If you want to understand the OT you have to understand two things. These two things govern the entire structure of the post-Gen 11 Scriptures. They are two covenants which form the framework for understanding world history and Israel's history in particular. Of *first* importance is the Abrahamic Covenant which provides the overall framework for understanding world history and the key role of God's chosen people, Israel, through whom divine revelation and salvation would come. Of second importance is the Mosaic Covenant which provides a narrower framework for understanding Israel's history until the death of Christ. A third covenant is also crucial and that is the New Covenant which I will introduce later.

**A. The Abrahamic Covenant**

On one hand we have the Abrahamic Covenant which spelled out God's three-fold obligation to Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob.

1. *First*, Abraham was promised that his “seed” would multiply greatly and that one from his “seed” would be the Christ.
2. *Second*, through his descendants and particularly the seed “blessing” would come upon the whole world.
3. *Third*, Abraham and His descendants were promised a specific “land” to be their eternal possession.

These covenant promises govern the entire track of world history. They assure the eternal existence of the people of Israel and they place the Messiah at the center of world history. So, no matter what Israel does, no matter how much idolatry or sin she commits it will never result in the extermination of Israel. God has a permanent relationship with the people of Israel. As such, the Bible describes God’s relationship to Israel as that of a Father to a Son (Exod 4:22).<sup>i</sup>

## **B. The Mosaic Covenant**

In contrast to the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant spelled out Israel’s obligations to God as His Son. That is, since it was a true Father-Son relationship dynamics were inherent in that relationship. So, while the relationship between God and Israel is permanent, fellowship within that relationship could fluctuate (a typical experience among family members). Fellowship was conditioned upon the nation’s obedience or disobedience to the 613 commandments of God in the Mosaic Law. These 613 laws expressed God the Father’s will for Israel, His Son. So, in contrast to the Abrahamic Covenant which guaranteed a permanent relationship between the two, the Mosaic Covenant outlined temporal blessings or cursings (disciplinary measures) dependent on the Sons obedience or disobedience. So, God as Father obligated Himself to the nation of Israel in the Abrahamic Covenant but Israel as His Son was also obligated to obey the Father’s laws in the Mosaic Covenant.

### **1. The Covenant Included Blessings and Cursings (Lev 26; Dt 28)**

Inherent within the Mosaic Covenant there were rewards for obeying and there was discipline for disobeying. The Bible calls these blessings and cursings. If Israel obeyed God He would bless them. If Israel disobeyed God He would curse them (that is discipline them). An understanding of these blessings/cursings is essential to understanding the rest of the OT from 1445-586BC. They are outlined in Lev 26 and Dt 28. In Lev 26:1-13 the blessings are outlined. If they obeyed God’s commandments then God promised an abundance of agricultural produce (26:4-5), homeland security (26:5-9),

numerical increase (26:9), and His presence among them (26:11). However, if they did not obey God's commandments then they would undergo five degrees of cursing. During the first degree God would send upon them sudden terror, sickness, sowing but not reaping and military raids from surrounding nations (26:14-17). If they still did not obey God's commandments then the second degree of cursings would begin: lack of rain which resulted in famine as well as agricultural and economic collapse (26:18-20). If they still refused to obey God would implement the third degree of cursing; the population would decrease due to ravaging beasts, travel and trade would be greatly affected (26:21-22). If they still refused to obey God then He would send the fourth degree of cursing: pestilence, military raids, and severe food shortages (26:23-25). If after all this they still refused to obey God then He would send the fifth degree of cursing: severe famine so that they would even eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, desolation of the land and cities, military defeat, and exile. Thus, in a very real way God's Son Israel could evaluate the family dynamics by looking at their experience and know where their fellowship with God stood.

## **2. The Israelites Promised Obedience**

Several things need to be noted about the Mosaic Laws. First, when God gave the Israelites His Law they said "we will hear and do *it*" (Dt 5:27). They promised obedience (also see Exod 19:8). However,

## **3. The Laws Exceeded Sinful Human Capability**

Second, the Laws exceeded sinful human capability. Though they promised obedience God knew that their sinful hearts would fail to obey. God said, "I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They have done well in all that they have spoken. <sup>29</sup> 'Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!" (Dt 5:28-29) It is crucial to understand this dynamic in the OT of blessing/cursing. I would say Lev 26 and Dt 28 are two of the most important chapters in the entire Bible because the rest of the OT describes the dynamics of this Father-Son relationship; rewards for obedience and discipline for disobedience. Throughout the OT God demonstrates that He is a faithful Father and His Son Israel is unfaithful. In this respect, God and Israel shared the relationship of a faithful husband and an unfaithful wife.

## **4. Suzerainty-Vassal Treaties**

To monitor the dynamics within this relationship the Mosaic Law was built structured after ancient suzerainty-vassal treaties (cf Dt 32). A suzerainty-vassal treaty was made between the kings of two nations; a greater and lesser king. Normally, the greater king promised to provide military protection for the lesser king as long as the lesser king provided certain goods and services. The Mosaic Covenant was this kind of treaty. God was the great King or Suzerain and Israel was His vassal. As long as they did what the great King said they would be blessed by the Great King. However, if they disobeyed the Great King and did not meet their end of the bargain then the Great King would not bless them but curse them. If and when Israel broke the Mosaic Law God would initiate court procedures. The first step was calling the witnesses who were present when God entered into the Mosaic Covenant with Israel at Mt Sinai. These witnesses were the angels (Dt 32; Acts 7). Second, the case would be introduced by the prophets who were God's prosecuting attorneys. Third, the prophets would provide evidence of God's faithfulness. Fourth, the prophet would indict the nation listing their various offenses against God. Fifth, the prophet would announce impending judgment upon the nation. These court procedures are found in several OT passages and this format is called the "rib (pronounced 'reev') format".<sup>ii</sup> Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah all convey their messages under this format. Understanding that these are court procedures will help you understand the OT and the role of the OT prophets.

So, what the OT prophets are doing is presenting God's case against Israel to demonstrate that He is not obligated to bless the nation and if He wants He can implement the fifth degree of cursing and send them into exile. As we will see later this happened twice in the OT. And all I'm trying to do here is give you a handle on the larger scope of the OT and what is happening. I want you to be able to pick up your Bible and read these OT books and get an idea of what is going on. So, now, let's look at Israel's history from 1445-586BC under the blessing/cursing motif and at the same time keep the Abrahamic Covenant in mind because no matter how idolatrous and sinful Israel gets God will not exterminate them. So, now we're going to put these principles that we have learned to work so we can understand why Israel's history flows the way it does.

There are two things to keep in mind before we begin. First, Israel became a nation at the Exodus in the year 1445 and so I'm tracing their history as a sovereign nation because next week I want to trace their history as a subservient nation. Second, the Shechinah Glory was with them during this entire time, he was with them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, once the tabernacle was built He dwelled there and when the Temple was built by Solomon He dwelled there until 586BC when He departed.

## II. HOW DOES ISRAEL'S OT HISTORY REFLECT THE BLESSING/CURSING MOTIF OF LEV 26 & DT 28?

### A. Wilderness Wanderings

Keeping that in mind let's trace the blessing/cursing motif of Lev 26/Dt 28 during the sovereign nations history. After the giving of the Mosaic Law at Mt Sinai, the nation began to head north and they sent out twelve spies into the Promised Land. And ten of the spies came back with a bad report and Joshua and Caleb came back with a good report And this angered God

**Numbers 14:22-23** "Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, <sup>23</sup> shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it.

This is cursing for disobedience. And so, Israel had to wander in the wilderness for forty years because of their unbelief. Only those under 20 years of age and Joshua and Caleb would get to enter the Promised Land. Even Moses was not permitted to enter and had to stand at a distance on Mt Nebo and look across at the land. Now, that generation died and a new leader, a godly man named Joshua was Moses' successor.

### B. Conquest and Settlement

Joshua led military conquests for seven years during which the Israelites conquered a large portion of the Promised Land (Josh 14:7, 10). During this time the faithful obedience of the people was rewarded with prosperous military campaigns and agricultural produce. The Bible says,

**Judges 2:7** The people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the LORD which He had done for Israel.

So, here they are under blessing (Lev 26:1-13).

### C. Judges

**Judges 2:10-15** All that generation (the elders who survived Joshua) also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel. <sup>11</sup> Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals, <sup>12</sup> and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from *among* the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger. <sup>13</sup> So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroath. <sup>14</sup> The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around *them*, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. <sup>15</sup> Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed.

So, God graciously gave them judges but the people did not listen to the judges and they continued to play the harlot and so God began to send even more cursing upon them (Lev 26:14ff).

#### **D. Election and Reign of King David**

After the period of the judges failed every man did what was right in his own eyes. And though God was their King the nation asked for a human king so they could be like the other nations. Saul became king but he was a spiritual failure and he led the people into further disobedience and thus further cursing came upon the nation until God appointed David, a great warrior and man after God's own heart. David walked in the statutes and commandments of the Lord. He was obedient and the nation prospered. He was able to conquer much of the territory in the Promised Land. And so God gave the land rest on every side and Israel moved into God's blessing (1 Ki 3:6).

#### **E. Golden Era of King Solomon**

David's son Solomon succeeded him and the kingdom of Israel enjoyed its greatest prosperity, largely because of David. Solomon extended the borders near the Euphrates River. But Solomon's violation of God's command not to have multiple wives, not to depend on military alliances for safety, and not to set up high places for idol worship prepared the way for the kingdoms decline.

**1 Kings 9:4-7** "As for you, if you will walk before Me as your father *David* walked, in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you *and* will keep My statutes and My ordinances, <sup>5</sup> then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, just as I promised to your father David, saying, 'You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.' <sup>6</sup> "But if you or your sons indeed turn away from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, <sup>7</sup> then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them, and the house which I have consecrated for My name, I will cast out of My sight. So Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples.

So, you can see that this is an outworking of the blessing/cursing motif of Lev 26.

#### **F. Kingdom Decline**

Solomon's son Rehoboam was a spiritual idiot. Instead of relying on the *wisdom* of the elders in national policy making he followed the *folly* of his best friends. This is no surprise considering the fact that Solomon's children were raised by heathen wives. As a result the kingdom declined and eventually divided.

**2 Chronicles 12:1-4** When the kingdom of Rehoboam was established and strong, he and all Israel with him forsook the law of the LORD. <sup>2</sup> And it came about in King Rehoboam's fifth year, because they had been unfaithful to the LORD, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem <sup>3</sup> with 1,200 chariots and 60,000 horsemen. And the people who came with him from Egypt were without number: the Lubim, the Sukkiim and the Ethiopians. <sup>4</sup> He captured the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem.

#### **G. Kingdom Divided**

After a raging civil war the 10 northern tribes (Israel) succeeded from the 2 southern tribes (Judah) and set up their own high places in Dan and fell into mass idolatry. The kings in the north were very bad. The two southern tribes (Judah) only had a few good kings.

**1 Kings 11:31-39** He said to Jeroboam, "Take for yourself ten pieces; for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and give you ten tribes' <sup>32</sup> (but he will have one tribe, for the sake of

My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel), <sup>33</sup> because they [southern kingdom] have forsaken Me, and have worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the sons of Ammon; and they have not walked in My ways, doing what is right in My sight and observing My statutes and My ordinances, as his father David *did*. <sup>34</sup> 'Nevertheless I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, but I will make him ruler all the days of his life, for the sake of My servant David whom I chose, who observed My commandments and My statutes; <sup>35</sup> but I will take the kingdom from his son's hand and give it to you, *even* ten tribes. <sup>36</sup> 'But to his son I will give one tribe, that My servant David may have a lamp always before Me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen for Myself to put My name. <sup>37</sup> 'I will take you, and you shall reign over whatever you desire, and you shall be king over Israel. <sup>38</sup> 'Then it will be, that if you listen to all that I command you and walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight by observing My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build you an enduring house as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you. <sup>39</sup> 'Thus I will afflict the descendants of David for this, but not always.'"

**2 Chronicles 21:12-20** Then a letter came to him from Elijah the prophet saying, "Thus says the LORD God of your father David, 'Because you [King Jehoram] have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father and the ways of Asa king of Judah, <sup>13</sup> but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have caused Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot as the house of Ahab played the harlot, and you have also killed your brothers, your own family, who were better than you, <sup>14</sup> behold, the LORD is going to strike your people, your sons, your wives and all your possessions with a great calamity; <sup>15</sup> and you will suffer severe sickness, a disease of your bowels, until your bowels come out because of the sickness, day by day." <sup>16</sup> Then the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabs who bordered the Ethiopians; <sup>17</sup> and they came against Judah and invaded it, and carried away all the possessions found in the king's house together with his sons and his wives, so that no son was left to him except Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons. <sup>18</sup> So after all this the LORD smote him in his bowels with an incurable sickness. <sup>19</sup> Now it came about in the course of time, at the end of two years, that his bowels came out because of his sickness and he died in great pain. And his people made no fire for him like the fire for his fathers. <sup>20</sup> He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he



reigned in Jerusalem eight years; and he departed with no one's regret, and they buried him in the city of David, but not in the tombs of the kings.

The story of Josiah (the good boy king from the southern kingdom)

**2 Kings 22:2** He did right in the sight of the LORD and walked in all the way of his father David, nor did he turn aside to the right or to the left.

**2 Kings 22:8** Then Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD." And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan who read it.

**2 Kings 22:10-11** Moreover, Shaphan the scribe told the king saying, "Hilkiyah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it in the presence of the king. <sup>11</sup> When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes.

**2 Kings 22:13** "Go, inquire of the LORD for me and the people and all Judah concerning the words of this book that has been found, for great is the wrath of the LORD that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."

**2 Kings 22:16-17** thus says the LORD, "Behold, I bring evil on this place and on its inhabitants, *even* all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read. <sup>17</sup> "Because they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods that they might provoke Me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore My wrath burns against this place, and it shall not be quenched."

So, God's judgment was certain but it was delayed because Josiah did right in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of David. So, you can see clearly the outworking of the blessing/cursing motif of Lev 26 and Dt 28 which governs the history of Israel in the OT.

## H. Exile

Now, in fulfillment of what God had said, and as an outworking of Lev 26 and Dt 28, God's judgment came upon the northern kingdom in 722BC and upon the southern kingdom in 586. As His weapon of judgment God sent the nation of Assyria to the northern kingdom. The Israelites became so hungry that mothers and fathers actually ate their own babies. This was a part of the fifth degree of cursing in Lev 26. Eventually they suffered military defeat and went into Exile to Assyria. These ten tribes were never permitted to return to the Land and are known as the "lost tribes of Israel".

God's judgment on the southern kingdom, over which Josiah was king, was delayed until 605BC when God had finally had enough and implemented Lev 26 & Dt 28. They too ate their own children with was a part of the fifth degree of cursing. The nation God sent to judge Judah was Babylon. This destruction and exile came in three stages; 605BC, 597BC, and 588-586BC. The Shechinah Glory, which had been with them ever since the Exodus when He went before them in a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, departed from the Temple in 586BC. These two tribes were partially restored after 70 years of exile (Jer 29:10) in 536BC. But the twelve tribes have never been completely restored to their Promised Land in fulfillment of Gen 12:7, 15:6-21; 17:8, Amos 9:15; Zech 8:7-8 and many other passages.

The important application of all this to us is that the Christian life is very similar to the life of the nation of Israel. For when we believe we entered a permanent Father-son relationship, yet our Father has given us NT commands to follow and our obedience or disobedience to these commands affects our fellowship with God and consequent reward or discipline.

### **III. HOW CAN GOD ENSURE ISRAEL'S OBEDIENCE (Jer 31:31-34)?**

There's one last hole to plug. If the Israelites sinful hearts did not have the ability to obey the Mosaic Law, how would they ever get to enjoy the Land forever as the Abrahamic Covenant promised? This is solved by the promise of a new and better covenant.

**Jeremiah 31:31** "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup> "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>34</sup> "They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

This covenant will unite the ten lost tribes of Israel and the two tribes of Judah. Notice the "I will..." language of this covenant. This signals that it is an unconditional covenant...not like the Mosaic Covenant. So, it's on the basis of this new covenant that

God will ensure the nations obedience. He says, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it...” So, God is going to give them a new heart that will enable them follow His law so that they can dwell in the land forever and not be spewed out. I hope this has helped you understand the OT and Israel’s history.

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<sup>i</sup> The nation was elect of God to fulfill two basic services to the human race. *First*, they were entrusted with the revelation of God so that their prophets would receive divine revelation and their scribes would faithfully preserve the Scriptures (Rom 3:2). *Second*, Israel served as the vessel through which salvation would come to the whole world through the Promised Messiah.

- <sup>ii</sup> I. Court Procedure (1:2a-4)
  - A. Call to witnesses (1:2a)
  - B. Introduction of the case (1:2b-4)
  - C. Judicial proof of God’s faithfulness and Israel’s unfaithfulness (1:2b-4)
- II. Indictment (1:5-23)
- III. Judgment (1:24-31)

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