## When Will Israel Be Converted to Christ?

Acts 1:6-8 September 27, 2015 Greg L. Price

There are some who profess to be Christians and yet make the most unbiblical claims imaginable about Jews not needing to trust in Jesus Christ and become Christians because God made a covenant with Abraham and his posterity that supersedes at least for the Jews the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. One such prominent proponent, John Hagee, teaches:

Let us put an end to the Christian chatter that "all the Jews are lost" and can't be in the will of God until they convert to Christianity! (Should Christians Support Israel?, p. 125).

I'm not trying to convert the Jewish people to the Christian faith.... In fact, trying to convert Jews is a waste of time. Jews already have a covenant with God and that has never been replaced by Christianity (*Houston Chronicle*, April 30, 1988, section 6, p. 1).

What about the words of Jesus in John 14:6? Jesus taught the exclusivity of the gospel of Jesus Christ as absolutely necessary to salvation. And what about the unforgettable words of the Apostle Peter spoken to the Jews themselves in Acts 4:10,12?

There are also those who profess Christ that teach that God is saving a remnant of individual Jews through the gospel of Jesus Christ, but it is claimed that God has no further plans to save Israel as a nation—because the kingdom of God has been permanently taken away from Israel as a nation (Matthew 21:43).

There are weekly threats from Israel's enemies in the Islamic world promising the total annihilation of Israel as a nation. What are we to expect from a biblical perspective concerning the future of Israel? Will Israel as a nation be forever destroyed by a nuclear bomb from Iran? Will Israel as a nation continue to despise Christ or will it be converted to

Let us turn to our text in Acts 1:6-8 where the apostles of Christ pose a question to the Lord in one of their meetings with the Lord Jesus before His ascension into heaven. The main points from our text this Lord's Day are in the form of two questions: (1) What about the Future of Israel (Acts 1:6-7)? And (2) What about the Present Work of the Church (Acts 1:8)?

## I. What about the Future of Israel (Acts 1:6-7)?

- A. As the apostles and Jesus gather together in Jerusalem in Acts 1:6, it would appear that the apostles saw in the powerful, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ an indication that the time was now ripe to restore Israel as a nation to her previous Davidic kingdom under her Messiah, Jesus Christ. And therefore this question is put to Christ: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" They still did not understand the course of events that God had ordained for His Church (which Christ will address momentarily).
- 1. The Old Testament Scriptures foretold that Israel as a nation would embrace Jesus Christ (Zechariah 12:9-10—this has not yet been fulfilled) and that the former enemies of Israel (Egypt and Assyria—portions of Iran and Iraq) would become fellow covenanted nations together with Israel to Jesus Christ (Isaiah 19:24-25).
- 2. During the ministry of Christ, the disciples at different times had hopes that Christ would then restore the Davidic kingdom to Israel, reigning from Jerusalem, and destroying the Roman occupiers in Palestine. But there were also those times that the hopes of a restored Davidic kingdom were quashed by Christ as well (Matthew 21:43; Luke 24:21). But now that Christ was raised from the dead in great power and glory as their Messiah, their hopes were once again revived that the time

of Israel's restoration to an even greater glory than ever before was about to be fulfilled.

- B. How does the Lord respond to this question put to Him? Look at the answer of the Lord Jesus in Acts 1:7.
- 1. Jesus doesn't say that the idea of Israel being restored as a covenanted nation is preposterous, is absurd, and is never going to happen. We have already considered a couple Messianic prophecies that demonstrate that such will indeed be the case (God is not finished with His ancient people Israel). Jesus says nothing that would contradict that at all. To the contrary, the fact that Jesus does not contradict the substance of the question asked by the apostles would more likely assume the basic truthfulness of what the apostles presupposed: namely, that the kingdom will one day be restored to Israel.
- 2. What Christ does want the apostles to understand is that they are not to be consumed with anticipation of Israel's national conversion to Christ and restoration under Christ because there is yet much work to be done for the Lord and testimony to be borne for the resurrected Christ before those prophecies concerning national Israel will be fully realized (Acts 1:7). These are glorious events that Christ states are in God's power and sovereignty to bring to pass, yet the times and the seasons for Israel's conversion and restoration were not then ready to be fulfilled (individual conversions of Jews—yes; but national conversion would have to wait). Christ does not deny that the times and seasons of Israel's conversion will yet come, but simply denies that the times and the seasons were not yet come. What the disciples needed was patience in the hope that God will bring to pass what He has promised at His own appointed time.
- 3. Perhaps the Lord did not tell the apostles, "Israel's conversion will not be for over 2,000 years" because it would discourage them in the present duties of bearing witness to the resurrected Christ

for the remainder of their life. The issue for the disciples of Christ was not timeliness, but faithfulness. The issue then (and now) was not reigning upon a throne, but suffering and taking up their cross and following Christ. O how difficult it is to wait for the Lord to bring about the changes in our lives, in our marriages, in our church, and in our nation for which we hope and pray. We need to hear the same message from Christ—be a faithful witness for Christ—don't get caught up so much in the "when" the change will take place, but rather in being what is needed in your life to be a faithful witness for Christ regardless of how long it might be before that change comes for which you have fervently prayed.

- C. Before moving on to our next main point, let us briefly survey what the Scripture teaches about Israel's conversion to Christ.
- 1. First, Israel's conversion will be a conversion to Jesus Christ and not a resting in or obedience to the Torah or the Talmud or to the tradition of the elders.
- a. No sinner (Jew or Gentile) is righteous before God on the ground of his/her obedience to the Law of God—absolutely no one (Romans 3:9-10a; Galatians 3:11). The Old Testament ceremonies and feast days were types and shadows that have ended with the coming of Christ (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1). Just as there is no difference between Jew or Gentile when it comes to sin and condemnation, so there is no difference between Jew or Gentile when it comes to righteousness and justification before God (Romans 1:16).
- b. There is no back door or secret way into the kingdom of Christ—He alone is the way, the truth, and the life! Israel as a nation is not presently under the blessing of God—it hates and despises Jesus Christ—it is the enemy of Christ and of the gospel (Romans 11:28a). There is yet military defeat in the future for Israel from her enemies for her hatred for Christ (Zechariah 14). But it is at that very time that the

Holy Spirit will convert her to Christ, grant national repentance, and deliver her from her enemies.

- c. And yet Paul says that Israel is a chosen and elect nation, and on the basis of that national covenant that God made with her (through the fathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), she is beloved for their sake and covenant (Romans 11:28b) and will yet be converted to Christ.
- d. And thus God is not finished with Israel as a nation, but will bring her out of her rebellion against Christ and will powerfully through the gospel of Jesus Christ and will by the power of the Holy Spirit bring her to a place of morning and repentance before God so that she throws her arms around Jesus Christ, falling upon his neck, and kisses the Son to the glory of God who will not forgets His covenant with her.
- 2. The casting off of Israel for a time for her rejection and crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the conversion of Israel to Christ is beautifully illustrated in the analogy Paul gives of the olive tree in Romans 11 (which represents the Covenant of Grace and Visible Church into which Israel as natural branches was originally grafted—the unity of the Covenant of Grace and the Visible Church). However, due to her unbelief of the gospel and rejection of Christ, those natural branches were broken off, and in their place were grafted unnatural branches of Gentiles who professed faith in Christ. There are not two different olive trees—one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles—one for Israel and one for other nations of the world that come to Christ.
- a. Paul warns the Gentile believers not to be haughty and proud about God's mercy upon them and God's just judgment upon Israel and the Jews. For just as Israel was broken off and removed from the olive tree of God's covenant and church due to her unbelief, so Gentiles and Gentile nations will likewise incur God's judgment if they walk in rebellion against Christ (think of the Protestant Reformation in Europe and in Scotland, England, and Ireland by means of the Solemn

League and Covenant, but look now where these nations are). God's judgment rests upon Israel and upon Gentile nations alike due to their rebellion against Christ. But Paul holds out the certain and confident hope that God will by the power of the gospel bring the fullness of the Gentiles and Gentile nations of the world into the Covenant of Grace and Visible Church, and will likewise cause all Israel as a people and nation to be saved at that future time through the same gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 11:25-26).

Dear ones, there is no love and mercy that can possibly compare to that of our Savior. He who was unjustly condemned for being absolutely righteous and holy—He who was spat upon, blindfolded, and beaten with fists—He who had a crown of thorn pounded into His blessed skull with rods—He who was taunted, teased, and blasphemed—He who was treated like the worst kind of criminal and was crucified, suffering the most excruciating death ever devised by the cruelty of wicked men—He who willingly suffered all that and especially suffered the full wrath of the Father in order to rescue undeserving sinners from among Jews and Gentile is He who comes to you in the gospel and bids you come in faith unto Him, repenting and despising your sin that sent Him to that cross, and receiving by faith alone His forgiveness and His perfect righteousness as your only hope of eternal salvation. That is Israel's only hope of salvation, and that my friend is likewise your only hope of eternal salvation. The kingdom will only be restored to Israel when Israel is brought to kneel before the Lord Jesus Christ.

## II. What about the Present Work of the Church? (Acts 1:8).

A. Rather than being preoccupied with when the kingdom will be restored to Israel in the future, the Lord Jesus gives His apostles a present commission to fulfill by means of a present power through the Holy

Spirit.

- 1. Note first that Jesus gives His disciples a present commission to fulfill ("and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" Acts 1:8b).
- a. It is interesting that though the Lord Jesus would not have the apostles cast their hopeful eye upon a present restoration of Israel to Christ, nevertheless, the commission Jesus gives to the apostles is the very means that God would use to bring about the restoration of Israel in its appointed time—bearing witness to the resurrected Christ. This commission was not just busy work with which the apostles were to occupy themselves; this was the means to seeing their question about Israel realized—Israel's restoration would be realized through being faithful witnesses of the resurrected Christ to Jews, to Samaritans, and to Gentiles. These are the three major divisions in the Book of Acts: Jerusalem and Judaea (Jews) in Acts 1-7; Samaria (Samaritans—mixed Jews) in Acts 8; and the uttermost part of the earth (Gentiles—which includes us in North America) in Acts 9-28.
- b. A witness is one who bears testimony to what he has seen and heard. The apostles were **extraordinary witnesses** in bearing an eye-witness testimony to the teaching of Christ, the miracles of Christ, the sinless life of Christ, the suffering and death of Christ, the burial of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Christ, and the bodily ascension of Christ into heaven. The Greek word that is translated "witnesses" is *martures* (from which our English word "martyr" is derived).
- (1) Jesus never promised that being a witness for Him and bearing testimony for Him would be an easy job. It would prove to be a very dangerous job—enduring ridicule, rejection, isolation, imprisonment, torture, and even death. With enemies of the gospel so prevalent throughout the world and in our own nation, we ought not to be shocked and surprised to see and to experience persecution for our

witness to Jesus Christ—that is simply what a witness should expect. Why would we expect such a cushy, easy, comfortable life in witnessing for Christ when Christ did not experience this kind of life, when the apostles did not experience this kind of life, when the faithful throughout history have suffered horrendously, and when Christians who will not compromise their faith in Christ throughout the world are presently suffering the hatred that people have for Christ Himself.

- (2) That is what we must understand, dear ones. The hatred that others have for us when we bear witness that we are biblical Christians who trust in Christ, who love Christ, and who will not sacrifice His truth and His commandments on the altar of expediency and comfort, it is Christ that the world hates and despises in us (Acts 9:4-5). The anger of the world is not so much directed against us personally, but is directed against the Lord Jesus who they hear from our lips and see in our lives.
- 2. Second, Jesus gives a present power to accomplish that commission ("But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you" Acts 1:8a).
- a. The Holy Spirit is the power of Jesus Christ here upon earth in the bodily absence of Christ from earth. That which is said to characterize the ministry of the Holy Spirit as it relates to bearing testimony for Jesus Christ is POWER (*dunamis* from which comes our word for dynamite—this is the might and energy of the Holy Spirit to bear a faithful and powerful witness for Jesus Christ).
- (1) As was indicated in the previous sermon, it is not that the Holy Spirit did not work powerfully in the Old Testament in the lives of God's people, but this is a power that comes from the resurrected Christ who sits as King of kings at the Father's right hand. This power is not different in kind from that given in the Old Testament, but is different in degree in the lives of not only the apostles, but also in the lives of all of God's redeemed.

- (2) Whatever you need, dear ones, to be a faithful witness in your family, at work, when you are all alone on your computer, when you are tempted to follow the multitude to do evil, when you are afraid, when you are angry and upset, when you feel betrayed, when you feel weak, helpless, confused, when you struggle in overcoming that besetting sin, when you endure persecution, afflictions, pain, heartache, poverty, and death, the power and energy of the Holy Spirit is the power and energy of the resurrected Christ that is yours in Christ Jesus.
- (3) It is not a power that is alien and foreign to the Christian, but a power that works within us both to will and to do God's good pleasure, to bear the fruit of the Spirit, to speak with wisdom, to grow in knowledge, to hate and despise sin, to grow in removing those glaring inconsistencies in our lives. It is a power that Christ purchased for you as a part of your inheritance in Christ. Just as the Spirit of God is yours in Christ (as your most prized gift from the ascended Christ), so the power of the Holy Spirit is yours in Christ.
- (4) The greatest manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit is not necessarily found in miracles, but is especially found in giving us new and holy desires, in giving us a holy hatred for all that offends and grieves the blessed Holy Spirit, in giving us a sacrificial love in coming down from our throne to lay down our "rights" for your wife, your husband, your children, your parents, your brother and sister. The power of the Holy Spirit is so often not seen in the loud, earthshaking, and fiery life and ministry, but rather in the still small voice (1 Kings 19:11-13).
- b. Dear ones, the kingdom of Christ will not come and transform this nation (with all of its gross idolatry, blasphemy, false religion, covenant-breaking, Sabbath-breaking, murder of the unborn, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, no-fault divorce) by a political agenda, by a political party, by people looking to a new President, Congress, by hoping in a visit from the Pope (who Scripture calls the man

of sin and son of perdition in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). When will we learn that our faith cannot be in the strength of the economy, in the prognostications of financial gurus, or in the arm of princes, but in the Lord alone (Psalm 118:9; Psalm 146:3)? The kingdom of Christ will not come to Israel or to this nation apart from the power of the Holy Spirit turning it to Jesus Christ for salvation and covenanting as a nation to be Christ's. The power of the Holy Spirit that will one day bring Israel and the nations of this world to Christ is the same power that is yours to be a faithful witness for Christ in every trying circumstance you face in life. The Holy Spirit is yours in Christ and so is His power. It is not by the might or strength of men, but by my Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts (Zechariah 4:6).

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