

Lessons from Israel 2

The figure of Israel 2

Today we want to examine the ways in which Israel is used as a picture in the New Testament.

We want to see why Israel - and things related directly to Israel are brought up in New Testament contexts, such as the one we will address today.

Ephesians 2 is a key chapter for believers in Christ. We use verses 8 and 9 to explain the concept that salvation is by grace through faith. We insist, because this passage insists, that salvation is not by works.

We call salvation a gift, because that is what salvation is called here.

Our responsibility to walk according to God's commands is also outlined here too, because we are His workmanship.

In this chapter we see the mercy of God, the love of God, the grace of God, and the kindness of God.

But do we also see Israel? And if we do, why?

Let's approach the passage and attempt to find out:

Ephesians 2:1-3

1 ¶ And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;
2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:
3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

There was a time, before we were made alive, that we walked in a common way. We walked in the same way the world was walking.

It was a lifestyle the disobedient still have. Its path was determined by our flesh. We took each step based on the desires of our flesh.

We say that it was common, because it was not a life set apart for God, it was a life we wanted. In the same way others are walking in the way they want.

We were, at that time, not part of God's family. We were outsiders - and on the broad road.

Ephesians 2:4-7

4 ¶ But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

God intervened. He provided mercy, because He loved us.

We were still dead at that time, but He stepped in to make us alive. He did so through His son, Jesus Christ. And He did it by grace.

He put us on a path that was not common. We became part of something - part of a plan that has a future.

Walking in this way would shew forth His rich grace and kindness. It would no longer be our way, but His - and this way of living would glorify Him.

Ephesians 2:8-10

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

This new way of living is by faith. It is salvation by faith - and ultimately a lifestyle of faith.

Grace is provided to us as a gift and we accept that gift. We begin living in the way God intended for us. We do the kind of works He intended for us to do, because we are His.

Now, we are who we were created to be. And we have fellowship with those who are living in the same way.

One who also lived by faith is mentioned in Hebrews 11. And this is where we begin to see our connection with his nation, both in sense and in substance.

Hebrews 11:8

8 ¶ By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

Abram's journey started much like ours, not knowing where it would lead, but having faith in the One that called.

Hebrews 11:9-10

9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

He lived in an uncommon way, looking forward to a future with God.

Hebrews 11:11-12

11 ¶ Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

12 Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

Sarah had to walk by faith too, judging the One who made the promise faithful.

And the promises made were fulfilled.

Hebrews 11:13-16

13 ¶ These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.

16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

These who lived by faith were looking toward a future only God could provide. They walked as strangers and pilgrims.

They were set apart from the world around them because of their walk of faith. They were not taking action based on their own desires.

They obeyed God, believing the promises of God.

Hebrews 11:17-19

17 ¶ By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,

18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:

19 Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

And even in these moments of faith-trial, when the commands don't make sense, Abraham still obeyed. He did the math (accounting that God was able) and proceeded accordingly.

Ephesians 2:11-13

11 ¶ Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Wait, we were what? Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel?

These are not the first words that spring to mind when we begin talking about our salvation. We speak more our bondage to sin and deliverance.

This passage brings the nation of Israel to the top of our minds. Israel is a picture (a figure) of things we embrace in Christ today, that were present first in Israel.

We've talked about at least three of them already:

Faith - trusting God enough to live in the way He chooses

Family - set apart, unified by an uncommon life, faithful to Him

Future - knowing that there is something beyond, because God has promised

Let's think about the ways in which Israel was different because they were not "without God in the world."

I thought of at least one testimony that represents an understanding that Israel was different - because of their God.

We find it in Joshua, when the people of Israel were preparing to enter the land of promise and had sent spies into Jericho. And there they lodged with one Rahab.

Joshua 2:9-11

9 And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.

11 And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

To observe the history of Israel is to observe a people that are not "without hope." It is to see a people walking in a certain way, because they have a very certain kind of God.

It is to see a nation that is "nigh to God" and therefore to see His very specific and special work on their behalf.

When we observe Israel, we always observe Him.

And Jesus Christ has made us "nigh unto God." He has brought us into God's family. He has given us a future beyond those base things of this world - giving us eternal hope!

Ephesians 2:14-18

14 ¶ For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

We see in Jesus Christ the perfect, spotless lamb. The sacrifice that could make all that was wrong, right.

He has made those of us who were outsiders, insiders. Solving our sin problem and giving us an eternal home, as part of His family.

Ephesians 2:19-23

19 ¶ Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

We are now part of a heritage. We are the people of God. The history of His working in the world - Israel's history - is now ours.

He is the cornerstone.

Nothing could have been built. Nothing is built without Him.