

ANOTHER EXODUS

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With the arrival of spring, the Jewish people will be once again observing the Feast of Passover as they have been faithfully doing for 3,500 years, whether in good times or bad. Israel's mighty deliverance from bondage in Egypt has so shaped their identity and faith, the Exodus remains an unforgettable experience to this day.

Yet consider these words from the prophet Jeremiah:

"Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "that it shall no more be said, 'The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, 'The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.' For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers." Jeremiah 16: 14-18

In other words, God promised that one day there would be such an amazing Israelite return to their ancient homeland from all corners of the world that it would eclipse in magnitude the memory of the Exodus.

We have been privileged in modern times to see that promise coming to pass before our very eyes. No other people on earth have ever been exiled from their homeland, only to return and be re-established as a nation. Yet this has happened to Israel not just once but twice in history, and what makes it even more amazing is that the Bible actually tells us all this is going to happen ahead of time. Indeed, we can look upon it and say *"the Lord lives..."*

Nonetheless, many Christians do not want to hear anything about God still being faithful to the Jews. They cling to Replacement theology, an erroneous doctrine that holds Israel was exiled and accursed forever for rejecting and crucifying Jesus, and 'replaced' by the Church as God's redemptive agent in the world. This teaching has caused untold harm to the Jews over the centuries and persists to this day. One of the favorite Scriptures cited by the Replacement camp to prove their point reads:

"The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits." (Matthew 21:43)

To truly understand what Jesus meant by this saying will lead us to the next major feast on the Hebrew calendar - Pentecost.

In context, Jesus was speaking to those who controlled Temple worship and - drawing from the Hebrew prophets - he warned that the "abominations" being committed at the Temple would soon lead to its destruction (see Ezekiel 5:11). "Behold, your house is being left to you

desolate!" he cautioned in Matthew 23:38.

Again in Luke 19:46, he upset the Temple priests by saying, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a House of Prayer,' but you have turned it into a 'den of thieves.'" The latter phrase comes from Jeremiah 7:11, which harkens back to God's destruction of the Tabernacle at Shiloh due to the thievery of Eli's sons (I Samuel 4). The priests instantly knew that Jesus had just invoked a divine judgment on their Temple livelihood.

Thus we see that Jesus gave clear warning that the Temple would be destroyed due to the sins of the priesthood, and that the 'kingdom of God' - the unmistakable presence of God that had rested there - would be lifted. But what happened to that kingdom, that divine presence?

The second chapter of Acts records that it was then entrusted to a small band of 120 Jewish followers of Jesus when the Holy Spirit fell on them on the Day of Pentecost. The Church was born that day, but it was not made up of another "people" - they were still Jews, still Israelites and sons of the covenants. The fact that within 200 years the Church was largely Gentile is not a testament that the Kingdom was ripped from the Jews forever. Rather, it is a testimony to the effectiveness and zeal of the original Jewish Apostles in preaching the Gospel to all nations.

God intended the Church to be an ever widening 'movement' that would not replace Israel, but enlarge her. Gentiles were being added or "grafted into" the existing olive tree of Israel, according to Paul in Romans 11:17-21; while in Ephesians 2:11-22 we who were once "excluded from the commonwealth of Israel" are being "brought near" or included through Christ, now "fellow citizens... in God's household."

No doubt, within natural Israel many "branches" (individuals) have been "cut off" down through the ages because of unbelief, but the olive tree itself remains, as does the "everlasting" covenant that God made with Abraham and his seed by solemn oath (Hebrews 6:13-18). Unlike the Mosaic sacrifices referenced in Hebrews 10:9, the Abrahamic covenant - being God's decision to bring salvation to the world through Israel - was never abolished. In this regard, Romans 3:2 tells us the "unbelief" of some "will not nullify the faithfulness of God" to His covenant promises to Israel, while in II Timothy 2:13 Paul further says of his fellow Israelites, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself."



Whether Replacement adherents realize it or not, we are in the midst of an incredible deliverance for Israel as unforgettable as the Exodus. God has promised to free His ancient people from exile and unbelief, and to restore them to their land and to Himself. This promised national redemption in the fullness of time involves a most dynamic return of the Kingdom of God back to the Temple courts (see Joel 2; Zechariah

4; Revelation 11). One day, we will *all* be able to look back at this and say, "the Lord lives."

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