
THE HOPE OF ISRAEL

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QUESTIONS:

- 1) What were all the people expecting when Jesus was born?
- 2) Why did Jesus disappoint Israel?
- 3) What did the apostles preach which infuriated the Jews?
- 4) Why was Paul arrested and sent as a prisoner to Rome?
- 5) What was the problem with Israel's leaders? Did they not believe the prophets of the OT were inspired?
- 6) In many people's minds, what is the opposite of "*literal interpretation*"?
- 7) What does the shadow of a foot tell an ant?
- 8) Who are the true sons of Abraham?

INTRODUCTION

Two thousand years ago, when Jesus came to the earth as a babe, the Jewish nation was expecting and anticipating the coming of the Messiah.

Luke 3:15

¹⁵ Now as **the people were in expectation**, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ [Messiah] or not,

John 4:25

²⁵ The woman [at the well] said to [Jesus], "I know that **Messiah** is coming" (**who is called Christ**). "When He comes, He will tell us all things."

But Jesus was a different Messiah than they were anticipating. They had read the OT prophets and drew the conclusion that the Messiah would be:

- An earthly king.
- A strong military ruler.
- That Israel would break off the bondage the Roman Empire had on her.
- That Israel would become supreme over all other nations and rule the world with a rod of iron.

This was the "hope of Israel" at the time Jesus was born. This is what Israel and her leaders were anticipating.

But I submit to you that this was not what the Messiah was going to be like and the kind of kingdom the Jews were expecting was different than the one the prophets actually prophesied.

When Jesus came along:

- He was poor (Mt 8:20).
 - He taught that Jews should pay taxes to Caesar (Mt 22:21).
 - He taught that even Jews would not enter the kingdom unless they were "born again" spiritually (Jn 3:5).
 - He taught that His kingdom was not "of this world" (Jn 18:36).
- a) Because the Jews were expecting an earthly kingdom and an earthly ruler and
 - b) Because Jesus was bringing a spiritual kingdom and would be a spiritual ruler, the Jews rejected Jesus.
 - c) They did not believe He was really the Messiah prophesied in the OT scriptures.

THE APOSTLES

After Jesus came the apostles. They preached:

- That Jesus really was the Messiah of the OT scriptures (Acts 17:3).
- That Jesus was ruling in the kingdom of heaven right now (Acts 2:30-31).
- That when Gentiles became Christians, they were on equal footing with Jews who had obeyed the gospel (Gal 3:28).

This infuriated the Jews who were looking for an earthly Messiah. The Jews began to persecute **the apostles** and rejected their message – just like they had rejected Jesus.

I direct your attention to something the apostle Paul said when he arrived in Rome as a prisoner:

Acts 28:17-20

¹⁷ And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans,

¹⁸ who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death.

¹⁹ But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation.

²⁰ For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for **the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.**"

Look at v20: "for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain." (Underline those words.)

Paul had been preaching the gospel. He called the gospel he preached: "**the hope of Israel.**" It was so different from the Jewish ideas that it caused the Jewish leaders to clamor for his death: ↓↓

Acts 22:21-22

²¹ [Jesus] said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'

²² And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, "**Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!**"

In front of the Roman governor the Jews said this: ↓↓

Acts 24:5

⁵ For **we have found this man a plague**, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

Had Paul been preaching:

- That Jesus would come again to set up an earthly kingdom,
- That Jerusalem would be the place of His throne,
- That Israel would rule over all Gentile nations on earth,

- Paul would not have been persecuted.

Q: Why?

- Because that is what the Jews were expecting.
- This is what they wanted.
- This is what the rabbis had been teaching them as the true interpretation of the prophecies.

But when the apostles taught that the prophets and scriptures predicted:

- A spiritual kingdom (Jn 18:36).
- That Jesus was of the seed of David and the true heir to the throne (2 Tim 2:8).
- That He began His reign when He resurrected (Acts 2:30-31).
- That in this kingdom Jews and Gentiles are on equal footing (Gal 3:28).

This infuriated the Jews and the apostles were persecuted and hated.

Listen to me: Jesus was crucified and the apostles were persecuted because *"the hope of Israel"* which they were preaching came into direct conflict with the ideas of the leaders of Israel.

Think about this: What the Jews were expecting is the very same thing which most denominations today are still expecting and teaching will eventually come! Most denominations are teaching:

- Jesus will come back again and set up an earthly kingdom.
- The Jewish nation will be reorganized and become supreme over all the Gentile nations.
- The temple will be rebuilt and Jewish worship will be reestablished – including all the animal sacrifices.

Is this an innocent doctrine?

Christ was crucified and the apostles were persecuted because they opposed this very doctrine.

This is a dangerous doctrine which carries with it dangerous consequences.

INTERPRETATION

What was the problem with Jews back in the days of Christ?

What is the problem with people today who believe Israel will become an earthly kingdom and eventually rebuild their temple and reign over Gentiles?

Q: Is the problem that these people don't believe what the prophets wrote? Do they reject the prophets as not being inspired?

A: No ... that's not the problem. They believe the prophets were inspired. They believe what they wrote. ***The problem is a matter of interpretation.***

The Jewish teachers understood the scriptures in what is today called **the "literal" sense**. When these people say they believe the prophecies "*literally*," what they mean is:

- The OT prophets used the term "**Israel**" to mean earthly people.
- That "**Zion**" is an earthly place.
- That "**Christ**" will be an earthly conqueror like David.

But here's what the apostle Paul said about their interpretation:

Acts 13:27

²⁷ ... those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because **they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets** which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him.

"they did not know Him nor the voices of the Prophets" – they did not correctly interpret what the prophets wrote. They did not correctly understand that Jesus was fulfilling exactly what the prophets wrote.

It was an interpretation problem.

"LITERAL" INTERPRETATION

I want to focus on this idea of "*literal*" interpretation.

People often use the word "*literal*" as a contrast with the word "*spiritual*." But this is not a fair comparison.

Think about this:

- "*Literal*" is not necessarily the opposite of "*spiritual*."
- **"Literal" means "actual," "real."**
- A passage of scripture might be ***literally* (actually) true in regard to spiritual things** or it might be ***literally* (actually) true in regard to earthly things**.

When people today say they believe Bible prophecies should be interpreted "*literally*," what they really mean is Bible prophecies should be interpreted **earthly** – pertaining to things of the earth.

You see ... it is an error to assume that a "*literal*" interpretation calls for something in the material, earthly world to happen. So:

- When these people read a prophecy about "**Israel**" – they think of the material, earthly country.
- When they read about a "**Jew**" – they think of an earthly, physical Jew.
- When they read about "**Jerusalem**" – they think of an earthly location.

But prophecies can be fulfilled "*literally*" in the spiritual realm.

1) There is A SPIRITUAL ISRAEL.

Romans 9:6

⁶ ... they are not all Israel who are of Israel,

Prophecies about this "*Israel*" are just as literally true as any prophecy about earthly, physical Israel.

2) There is A SPIRITUAL JEW.

Romans 2:28-29

²⁸ For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh;

²⁹ but **he is a Jew who is one inwardly**; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

Prophecies about these "Jews" are just as literally true as any prophecy about earthly, physical Jews.

3) There is A SPIRITUAL, HEAVENLY JERUSALEM.

When Paul wrote his allegory about Abraham having two wives, he explained:

Galatians 4:24-26

²⁴ which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar —

²⁵ for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to **Jerusalem which now is**, and is in bondage with her children —

²⁶ but **the Jerusalem above** is free, which is the mother of us all.

Here are two Jerusalems. They are both literal (actual). But one is a material, earthly place and the other a spiritual place.

The blessings that we enjoy as Christians are far more wonderful than anything that could be imagined by the saints of old. **Some argue that a promise that has not been fulfilled in a literalistic, physical way has not been fulfilled at all.** How ridiculous! If I promised to give you a five dollar bill, and instead gave you a twenty dollar bill, would you want to insist on a literal fulfillment of my promise? The truth is that God has more than fulfilled his word of promise to the Old Testament saints.

He promised streams in the desert; **he gave us the water of life.**

He promised no hunger; **he gave us the bread of life.**

He promised a transformation of animal life; **he gave us gospel-transformed murderers**, [gospel-transformed] **sexual deviants**, [gospel-transformed] **thieves and liars.**

He promised a desert blossoming like a rose; **he brought to our barren lives meaning, purpose and hope.**

He promised that people would live to a ripe old age; **he gave us eternal life!**

James E. Smith, Ph.D. (2011-06-01T05:00:00+00:00). *What Does the Future Hold?* (Kindle Locations 453-460). Lulu.com. Kindle Edition.

SUMMARY

So ... it's misleading for people to say, "*I interpret prophecies literally,*" when they really mean, "*I interpret prophecies **earthly, materially.***"

This was the problem with the Jewish leaders of the first century: they were interpreting the prophets earthly and materially.

Acts 13:27

²⁷ ... those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, ... **did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets** which are read every Sabbath, ...

Let me give you a specific example of this happening: ⇓

John 2:18-21

¹⁸ So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"

¹⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, "**Destroy this temple**, and in three days I will raise it up."

²⁰ Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"

²¹ But **He was speaking of the temple of His body.**

When Jesus said, "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up,*" the Jewish leaders were guilty of misinterpreting Jesus.

They interpreted what He said physically – earthly.

I maintain that what Jesus said was fulfilled "*literally,*" but it was not fulfilled in regard to a physical, earthly building.

The spiritual realm is just as real as the earthly.

The same problem exists today. People read prophecies about:

- Israel
- Jews

- Jerusalem
- The kingdom

And they absolutely cannot imagine anything except physical, earthly things ... and since they cannot see any of these prophecies happening in history, they conclude they all still await some time in the future.

They pride themselves for believing exactly what the Bible says, but like the Jewish leaders of the first century, **they cannot focus on spiritual things.**

They cannot imagine that **spiritual things are sometimes "more real" than physical things.**

Example #1:

Colossians 2:16-17

¹⁶ So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,

¹⁷ which are a **shadow** of things to come, but **the substance** is of Christ.

Look at the words "*shadow*" and "*substance*."

If you stand in the sun and look at the ground you will see your shadow.

Q: Is your shadow real?

Yes ... of course.

Q: But what is causing the shadow?

Your body.

Q: Is your body real?

Yes ... of course. It is the "*substance*" which is causing the shadow.

The shadow of your foot tells the ant a *real foot* is about to smash him to smithereens. To the ant, the foot is "*more real*" than the shadow.

The OT food regulations and festivals were real, physical feasts and regulations, but they were "*a shadow of things to come*." They were pointing to other things which were more important.

"the substance is of Christ" – this means the Lord's church and NT which guides the church are the true spiritual realities which these physical things were preparing us for.

The spiritual is not only real, but it supercedes the physical in importance.

Example #2:

Hebrews 10:1

¹ For the law, having a **shadow** of the good things to come, and not **the very image** of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

The OT required a physical temple with priests offering animal sacrifices. These were real, but they were also shadows – merely physical.

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was **"the very image"** – in other words, it was real also, but it had spiritual, supreme significance. It fulfilled the purpose of the animal sacrifices.

This passage is teaching that the physical animal sacrifices were *less important* than the spiritually significant death of Christ on the cross.

APPLICATION

Now ... here's the application of all that I've been saying.

There was a physical nation of Israel which had been brought out of Egypt and settled in the promised land. But this physical nation was not the future society of heaven.

(Here is where the Jews made their mistake.)

Because God was using their nation to bring the Messiah into the world, they assumed they were so special in God's sight they would be given salvation in heaven.

Romans 9:6

⁶ ... **they are not all Israel who are of Israel,**

Think about that.

There are two Israels: a physical and a spiritual.

Only the spiritual Israel is going to inherit the spiritual land of Canaan.

Galatians 3:7

⁷ Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.

Q: How does one become a son of Abraham by faith?

Galatians 3:26-27

²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Put the information in v7 together with the information in vv26-27 and here's what you have:

- (v7) The only ones who are sons of Abraham are those who have faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God.
- (v27) **The only ones who have faith in Jesus as the Son of God are those who have enough faith to be baptized into Christ.**

No one is a son of Abraham before being baptized. No one is saved before baptism. No one is a Christian before baptism.

If a person thinks he is already saved before baptism, then he is baptized for the wrong reason.

Now ... observe what happens when one is baptized into Christ and becomes a spiritual son of Abraham:

Galatians 3:28

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Once a person becomes a son of Abraham by faith, it does not matter what nationality one is physically.

Since we become sons of Abraham by being baptized, this means we become heirs of the inheritance of Abraham:

Galatians 3:29

²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

SUMMARY

Let's summarize what we've learned:

- We become a son of Abraham by having faith in Christ.
- We have faith in Christ only when we have enough faith to be baptized into Christ as He commanded.
- Being "in Christ" (by being baptized) makes us spiritual sons of Abraham and heirs to all the blessings promised to him.

Galatians 3:9

⁹ So then those who are of faith are **blessed with believing Abraham.**

2 Corinthians 1:20

²⁰ For **all the promises of God in Him** are Yes, and **in Him** Amen, to the glory of God through us.

Ephesians 1:3

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with **every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places **in Christ,**

Every spiritual blessing is "*in Christ*" and we get into Christ by having faith enough to be baptized.

Not only do we receive all the promises and blessings given to Abraham, but we are considered the "*chosen people of God*":

Ephesians 1:4-5

⁴ just as **He chose us in Him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

⁵ having **predestined us to adoption as sons** by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

Here are the true "chosen" people of God.

It is not someone who is a Jew outwardly. Let's read it again:

Romans 9:6

⁶ ... they are not all Israel who are of Israel,

Romans 2:28-29

²⁸ For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh;

²⁹ but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

The real Jew ... the real chosen people ... the real sons of Abraham ... are those who have faith enough to be baptized into Christ. These are the ones who are the rightful heirs to all the promises of God.

THE HOPE OF ISRAEL

Paul said he was a prisoner because of "*the hope of Israel*":

Acts 28:20

²⁰ For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain."

- Paul was in prison because of what he preached.
- This gospel message Paul called "**the hope of Israel.**"

He taught:

- Physical Jews are not real Jews.
- Only those who have faith in Christ enough to be baptized are true Jews – true sons of Abraham.
- Only those who have been baptized into Christ are heirs of all the promises of God.

- When one is baptized into Christ it does not matter what nationality he is – for "you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

This message infuriated the Jews of Paul's day.

This message drove the Jews to crucify Christ and persecute Paul.

This same message infuriates people today. If you want to see someone get angry just tell them these things.

CONCLUSION

I would conclude this study by calling your attention to:

1 Corinthians 15:46

⁴⁶ However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.

The point I want to make is simply this: There was first ***a physical nation called Israel*** that was ***given physical blessings by God***. It was ***a shadow***.

After the physical came the ***spiritual nation of Israel*** (the church) which received all spiritual blessings from God. ***This is the substance***.

It is a mistake to leave the spiritual and return to the physical:

Galatians 3:3

³ Are you so foolish? Having begun in ***the Spirit***, are you now being made perfect by ***the flesh***?

Read Gal 3 in context and you will see that Christians were being taught by false teachers that physical Israel was God's true chosen people. Christians were being persuaded to forsake the spiritual Israel (the church) and become part of physical Israel.

LISTEN:

1 Corinthians 15:46

⁴⁶ ... the spiritual is not first, but the natural [i.e. physical], and afterward the spiritual.

It is a mistake to leave the spiritual and seek after the natural.

Men are doing today the very thing these Galatians were doing and the Galatians were called "*foolish*" for doing so (Gal 3:1).

- Men today are teaching the very thing which caused Jews to crucify Jesus and persecute the apostles.
- Men today become infuriated when they hear the same message that Paul taught – only those who have enough faith to be baptized are sons of Abraham.

Let's learn these lessons well and let's learn the lesson that spiritual things are just as real as natural things.