"Why Israel is important to every person on earth"

'May peace be within you.' For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good." (Psalm 122: 6-9)

9.30a.m. Sunday 17 September, 2017

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

Opening Question – Why is the nation of Israel so important?

The Bible has a lot about the people of Israel being God's chosen people. But He loves and has a plan for all people, so why did God choose Israel?

The Scriptures are predominantly about whom / which country? [ Israel ]

Whom did God choose to give His commands and words to? [ Israel ]

Who is God’s own people? [ the nation of Israel – the Jews ]

Who was trusted to obey and hand on the Scriptures generation to generation? [ Israel ]

Who was the Gospel given first? [ Israel – Romans 1:16 ]

As a minister and as I move amongst people everywhere, the one thing that most Christians want to have is a summary of the key Scriptures about Israel and the Jewish people. God has much to say about His Covenant people and His Land, Israel.

The Land of Israel is the only place on earth which God says He owns in terms of property ownership that can be transferred. (Of course, we know the whole world is His, yet this one parcel of land on the earth has a unique relationship to Him.) About Israel, He says, “The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine: for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me” (Leviticus 25:23).
In a few weeks, Yvonne, Jackie and I will be heading to the Promised Land – the Holy Land of Israel. We have been before in 2012, but are returning to learn more of the nation of Israel and to find out how we can help & pray for her.

We will be visiting a number of Israeli run projects helping the poor, community kibbutz’s, a youth shelter & support program and listening to the life of soldiers in the IDF. We are also bringing gifts for the soldiers.

So who are Israel? [Maps of Israel]

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem - Pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6): "May those who love you be secure/prosper/be at peace.

Ever since I was a young fellow I wanted to know more about Israel & why God would choose this group of ‘disobedient’ people.

And as I got older and grew in my faith, if you’re like me, you’ve often wondered why the Church places an importance on “standing with Israel.” You’ve probably even seen some believers seeming a little bit funny/fanatical in how they act, out of love for Israel and the Jewish culture. Rather than just showing allegiance to Israel without knowing why, it’s important to get God’s heart for Israel and to understand her Biblical importance, even to you and me as individuals.

The entire storyline of the Bible (Old Testament and New) is about Israel, and the Jewish people. Does it “ruffle” your theological feathers that salvation first came for the Jews (Rom. 1:16, 11:11)? Thank God the Gentile Church has been included in the plans that God has for Israel, as well (Rom. 11:17).

Over the next few weeks I’m going to talk about Israel and their place in the Scriptures – past & present, as well as look at the prophecies around Israel in the coming future as it relates to the end times.

Exactly what does the Bible say about God’s parcel of land, and who has a right to it?

When we come to the modern-day Israel-Palestine issue, people often ask the question, "Just what right do Israel and the Jewish people have to this land?" Arguments are
continually brought forth concerning the rights of the Palestinians and the rights of the Israelis that seem logical to the people who present them. But a basic question still remains in my mind as I listen to the many conflicting viewpoints concerning this parcel of land: "Who has the ultimate authority to determine rights concerning this special piece of real estate?"

The biblical answer to that question is that God alone determines the "rights" that any of us have. Something is right or wrong because of Divine decree, not human feeling or human reason. The existence of God previous to the creation of the universe and mankind gives Him the right to determine our "rights."

Morality exists because God exists. Authority exists because God exists. And, Almighty God has already determined the rights of Israel and the Jewish people to the land God owns and has deeded over to them.

Let's look together at what He has to say about the Land of Israel, the people He chose to possess it, and why. Today, is a bit of an introduction, so let’s look briefly at why every person on this earth should know about the nation of Israel.

### Agreeing with God’s sovereign decision

**ISRAEL WOULD BE HIS PEOPLE**

To really understand why Israel is important we must go back to the beginning. In the Garden God made man and told him that He could eat anything but the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. After their disobedience and fall, God made a way for them to be reconciled to Himself. God knew that the only way that man could be reconciled to Himself would be for Him to do it Himself. No man was able to do it, so it must be God.

Through Israel’s Seed He would raise up Someone who would crush the Enemy’s head (Satan). He sovereignly chose that the Seed would come from the house of Abraham (Genesis 3:15).

Fast forward to God’s promise to Abraham: “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” (Genesis 12:3). Then God said, “Lift your eyes now and look... For all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever” (Genesis 14:14-15).
The Abrahamic Land Covenant – was given to the nation of Israel all those years ago & has never been cancelled or superseded.

**Israel’s kingdom established forever**

**GOD PROMISE THAT JESUS WOULD REIGN FROM JERUSALEM**

Decades later He would promise David saying, “And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.” (2 Sam 7:16)

God has chosen to bless the whole earth and to establish an eternal throne through Israel.

Once again, I will speak in coming weeks about the place of Israel (and the Church) in the Messianic Kingdom when Christ returns.

**Jesus’ Second Coming depends on Israel’s acceptance of Him**

**GOD’S PREDICATION FOR THE RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS**

God has made a promise to Israel that affects every people group on Earth. Remember that God told Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through his seed- He tied the blessing (salvation) of every nation to Israel. When Jesus the Messiah came, the people of Israel rejected Him. As a result, salvation came to the Gentiles while Israel’s promised salvation was put “on hold”.

Romans 11:11-12 - “…through their trespass (i.e. rejection of Jesus as Messiah) salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world (salvation)... how much more will their full inclusion mean! (acceptance of Jesus as Messiah)”

Romans 11:15 - “For if their rejection [of Jesus] means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance [of Jesus] mean but life from the dead (The resurrection, 1 Cor. 15:50–55)?”

God has given Israel so much favor that even their failures are turned into blessings for the rest of the world. I speak of their “rejection” and the Gentiles’ salvation. Jesus goes one step further and bases His return (Second Coming) on the future promise that Israel will accept Him as their Messiah. “For I tell you, you will not see Me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (Matt. 23:39)
As a Church, we must agree with God’s sovereign decision to choose Israel as His people and see ourselves as grafted into this Olive Tree.

The Devil’s schemes throughout history has been to annihilate the Jewish people (Israel) so that Jesus cannot return. That understanding puts a whole new perspective on the holocaust during WWII and why so many nations currently harbor hatred towards Israel. I believe it’s a tactic of the Enemy to cloud the Church’s minds with confusion as to the place of Israel’s divine selection in the world, and in some cases even cause believers to harbor anti-semitism towards Israel.

I have heard long standing ministers speak out against Israel – I have been horrified.

As a Church, we must agree with God’s sovereign decision to choose Israel as His people and see ourselves (as the Gentile Church) as grafted into this Olive Tree. In doing this we must then begin to seek God’s plans for Israel and pray for their peace and salvation.

I want to play you a clip of a Tour Guide, Hannah Ben Haim, explaining this ‘grafting in’ principle. (Play Clip – 5mins)

“On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; All day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the LORD, take no rest for yourselves; And give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.” Isaiah 62:6-7

Israel – God’s People

The Scriptures are quite clear that among all the nations in the world, God chose Israel as the one He would work with. This was the nation that God delivered out of slavery in Egypt, the nation to whom God gave the land of Canaan, and the nation through whom would come Jesus, the Messiah. Was there something special about these people unlike others?

God Himself answered this very question. In addressing the ancient Israelites, He told them: “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD 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 LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers,
the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt”  
(Deuteronomy 7:6-8,).

So why did God choose Israel? God chose the ancient Israelites because He had promised Abraham that his descendants would become a great nation and occupy the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:3, 7; 17:4, 7-8; 22:17). God blessed Abraham and his descendants because of Abraham’s faith, a living faith that resulted in diligent obedience to God’s instructions and law (Genesis 26:3-5). This promise was repeated to Abraham’s son, Isaac, and to Abraham’s grandson, Jacob (Genesis 17:21; 26:24; 28:1-4, 13).

God’s purpose in choosing Israel was for them to be a model nation to other nations and that through them “all the families of the earth” would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). He wanted Israel to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6).

Other nations would see that when the Israelites obeyed God, they were blessed (verse 5), and when they disobeyed God, they would be punished (Deuteronomy 28).

Non-Israelites welcomed in the Old Testament
While God chose to work with the ancient nation Israel, this decision did not exclude people from other nations (gentiles) from coming to understand God and serve Him. God instructed the ancient Israelites that they were to respect peoples of other nationalities who came to live with them.

As for observing the Passover (one of God’s commanded observances in both the Old and New Testaments), God said, “And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it” (Exodus 12:48). Showing fairness for all, God continued, “One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you” (verse 49). Later, God added: “You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 22:21).

A good example of God’s acceptance of non-Israelites in the Old Testament is found in the life of Ruth. Though a Moabite by birth (Ruth 1:1-4), she came to respect and follow God. As Ruth told Naomi, her Israelite mother-in-law, after the premature death of her husband: “Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God” (verse 16). Ruth then married an Israelite man named Boaz and became part of the family lineage God selected for Jesus (Matthew 1:1-16).
Gentiles welcomed into the Church

When the Holy Spirit was granted to Jesus’ followers and the New Testament Church was established on the Day of Pentecost, the people in this beginning congregation were initially Jews (Acts 2:5), one of the 12 tribes that comprised ancient Israel. Because God had specifically chosen and worked with their ancestors and now was continuing to do so, they understood themselves as being part of “the commonwealth of Israel,” which gave them access to God’s “covenants of promise” (Ephesians 2:12).

These Jews who were the earliest Christians did not fully understand that God was also going to bring gentiles into the Church. Through a miraculous granting of the Holy Spirit to a gentile named Cornelius and his household, just as God had previously done for Jews on the Day of Pentecost, Peter and the members of the New Testament Church came to understand that God was now also calling gentiles.

Israel’s future

The ancient Israelites went into captivity for their sins and lost their national prominence, leading many to wonder, Why did God choose Israel? Still, there remains a bright future for these peoples. When Christ returns to this earth and sets up the Kingdom of God, He will restore Israel to its position of leadership in the world (Isaiah 11:12; 14:1-2). A humbled, obedient people will then fulfill the leadership role God intended for them.

The name of this Land is not Palestine, but Israel.

Twenty-five hundred years ago, the prophet Ezekiel spoke of the restoration of Israel to its land in the last days. Ezekiel spoke of dry bones coming to life. Never before in history has a nation been destroyed and scattered all over the world, and then been brought back to life. It is a miracle and a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. We read in Ezekiel 37:11-12:

"Then He said to me, 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, 'thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of ISRAEL.'"

Notice that the name of that land is ISRAEL, the land that so often is called the "land of Canaan" in the Bible. God says that in the last days it will be called ISRAEL.
The name, Palestine, was a regional name that was imposed on the area by the Roman Emperor, Hadrian, who suppressed the Second Jewish Revolt in AD 135. He was so angry with the Jews that he wanted to humiliate them and emphasize that the Jewish nation had lost its right to a homeland under Roman rule. The name Palaestina was originally an adjective derived from Philistia, the arch-enemies of the Israelites 1000 years earlier. Hadrian also changed the name of Jerusalem to Aelia Capitolina after his own family name, Aelia. He also forbade Jews from entering the city, except on the 9th of the Hebrew month, Av, to mourn its destruction.

Since he was considered a god in the Roman Empire, this was his attempt to break God's covenant between the Jewish people and their land. This effectively declared his pagan authority over Jerusalem, which had been the place of the presence of the God of Israel. To this day, the name Palestine flies in the face of Israel and the entire issue can be boiled down to a religious (spiritual) battle over a land whose fate will be decided by the God of the Bible, since it is His land (Leviticus 25:23).

Yeshua (Jesus), in describing the signs of the end of the age, said: "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24b).

From the time of Hadrian until 1967, Jerusalem was controlled by Gentiles. It is now back in the hands of the Jewish people, which is one sign that Messiah is soon to come to Zion.

**The return of the Jewish people at the end of days will be initiated by God, and their return will signal the restoration of a barren and broken land.**

The prophet Isaiah spoke of God's plan to bring His people back to Israel, saying: "He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel, He will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth" (Isaiah 11:12).

When the Jews began to return from the nations of the world at the end of the last century, the land was barren and sparsely inhabited. In the 1860s, the author, Mark Twain, traveled in what was then a backward region of the Ottoman Turkish Empire, called Palestine and described the land, thusly: "Nowhere in all the waste around was there a foot of shade." He called the land a "blistering, naked, treeless land." Of the Galilee, he said, "There is no dew, nor flowers, nor birds, nor trees. There is a plain and an unshaded lake, and beyond them some barren mountains." His summary of Palestine: "Of all the lands there are for dismal scenery, I think Palestine must be the
Why is Israel so important to every person on earth?  

This description matches the Ezekiel's prophecy of the "barren mountains of Israel" in Ezekiel 36:1-7. However, Ezekiel goes on to say, "But you, O mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for My people Israel, for they will soon come home. I am concerned for you and will look on you with favor; you will be plowed and sown, and I will multiply the number of people upon you, even the whole house of Israel. The towns will be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt. I will increase the number of men and animals upon you, and they will be fruitful and become numerous. I will settle people on you as in the past and will make you prosper more than before. Then, you will know that I am the Lord. I will cause people, My people Israel, to walk upon you. They will possess you, and you will be their inheritance; you will never again deprive them of their children" (Ezekiel 36: 8-12).  
Truly, the return of the Jews from over 100 nations of the world is a modern-day miracle. Large waves of immigrants began to come in the 1880s. Since those early days, the deserts have been reforested, the rocky fields made fertile, the swamps drained and planted, the ancient terraces rebuilt, and the ruined cities of old re-established. Israel is now a nation of over six million people that is a food exporting nation that boasts high levels of literacy, health, education and welfare, high technology and agricultural development.

The nations will be part of the return of the people and the restoration of the land.  
The prophet Isaiah of Israel said: "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. Surely the islands look to me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish, bringing your sons from afar, with their silver and gold, to the honor of the Lord your God. Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you. Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night, so that men may bring you the wealth of the nations. For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined" (Isaiah 60:1,9-12).  
In Romans 11:11-14, Paul teaches us Christians that we are grafted into the olive tree, which are the covenants, promises and hopes of Israel. We do not hold up the tree, but it holds us up, so we should not boast against His people, Israel. In verse 28, he tells us that they are beloved for the sake of the patriarchs. Without the faithfulness of the Jewish people in Israel, we would not have our example, our Bible, our Yeshua or our salvation. Therefore, he concludes that "by our mercy, they will receive [God's] mercy." (Romans 11:31).
Paul teaches us Christians that we have a debt to pay to the Jewish people, by blessing them in tangible ways. Romans 15:27 clearly states: "For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings." How much more direct can God be regarding our Christian relationship to Israel and the Jewish people.

What Does This Mean To Us?
The day of Israel's full restoration is near. Messiah will make it possible and we shall all live in peace. Until He comes, we, who believe the Bible to be God's Word and that every promise of God will come to pass, must stand and pray for Israel and it's people and land. They have a Divine right to it. We are patient with those who do not believe the Bible, nor accept Israel's right to it's land. Yet, with love for all, we must strongly support Israel's right. We cannot do otherwise and have clear consciences. We cannot say on the one hand that we believe there is a God Who has revealed His perfect will in His Holy Scriptures, and on the other hand, deny Israel its right to the land God promised to her.

Our commitment to Israel was penned by the Psalmist so long ago in Psalm 102:13: "You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favour to her; the appointed time has come." This is that day.

Again the Psalmist exhorts us: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; may they prosper who love you. May peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces. For the sake of my brothers and my friends, I will now say, 'May peace be within you.' For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good" (Psalm 122; 6-9).

Conclusion:
Next week I will be speaking about Israel – past, present & future. It is interesting how this little nation has so much to say about the end times and what will happen. More next week ...

For the time being, I pray that you will see how important Israel is in the Scriptures and how important that we pray for her and for her people to see their Messiah.

Let’s finish in prayer for all of God’s people, whether in Israel, or around the world, or in the Church. Let’s pray ...
Gracious Heavenly Father, thank you for your Word today and for choosing the nation of Israel to be your people. Today we pray for her and for her peace. We pray for it’s leaders and for her protection from those who do not acknowledge you. The world wished to destroy her, but your plan is to prosper her and her people.

Thank you that as Gentiles, we can be grafted into your holy nation, only through the reconciliation of Jesus’ blood on the cross. That you have adopted us as brothers and sisters all of us awaiting your glorious return when all things will be put right again. We pray that you will keep us watchful and alert for your coming. May our lamps be trimmed and burning with the indwelling of your Holy Spirit.

Teach us more over these coming turbulent days of your plans for both your Church and your favoured nation of Israel. May we both be a blessing to your name. We thank you for showing us both your amazing grace through the finished work of Jesus. We are grateful that we can be set free from sin & death and that we may experience the freedom that you bled and died for on our behalf. Blessing & Honour be to the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob forever.

Amen.

Closing Song – Amazing Grace