“Jesus, Israel & the Church”

“... remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

(Ephesians 2:12-13)

9.30a.m. Sunday 1 October, 2017

Delivered by Senior Pastor Marshall Muller @ the Laidley Baptist Church (Qld).

Introduction

Five years ago, my wife & I intentionally visited the 7 Churches mentioned by the Apostle John in the first few chapters of Revelation. They are all located in Turkey. We also visited the Greek Island of Patmos (off the coast of Turkey) where this apostle John, one of Jesus’ young disciples (and someone who talked and walked with Jesus, and who witnessed the crucifixion and the empty tomb, and the ascension), wrote the Revelation ... what we know as the final book of the Bible. It is full of prophetic and apocalyptic language. It foretells the future history of the world, what will occur to mankind and sets out a timeline of the events that will follow in what is known as the end times.

There are great battles, pestilence, suffering, darkness, false prophets, the anti-Christ, Satan roaring around, trumpet blasts, judgements, the wedding feast of the Lamb, angels and demons, new heavens and new earth, scrolls, bowls and trumpets, riders on horses, destruction, miracles, good prevailing over evil ... wow – it sounds like a Steven Spielberg thriller, or something out of C.S. Lewis’ Narnia, or perhaps Tolkien’s trilogy ‘Lord of the Rings’.

Smack bang in the midst of all this future drama is the small but blessed nation of Israel – God’s chosen and loved people. They are front & central to all that occurs in the Book
of Revelation. (WHO are they all trying to destroy? Who is Satan rallying troops to conquer? Where is the battle of Armageddon set?

Everything revolves around Israel and it’s people and it’s place in God’s agenda. Do I understand it all? NO. Do I need to? NO!! I just need to trust God. It’s His plan, not mine. God’s Holy Word states that Israel will be hunted down. The whole world intends to destroy Israel because of who she is (God’s precious nation), and God will ultimately rescue her dramatically and supernaturally provide for her, conquering all her enemies with his breath. Whose side do you want to be on?

So, let’s look at how it all fits together. I will not be able to give you everything that I would like to this morning. Nonetheless, let’s look at as much as we can in summary.

I want to speak this morning about Jesus, the Church & Israel in the future. Let’s see what the Bible says this morning. But first let’s pray …

Gracious Heavenly Father,

Thank you that you are here and that you are in our hearts by your Holy Spirit. May our hearts join under your sovereign name so that your Word can be heard and applied in our lives. Teach us, mould us, direct us, encourage us. Thank you in the name of Jesus, who has paid the price for our freedom.

Amen.

JESUS – the JEW

What do we do with this revelation that God has given us down through the ages? Who is it all about? God has revealed bits and pieces to various prophets of long ago, each time showing us a little bit more of His plan. Each of the prophecies pointing to a Messiah (Jesus) who would become the sin sacrifice for you & me. Accurate in it’s prediction to the nth degree, Jesus leaves this world after only thirty-odd years from the side of the Mount of Olives with nail prints in his hands, resurrected from the dead by the very power of God, and He says, “I’ll be back!” (Arnie voice).

Terminator? You better believe it – God is the terminator. He terminates all evil, He vanquishes Satan and terminates all of his plans, destroys all of his demons/fallen angels, He terminates all pain and suffering and tears. And so we hang on his final words – “I’ll be back!” – said to a handful of Jewish men who dared follow this tradie,
Jesus, Israel & the Church

this carpenter, this amazing teacher, for a few years, discovering that he really was the Son of God. They saw miracles, healings. They heard incredible teaching that just made so much sense. They saw and experienced love that died on a cross for them. An innocent man – no, the Son of Man – betrayed and willingly become the sacrificial Lamb in a Global Passover Meal that would set the stage for His return to redeem this small nation, and those who, by grace have been grafted into their rest and reward.

These few men, disciples, so filled with God’s holy spirit, that each one would be cruelly killed, counting it a privilege to serve the God of this universe, the creator architect who chose to come and walk among us and show us how to really live life – abundant life. If none of it was real, why would they go to their deaths with such confidence? Why would they choose to be ripped apart by lions, have hot oil poured over them and lit up, be sawn in two, crucified by mankind that has become so evil and depraved, interested only in themselves, and self-gain.

Because the God of this universe is returning as He has promised. He has a grand plan to make all things new, as He originally intended.

So, here we are ... positioned in history, watching nations threatening each other, watching the world deteriorate in sin, distracted from the truth and purity of the love and honesty that Jesus came to show us.

The final book of our Bible is called Revelation for a reason – I believe that God is revealing His plan to all generations, including our generation. Sadly, many (most) cannot see it. But it’s there – written for us as plain as day, embedded with the prophecies from so long ago. Each one, a scarlet thread that runs through the whole Bible, piecing it all together in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

One of the big problems in understanding the Bible and particularly Revelation is that we tend to see everything with our own filter, rather than to put on our Hebraic spectacles and understand and reconnect with the Jewish Jesus. We want Jesus to be someone he’s not ... a western, white Christian Jesus – a Jesus through our lens. Maybe a social fighter Jesus, or a hippie Jesus or something-or-other Jesus that we want.

Vatican City lies in the city of Rome, Italy. Smallest sovereign state in the world – only 44 hectares & population of under 900. Ruled by the Bishop of Rome – the Pope. Contains one of the greatest & largest Churches in the world – St. Peter’s Basilica. People come from all over the world to marvel at it’s magnificence. Yet how often do these visitors consider that it was named after a Jewish man – one of the first (Jewish
Another Jewish man lent his name to the famous St. Paul’s Cathedral in London.

Even though Jesus never used the term Christian/ity, the Bible demonstrates that Jesus & the Church go hand in hand. And the Jewish nation Israel, as I said, sits front & centre, in this revelation. After all, Jesus was a Jew, from the land of Israel, the tribe of Judah. Read the first verse of Matthew’s Gospel – it says that Jesus was ‘the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. Jesus is the fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham so long ago – that, through Abraham, all nations of the earth would be blessed. And a promise to David that a descendant of his would be on the throne of Israel forever. Matthew 1:21 – ‘And you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save His people from their sins.’ His Hebrew name Yeshua actually means ‘the Lord saves’.

The Law & the writings of the Prophets – guys like Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah – show us that Jesus was the fulfilment of the prophecies and promises made to the Jewish people. And when we look at the Jesus that presents at the end of all time in the Book of Revelation, he still identifies himself by his Jewish heritage. Revelation 5:5 – He is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David.

Jesus didn’t just grow up in a Jewish culture & wasn’t just passing through a Jewish phase. As he performed the miracles, taught in the synagogue, and on the hills of Galilee, the Jewish people started to remember the prophecies about a Messiah. This was being fulfilled in Jesus’ life.

Sadly, the Church has lost and abandoned it’s Jewish roots. So much so that it has lost all sense of the Jewishness of Jesus and his teaching, and of the Bible itself. I believe that the Church is much the poorer for this. Many times, the Church has deliberately cut away the things that relate to the Jewish ways in the Scriptures. The Jewish way is one of discipleship, faithfulness and commitment. But sadly, the Church has reduced it to attending a building once a week.

So we need to restore an inherent Jewish mindset when we study the scriptures. This gives us a rich framework to recover the correct lens to see things through. I also believe if we do this, we will enable more Jews to re-examine Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah.

I also believe that we need to create a house of learning, not just a house of believing. Instead of being spoon-fed each week, we need to embrace the need to take responsibility for our growth, we (and our children) can learn to understand the
Scriptures and to ask the right kinds of questions. That way we grow in maturity and the Church becomes healthier.

The CHURCH ... both Jews & Gentiles

That’s where the Book of Revelation comes in. Some say it’s just an old man’s dream, or a made up story. I would beg to differ. I believe it’s God own story, his Word, revealed in advance to his people about what to expect in these final days.

God came to reveal himself to his own special nation, the Jewish nation of Israel. In the process of doing that, they rejected Him. So God set about also revealing himself to the rest of the nations (the Gentiles) and so the Church is born in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost. A handful of disciples in a room visited by the Holy Spirit of God, started spreading the amazing Good news (the Gospel) to the whole, first in Jerusalem, then in Samaria, then to Judea, then to the outer regions of the world.

Gentiles (ie those who aren’t Jews) didn’t get a look in until Chapter 10 of Acts when Cornelius (a Roman Centurion) and his family & household had the Gospel explained to them, receiving it with confirmation by the Holy Spirit. It didn’t make sense at the time that God would now give his promises to people other than the Jews. The early Church, the Apostles and leaders struggled to recognize that Gods plan was much bigger than they thought. It was a global plan.

That has been happening for 2,000 years now. Millions and millions have heard the good news about Jesus and His saving grace. Millions and millions have responded to His call as he has knocked on their heart’s door. The Church has grown and grown, the bride of Christ. Persecuted in some countries, but still flourishing – in a time known as the age of grace. God’s grace for Gentiles to come into God’s sheep-fold, loved and protected by the Good Shepherd, Jesus.

BUT ... a time is coming when the age of grace will be completed. God’s plan will be revealed. Israel, His favourite and loved people/nation, plays such a strategic part. Is it any wonder that so many leaders, past & present have tried to wipe her out, influenced by Satan’s agenda. He tried to wipe her out because the Messiah, God’s own son, was to come from her – the tribe of Judah. And so he used Herod, who killed thousands and thousands of babies under 2yo. To try and divert the course of history – God’s plan of salvation. Satan used the Romans, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Egyptians and many more, using Adolf Hitler in the 1930’s & 1940’s to try and wipe Israel and it’s God-given right off this planet.
Didn’t work!!! When you’re up against God, it doesn’t matter how strong or evil you might be, God always comes out on top victorious. Satan might think he’s gaining the upper hand, but God will always have a remnant of his people who will ALWAYS stand upon His Word. They will always prevail. That has been the case down through history – the Scriptures tell us that story time and time again.

I believe that the Church also has a role in standing up for and stand next to this remnant – a tiny nation called Israel. God’s special nation. The Church will never replace Israel – it can’t. Israel’s story continues to be written, and we will discover it as we take a brief look at Revelation and end times prophecy this morning.

The early Church was mostly Jewish, with a distinct culture and distinct teaching. When once in the early Church, the question was ‘How can anyone who is not Jewish be part of this community? The question now in the mostly Gentile Church is ‘How can someone who is a Jew be part of this community?

The Church has lost touch with it’s Jewish roots, and it’s affinity to the nation of Israel, it’s promises etc. But we don’t get that from the Apostle Paul as he explains to the Church in Ephesus that Jesus brings together both through his blood.

“... remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

(Ephesians 2:12-13)

There is much more to say on this, but time will beat us today. For the past 2 weeks I have spoken on the importance of Israel, God’s chosen people, and their role in the past and the present. The truth about Israel is that God created her for His purposes. But today I want to look at Israel in the future. What does the future hold for this little nation that has been selected by God, protected by God and promised that it would be something special – the apple of the Lord’s eye?

**ISRAEL in the Book of Revelation**

If we want to understand the character and teaching of Jesus and his followers, we need to read the New Testament/New Covenant differently. We need to let go of our traditions and restore the Jewish context in which they loved and thought.
God creates Israel. He calls Israel. He loves Israel with an everlasting love (refers to her as His Beloved). God watches her grow up. In Isaiah 62, God talks about Israel as His bride. God calls her the apple of His eye. So I wonder how God must feel when we, His Church display no affection or interest for Israel?

How does He feel about the Church being entirely indifferent to this deep passion of his? Let’s go a step further – I wonder how God must feel about the Church actually persecuting the Jewish people whom he loves?

Isn’t the Church supposed to be the expression of God’s heart throughout the earth? Why do we struggle so much to love Israel as God says he does?

Unfortunately, some traditions suggest that God has finished with Israel, and if that is the case then why should He have any affection for her. They are saying that God has moved on.

But the Scriptures reveal that the Church hasn’t replaced Israel. As the Church, we cannot have Christ without all the promises, the covenants, the glory – that’s what Romans 9:4 says. We celebrate the New Covenant this morning, but who was it given to? Jeremiah 31 tells us that it was made with the ‘house of Israel’. The gentiles are grafted in to all of this through the new covenant. Branches from another family tree, if you like. Good parents will give adopted children get all the same rights & privileges as the natural child. But it doesn’t mean they replace the natural child, regardless of how wayward they are.

That’s what is happening here – Israel (Jews) and Gentiles in the new covenant arrangement. Paul says that some branches were broken off – in other words God made room for the Gentiles through the disobedience of some of the natural children, who are … at this time, broken off. Remember the Parable of the Great Banquet? The invited guests didn’t show up, so the Master tells the servants to invite all and sundry to the feast.

Another misrepresentation in the Church is that God is punishing Israel. That’s why the holocaust happened, why there is so much anti-semitism in the world etc. That is wrong – without the Jews we would have no Jesus, no Church, no New Testament, no Gospel, and no concept of God’s promises. Didn’t Jesus himself ask the Father to forgive those who crucified him? In the Book of Romans, it states the some of the Romans & some of the Jews put Jesus to death. So does that by extension mean that God hates all Romans as well, and therefore all Gentiles? If so, then God must hate and want to punish everyone.
No, here’s what has happened – the nation of Israel, just like the prodigal son, has walked outside of the blessings of the Father’s house. His father didn’t punish him. No – he ran to meet him when he saw him a long way off. In the same way, the Jewish people are walking outside of the fullness of the Father’s plans for them. Intimacy that is available to them through their Messiah Jesus. God is not punishing them. He is longing for them (and for us) to come back into His house, even as He adopts and welcomes other sons and daughters into his house.

So, let’s talk about God’s plan for Israel and the Church in the future (Book of Revelation)

Let me say categorically, that God hasn’t finished with Israel. Paul states in Romans 11:28 that the gifts and call that God has given the Jewish people can never be withdrawn.

Many (including the disciples) asked Jesus when Israel would be restored. Jesus tells them it is not for them to know the times and seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:7-8)

Imagine – I’m your boss and we have agreed to have lunch. During the morning you come to me and ask ‘When are we having lunch?’ I reply, ‘Listen, I can’t tell you when we having lunch yet, but please finish the work I asked you to do for now.’

It means we’re still going to have lunch, but the time is unknown as of yet. Likewise Jesus affirms there is a plan for Israel, but tells his disciples to focus on the task they have been assigned – to be his witnesses throughout the earth. So there is a plan still for Israel. Jesus said in Luke 21:24 – ‘that Jerusalem will be trampled … until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled’.

As a result we see God restoring people to the Land of Israel. They may or may not be Christians as they return, but they are returning for the future that God has in store for them. Ezekiel 36:23-28 says that God will draw them back to the land and THEN he will sprinkle clean water on them and give them new hearts of flesh to replace their hearts of stone. God has drawn more than 6 million Jews back to Israel. Many are turning to their Messiah Jesus. Fellowships are springing up everywhere in Israel. Zechariah talks about this – the spirit of grace and supplication will be poured out on Israel and the
people will turn to their Messiah. This has begun and is now accelerating. It’s all part of God’s plan.

God calls Israel ‘my people’. He calls the land ‘my land’. He talks about ‘my holy mountain’ (talking about Zion – another name for Jerusalem).

As we reflect on God’s purposes, we can see that in God’s timescale for the future, Israel becomes even more important as the future unfolds, and that Israel’s restoration is a blessing for the whole world.

As history unfolds, Israel is key and as a result God cares about our attitudes and actions in relation to Israel. The church, as I mentioned earlier, needs to be aligned with the heart of God. So when God said to Abraham, “those who bless you I will bless, those who curse you I will curse”, He meant it (Gen. 12:3)

When God says in Joel he will bring the nations into judgement for dividing up his land (my land), and for mistreating my people, He means it. And when the Psalmist declares that we should pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6) – this is God’s word for us.

Revelation – what is going to happen?

Let me give it to you in a nutshell. We’re going to expand it in detail, but not today we have run out of time. I will be away next Sunday in W.A., but in a fortnight we will return to looking at God’s plan for Israel in end times prophecy. It’s all about the nation of Israel. You might be surprised at that, but I hope that after today, we can get a better understanding about God’s plans through His lens – that he will bless the nation of Israel, and those he grafts in to the olive tree – that is the Church of the Gentiles.

Here’s what’s going to happen in the future, according to the Book of Revelation:

We are living in the Age of the Church / Age of the Gentiles

Each of the 7 Churches in the Book of Revelation (the 7 Letters) are different ages:

- Ephesus – The Apostolic Church (A.D. 30 -100)
- Smyrna – The Church of Roman Persecution (A.D. 100-313)
- Pergamum – The Church of the Age of Constantine (A.D. 313-600)
- Thyatira – The Church of the Dark Ages (A.D. 600 – 1517)
- Sardis – The Church of the Reformation (A.D. 1517 -1648)
- Philadelphia – The Church of the Great Missionary Movement (A.D. 1648 – 1900)
- Laodicea – the Church of the Apostasy (A.D. 1900 – present day)
Revelation in a nutshell (60 seconds):

- Jerusalem will come under Jewish Control.
- A Northern Alliance will invade Israel
- One World Government will be established with 10 kingdoms
- The Rise of the AntiChrist
- A period of peace and false security (7 year covenant)
- There will be a first blackout
- The Third Temple will be built
- The Church will be raptured
- The Judgement Seat of Christ (Bema Seat – rewards & judgement)
- The marriage of the Lamb
- In Heaven there will be the Lamb and Seven sealed Scrolls
- A Great Tribulation will befall the world
- The decree of the Seventy-sevens (spoken of in Daniel 9)
- There will be six Seal Judgements upon the earth
- Worldwide revival through the 144,000 Jewish witnesses
- There will be six Trumpet Judgements / Woes at this time
- Two witnesses will arise
- There will be a second world-wide conflict
- The Anti-Christ will be killed
- Satan will be cast down to earth
- Where he will resurrect
- 3 of the 10 Kingdom Kings are killed & the other 7 submit.
- The Two Witnesses will be killed
- The Anti-Christ will be worshipped along with the False Prophet.
- The Mark of the Beast will be installed.
- The seven year peace covenant will be broken
- Then we will see the Abomination of Desolation
- Jews will be persecuted mercilessly
- The 7th Trumpet Judgement
- Then the Bowl Judgements (revelation 16)
- Israel – 2/3 of her will be lost/killed, but God will protect the Remnant and supernaturally protect her in the wilderness in the City of Refuge (Petra/Bozra).
- The basis of the second coming will be the repentance of Israel and crying out for her Messiah in Jesus Christ.
- The Allies of the Anti-Christ will assemble for the campaigns of Armageddon
- Babylon will be utterly destroyed.
- Jerusalem will fall
• The armies of the Anti-Christ will surround the Remnant in Bozrah
• This is when Jesus returns again
• Israel’s National Salvation
• The Battle Bozrah all the way to the Valley of Jehoshaphat
• Jesus’ victory ascent up the Mount of Olives.
• The Anti-Christ & the False Prophet will be removed/defeated
• The Judgement of the Gentiles
• Resurrection of the Old Testament Saints.
• Resurrection of the Tribulation Saints.
• The Marriage Feast of the Lamb
• The Messianic Kingdom – Jesus is King & Lord
• Final Restoration of Israel in the Messianic Kingdom
• The Millennial Temple will be established along with the Priesthood
• Loosing of Satan & the final invasion of Israel
• The Great White Throne Judgement
• The Second Death – The Lake of Fire
• The passing away of the old order and the creation of an eternal order.
• New Jerusalem (eternal)
• The faithful remnant of Israel (from the Tribulation) in the Messianic Kingdom.

Conclusion:

We need to be in prayer for the nation of Israel, but we also need to be across what is occurring in terms of the prophecies contained in the Scriptures. There’s no point just putting our heads in the sand.

Jesus is not finished with the Church, and neither is he finished with Israel. We will continue this journey in a fortnight’s time when I return from the West.

Pray that God will open our eyes to the place that His people have in His plans for the future – an eternal glorious future.

Let’s pray ...

Closing Song