

to Abraham (Genesis 12:7, 13:15 & 17, 17:8) and was confirmed to Isaac (Genesis 26:3), and then to Jacob (Genesis 28:13), the father of the twelve tribes of Israel.

There is no indication that God “transmuted” the promise of ownership of the land to a “spiritual inheritance” by the church. To do so is to ascribe changeableness to God, and this is contrary to the statement of Romans 11:29 (compare Malachi 3:6) which affirms that God has not set aside his call of Israel as a nation.

A study of the New Testament usage of the word “Israel” (70 times) shows that in every case it refers to the people or land of Israel and never to the church. Thus, throughout the church dispensation, the Church and Israel exist side by side with distinct callings. (See separate study “What Does the New Testament Mean by the Term ‘Israel’?”). Since the land of Israel and the people of Israel are inseparable in God's promises and dealings, and because people in association with a land imply a national entity or state, the New Testament again implies that a Jewish nation has an ongoing place in the plan of God.

That this Jewish nation-state will find its fulfilment in a millennial Kingdom, over which the Messiah, the Son of David reigns from Jerusalem, is nowhere denied, and is in fact implied in the New Testament e.g. Luke 1:32-33, 2:32.

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THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The scarcity of reference to the future of Israel as a nation in the New Testament, compared with that in the prophetic scriptures of the Old Testament, is a source of perplexity to some Christians. In view of this, the following factors are worthy of note.

1. Israel, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, had rejected her Messiah, and a time of silence and discipline in God's dealings with them as a nation began (see Matthew 23:34-39). It is noteworthy that in these words of Jesus, verse 39 includes the promise of a restoration to faith, which coincides, with the return of their Messiah. In fact a 40-year period of grace intervened before the destruction of Jerusalem finally took place.

2. The New Testament focuses on the church, the body of Messiah, which is to be God's instrument for worldwide blessing during this period of Israel's setting aside from God's purposes as a nation. An example is Acts 1:6-8 where Jesus by no means denies that sovereignty will in the future be restored to Israel (indeed He implies that it will be so restored) but rather states that until this does take place, in the Father's own time, the priority of the disciples is to preach the Gospel of Salvation through the Messiah in all the world.

3. There are clear references in the New Testament to the restoration and future of Israel, as for example in Acts 3:17-21, where Peter explains that Jesus had re-entered heaven (Acts 1:10,11) until the time came for fulfilling all that had been foretold by the prophets –

and this must include the promised restoration of Israel as a people to their land at the end times.

4. The Old and New Testaments are a continuous revelation so that, in one sense, the division between “Old” and “New” is artificial. The opening verses of Matthew's Gospel link all that follows with the roots of Jewish history and it is wrong to suggest that the New Testament Scriptures have in any way rendered the Old Testament Scriptures obsolete. (Hebrews 8:13 is referring specifically to the sacrificial system instituted under Moses.) We need to be reminded that the Gospel writers, who were writing in a Jewish context at a time when all the believers in Jesus were themselves Jews, assumed in their readers a familiarity with the Old Testament Scriptures and of contemporary Judaism. This very fact explains many of the apparent omissions in the New Testament record.

Additional references in the New Testament to the restoration and future of Israel include the following:

Acts 1:6-8 “So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’...”

This has already been referred to. It is clear that the disciples had in mind the future restoration of the Kingdom to Israel, as an integral part of their Messianic hope. Had they been mistaken in this expectation, it is unthinkable that Jesus would not have corrected them by some clear explanation of God's change of purposes consequent upon the birth of the church.

Luke 21:24 “... they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led captive among the nations; and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

The plain meaning of these words of Jesus is that the imposition of Gentile rule and possession of Jerusalem is to have an end, and that

it will come again into the possession of the Jewish people as their Capital. It is impossible, without doing disservice to all reasonable Bible interpretation, to spiritualise “Jerusalem” here and make it mean anything other than the city, the Capital of Israel, called by that name. In the first part of verse 24 Jesus is certainly speaking literally and therefore also in the second part of that verse. The implication of this verse is the restoration of sovereignty to the Jewish nation when the “times of the Gentiles” have run their course.

Many believe this Scripture to have had its fulfilment in June 1967 when Israeli forces liberated East Jerusalem from Arab rule and returned it to Jewish jurisdiction for the first time in 1900 years. Whether or not this is so, we are certainly within the period of the close of the times of the Gentiles.

Acts 1:11 “... and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’”

Jesus is going to return to a specific place, and that place is the Mount of Olives just outside Jerusalem (see also Zechariah 14:4). The language of Zechariah 14:1-4, which refers to the same event as Acts 1:11, must be taken literally if complete violence to any reasonable interpretation of Scripture is to be avoided. This being so, it implies that Jerusalem is, at that time, the Capital of the Jewish nation (or why else will “all the nations” be gathered against her?).

Romans 11:28-29 “As regards the gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.”

The Covenant made by God with the Patriarchs included the everlasting possession of the land of Israel. This promise was made