

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #53:

THE TWO ISRAELS

By John Temples

Israel is important in today's world politically, militarily, and in many other ways. The nation of Israel was important in Bible times also--over half the Bible is about Israel. Yet there are many misunderstandings and false views as to how the modern nation of Israel fits into God's plan. Consider:

FOUR MISTAKEN VIEW REGARDING ISRAEL:

Mistaken view #1: Modern-day Israel, established in 1948, is a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy.

Mistaken view #2: Modern-day Jews have a divine right to the land of Canaan because God promised to give it to them forever.

Mistaken view #3: The majority of modern Jews will one day come to Christ.

Mistaken view #4: Christ will one day return and set up His throne in Israel, rebuild the Jewish temple, and rule the world from Jerusalem.

The majority of these errors are concerning the physical land long occupied by Israel and the existence of Israel as a distinct nation. The truth is, **God is done with Israel as a separate nation of people.** Here are some vital truths:

- Yes, God did promise Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan "forever." But the word *forever* in the Bible in regard to earthly things means "age-lasting, enduring as long as a particular set of circumstances prevails." Those circumstances no longer prevail--the law has been changed (see Hebrews 7:12).
- Also, God made it clear to the Jews that if they did not remain faithful to Him, He would revoke the land promise and drive them off the land--both of which came to pass. See Deuteronomy 28:58-68.

- Because of their inveterate unfaithfulness, God finally “divorced” Israel and stated His intent to marry another, spiritual Israel.

Here is a most important truth for us as Bible students to understand in this regard: **The Bible speaks of two Israels--a national or fleshly Israel and a spiritual Israel.**

Listen to Paul in Romans 2:28, 29--“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly [in a racial or physical sense]...but he is a Jew who is one inwardly.” He also said, “For they are not all Israel who are of Israel” (Romans 9:6). These texts are shouting out that there are two Israels in the Bible.

The same is true of “Abraham’s seed.” There is a fleshly seed of Abraham (his racial and physical descendants), and there is a spiritual seed of Abraham. Christians--the church--are that spiritual seed. Galatians 3:29 says, “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Paul spoke of two sets of children of Abraham in Romans 9:8: the children of the flesh (racial Jews) and the children of the promise (the church, Christians, whether Jew or Gentile). It is absolutely vital to keep these distinctions in mind when interpreting Bible prophecy.

GOD DIVORCED ISRAEL BECAUSE OF HER UNFAITHFULNESS

God often described His relationship with racial Israel as a marriage:

- Jeremiah 31:32--God calls Himself Israel’s husband.
- Ezekiel 16:32--God calls Israel His wife, albeit an adulterous one.
- Jeremiah 3:14--God flatly proclaims to Israel, “I am married to you.”

But because of Israel’s shameful, continual idolatry (which God considers as spiritual adultery), God through His prophets announced He would divorce Israel and marry another.

The Israel that God divorced was fleshly, racial, and national Israel. The “new Israel” that God married is the church. We (Christians) are now the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:24-27).

The Old Testament book that most dramatically portrays this distinction is Hosea. In fact, Hosea is actually God’s official “bill of divorcement” to Israel. We need to spend some time studying this remarkable book, and to study carefully to avoid misinterpreting some of its teachings.

THE BOOK OF HOSEA: GOD’S DIVORCE DECREE TO ISRAEL

In chapter 1, we read that God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute. Why? To make a dramatic statement, to be a prophetic analogy of God’s strained relationship with the Jews.

Hosea married a woman named Gomer (1:3). They had three children, who became part of the prophecy by virtue of their names:

- *Jezreel*--meaning “God sows” or “God scatters.”
- *Lo-Ruhamah*--meaning “no pity” or “unloved.”
- *Lo-Ammi*--meaning “not my people.”

Hosea 1:9 is the beginning of God’s official pronouncement disowning Israel. Speaking of Hosea’s third son, God says, “Call his name Lo-Ammi, for *you are not My people, and I will not be your God.*” (THAT’S PRETTY PLAIN!)

But when you come to verses 10 and 11 of chapter 1, amazingly, the tone changes.

- In verse 6, God said He would utterly take Israel away; but in verse 10 He says, “the number of the people shall be as the sand of the sea.”
- In verse 8, God says, “You are not My people”; yet in verse 10b He says they will be His sons.
- Verse 5 says God will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel (“valley of scattering”); yet verse 11b says the day of Jezreel will be great.

How do we explain these wildly different sentiments? Many commentators say, “Well, God is like a man whose wife has been unfaithful, but he loves his wife so much he can’t bear to let her go.” To these commentators, God is saying, “Aw shucks, Israel, I love you so much that I’ll just have to overlook your idolatry.”

Folks, God is not an “aw shucks” God--fickle, naive, or changeable. No, God did not give in and reconcile Israel to Himself. Here is the real reason for the change of tone in Hosea 1: *In verses 1-9, God is speaking of FLESHLY Israel; in verses 10-11 He is speaking about SPIRITUAL Israel, the church which was to come.*

Here are some points that show this to be true:

- Verse 11 says, “Then [when God marries again], the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together and appoint for themselves one Head.” “One head” is an unmistakable reference to Christ, who is the one Head of the church (Colossians 1:18).
- And more proof: in Romans 9:25-26, Paul quotes Hosea 1:10 (“I will call them My people who were not My people”) and applies it to the church.

Look at the next chapter, Hosea 2. Verse 2 says, “Bring charges against your mother [He means the nation], bring charges! For she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband.” God is actually taking Israel to divorce court! He starts to present His case in verse 5: “For their mother has played the harlot...for she said, I will go after my lovers.”

Because of Israel’s unfaithfulness, God says in verse 11, “I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, her sabbaths, all her appointed feasts.” When did this happen? Initially, when the people were carried into Assyrian and Babylonian captivity; and ultimately, when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.

God says in verse 13, “They forgot Me.” You can feel the pathos of this statement. Their unfaithfulness surely broke even the mighty heart of God.

But again, incredibly, the tone changes in verses 14-23: “Behold, I will allure her [woo her, court her], will bring her into the wilderness and speak comfort to her....She shall sing there as in the days of her youth.... And it shall be in that day, says the Lord, that you will call Me ‘my Husband’.... I will betroth you to Me forever.”

Can it possibly be that these two wildly different sets of statements (verses 1-13 and verses 14-23) are talking about the same nation of people? They are not. Once again, verses 1-13 are speaking of national, fleshly Israel, and verses 14-23 pertain to spiritual Israel.

On the words “I will betroth you to Me forever” in verse 19, Burton Coffman comments, “The triple betrothal here signals a marriage, not a remarriage to the apostate whore, but to a people of God who will exhibit the five Christian virtues of this passage: (1) righteousness; (2) justice; (3) loving-kindness; (4) mercies; and (5) faithfulness. As Hailey flatly declared: ‘The betrothal here indicates a new marriage based on the New Covenant.’ Note the emphasis upon one of the great words of the passage in Jer 31:31-35, ‘Thou shalt know Jehovah.’ In the light of the obvious truth here, there can no longer be any doubt whatever that the divorcement of Hos 2:2 above was indeed effective and permanent. God, once the husband of Israel, will now become the husband of another, the new Israel.” (from Coffman's Bible Commentary, Copyright © 1971-1993 by ACU Press, Abilene Christian University. All rights reserved.)

CHAPTER 3--THE CONTINUING SAGA OF HOSEA AND GOMER

Verse 1 suggests that Gomer had forsaken Hosea and was living in adultery with another man. Somehow, it seems, she had even fallen into slavery. God tells Hosea, “I want you to take her back.” Why? Again, because the events in their tumultuous relationship are meant to parallel and portray the “marriage” between God and Israel.

Hosea pays the price of her release and brings her back to his home (verse 2). Does this suggest that God would remarry Israel after divorcing her? By no means. For one thing, that remarriage was specifically forbidden by the Law of

Moses. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 says, “When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, then **her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord**, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.”

Notice that after Hosea took Gomer back, their relationship became a different one. He brought her back into his home as a slave, not as a wife. Hosea 3:3 says, “And I said to her, ‘You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man; so too will I be toward you.’” This tells us that Gomer was to live with Hosea again, but not in the same way as before. She is permitted to live in Hosea’s house, but she must cease her harlotry; and she is not permitted to have marital relations with any man, including Hosea. This is the significance of the statement “thus I will be toward you.” Their relationship would be a celibate one. This parallels God’s relationship with Israel after the “divorce.”

Verse 4 is descriptive of the state of fleshly Israel under this arrangement: “For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim.” Those “many days” commenced with the captivity (ca 721 BC) and lasted until the coming of Christ.

Speaking of verse 4, Burton Coffman says, “This is a prophecy of the long and bleak interval between the Old Testament and the New Testament, during which the Northern Kingdom never more had a king, and during which even the Southern Kingdom also came into very great hardship, suffering vassalage to other kingdoms and paying dearly for their loss of status as the wife of God, or ‘His chosen people.’ The last view of Gomer in the above verse leaves her visible not as Hosea’s wife, but as his slave, without conjugal relations.”

As with chapters 1 and 2, the first part of Hosea 3 speaks of fleshly Israel, the following verses relate to spiritual Israel. Here's another marker of spiritual Israel in chapter 3, verse 5: "Afterward the children of Israel [the true children of Israel, the church] shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king [Christ, seated on the throne of David, Acts 2:30]. They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days." (That term, "the latter days," is another "Pentecost pointer"--the Christian age is called the "last days," Acts 2:16-17, Hebrews 1:2, 2 Peter 3:3.) This prophecy was never fulfilled in the days of fleshly Israel, but was fulfilled when multitudes sought the Lord through His church.

Here is a summary and paraphrase of Hosea 3: God was saying to the Jews, "I will scatter you, have no mercy on you, and allow you to be taken and ruled by the nations. You are no longer my people. I have divorced you because of your adultery, and I will marry another. You may live in my house until my promise to Abraham is fulfilled and the Messiah comes; but you and I will not have the same relationship as before."

WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF THE BOOK OF HOSEA?

It's more of the same. Chapters 4-13 might be called God's "court brief"--a long list of charges against Israel. Chapter 14 is a final appeal to the Jews to become true Jews, part of spiritual Israel, and to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom of Christ.

And here is a crucial point modern people need to understand: *God remains divorced from fleshly Israel, and will never marry her again.* The Jews today can never be saved as part of fleshly Israel, for God is through dealing with them as a nation. They can be saved only by becoming part of spiritual Israel, the church of Christ.

Understanding that there are two "Israels" in the Bible is going to do amazing things for your spiritual understanding. It will unlock many perplexing passages. And it will help you put modern-day events concerning Israel into proper perspective. --John Temples

POSTSCRIPT: For much of the material I have presented in this lesson, I am indebted to a small book by Burton Coffman titled "The True Israel of God," published in 1995. I don't know if this book is still in print, but if you can find one, get it. It is listed on books.google.com, but no source or price is given.

Attached is a chart which will clarify some of these points. --jt