

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XI



By Philip E. Busby

Question #21 - *"Is it true that the Jews are God's chosen people? I have a Christian friend who says the Jews were not God's chosen people."*

Our last segment talked about how looking from the standpoint of a historical narrative, Ezra's and Nehemiah's work really brings us to the chronological end of the Old Testament. We also got into the discussion of why it is important for the sake of answering our question that we continue to look at the historical facts that brought what we see at the opening of the New Testament, because the New Testament tells of the coming of The Messiah to the chosen nation. Unless one believes in casting the Bible's narrative completely to the side (something that, if one does, there really is no point in having our discussion at all), I believe we've covered how the nation of Israel became known as the Jews by the close of the Old Testament. Thus, if the Jews at the close of the Old Testament are the chosen nation, then the Jews of the New Testament would have had to develop and take the identity of the former Jews during the roughly 400 year history that lies between the Testaments, to not be the same people as the original chosen nation.

Starting off with this thought in mind, I want to make a very obvious point about this idea. If the Jews of the New Testament were a different people than those of the Old Testament, then one needs to ask why God sent Jesus to them? I know some would love to answer this by

saying the Jews, as a nation, did not accept Jesus because they were not truly the chosen nation, and I'm sure one could start a whole new cult with that idea at its core! However, no matter how much this might be another one of those things that sounds good on the surface for those with itchy ears, who like turning to fables, what we started discussing last time is the deeper point for those who seek the truth, and it destroys this idea. The Messiah was not sent at some random point in history. Jesus came when He did because He was the chosen nation's only real hope of getting things back on track by that point in history; and in talking about getting things back on track, I'm not talking about just keeping the chosen nation in existence. No, I'm talking about keeping the temple in existence and the Jews on the promised land. The fact God was continually working toward, and desirous to maintain this goal in spite of the pitfalls various generations fell into, is shown in no better way than by studying the work of Ezra and Nehemiah following the Babylonian captivity. Why? Because the captivity very well could have, and without God's hand would have, brought an end to there being a chosen nation at all, much less a nation able to return and rebuild the temple, Jerusalem, and bring together the Hebrew Bible which Christians call the Old Testament.

On this point, I would also like to speak again to just how much no one has the right to judge the Jews for any of their failures, because maintaining their distinction as a specific people in this world was/is a hard enough job in and of itself. It is certainly a job many of us would never even accept the challenges of, especially in the political climate of today's world! The very thought pattern of the importance of protecting the distinction of the chosen people is a big part of what Ezra, Nehemiah, and their contemporary prophets can be credited with restoring an understanding the need for, and the importance of this should not be underrated. Why? Because the shifting political circumstances that lay ahead of the close of the Old Testament ended up making the intermixing of peoples, the earlier Assyrians had attempted, look like child's play! With that, I believe we're ready to begin looking more directly at the history between the Testaments.

There was, for a short while following the return and reestablishment of Jerusalem, a time for the Jews to live on the promised land in a period of relative quiet when they were able to focus on their own affairs. The world empire of the day continued to be, at the very least, tolerant of the Jewish nation, or maybe even disinterested is a way to describe it at times. Either way, this is the kind of favor God could bring if His people would humble themselves before Him, and worry foremost about following God's Law and not the secular government part of this life. During this time, the Jews seemed to have

made peace with the idea that serving God was possible and even in God's will, while still being under the governmental control of a foreign power; and again, having no aspirations of power for themselves helped maintain the quiet. However, one must not forget that the world empire, and others in the world, never believed in laying aside their aspirations for worldly power, and world affairs were already in flux during the time of the restoration of Judah. The reason for the coming storm all started when the empire chose to push its way into the territory further north and west of the promised land. This was an area the empires that had preceded the Medes and Persians very well may have claimed to rule, as they claimed to rule the entire world, but they never really had "harassed."

As the empire was allowing the Jews to return and rebuild the temple, it was making inroads into the West, eventually crossing over into what we call Europe today and clashing with the people living in the region of Greece. To condense the history here, the Greeks (to use a general term) did not just fold up and walk away, but fought back and forced the empire to settle for controlling only as far west as Asia Minor, or what is Turkey today. As much as these efforts were a loss for the empire, they did not give up on the idea they could go further one day, but in it all they never really understood the hornets' nest they were stirring up! Because of these activities, we begin to see coming to pass what Daniel was shown in his visions. For Judah, there would be about one hundred years of quiet beyond the time of the Old Testament's close, but to the Northwest of the promised land many things were changing, and the Greeks were on the rise!

Essentially, the Medes and Persians had met with just what God had put in place by confounding the language of men during man's first attempt at a one-world government, which was the Tower of Babel. The Medes and Persians would push too far and anger a people not in agreement with their ideas. Probably a better way to look at it is to say because man no longer had that common understanding between each other that existed before the confounding, there was not a way to convey the grand humanistic ideas the empire represented. If there had been, others may very well have agreed with them and ideas would even have been shared in both directions. We see this again and again as empires fell only to be taken over by people who end up revering the very thing they defeated and attempting to rebuild, continue, and/or even expand upon it. Again, this is exactly why God confounded man's language. Man can choose to cooperate and agree, but no agreement is always better than bad agreements which lead to overall bad end results! (Prov. 14:12)

The fact each empire desired to force their great ideas upon the whole world, as well as their greed for power in general, is what spurred them to continue their attempt at expansion of territory through war instead of being content with taking in just those who agreed with them, and agreeing to just disagree with those who did not accept their ideas as grand. It is also fair to point out, this was happening on a smaller scale among people all over the world, and, in no small part, would happen among the Greeks before they chose to truly push back at the empire. The point is, in pushing for expansion, the Medes and Persians specifically anger people who otherwise might never have cared the empire existed. A man by the name of Alexander, who, due to his actions, would come to be known as "The Great," would take command of an army determined to revenge his land and family. Alexander would desire to turn back the empire and ensure it would not march toward Greece again. Overall, this would not just end in another political shift of imperial power, but as Daniel's prophecy illustratively shows, it would bring people into the picture who had, until then, been to the west of most all the imperial goings on in the East. This involvement would make the entire story of a world beast an ever greater, all inclusive matter for all the people living on this planet. Even those living far away on the continents now known as the Americas, and those deep into places such as Africa, would not go unaffected as some believe, but that's a much broader historical look than we need to go into for this discussion.

Alexander would have great success and very quickly overrun the empire, making it to, and taking the throne in Babylon. There, Alexander, being impressed by the glory of the city, would not turn in disgust of what the empire that had angered him consisted of, and head for home feeling good about the fact he had freed the world from imperial tyranny. No, Alexander liked what he found and even ended up living in Babylon's grander, demanding to be treated much more like a king instead of remaining the greatly respected leader which had brought him success. However, this would not last long. In his vision, Daniel had seen one great horn on the goat that came from the west; but this first great horn of what would be the Greek empire was very quickly broken after its initial success, and replaced by four others. (Dan. 8:1-8) This vision would come to pass as Alexander would rule only a short time before his death at a relatively young age, and the bulk of what he had conquered would fall to four of his generals who would fight back and forth over who would rule and/or over what. The prevailing parties in this struggle would go on to continually do what had initially angered the Greeks, which is focus on their own desires for power, fighting with each other and attempting to expand their territory

without regard for the people over which they ruled.

Now, as it came to the chosen nation, this would be a dramatic change of events. However, the effects of all this would not be felt so much at the first. At some point, as Alexander was fighting along the Mediterranean coast, presumably as he was on his way to conquering (some would say liberating) Egypt, or maybe as he was turning back north to head east to the empire's heart, Alexander would encounter the Jews. It's not known how much the Greeks may have understood about Jewish culture and/or religion, but I believe Alexander was wisely approached by the Jewish leadership with the very thought pattern God wanted them to have at the time Babylon was on the rise. The Jews simply ask for peace with Alexander on the basis Jerusalem was not a city of war or a stronghold of power. The Jews were not interested in secular power, but only their own affairs of serving God. While little hard information is really known about all this, it is likely Alexander saw in the Jews a people much as the Greeks had been many, many decades before when the Persians originally attacked Greece. He saw a people who just wanted to explore and maintain their culture while living their own lives. One way or another, the problem for the Jews being under the Greeks would not really begin to show itself until after Alexander was dead.

Alexander had actually encouraged Jews to settle in other cities of his expanding territory, giving Jews great freedom of movement, which could be taken advantage of for Jews to come back to, as well as settle, all up and down the land of promise. However, Jews would not just take the opportunity to reestablish their presence all across the promised land. As time passed, many Jews would leave the land and come to live even in places that the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity had not forced them into. Several Jews would eagerly go to live in the great Egyptian city founded by and named for Alexander. The Egyptian city of Alexandria would become a world cultural hub - so to speak - and the Hebrew Bible would become an important part of what was shared there. However, we'll come back to this subject a bit later. Looking at where the turmoil for the the Jews and the promised land in general came into play while under the Greeks, starts with an understanding that even in the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it was clear the promised land was an important trade route between not just North and South but East and West. We get the sense that this died a bit when the Babylonians arose and seemed to shift world power, along with trade, more to the east. However, traders from all lands still moved goods across this land. In spite of what might appear to be true in some ways, Israel was never some backwater insignificant place. No

matter how many or how few people lived on the land, it was always a path for goods to flow. As one moved into the time of the Greek empire's existence, we begin to see the rise of how important monetary systems would become to the world, and the knowledge leaders had of how much money and/or trade systems in general was not just for their personal comfort, but an important part of obtaining and maintaining power itself along with interconnecting people.

The coming of the Greeks was shown to Daniel because of its importance not just to how it would affect the chosen nation, but also put all the pieces in place for the beast to be a true world beast, as well as one that could survive as an image of itself after its more physical fall. This is why Revelation refers to the beast at one point as being one "...that was, and is not, and yet is." Revelation 17:8 After Alexander's death, this rising understanding of how to rule the world, along with the shift of people involved with the seat of imperial power, combined with the division of that power, no longer being centered just in the Mesopotamian Valley, put the land of Israel right in the middle of world affairs, and the Jews living on that land, of course, came along with this. This should fascinate any person seeking to understand why God established a chosen nation to do a work in this world, along with why it was so valuable for them to remain on the land God promised Abraham they would possess. The chosen nation was placed in strategic spots from the very start. To grow into a nation, they went to the seat of the arising world power, which was Egypt. After being brought to the land of promise they eventually rose to be a great nation of their own, the influence of which at the time of David and Solomon really spread far and wide.

When the seat of world power significantly took world matters to the east, God used punishment for the chosen nation's rebellion against Him to place the Jews in Babylon. As events were going to move, once again, back to the west, and the promised land would again be at the heart of world affairs, the Medes and Persians were used of God to be ahead of those events, and sent those Jews willing to identify themselves as the chosen nation and go back to their land to do so. Using the chosen nation, time and again, as a focal point from which to influence the world with the ways of God, was, and still is, the nations purpose for existing; and again, The Messiah would come at a time it was necessary to, once more, ensure this job continued! The inability for many who call themselves Christians to see this is why they diminish the importance of, and/or believe there is no need for, and/or believe the church can or has replaced the chosen nation, instead of seeing that on this side of The Messiah there being Christians at all is a result of the very work God

established and maintained the chosen nation for. Being able to share the message that The Saviour has come goes hand in hand with us having things such as the Hebrew Bible, and understanding all we teach about made available through God's use of a chosen nation!

Getting back to our historical look, by the time the Greeks come and the four generals take up positions of power, which struggle against each other, the chosen nation is, once again, right in the middle of it all. The promised land would not be just a quiet place far on the west edge of an eastern empire, but a significant crossroads of all that was going on between the would be kings of the world! This is why Daniel's prophecy does not specify names, but simply lays out for us a continuous struggle where the king of the North would clash with the king of the South and so on. No matter who these kings specifically were at any given point, the promised land and nation would be marched back and forth over many times as the armies fought and political circumstances shifted faster than anyone could keep a clear score card on.

This would bring into clear view the truth that the world's, or we should say, man's thoughts have not been about God's ways! (Isa. 55:8-9) While God would often have liked to use the chosen nation in a more efficient way than they were willing to obey and follow, the reason kings of Israel/Judah and specifically the city of Jerusalem ever came to be known as rebellious places, and the Jews a rebellious people, during any point, was still based primarily on the fact their laws and customs, which God had given them, were "strange," even among what secular people would call a very diverse world of culture and religion. When the nation failed to put their trust in God's way of defending the fact not everyone appreciated their uniqueness, and went in directions God had not instructed, God still used them, but they made life harder for themselves! After Alexander died, possibly more than ever before, this became a factor. During the turbulent times of the beast struggling to put even itself back together again, it became very important for the Jews to be in tune with God, putting Him and His ways first, in order to know what step they should take at each point and time. Their success and failure to do and not do right would shape the path to the coming of The Messiah just as Daniel was told!

To take a little closer look at what we historically understand as happening after Alexander's death, than Daniel's visions were intended to give prior to it happening, the base fact about four kings taking the place of one is, of course, spot on. Four of his generals would initially divide up the new empire Alexander had put

together. In a way one could argue that the Greeks only briefly had a world empire and then it was nothing more than a jumbled mess of territorial powers, the borders between which shifted time and again with little regard for the common people living their daily lives. While the last part of this thought is true, one should not rule out the idea Greece was as much a world empire as any of the others before it. If nothing else, we need to understand there is a more important point to the Greek's reign than the idea the world was not solidly ruled from one seat of power - and that is culture!

In all this, it is so important we understand that while God is a great God Who works His will using those who want to live for Him, the devil (who wants God's position) is only interested in gaining power over everyone. This is a most basic reason for God confounding man's language at the tower. What man was doing there made all of mankind ripe for the devil's picking. All he had to do was step in and take over. By confounding language, God protected people from the devil as well as each other. This was/is frustrating to men, many of whom never have stopped desiring to rebuild a world of unity, but also for the devil. This is why, in Revelation, John sees both a beast with the seven heads and a dragon. (Rev. 12:3, 13:1-9) The devil's plans run parallel with those people who want to unify the world; and make no mistake about it, little to none of this is about the pursuit of real peace! As we have discussed, the tower itself, along with these empires are the heads of the beast, and the Assyrians represent the re-arising of that beast after God wounded it with the confounding. Just to note, one-world government will never be accomplished by man, but his insistence on pursuing it will, as we clearly see in our day, destroy this world! This shows how much the idea may be masked in peace, but no matter how much it accomplishes peace, the idea certainly has nothing to do with righteousness, and there in is the problem! This, again, speaks to what we've been discussing about The Messiah coming and doing the work He did at the time of His first appearance, but let's get back to directly talking about the Greek culture thing.

You see, the Assyrian idea of how to unify the world was to force everyone out of their culture and attempt to set up a new and unifying world culture. Not to put too fine a point on it, this backfired in that it really only served to anger so many people that the empire fell to what was basically an internal rival who didn't like being told what to do. That was the Babylonians, and they had a different idea. Their idea was basically one of simple superiority. The Babylonians took power believing their ideas to be the very best and it being their right to rule the world. In this mindset they swept across various regions

with force. They made agreements with those who would yield to them and leveled those places that resisted. This is why in Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream, the Babylonian king is said to be the head of gold! (Dan. 2:38) No other empire would rule with such certainty and centralization of power over such a vast amount of people and lands. However, the arrogance of being able to do this, especially holding secular power over God's chosen nation, truly went to the king's head; and in the end, God judged the empire, allowing the Medes and Persians to take over.

The Medes and Persians had yet another approach as to how to rule the world. They were probably the most interested in the concept of diversity. Sure, they were the rulers and had their fair share of a superiority complex, but to speak in terms we like to use today, in many ways they embraced the fact different people had different ways of living. This is why the Jews were allowed to return and rebuild the temple and Jerusalem. The argument the devil had to push for to counter this was that the Jews alone were a strange and disruptive culture to the harmony of the empire, and this argument is how the temple work was delayed for a time, and is also the one Haman had to use as the reason the king should single out the Jews for destruction, which is why we have the story of Esther. Let's not forget, all this embracing of diversity was not about forgetting the dream of one central point ruling the world and bring all the world under its umbrella. That is why the empire kept pushing its borders and ended up angering people, specifically the Greeks, which brought Alexander across to Babylon!

To get us back where we started this whole line of discussion, the fact Alexander died and the empire fell to an internal power struggle that greatly dampened the centralization of power idea, something of greater power than a central throne was taking hold in no small part because of what Alexander had done during his short time! Alexander is credited by some as being the first man to do a truly great scientific expedition. As much as his goal was to take down the Medes and Persians, he took time to plant many colonies of Greeks throughout the territory he conquered. He also is said to have sent hundreds, if not thousands, of plant and animal specimens back to Greece for study and research. This may also have caused many people from various cultures to be involved in transporting these things, and thus visiting Greece, at the very least. All this resulted in Greek culture taking root in many places and the Greeks not just being known as the rulers of the world.

Thus, in spite of all the infighting after Alexander's death, the more people of the world learned

about the Greek culture the more they liked it! If one has much of a world view and grasp of modern history, I really should not have to defend this point at all, because the truth is, people, to this day, still consider Greek culture the true classic of the world. During the Greek's rule, people literally started to look at their individual cultures as inferior to the Greeks. In many people's eyes the Greeks had more beautiful art than they did. The Greeks told better stories and had a more beautiful way of thinking which seemed wise and highly developed. The Greeks even had more attractive gods, and their pantheon of gods was more organized and logical than the vast majority of cultures. Even the later empire of the Romans couldn't argue with this point, and it has a lot to do with why it is so easy to draw direct parallels between most all the Roman and Greek gods.

Striking directly at what God did at the Tower of Babel, people even believed the Greeks spoke a more beautiful and expressive language than any other! The end result of this is that almost without trying the Greeks accomplished what the Assyrians could only have dreamed of doing. People of the world started learning the Greek language, how to read and write it, how to organize thought and build philosophy like the Greeks, all the while voluntarily allowing their own unique cultures and languages to be left behind and lost. The Greeks, more than any before and any after them, accomplished the biggest reversal of the Tower of Babel effect. What happened in their time drew the best map the devil has ever found for attempting to unify the world, and he has never stopped using this as a model. The catch is that because the devil and men don't care about bringing righteousness to the world, they will never figure out how to bring true unity, much less peace to it!

Until next time, may we each continually choose to be the people God wants us to be!

