

# The Importance of Israel in the Old Testament<sup>1</sup>

## Topics


## Charts, Maps and Doctrines

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Messiah to come from Israel; the tent and later Temple worship, David's words here; Psalms 41-44, Millennial rule of Jesus Christ; God was clearly able to act outside of Israel (Egypt, for instance). Deut. 32:9.

**Preface:** There are a lot of goofy notions out there concerning Israel, and many Christians today, because they only know a few Bible stories from the Old Testament, have little or no understanding of Israel during the time of David. Therefore, we need to determine just how important Israel was in Old Testament times and just exactly why God focused on Israel.

### A Basic Review of Dispensations:

1. First of all, EVERYONE believes in dispensations—if you are a Christian, you are automatically a dispensationalist. You might say, “No, I am a covenant theologian [one who believes that the *church* started in Abraham's tent].” Still, you believe in dispensations; the difference is degree. If your church does not offer animal sacrifices, then you are a dispensationalist. If you read through the books of Exodus through Numbers, you will find a huge number of ceremonies, sacrifices, etc. which neither you nor your church practice. If you do not practice all of those things found in the Old Testament (some of which are very difficult to do if you are not Jewish), then you are a dispensationalist. You believe that God has a slightly different plan in different ages.
2. There are four basic dispensations, which may be further subdivided: The Age of Adam, the Age of Israel, the Church Age and the Millennium. In these four ages, we have man on earth, we have God and we have God's work on earth.
3. Time frames:
  - a. The Age of Adam: from Adam to Abraham (about the time he offered up Isaac).
  - b. The Age of Israel: from Abraham to Christ (His resurrection and ascension).
  - c. The Church Age: from Pentecost to the Rapture.
  - d. The Tribulation is a part of the Age of Israel, a completion of the Age of Israel, and it runs from the rapture to the Millennium.
  - e. The Millennium: from the end of the Tribulation until after the creation of a new heavens and a new earth (which may take forever).
4. Salvation in every age is the same: believe in Jesus Christ and you are saved. In the Old Testament, it was *believe in Jehovah Elohim*.
5. God has to communicate His truth to man:
  - a. In the Age of Adam, it was primarily through direct revelation, sometimes through dreams.
  - b. In the Age of Israel, some information was communicated directly from God to man; however, most of Israel learned their doctrine partially from the religious sacrifices and customs and partially from teaching and partially through what was written in the Old Testament that was extant during any particular time (the sacrifices, ceremonies and teaching were often based upon extant Old Testament Scripture).

<sup>1</sup> Dude!

- c. In the Church Age, God primarily speaks through His Word, the Bible. However, in the early Church Age, God spoke directly to a few men.
  - d. In the Millennium, understanding of God's Word will be universal.
6. The gospel message:
- a. In the first two ages of man, this primarily came via the animal sacrifices and revealed truth.
  - b. In the Church Age, this is reveal from one believer to one unbeliever. The believer generally learns gospel information in church. However, a believer or unbeliever can learn and give the gospel from reading it.
7. The recording of and custodianship of Scripture:
- a. The line from Adam through Abraham were responsible to record the small amount of revelation which is extent today. This would be all of Genesis.
  - b. The nation Israel and the people of Israel recorded and kept secure God's Word for the next two and a half millenniums. In fact, there were some groups who maintained copies of the Old Testament even after the Church Age was in full swing (the Massorites).
  - c. Christians wrote the New Testament (primarily Jews) and preserve and disseminated New Testament writings (and, eventually, the writings of both testaments) unlike anything we have every seen before.

#### Israel:

1. God specifically followed a particular family from Adam to Abraham; most, if not all, in this direct line were believers.
2. Joseph, before there ever was a nation Israel, specified that his dead body be kept in an above ground sarcophagus that could be moved into the Land of Promise.
3. All of the sacrifices which spoke of Jesus Christ were done in Israel.
4. Not only were the sacrifices done in Israel, but they were always done from one Tent (or Temple) in one place. God was very specific in what He required for worship; and standardizing that would have been difficult in various locations. Furthermore, the idea the Jehovah God is One God—this could only be expressed with a centralized location. Even though God was omnipresent and omnipotent, He expressed His involvement with the world in one place: the Tabernacle in Israel.
  - a. Some of you who know a little ancient history are probably partially confused by the division of Israel into two countries: the northern and southern kingdoms (Israel and Judah).
  - b. When the country split up, there were two priesthoods, which did not properly express Who and What God is. There were two kings; also not a proper shadowing of the Messiah-king to come.
  - c. More confusing than this would have been to have Tents, Tabernacles and Temples all over Israel (in fact, all over various countries). At that point in time, they would become nothing more than local country gods and goddesses.
  - d. As is obvious, even in our day and age, even with the Bible being *set in stone*, as it were; an incredible variety of churches have popped up. In ancient times, without a fixed canon of Scripture, the situation would have been worse.
5. All of the Old Testament written Scripture which we have comes down through the Jew. Although, it is possible that God spoke more directly to Gentiles, we don't have anything recorded outside of the Old Testament which comes anywhere close to being God's Word.
6. Jesus Christ, the Savior of all mankind, was to come from a royal line—the line of David. Therefore, this royal line must be documented. Every single line in the Old Testament has huge gaps here or there in it—with one exception: the line of Adam going to the line of Abraham going to the line of David and finally going to the line of Jesus. God had to preserve this line, which was preserved in Israel, in Holy Writ. Apart from the very imperfect line of the Egyptian pharaohs, I am unaware of any other nation which so carefully documented its genealogy, to the point where we can go all the way from Adam to Jesus, a span of perhaps 4000 years. This was preserved by Jewish tradition.
7. God chose a people who were all believers and made them into a nation.
8. God chose to work within the nation Israel personally. This is much different than today, where the *cradle of Christianity* has moved all over the globe, from Rome to Spain to Ireland to England to the United States. However, for 1500 years, God's work was with one nation, and for 2000 years, His work was through one people.

9. He sent His prophets to that nation as well.
10. Of course, we will hear the question, *what about the heathen* for that period of time as well as this. The answer is essentially the same:
  - a. God is able to contact any unbeliever anywhere with the gospel.
  - b. God usually does this via human means—that is, through people who evangelize.
  - c. Israel was not commissioned to go out and evangelize, however.
  - d. Therefore, what God did in the nation Israel served as evangelization. Throughout Israel's history, it is clear that other nations were well aware of Israel's relationship with God.
    - i. The Egyptians.
    - ii. Solomon and the Queen of Sheba?
    - iii. Jonah on the boat.
    - iv. The Jews when dispersed.
  - e. God managed to use Israel in one way or another to inform the other nations that there was but One True God—Jehovah Elohim.
  - f. We are so used to evangelical movements and missions and the like, that we don't realize that God simply had a different model that He used in the Old Testament.
  - g. When an unbeliever is negative toward God and God-consciousness, then God does not owe this person the gospel (although God may provide him the gospel, anyway).
  - h. However, if an unbeliever is positive toward God at God-consciousness, then God will make certain that, no matter what, that person will be exposed to the gospel of Jehovah Elohim.
  - i. History is littered with examples of Jewish evangelism, several of which are given above.
11. You will note that there was a difference of technology, if you will, between the first century A.D. and the time of Moses. In the first century A.D., there were letters written by Paul to the various churches and *they copied and distributed these letters to other churches*. By that point in time, there were ways to disseminate God's Word, even though these were but hand-written manuscripts. During earlier times, there were fewer than a handful of manuscripts, as far as we can tell. There was the manuscript written by the prophet (several written by several prophets); and there might be a copy made for the king (the king of Israel was required to have a copy of God's Word to study). You see the difference? During the time of ancient Israel, the number of copies of manuscripts which were around were very few. Once we reach the time of the Apostles, we are at a point where letters and manuscripts were hand-copied and distributed. There were libraries. Each church could have copies of several of the Pauline epistles. In other words, scattering God's Word during the time of Israel would not have worked. Scattering God's Word during the time of the initiation of the Church Age worked fine.
12. Israel faced many national crises; in fact, there were times when huge groups of Jews were thrown out of the land. When situations like this occurred, Israel had to determine which of their writings had to be preserved.
13. By the time of the Church Age and the first few centuries, there were meetings set up all over the world to determine what was divine Scripture and what was not. This was practical in the first few centuries due to improved travel conditions and communications between cities. This would not have been practical during the time of Israel. When God devised His plan for the ages, He also took into account technology and culture; and, of course, positive volition. Therefore, what was appropriate to the time of Israel is not appropriate today.
14. One of the most important reasons for God sticking with Israel is, the world needed to be focused on Israel. This world needed to be focused on the Jew. Messiah was going to come from Israel—therefore, God could not have any confusion elsewhere, any false messiah's coming from here or there. Scripture had to focus on one country and one place. This is like spotlighting a stage. When the actors come on stage, there is a spotlight on them—we are supposed to watch them. God's spotlight was on Israel. Messiah was to come to Israel; the Messiah is a Jew. Therefore, God could not spotlight other countries; it would have just confused the issue.