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Israel's Long Stay in "The Land" and God's Glory



By Steven J. Hogan

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What's the big deal about this small piece of land that sits off the eastern edge of the Mediterranean? **Didn't you know that God's purpose has always been to work with His chosen people who are living on this land?** God's plan has always been to bless them so they might fear Him, obey Him, and forever praise Him. *"The Lord remembered His covenant for their sake... Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. And let all the people say 'Amen'. Praise the Lord."* Psalm 106:44-48

Who are these people? They are descendants of Abraham, the Jewish people, the Israelites. And God's plan is for there to be a special piece of land, a designated place where He can bless His people, and where they can worship Him, serve Him, and be a witness to the world of His glory. God wants people all over the world to see His people being

blessed so that they themselves might fear Him, obey Him, praise Him, and be blessed by Him. *“Let the peoples praise You, O God… Let the nations be glad and sing for joy… God blesses us so that all the ends of the earth might fear Him.”* Psalm 67:7

That Israel should possess this land started with God’s promise to Abraham around 2,050 BC, and this was an everlasting covenant. About 1440BC, God gave Moses specific plans as to how He wanted the Jewish people to live in the land. Then around 1400 BC, Joshua led them into the land, the land from the river to the sea, *“from the Jordan even to the Great Sea”* (Josh. 23:4), where they lived for a little over 800 years.

God’s history of the Israelites living in their land for those 800+ years is extensive, given in 25 different books of the Old Testament, a history that covers close to 60% of its pages. So what happened during the Israelite’s stay in the land? What does God want us to learn from them? Here are some of the most important lessons:

* **God worked through the lives of godly people.** God always had His person carrying out His plan, like Joshua, Ruth, Deborah, Samson, Samuel, David, Elijah, Asa, Isaiah, Joel, etc. By God’s grace working in the lives of His people, victories were won and His purposes were fulfilled. I say grace because God’s people in and of themselves were unable to do what He wanted them to do. So God empowered the weak and the humble, like Gideon and his small army, and enabled them to get the victory. *“Arise, for the Lord has given the camp of Midian into your hands”* (Judges 7:15). And God always got the credit for the glorious work He was doing through the lives of ordinary people.

* **God worked through the lives of wicked people**. God raised up evil individuals and nations for His purposes, often allowing them to oppose His own people. Time and time again, God enabled His people to defeat His enemies. But it also happened that God would use His enemies, like the Assyrians and Babylonians, to judge His own people

for their terrible sins. Then He would judge these same enemies for their sins (Hab. 1-2). By showing mercy or justice, God would be victorious with both His people and His enemies. The fundamental difference between the two are the three promises that God made to the Jewish people about the land, the King, and salvation, all of which are eternal in nature. You find all three promises in Psalm 125, in Isaiah 55, and in Ezekiel 37:21-23.

*** Israel was at its peak during the reigns of King David and King Solomon.** The Israelites and their land were being blessed like never before, and when the surrounding nations saw this, they were in awe and worshiped the God of Israel. The Queen of Sheba visited Solomon to learn of his wisdom and wealth, and she was truly affected by the incredible display of God's glory in Israel. She said to Solomon, *"Blessed be the Lord your God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel, because the Lord loved Israel forever."* 1 Kings 10:9

*** God's character, purpose, and glory were on display during Israel's long stay in their land.** If the Israelites were obedient and victorious, it was because God's grace and power was working in their lives – think of David killing Goliath. If they were disobedient and defeated, then God was merciful and faithful – think of King Manasseh. In either case, God's character was evident, His purpose was fulfilled, and He was glorified.

These truths are wonderfully illustrated by Psalms 78, 105, 106, and 136. They describe God's holy, powerful, merciful, patient working with His people. They tell us that God was sovereign, that His promises were kept, and that His purposes were fulfilled. They speak of thanksgiving and praise being given to God because of His awesome works, perfect character, and amazing glory. Psalm 136, my favorite of the four, repeats the truth of God's love for His people 22 times, from the defeat of the Egyptians to their journey in the desert until the time they entered their land. *"To Him who… gave their land as an inheritance, for His love endures forever."* And God continues to show you His immense

love during your journey on earth.

God kept communicating to the Israelites during their time in Israel. What God said was the truth, and it was spoken clearly, completely, lovingly, and powerfully (Micah 3:8). He wanted the Jewish people to know who He was – *"The Lord is the true God; He is the living God, the eternal King"* (Jer. 10:10). And He wanted them to know what He was thinking, what He was doing, and what He planned to do. But most Jewish people weren't interested in what God said, didn't listen to what He said, or forgot what He said. Not knowing and heeding God's word was their biggest problem, and it might be ours too. *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."* Hosea 4:6

God talked to His people through the prophets, godly men who spoke eternal life-giving messages. *"He has told you, O man what is good; and what the Lord requires of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God"* (Micah 6:8, Mal. 2:4-7). The prophets talked about God, His person, purpose, and character. They proclaimed to the Jews their sin, warned them of God's wrath if they didn't repent, and promised them God's mercy if they did repent. And the prophets gave the people hope, for they predicted the coming of Christ as Savior (Is. 53) and King (Is. 9:6-7), and spoke volumes about His glorious kingdom age. Isaiah 61

From God's perspective, all those years in the land were very productive. The Israelites entered the land with promise and hope, but it didn't take long before they sunk deep into sin. Sadly, it was the general pattern for most of those years. This may have seemed like a failure from man's perspective but not from God's. Critically important things took place and extremely valuable truths were written down during this time.
– Christ's ancestors, 19 from Salmon to Jeconiah, lived during this time. Matthew 1:8-11
– God's work was done exactly the way He wanted. Psalm 33:10-12
– God's word was perfectly written down, and permanently so. Psalm

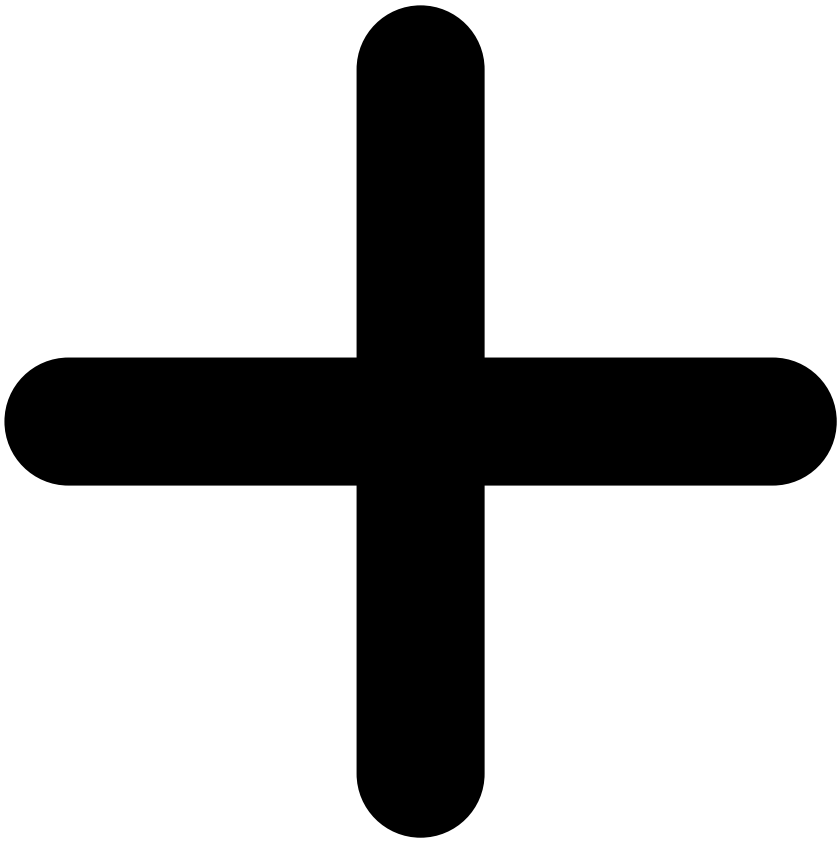
– God’s word teaches you very important lessons. From the Psalms you learn about praising God. From Proverbs, you learn many practical truths. From the Prophets, you learn about your Savior and King, and the coming Kingdom age.
– You learn life-lessons from the successes and the failures of those who lived during this time.
– Most importantly, you learn how God was always exalted and glorified by His word, by His works, and by the lives of people. Psalm 145

* **Most of the Israelites time in their land, humanly speaking, were bad years,** marked by all kinds of grievous sins. There was pride, rebellion, idolatry, disobedience, selfishness, worldliness, immorality, and murder, of babies too. God had no choice but to judge the defiled people and the defiled land (Lev. 18:24-28, Numb. 35:33-34). These judgments usually occurred after significant periods of sin. Some of the Jewish people died because of war, famines, and plagues, while others were forced from their sin-sick land and taken to other countries, most notably, to Assyria and Babylon.

* **The Israelites’ mass exodus from their land was in two stages, 606 BC and 586 BC.** Jeremiah predicted that their exile would last for 70 years, which was exactly what happened (Jer. 25:1-11, 29:10-14). Then the Israelites came back to their land during which time Jesus Christ lived, died, and was raised from the dead. In 70 AD, they were again exiled, and for a very long time. Since the 1880’s, they have been returning to their land, and now there are close to 7.2 million Jewish people living in Israel. It’s absolutely amazing to see God’s purposeful, powerful, and patient working with His people for the past 4,000+ years. But God has only just begun His work with the Jewish people. *“For the sake of His great name the Lord will not reject His people, because the Lord was pleased to make you His own .”* 1 Samuel 12:22

P.S. God speaks extensively about the Israelites and their time in their land. That’s because He wants you to know His eternal commitment to

them. In the years ahead, you will see the salvation of a great remnant of Jewish people and Christ’s reign over the world. To help you grow in your understanding of God’s chosen people, I encourage you to look at *“A Jewish Reading Lesson”.*



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