

ISRAEL

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Take a minute to pray for God to guide you as you study...

Welcome to the first lesson of ECCLESIA! Because you want to continue your journey of knowing God, you are taking this next step of finding your place in His mission of saving others. Ecclesia is the Greek word for "church," and over the next twelve lessons, you'll get a better understanding of where the church came from, what specific purpose does it have, what strengths God has given you and how you can use them in God's church to further His mission.

In this first lesson, we are learning about God's chosen people (a.k.a. church), Israel. See if you can discover something new that will change the way you think about church today.

The nation of Israel occupies only 8,630 square miles, making it smaller than the state of New Jersey. Yet, though this nation is small, its history has shaped our lives and the lives of the world in more ways than we know. The reason this nation has shaped so much of the world is because of its place at the heart of the Biblical story. When one sets out to read the Bible, there is no escaping Israel and its impact. In this study, we will see how God used such a small area to accomplish such a huge purpose: the spreading of the knowledge of God to a world in rebellion. In order to fully understand God's purpose in choosing Israel, one must start at the beginning.

Genesis 1:1 tells us, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* And then in verse 31, *"God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good."* This is the description of the world before sin entered in causing chaos, sickness, murder, and death. But God, being a God of love, had a plan for redemption. When He could have just simply redone everything, He decided to put into action, a plan that is higher than any human beings conceivable thought! He decided to act out of His love and redeem those lost to sin and selfishness, except God was handicapped! He could only operate out of His character, and since His character is one of selfless love, His plan would

only involve giving instead of taking. When the enemy could use deceit and lies, God could only function out of His nature, and His nature is selfless love. This is where the struggle lies. Because we live in a world full of destruction and selfishness, it is easy to think that God's plan won't work, when in fact the story of Israel in the Old Testament and how God used them to establish what is now called "the Church," is a trumpet sounding, *"For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."* (Isaiah 55:9)

ISRAEL: GOD'S OLD TESTAMENT CHURCH

The beginning of the Bible races from Genesis 1-11 covering the creation of the world, the fall of mankind, the rise of sin ultimately leading to a catastrophic flood, and the attempt to build a hedge of protection through a giant tower that reaches the heavens. However, when you reach chapter 12, you are brought to an immediate halt. And it's here in chapter 12 that God tells the story of a man named Abram and how he became the forefather of God's church. Genesis 12 begins this way:

Genesis 12:1-3: "The Lord had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and _____ peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'"

God was going to use Abram, and the nation his family would become, to bless the whole earth! Abram would go on to have a son named Isaac, and Isaac would have a son named Jacob, and Jacob would have 12 sons that would eventually become the tribes of Israel. It is through this family and the nation they became, that God was going to accomplish His mission.

WHAT IS THE MISSION GOD HAD FOR ISRAEL?

To find the mission of Israel, read through the following texts and write down the main mission that was given to Israel.

Deuteronomy 4:5-8:

Ezekiel 36:22-24:

Isaiah 66:19:

Psalms 145:10-12:

BASIC POINT

God gave Israel a mission to tell the world about a God of love!

God was going to use the Israel of the Old Testament the exact same way He would use the church of the New Testament - to spread knowledge of Him throughout the whole world! They were given an entrusted message, and through their message, nations were to come to a saving relationship with the God of Israel, the only true God. Their message contained 5 key parts that we will see have never changed.

ISRAEL'S MESSAGE

1. God is the Creator

For the Israelites, God as the Creator, was a crucial doctrine on which their message depended on. The apostle Paul, writing to a group of Christian Jews, says this, "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible" (Hebrews 11:3). Believing the literal six day creation narrative found within Genesis 1 not only safeguards against idolatry, but it also points to how God would be able to recreate us by a declaration through the death of His son.

2. The Messiah will come

Shortly after the fall of mankind, God seeks out Adam and Eve, and through His investigation of the situation gives a promise of redemption. The promise is found in Genesis 3:15.

Genesis 3:15: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will _____ your head, and you will strike his heel.”

This promise was the hope that the Israelites rested everything on! Read Genesis 4:1 and Isaiah 53.

3. God will establish His Kingdom

The message of Israel also contained the plan that God would establish His kingdom and that this kingdom would last forever. This doctrine not only shows that God is ultimately the conquering King, but that the way He reigns endures unto everlasting. In a vision to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar God shows that eventually *“the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed”* (Daniel 2:44). His kingdom will last forever and ever!

4. Salvation/Redemption comes from the Lord

This aspect of Israel’s message placed all of history within a giant story of redemption spanning from creation to re-creation. Jonah, being tasked to go and speak to a foreign nation and give the message of God to a city steeped in idolatry, prays from the belly of a whale, *“Salvation is from the Lord”* (Jonah 2:9). Israel was to show that there is only one way to be redeemed, and it is only through the Lord.

5. God is the ultimate judge of all people

Finally, the last part of Israel’s message was that ultimately God is the final judge. He alone is worthy to judge, and whatever His verdict is, it is wise and true. This allows many individuals in the Old Testament to rest, forgive, let go, knowing that ultimately God will repay and that His judgment is fair.

This is the purpose of Israel in the Old Testament. Unfortunately, Israel didn’t live up to their calling and continually rebelled, falling into various sins they would break their covenant with God. But there is still good news! Because the story of Israel points towards someone better than Israel, the true Israel, Jesus Christ, who came and lived the Mission of Israel.

He trumpeted the message of Israel, and ultimately, through His death, delivered Israel and the whole world from the power of sin. What a powerful and awesome God! What a message! What a mission that God gave a group of people to share with the whole world!

The best part about this whole lesson is simply that you too are a part of a chosen people that God is using and will continue to use to bring glory to Him. That’s what being a part of Ecclesia is about...sharing a message with others about a God that loves you! That’s the mission of Israel, and it’s your mission too!

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

1. What was surprising to you about Israel?
2. Which part of the message to Israel impressed you the most?

LESSON 1: HISTORY/PURPOSE OF ISRAEL

