

The Purpose Of Israel

Why God Chose Israel

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 17-Apr-03; Sermon #606A

During the Holy Days we frequently delve into this story of the Children of Israel. And we do this to a greater or lesser extent.

Sometimes we do it more so than others, but it seems like just about every year, we talk about what the children of Israel did.

The plain fact is we have a hard time avoiding it because the Holy Days themselves rest upon the events of Israel's history. It doesn't necessarily start with their sojourn in Egypt. But, in these Holy Days that's usually where we start—with the sojourn in Egypt—and then their eventual enslavement by the Egyptians.

God's efforts through Moses and Aaron to free them from their slavery, including the 10 disastrous plagues upon Egypt (three of which were on Israel themselves).

And then, of course, there is the Passover and their redemption as well as the Exodus on this day, the first Day of Unleavened Bread. And their journey across Egypt till they got to the Red Sea and found themselves hedged in.

And then, God provided a way out. They crossed the Red Sea, and the Egyptians were drowned as the waters came back.

Then, they journeyed on to Mount Sinai after about a week or so, and they end up there, pitching their tents at the foot of the mountain.

They received the Law there. Unfortunately, the Golden Calf incident also occurred there.

And then, there were the rest of their wanderings through the wilderness.

They finally get to Jordan, and they cross over, and they conquer the Promised Land.

To us these are far more than just stories. They are our history! They are the basis for many of the things that we do throughout the year.

The Bible, of course, doesn't stop there with Israel entering the Promised Land, and

conquering the Canaanites. It goes on and continues to talk about Israel's history.

Through the very tumultuous times of the Judges during which they would be good for a while, backslide, and finally end up in slavery again to someone. God would have to raise up a judge—a savior—for them who would usually, in most cases, pull together an army of some sort or do some heroic deed and win the people back and then the process would start all over again.

They did well for a while. They would become enslaved. God would have to raise up a savior for them. This was repeated time and time again over almost 400 years all the way up through Samuel's time (and even into the early days of Saul, you might say).

But, then the times of the Kings began. And so you have Saul, David, and then his line, and then all the things that happened there until finally you get to the point where Israel and Judah had split up, Israel went it's way, and Judah stayed where it was. And you have these two monarchies declining over the years.

And finally, Israel gets conquered by the Assyrians and led away into slavery.

Not too long thereafter, Judah does the same thing except they don't go to Assyria but to their neighbors—the Babylonians. Then, they come back 70 years later.

The story stops not very long thereafter. The Jews rebuild the Temple, and get settled back into the land—a very small portion of them. And then the Old Testament ends.

It is picked up at the birth of Christ about 400 years later. We have basically about 70 years more history or, if you want to go to the end of the time of the Apostle John, 90 or 100 years more.

But, it is the same thing happening.

Here, their very Savior has come, and they don't recognize Him. They slide further down the line, and both God and Rome get fed up with Jews. The Roman armies come in and they re-conquer Judea, level Jerusalem, and most of the Jews are led into slavery and that's it—until 1948 when their history as a nation picks up again.

So, it is a history of a people who have very short peaks of goodness, a long downslide, and just one captivity after another.

There is a lot to be learned in all of this.

From the point of 70 AD (if you will turn to Matthew 21) you will see Jesus' prediction of what was going to happen here.

Matthew 21:42-45 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD'S doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I say to you [He's talking to the Pharisees and leaders of Judea of the time.] the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. "And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived [correctly] that He was speaking of them.

Them and all their kind all the way back—all of Israel basically. Here He is specifically speaking to Judea, but the Jews were the only ones around at the time representing Israel.

Jesus tells them in a way that *"You've had your chance. Now I'm going to make a nation that is worthy of these things; that produce the fruits that show they are following My laws and keeping My covenant."*

Sounds similar to what Jesus (before he was a man) said in places like II Kings 17 where He put Israel out of His sight. Or Isaiah 50; or Jeremiah 3; or Ezekiel 16 or Hosea 2 where He says He put them away. No longer is He their Husband.

So, if God has put away the people of Israel and rejected them at least for the time being, what is Israel's purpose?

Maybe, I should say, What was Israel's purpose? Was Israel a failed trial run at God ruling the people? Or, was there something more to it?

Why did God use Israel? Why did God choose Israel? What makes Israel so special? Where does Israel fit?

This is what we will be getting at today.

Let's start with some good news.

Romans 11:26-32 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The

The Purpose of Israel by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this *is* My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." Concerning the gospel *they are* enemies for your sake, but concerning the election *they are* beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable. For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. For God has committed them all to disobedience [for now], that He might have mercy on all.

So this is the good news. It comes in two parts. The first part of the good news is that Israel has not been put away so far that there's not any hope for them. Paul says it very plainly, "So all Israel shall be saved." He is very positive.

I'm sure that word "all" means "most" or "almost all." I'm sure that there will be some that stupidly reject Him. That would be their own fault.

But, God will set out to bring all of them to salvation. It says in II Peter 3 that He wants all to come to repentance. It is the same "all" that he is speaking about here, and more—all of the Gentiles as well.

And the second part of the good news is that because of what Israel went through, and because of what they did, and what they showed in their history, we have been given the opportunity for salvation now as the first fruits.

God knew all along that Israel was going to fail. But, this was part of His plan. He wanted a people like Israel to show us the ropes, as it were, in a physical way.

He loves them. We'll see that a little later. So, He wasn't committing them to disobedience forever so that they would lose their salvation, or any hope for salvation. As it says here, "God committed them all to disobedience" implying "for the time being."

We know from other places that He will give them a chance later when it is better for them. But, here we have the good news: first they aren't lost, and second, we are saved as a result of their action making a place—an opening—available to us for this wonderful calling and salvation.

We will come back to this later, and see just how that works.

The Purpose of Israel by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

For the time being, they are cut off from the vine, and others are being grafted in.

Now, we need to go back to the beginning, though, to see God's purposes in choosing Israel at that time, when things got started.

So, let's go back to the beginning of Israel, you might say, in Genesis 12, and the calling of Abraham. This is when God really got the ball rolling on things.

Genesis 12:1-3 Now the LOORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family 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."

Now this last thing (in verse 3) I feel is the most fundamental reason God chose Abraham, and thus Israel, and his descendants. That is, to bless mankind in the Person of Jesus Christ. Christ is the center of everything. He is the One whom the whole bible—the Old Testament especially—was written toward as it says there in Romans, that He is the end, the goal, of these things.

Everything is focused on the Son. And, He had to come from someplace. He had to come from some people. And, God called this man Abraham, because Abraham had some special qualities that God saw. He was also descended from those who had been faithful before him. And he was the man that God chose to be the one to engender this race (if you will) that will culminate in Jesus Christ.

So, since He had to come from some family of humanity, and Abraham had certain special qualities that He felt were necessary to be an example to his descendants, He chose the family of Abraham.

God says here, almost speaking to Himself:

Genesis 18:19 "For I have known him,

This is when He was trying to decide whether He would tell Abraham what He was about to do to Sodom and Gomorrah.

The Purpose of Israel by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Genesis 18:19 "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LOORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LOORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him."

This man Abraham had a special relationship with God. And God had made everything possible for Abraham to have these qualities to command his children after him. His whole household it says.

And then it says the reason He had trained him a certain way was that they might keep the way of the Lord. There was something in Abraham that he would pass down, that would make them—let's say, because of the way they were, they had an affinity for God's way. I don't want to take this too far.

This was a people who it says here that God had worked with so they may keep His way.

I don't use too much hyperbole. God knew that for His purposes He was working out, Abraham was the most humanly perfect individual to begin building a nation.

This was a special man to found a dynasty that would end up in a nation that had these certain qualities.

Like I said, I don't want to take that too far. But, why else would God call him the father of the faithful? This was a man who was, in a way, head and shoulders above anybody else that had lived up to that time, and God certainly had a hand in that.

But, we know, of course, that Abraham was not perfect either. Abraham sinned. He had a lot of room to grow. But, he was one of the few, if not the only one, whom God ever asked to sacrifice his only son, just as He did.

So, that puts him at least one rung above the rest of us.

This is the beginning of things. God started with the best clay that He could find.

Exodus 19 is after the Israelites came out of Egypt, and God is about to propose the Covenant with Israel. He, at this point, gives some reasons why He is doing so.

Exodus 19:3-5 And Moses went up to God, and the LOORD called to him from

The Purpose of Israel by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. 'Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine.

He had a right to give it.

Exodus 19:6 'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

You might say that this is the "Preface to the Old Covenant." You know, "We the People..." type of thing.

This lays out in stark terms what the whole covenant is about.

He lists basically three main purposes here in this four-verse section.

The first one was they were to keep His covenant which involved obedience. Now remember I said that He chose Abraham because he would teach his children how to keep His way, and to obey Him. This one shows up again right here.

The second is that they were to be a special treasure to Him—a special people. A people, unlike all others, who answered to Him. And He then, helped them. They had this special relationship.

The third is that they were to be a Kingdom of Priests, and a Holy Nation.

Now, there is some overlap in these. Some of them impinge on the other. However, the primary point here that we need to get out of it is that God would set them apart from all other nations as the one He would work with and through.

In a way, you could say that they were the mediatory nation. God would work through Israel, to the Gentiles, and toward the rest of the world, just as He would work through the high priest to the rest of Israel.

So, they were to be a kingdom of priests that were supposed to bridge the gap between humanity and God. And then we see this in finer detail in the Levitical system and

priesthood.

Let's read Jeremiah 33. I'm using this passage in part to summarize another of Israel's purposes. (I've already mentioned this a little bit).

Jeremiah 33:14 'Behold, the days are coming,' says the LOORD, 'that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah:

Now remember what I said earlier about Jesus Christ's central place.

Jeremiah 33:15-18 'In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David A Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In those days Judah will be saved, And Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this *is the name* by which she will be called: THE LOORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.' "For thus says the LOORD: 'David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; 'nor shall the priests, the Levites, lack a man to offer burnt offerings before Me, to kindle grain offerings, and to sacrifice continually.'"

Now the summary idea here is that they are God's agents for bringing His plan to pass, for the most part. He has used Gentiles from time to time, but for the most part, God has used Israel to push matters along in His plan. We see here that the central idea through the Old Testament is to bring history to the point where the Messiah could be born, and have His ministry. And of course, as part of that ministry—make His sacrifice—and then start the church.

It goes beyond this though. God has, it seems, always used Israel as a prod to move history along in the way that He wants it to go. We can see that very clearly in the Old Testament. Every world empire had to go through Judea. And, things happened when they went through Judea.

The first one, Babylon, came through and made about the most difference in world history except for maybe the Romans. But when they came through and took the Jews back to Babylon, that set up all the stuff that was going to happen after that to bring Jesus Christ to this earth in Judea. Actually, the taking away of the Jews from Judea made it possible for Jesus Christ to be born in Judea! It seems a paradoxical way of doing things. But, God pulled the Jews to Babylon, and then He separated them out

there in Babylon and only a very small portion of Jews came back after the Exile.

What they did (based on Ezra, and Nehemiah, and the prophets of that time—Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) was set up a state that was very religious, centered at Jerusalem. A high percentage of the people who came back were priests, or of the priestly family; some Jews; very few Levites, because they were the ones who had to do all the work, and a lot of them didn't want to come back.

So, the ones who did want to come back were very dedicated. This lasted—this religious fervor and devotion—about 500 years, through the Maccabees.

There were some ups and downs through there—I don't want to make it sound like it was level the whole way—but, through the time of the Maccabees, through the reigns of the Maccabean kings, even into the time of Herod...at the end of which...Jesus was born.

So, Jesus was born in an environment in which the Law and God's way of life as the Jews perceived it was at the forefront of most of the populace's mind.

The temple was being beautified at the time, and everything was being set up for the coming of Jesus Christ.

So, all the things were set up perfectly for His ministry.

I've heard that the people up in Galilee were especially devout. They had migrated up to that area to get away from all the infighting and bickering going on in Jerusalem, to keep a pure law. And so, where was Jesus raised? He was raised in Nazareth—a hot bed of Galilean devotion.

So, He was raised at a time of religious fervor, also combined with nationalistic zeal, which set up the problems with the Romans, and these things then could come to pass.

That's just a sample of the way that God has used Israel and Judah to move events along. There's more that happens at the end-time—using Joseph to push the nations here and there, and to do certain things to make sure that the Beast rises, and the end-time takes place according to God's plan. The people of Israel will unknowingly be a great part of that.

So, I wanted to show you this here to summarize the fact that one of God's great purposes has been to use Israel to move His plan along. Remember, the peoples of

Israel are those whom God has worked through in the world of men.

OK. Because of all this, because God has chosen Israel to do these things, He gave Israel every advantage; physically when they came out of Egypt, they were strong-bodied slave people. They were physically pure, let's say, because they had pretty much a pure ancestry all the way back to Noah. They were strong. They were unmingled.

And then, when God brought them into the land, He gave them abundance. He gave them the land that was of milk and honey—it was productive and fertile.

He told them time and again that He would provide them everything they needed to be His people and to do the job that He had given them to do. Whether it was to fight their wars, or keep them from certain plagues, bless their crops and herds or whatever else it might be.

He said, "I will do it for you. All I want you to do is obey Me, and keep my Covenant." And they failed miserably to do this.

Now, there was a reason why God chose Abraham, who was "the most perfect human" up to that time to start this nation, and why He used Israel (though they weren't the greatest nation, the most populous nation, or maybe the strongest nation, physically). God had put them through this rigorous test in Egypt to make them strong.

So, here they had not only a good physical background, but they had God on their side to give them everything they wanted. They had these promises. And still, they failed.

Now this doesn't mean they were superior. Don't get me wrong. That's why I've been couching my words here, putting quotations around them. They weren't superior people.

But, as physical specimens, they had everything going for them. And God did this for a very specific reason.

God will say it before all humanity, "Even though you had every circumstance that was 'perfect,' you still could not obey Me." Not without something very important.

So, Israel's history over basically 4000 years will be the classroom history given to all peoples at some point, to teach how impossible it is for humanity to be saved alone without God's help.

Humanity, as God showed in the people of Israel, cannot solve its own problems. Even if everything was set up just perfectly, it would still go wrong without Him, and what he could supply spiritually.

Let's talk a little bit about this racial purity, because I don't want to just leave it like this. Let's go back to the book of Ezra. Ezra knew a thing or two. That's why God used him as He did after the return from exile. I think God must have given Ezra a look into His plan. He knew what needed to be done.

This section is all about intermarrying with the pagans in the land. The leader is speaking to Ezra:

Ezra 9:2 "For they have taken some of their daughters *as wives* for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of *those* lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass."

So, right when they got back from Babylon, they were getting into the same mess that they had before Nebuchadnezzar came. One of the big problems was intermarriage.

So, Ezra had to solve this problem.

Ezra 10:10-11 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives."

This was a huge step. Who knows how long some of these mixed families had been together. He told them, "You are making a big mistake."

There were both physical and spiritual reasons for why Ezra had them do this.

The spiritual reasons are the ones shown here. Because God said many times back in the Pentateuch, and here as well, that when you intermarry with pagans, your sons and daughters are more likely to end up pagan too.

So, he didn't want any religious problem there.

But, there is a bit of racial purity involved in this. I don't want to get away from it too much, but I don't want to emphasize it too much either.

Now, the critics who attack us for feeling that we have some attitude of racial superiority doctrine do not understand the real reasons for God's demand for Israel to remain racially pure. If they did, they wouldn't have a problem with it.

It (God's demands) are not for reasons of superiority. It was not because Israel was better than others.

It was because He had a purpose for Israel, and the most important purpose is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ Himself must be directly descended from Abraham through Judah, and through David and not from the line of Jeconiah. That was the only way that He could be the Promised Seed.

It was only this particular set of circumstances that fulfill the prophecies, and establishes His claim as Messiah.

And so if there were too much intermarriage His "blood" would not be right for the job description. He had to be a descendant of Abraham through Judah, through David, but not of the line of Jeconiah, because it says in scripture (about Jeconiah) that none of his seed will ever sit on the throne of Israel.

And so at this time, we're dealing with the line of Jeconiah part, because some of those of David's line that came back were from the line of Jeconiah. And Jesus had to come from the line of Nathan and Solomon (but not through Jeconiah, a descendant of Solomon). Mary's ancestry comes through Nathan, son of David (not the prophet). That was worked out by God and this was part of it.

The second thing about this purity is that Israel was to be a Holy and separate nation. And they were to retain as many of those physical advantages that they had at the beginning. God doesn't want (looking at this physically) somebody to come up and be able to say that Israel had degenerated over the years by mixing of blood, and therefore had become just "normal," and therefore their example would not be as good (or bad as the case may be).

But God wanted them separate with all the advantages that they had physically, as well as the perfect laws, to prove that mankind is incapable of overcoming its own nature and living in peace and love as they should.

So, God is looking at the long term, here. He is showing that Israel, throughout history (no matter at what point it happens to be)—even though they had all the attributes that should have allowed them to do well—failed.

There are also reasons of holiness that are associated with the Old Covenant and some of the laws there. I don't want to go into all of that, but the separateness issue is probably the biggest one. He wanted them to be a nation that was separate from the other nations to be the example. And so he wanted them not to intermarry.

In this book of the Second Law (the second time it was reiterated) He restates some reasons here.

Deuteronomy 7:6 "For you *are* a holy [which means separate, set apart] people to the LOORD your God; the LOORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself...

Now God is Holy, and the people that He has chosen for Himself must also be holy.

And so, one of the laws that He said was, that they were not to intermarry because they were to be holy as He is Holy.

Deuteronomy 7:6-11 ...a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. [They were to be we might say "a cut above."] "The LOORD 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 LOORD loves you, [Basically it says that the Lord did not set His love on you because of anything that you had, or that you did, but because He loved them.] and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LOORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. "Therefore know that the LOORD your God, He *is* God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; "and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. "Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them.

OK. I find here four reasons that He chose Israel.

He chose them to be a separate people for Himself. A special treasure.

He chose them to demonstrate His love for them. Because He simply loved them. He had to chose someone, and He decided to set His love on them (whether for Abraham's sake, or whoever's sake). He decided to choose Israel. They had a special place in His heart. This put them under a great burden. But, when God loves you, there is a great deal of responsibility that comes with that.

He chose them to keep His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with whom He had a very special relationship to begin with.

He chose them to make a covenant with them under which they were to keep the commandments and obey Him in everything.

These purposes just keep on coming. Many of them overlap. Many of them are almost the same. As we go through these things, you will see that God is very consistent about why He chose them to do these things.

Now I stressed just a few moments ago that God's choosing of Israel was an act of love for them. Even though from the start He knew that they would fail to obey.

Some might cynically say that He used them as guinea pigs. That's rather cynical.

His choice of them, however, gave them the very best in everything, because with God, that's all you get. And if any people would succeed, then, it would be the children of Abraham. This is not because they were better, or superior (I keep on emphasizing this), but because they had God as their King, their Provider, their Protector and they also had the heritage of Abraham.

They had a history of Patriarchs in their past that lived the way of God. They could look back and see in their history that it could be done if they remained close to God, and God provide this other thing.

So they had everything going for them as a physical people.

Deuteronomy 4:5-8 "Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me [Moses speaking here], that you should act according to *them* in the land which you go to possess." Therefore

be careful to observe *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.' "For what great nation *is there* that has God so near to it, as the LOORD our God *is* to us, for whatever *reason* we may call upon Him? " And what great nation *is there* that has *such* statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?

This is just another aspect of God giving them everything they needed, especially His law—especially God's nearness to them.

So what we get from this is that they were to be a model nation for the rest of the world. I already mentioned that they were to be a kind of a mediatorial nation between God and the rest of the world. But, this mediatorial (if that's a real word) aspect carried with it a responsibility to be an example for the rest of the world, not just to notice, but to then emulate. Because they would see that no other nation had such good, and righteous, and just, and merciful laws that it tried to live by.

This should have made a great example to the Canaanites, Ammonites, Moabites, and all the other nations that were around them and had a lot of contact with them, or were their cousins, the Midianites and such. And then it should have spread on beyond them to other nations.

But, because they failed to use those good and righteous laws—failed to live by them—failed to do just about everything that God asked them to do—it never got beyond the borders of Israel. And as we saw, at times in Israel, it was downright pagan!

So, the nature of God's laws is that if you keep them, they bring you good, and prosperity, and health, and abundance, and peace, and all those other things.

And so they had that. And they could have been the number one nation in the world perpetually if they had done this. But they failed, proving that no nation—even with the quality heredity of Israel from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and with the great laws that God gave them that would give them peace and prosperity—could, without help, solve humanity's problems, and live peaceful, abundant lives.

How many times did we hear Mr. Armstrong say that? This world is one of prosperity but one of appalling evils.

And man says that with just enough time, and just enough knowledge, we can solve everything. But the record of humanity, foremost in Israel has shown that it cannot be done. There is something missing. Even with God as King, Israel could not do this. They could not succeed.

So, what was missing? ***God's Holy Spirit!***

Jeremiah 31:31-33 "Behold, the days are coming, says the LOORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah [notice he mentions both here]—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke [we've seen that often enough already in this sermon], though I was a husband to them, says the LOORD." But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LOORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Notice that he says here that there was something missing in the Old Covenant. So, He has to make a New Covenant with this extra-added bit of spirit that He would put into their heart so that He could write His law there. That they would learn it and live it, and that they would surely be His people.

Not just living by a law written in stone, which they really could not keep because they did not have the heart. They needed this "heart softener."

I always remember Bill Cherry's sermonette on that with the sponge and the rock. You need some water to make the sponge soft, but once it is there, it can hold a lot of "water." And by that "water" you can do great works whereas a rock doesn't absorb a thing. And that is the history of Israel in a nutshell (or in a stone).

Paul picks up on this. Paul summarizes things in Hebrews 8, saying that the fault that caused the failure of the Old Covenant was with the people.

Hebrews 8:7-8 For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them (the people), He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LOORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—

So, Paul says that there was basically one thing wrong with the Old Covenant. And that was with the people. And God purposely withheld that vital ingredient from them to show to the whole world that no one can do it without Him.

He must be involved. And so one day He will give Israel that ability—that right heart—and allow them to succeed in the area in which they failed. And this will happen in the second resurrection. We will see that in a minute.

As far as I can figure out, Ezekiel 37 has a millennial setting. It comes after the "valley of dry bones," which would be the second resurrection, but this seems to have a millennial setting because He mentions here, gathering them from among the nations. He would not necessarily have to do that in a resurrection.

Ezekiel 37:21-28 "Then say to them [Judah and Joseph], 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; "and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again. [This is talking about the two sticks that are bound back together to become one.] They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them [they will be washed]. Then they shall be My people, and I will be their God. [What has He given them in the meantime? Well, we'll see that.] David My servant *shall be* king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them." Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David *shall be* their prince forever. "Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore." My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. "The nations also will know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.'"

Now this is speaking (I'm very sure of it) of the millennium—the time that God gathers Israel and Judah from wherever they had been driven throughout the world and brings

The Purpose of Israel by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

them back into the land and sets David as their prince over them. He will put His sanctuary—His Temple, His presence—among Israel once again.

They will then be given the New Covenant. They will be allowed access to God through His Holy Spirit, and they will keep His law. They will keep the statutes and the judgments. And do them! Not just pay them lip service. This time they are going to do it right.

And then He says, "then the nations shall see..." They will notice this time when Israel finally does what they were supposed to do. That is in verse 28. They will make the connections that because God has sanctified Israel by setting them apart, and giving them His spirit, and giving them His law, putting them through all these things, the world will say, "Ah Ha! Maybe we should be doing this too!"

And so Israel throughout the millennium will begin and continue to fulfill their original purpose to be a model nation, and a mediatorial nation for the rest of the world.

And we know from other scriptures that the law will flow from Zion. Everything will begin to flow out from the sanctuary, and then to Israel and then to the nations round about and then to the nations that are far off.

It will take time. It will take generations. But, slowly, surely, the whole world will see through the church and through Israel how it is to live under God. And there will be conversions by the thousands! Maybe, by the nations as they all begin to see what wonderful prosperity can come when a nation obeys God and lives the way that He has said!

Let's go over a few more pages in Ezekiel because it really doesn't end there—well at least that's the indication that Ezekiel gives.

This seems to me like it may be the Great White Throne Judgment, or it could be the Millennium, or it could be both. But, from certain things that are said here, I wonder if we are talking about the actual people that failed in ancient Israel.

Listen to what is said here:

Ezekiel 44:6-8 "Now say to the rebellious, to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "O house of Israel, let us have no more of all your abominations." When you brought in foreigners [that's a problem that will be repeated in Ezra's day], uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh,

The Purpose of Israel by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

to be in My sanctuary to defile it—My house—and when you offered My food, the fat and the blood, then they broke My covenant because of all your abominations. "And you have not kept charge of My holy things, but you have set *others* to keep charge of My sanctuary for you."

Remember what happened in Jeroboam's time? Jeroboam got rid of all the Levites and set up the least of the people—the worst of the people—to keep charge of the sanctuaries that he had made around the land.

Ezekiel 44:9-12 'Thus says the Lord GOOD: "No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart or uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter My sanctuary, including any foreigner who *is* among the children of Israel." And the Levites who went far from Me, when Israel went astray, who strayed away from Me after their idols, they shall bear their iniquity. "Yet they shall be ministers in My sanctuary, as gatekeepers of the house and ministers of the house; they shall slay the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them." Because they ministered to them before their idols and caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity, therefore I have raised My hand in an oath against them [that's pretty strong wording that God would swear]," says the Lord GOOD, "that they shall bear their iniquity."

Sounds to me like when they are resurrected in the White Throne Judgment, God is going to say, "*OK Israelites! We're going to go through this one more time! Levites! You are going to do exactly what you failed to do when you were here the first time! I'm going to put you through the paces, and you are going to do it properly!*"

He will give them a chance to (don't take this spiritually) redeem themselves.

Redemption spiritually is through Jesus Christ now and forever. But, He'll give them an opportunity to make up for the sins of the past. They will know every time that they lift a bullock onto that altar, or every time they keep the gate, every time they make the showbread, every time they do this or that, they are going through this because they sinned in not obeying God when He gave them the command to do it the first time.

That is how you bear iniquity! By being reminded in every action you do that you have sinned, and that you are a sinful person.

And so God is going to give them these lessons so that they will go through them and understand where they went wrong, and what they missed in the types, and so forth, of the service that He set up as worship of Him under the Old Covenant. And then they will be able to make those connections that they missed the first time because they failed to obey.

Isaiah 43:21 This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise.

Finally! In the end, when all things come down to where the "rubber meets the road" they will come and glorify God as He intended from the beginning. It is going to take a long time. They are going to have to go through Jacob's Trouble, among other things, to finally get the point that they can't do it without God. And they certainly can't do it without keeping the laws that He has given them to keep.

Let's read I Corinthians 10. This is the purpose in this time that we are probably most familiar with. This is the one I gave as we opened.

I Corinthians 10:1-12 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as *were* some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

As I said, this is the purpose we're all familiar with. Paul establishes here in the first few verses, that there is a one-to-one physical/spiritual parallel between Israel and the church. And even though Israel went through similar experiences to what we go

The Purpose of Israel by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

through, God knew that without His Holy Spirit, they would not be able to succeed in what He gave them to do.

Thus, they became primarily negative examples to us of what not to do!

Several years ago, I gave a sermon called, "Are you an Israelite?" where I brought this out. When we look at Israel, they are primarily negative examples.

And that is what Paul goes through here. At least five of them: "Don't lust, don't become idolaters, don't commit sexual immorality, don't tempt Christ, don't murmur," He said. All of these are negative things.

Each year God makes us rehearse the history of this negative people—people who did not succeed. Particularly those parts that illustrate the spiritual path we're on. Remember here it says, "All our fathers were under the cloud; all passed through the sea; all were baptized into Moses..." That, in a great part, is the Last Day of Unleavened Bread.

So, there is a great deal of information, and negative example that we can get out of those things. This is the message, using Israel, He has chosen for our admonition—for our learning, and instruction in His way. It is very necessary that we review the history of Israel.

Think of the sacrifices of millions of Israelites: Their lives of sin, their deaths, their wars, and their captivities. All the things that they went through, that they endured (and some of them not so well) in just living out their lives in typical human fashion, so that we and eventually all others throughout human history can learn what not to do. And also what happens when we fail to live the way that God has ordained for us.

So, Israel is very important. Each year we go back and look at this people, and we say, "How could they have done that?" And then we look at our own lives and say, "How could I have done that?"

And thus we learn, and grow.

And, as we saw earlier, the story will end happily. Let's go back a few chapters to Romans 11 and we'll see how all this comes about, and what good will come about because of it.

Romans 11:11 I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall?

The Purpose of Israel by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Certainly not! [Paul says this isn't the end of the story] But through their fall [talking about Israel], to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles.

He's talking in a way about us. Obviously, he was writing to Romans, and the Romans were Gentiles, but it has opened the way for all of us as the first fruits.

Romans 11:12 Now if their fall *is* riches for the world,

Meaning that if they had to go through all these terrible things and suffer all these things (even being rejected by God), it ends up being a good thing for the whole world!

Romans 11:12 ...and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!

He's probably thinking back to what Ezekiel wrote.

Romans 11:15 For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead?

It will be like the great resurrection in Ezekiel 37.

Romans 11:16 For if the firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*, and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches.

Romans 11:19-20 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Well *said*. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.

Don't think of yourself as any better, but fear God, and glorify Him for the mysterious ways that He was worked to bring this all about.

Romans 11:21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

There is a bit of a twist there. You benefited from it so far, don't you go down the same road as they did, because if God is so willing to let the natural plant be broken off, how much less sure is our connection if we have just been grafted in?

Now it really isn't that much less at all. When God grafts something in, it is like the natural ones again. But, He is using this analogy to say, "Look! If it happened to them, it could happen to you!" They had all of the natural advantages that God could give them.

Romans 11:22-23 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in *His* goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.