

# God's Plan for Israel

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## Part 1: Theological Antisemitism Ignoring God's Promises

God's unique plan for Israel is described in Romans 11,25-29 with the following words: *For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.'* Concerning the gospel, *they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*

The apostle Paul opens this passage with the question: *Has God cast away His people?* (Rom.11,1a). An answer to this question was provided by a catholic professor of Theology at a podium discussion in Berlin during the Catholic day in 1958. His answer was a quotation of verse 29: *"the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable"*. Based on this Bible word he explained that God never rejected His people Israel and never replaced them through the Church (Replacement Theology). After this short yet clear statement of the catholic theologian, his Jewish colleague, Pichas Lapide, rose to his feet and embraced him.

Up until the end of the 18th century, the idea that Israel could play a role in God's plan independent from the Christian Church was inconceivable to most. The following example may illustrate this. In 1621 Henry Finch published a book: *"The World's Great Restauration"* - subtitle: *"Calling of the Jews"*. Finch had an outstanding knowledge of the Hebrew language and his study of scripture lead him to predict the establishment of a global Jewish kingdom with Jerusalem as the capital city. In doing so, he rejected the commonly held view of his time, that the Jews would convert to Christianity beforehand. The notion that even the King of England should bow to the supremacy of the Jews angered King James I so fiercely that he called for Finch's imprisonment, until the controversial sections of the book had been removed.

For our subject - the historical development of the interpretation of prophecy in Christianity - it is important to know, that for centuries any kind of significance of Israel outside of Christianity seemed to be incompatible with God's plan.

This misunderstanding of Israel's significance in the divine plan can be traced back to the Church fathers of the 3rd and 4th centuries and had been widely taught and accepted since Augustine. According to this teaching, God's great promises for Israel had been once and for all transferred to the Church, because Israel had rejected their Messiah. Since this time all prophetic words about Israel's future role in the divine plan have been interpreted as prophecies for the 'spiritual Israel', or the 'church out of the nations'. With this teaching the prophetic vision for a resurging Israel was annihilated.

W. Kelly adds the following commentary on this matter: *"The fathers invented the miserable system of expunging Israel and Judah from o. t.*

*prophecy: for them, all was "the church"; and so with most Anglicans, and almost all "Dissenters," to this day. Their lucubrations therefore about the antichrist and the great tribulation are worthless. The Protestant scheme went farther astray in denying the individuality of the antichrist, as well as his literal place in the temple at Jerusalem in the consummation of the age and converting the days into nothing but years. But both alike Judaized the church by blotting out Israel's true hopes."* (Bible Treasury, Vol.16, p.1542).

By this teaching Christianity not only negated Israel's existence but became blind for the prophetic word. Zechariah 2,8:"... *for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye*" can be understood twofold. This word refers firstly to Israel as the apple of God's eye but also to each individual eye, meaning that the person who touches Israel becomes blind himself.

This teaching known as 'Replacement Theology' had devastating effects on hope in Christianity. The living and joyful hope of the first Church was dead and buried due to this false teaching. The Nicene Creed of the year 325 illustrates the lost joy of the Rapture of the church at the Lord's return.

In spite of all of this, there were individuals who continued to live in joyful hope. For example, Rube (1665-1746) expresses this hope in his hymn "*The Lord shall come in dead of Night*" with the words: "*But hourly watch, as if ye knew this night the master came*". That definitely doesn't mean, however, that these believers had also correctly understood the divine future of Israel. Similarly, in the 18th century, Matthew Henry could not accept the idea of Israel's future being separate from the Church. In his well-known and otherwise very good "Commentary on the Whole Bible" he writes regarding Romans 11, 26: "... *Not that ever they should be restored to their covenant of peculiarity again, to have their priesthood, and temple, and ceremonies again (an end is put to all those things); but they should be brought to believe in Christ the true Messiah whom they crucified, and be incorporated in the Christian church....*"

Nevertheless, there were at that time those who understood God's dealings with Israel. When Frederick the Great suffered bad defeat in the Seven Years War (1756-63), his believing general, General von Zieten, tried to comfort him with a thought about God. The King responded: „*Prove the existence of God to me with one word!*“ Zieten answered: „Israel“, and added the polite address „Sire“.

(Source: [www.efg-hohenstaufenstr.de/downloads/texte/preussenjahr2001.htm](http://www.efg-hohenstaufenstr.de/downloads/texte/preussenjahr2001.htm)).

The 19th century brought with it the beginning of a fundamental change in perspective. A Jesuit by the name of Manuel de Lacunza wrote under the name Juan Josaphat Ben Ezra, an enlightening book: "*The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty*" where he addressed among other questions, the question whether the millennial kingdom had actually already begun, as the catholic church had been teaching since the 4th century. From the scriptures he proved, that the messiah must return in Glory and Majesty prior to the beginning of the millennial kingdom and that Israel has a divine role separate from that of the Church. In 1812 his book was published in Spanish and thereafter translated by Edward Irving and published in English, (L.B. Seeley and Son, London 1827).

Darby and his friends discovered this book at the time of the Albury Park conference on Prophecy (1826-1830). They tested Lacunza's thoughts about the coming of the Messiah prior to the millennial kingdom as well as Israel's future significance in God's plan against the scriptures and came to the conclusion that Lacunza's teaching on these issues was in line with the teachings of the Bible. The results of this discovery were clear: As the theologians since Augustine, had not made a distinction between Israel and the Church with regard to prophecy, their exegeses of prophecy were based on error. Therefore, it was necessary for prophecy to be considered entirely from scratch in order to develop fresh understanding. J.N Darby and his brothers devoted themselves to this task with energy and the success, that the joy of the living hope again flourished among the young circles of the revival movement. Many hymns from the previous century reflect this.

Amillennialism had its roots in the wrong teaching, that Israel had no room in God's future plan. According to this teaching the millennium had started with the birth of Jesus Christ and no future millennium was to be expected. In the USA this teaching is held by many evangelical Christians. During the international congress on World Evangelisation 1974 in Lausanne disputes were growing among Christians with amillennialistic and postmillennialistic view of prophecy. Therefore, Billy Graham tried to defuse this conflict by calling the two views "apocalyptic optimistic" or "apocalyptic pessimistic", and he stated that also the "apocalyptic pessimistic" view was biblically founded.

The opinion of current theologians, that Matthew 24 is an outline of the prophetic events for the church, is a remnant of the false teaching of Israel's ultimate rejection. On the other hand, those who recognised this teaching as error, must also reject all false conclusions that logically follow on from this teaching. This is not a matter of arrogance but rather conclusive to a logical approach to studying scripture.

It is imperative for us today to approach prophetic passages with fresh thought and in relation to the current state of the world. According to the word given to Daniel, Daniel 12,4 *But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.*

With a thorough study of prophecy with the objective of distinguishing the prophetic words for Israel from those for the Church, we will at points differ from the viewpoints that brethren took 150 years ago. In this new study of prophecy, it is our desire to - in the words of the Apostle Paul (1.Thess.5,21) - *„Test all things; hold fast what is good.“* We therefore need to hold fast what is good from the works of previous generations on prophecy and justify new viewpoints from the scriptures.

In the following, we shall consider the Lord Jesus Christ's sermon on the end times in Matthew 24 and 25. Many expositors attribute parts of it to Israel and other parts of it to the Church. I will argue the view that the prophetic meaning of both of these chapters refers solely to Israel.

### **God's plan for Israel in Matthew 24 and 25**

In His sermon on the Mount of Olives, the Lord Jesus Christ answers His disciples' questions on future events. In the gospel according to Matthew, He addresses the question: *What will be the sign of Your coming, and of*

*the end of the age?"* The answer to the disciples' question about signs for the destruction of the temple is found in Luke 21.

In Matt.24 our Lord describes the future of Israel including the awful tribulation, which will pass over Israel and all who believe in the true God, when the last false Messiah deploys his power. Jesus Christ quotes in Matt.24,15-16 from the book of Daniel: *Therefore, when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.*

This tribulation will last 3 and a half years and will be the most intensive tribulation of all time. Thereafter the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, will return to the Earth in Glory and Majesty. He will destroy the armies of the world, who tried to get control over Jerusalem (Zech.12 and 14) and then he will judge the nations before the begin of messianic kingdom. Mt.25,31-32 *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: 32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.*

### **The Parable of the ten Virgins**

This parable together with the following parable of the entrusted talents is interpreted by many as parenthesis referring to the Church. In the following we see, whether a different interpretation is possible.

For us it is surprising that the Lord speaks in a parable of a wedding feast about the groom and the 10 virgins but not the bride. The disciples would not have found this surprising, however, as they would have known the two phases of an oriental wedding 2000 years ago. (Compare. Henri Daniel-Rops: Daily Life in Palestine at the Time of Christ, Phoenix Press, London, 2002, p.123-124):

The first phase is described by Daniel-Rops in the following way: *"On the eve of the great day the bridegroom, accompanied by his friends, went to fetch his betrothed from her father's house ...The bride was brought in a litter ...So the procession reached the bridegroom's house ...The bride withdrew into a room that was kept aside for her."* Then he describes second phase: *"The great day came next morning ... The bridesmaids stood about the bride, all dressed in white ... The bride sat under a canopy, the huppah, which had been part of the ritual for a very long time and which gave her the air of a queen - the whole ceremony, for that matter, had something regal about it. ...There was a meal toward the end of the day".*

The Lord Jesus addresses the second phases of the wedding in the following way: At the time described in Matthew 24, the kingdom of heaven will resemble 10 virgins of whom only 5 will participate at the marriage supper. The other five were not known to the groom and were not allowed to partake at the marriage supper. They did not become condemned like the unprofitable servant (Matt.25,30). Their punishment consisted solely of their exclusion from the marriage supper.

The knowledge of the old oriental wedding leads us to the following conclusions: At the time when the groom comes (Mt.25,10), the bride is already in his house (compare John 14,2-3).

One half of the faithful remnant of Israel which wait upon the Messiah, has lamps which are burning, i.e. a witness for the Messiah who is coming to reign and allowed to participate at the marriage supper of the lamb at the end of their witness.

The other half are indeed excluded from participation at the marriage supper but not condemned. These people only come to repentance, after they have looked upon and recognised their awaited King-Messiah as the one who was crucified and resurrected. (Zech.12,10).

## **Part 2: God's threefold plan for Israel** **The Prophetic meaning of Matthew 25**

### **First Parable: The Ten Virgins**

After his teaching in Chapter 24, the Lord explains further details of prophecy for Israel in the form of parables and begins with the word „then“.

Mt.25,1 *Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.*

With the word „then“, our Lord expresses that the prophetic meaning of the parable of the ten virgins refers to time described in chapter 24.

### **Who is the Bride of the Lamb?**

Paul uses the image of the temple court, upon which a wall prohibited those who were uncircumcised from accessing the holy area. Christ Jesus has destroyed this wall through his death on the cross and has united the believers out of the nations with the believers from Israel.

Eph.2,3-16 *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ .For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.*

When the wall of separation was destroyed, the believers from Israel did not lose their Israeli citizenship. Therefore, in the eyes of God, the „new man“ in v.15 is Israel - Abraham's *born again* (Joh.3,3) children of faith. This truth is also expressed through the picture of the olive tree in Romans 11:

Rom.11,24 *For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?*

God's great promise to Israel: „I will betroth you to me forever... (Hosea 2,19-20) became reinterpreted in the context of Replacement Theology as

a prophecy for the Christian Church. But in Galatians 6,16 we read: *And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God!* W. MacDonald explains in his Commentary on the New Testament: „It is the **rule** of the new creation. He pronounces the double blessing of **peace and mercy** on all those who judge teaching by the question – *Is it of the new creation?* – and who reject all that is not. **And upon the Israel of God.** Many have taken this to mean the church. However, **the Israel of God** refers to those Jews by natural birth who accept the Lord Jesus as Messiah.”

God is faithful to His chosen people and fulfils his promises. Even today the prospect of how God sees the bride of the lamb seems foreign: **In the eyes of God, the Bride of the Lamb is Israel which believe in the Lord Jesus Christ together with the sons of Abraham out of the nations (Gal.3,7), who have come to faith in the time between Pentecost and the rapture.**

In God's plan for Israel we can distinguish between the following three groups:

- 1) The Church which is His bride: Christians from Israel plus the believing children of Abraham out of the nations.
- 2) Five wise virgins: Their burning lamps show that they proclaim that the Messiah will soon come to reign (Matt.24,14: *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.*)
- 3) Five foolish virgins: The faithful remnant of Israel (Romv11,26), who are waiting on the Messiah and who do not worship the last false Messiah.

The ten virgins represent the part of Israel waiting on the King-Messiah. They all come to meet the bridegroom but fall asleep because he tarries. – During the history of the church never all believers slept. – The loud call in the middle of night, which wakes all the virgins, is, I believe, the call of the rapture of the church.

At this time only the five wise virgins have oil and burning lamps. The burning lamps symbolise the witness of the imminent messianic kingdom. They continue to proclaim the kingdom just as John the Baptist and Jesus Christ did at the beginning. After ca. 3 ½ years of the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom they will be caught up to heaven (compare. My essay: *The Mystery of Glad Tidings in the Darkest Days*) and participate at the marriage supper of the lamb (compare. Rev.19,7-9).

No judgement will fall on the five foolish virgins but they will certainly be told: *I do not know you.* (Matt.25,12) – In contrast with the unprofitable servant in the second parable: Matt.25,30 *And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

They are excluded from the marriage supper of the lamb because they have no burning lamps and therefore no witness or saving faith. The Lord does not know them (yet), but they are yet to have the opportunity to meet him.

There is no second chance for those who reject the Lord Jesus because *he who does not believe the Son* (those who refuse to believe in the son) *shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*" (Joh.3,36).

In the day of grace, the following statement is valid: *Blessed are those who believe without seeing* (Joh.20,29). The five foolish virgins represent, I believe, the faithful remnant of Israel, who in contrast to the believers of the day of grace first want to see and only then believe. They are allowed to do that:

Zech.12,10 *And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him.*

### **Second Parable: Entrusted Talents**

Mt.25,14-15 *For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.*

What do the entrusted talents mean?

Röm.3,1-2 *What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.*

The prophetic meaning of this parable is the judgement of the living believers from Israel –Worshippers of the Beast get killed at the return of the Lord Jesus. (Rev.19,21). This parable ends with the Messiah's judgement of the unprofitable servant: *And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

In this parable the servants are entrusted with various gifts according to their ability. Two servants worked diligently and the fruit of their labour was a duplication of their talents, with both receiving recognition from the Lord. The third servant buried his talent, did not work, did not bear any fruit and is thrown into outer darkness.

In Lk.19,11-30, a similar but different parable is told. All servants received the same gift, one pound. One servant increases it tenfold the other fivefold. Their reward corresponded to their performance.

In the parable in Matthew 25 the essential question is, whether there is any fruit or not. The first two servants are loyal to their master, bear fruit, and are rewarded. The third servant calls his master tough and unjust and tries in this way to justify his infidelity. Although he, like the other two, received a good gift, only bad fruit grows from his evil heart; he is comparable to a bad tree which is cut down and thrown into the fire (Matt.7,19).

The parable of the different soils helps us to understand better the principles of God's judgment. The good gift of the Lord – the one talent – is represented in the second and third soil as a germinating seed that does not bear any fruit. In connection with the second soil, the question arises, how a heart can become rock hard under a thin layer of soil. The most impressive example of this is Pharaoh in the time of Moses. First, Pharaoh asked for God's help. Then he broke his promise several times. But when he hardened his heart for the third time and broke his word, he passed the

point of no return. After passing this point, God finally hardened his heart. This heart can be compared with Heb.10,26-27.

The people in whose hearts the seed grew together with the tares also received a talent; but *the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful* (Matt.13,22). Are they those people who *have tasted the good word of God and have fallen away* (Heb.6,5-6)? An example of a person in whom the deception of wealth choked the word is Balaam. He had an extraordinary gift of the spirit, heard God's voice and knew God's will; but he was possessed by the greed to get the reward of the fortune-teller (2Pet.2,15-16).

Judas Iscariot is an example in the New Testament. He lived as a disciple of Jesus Christ for 3 ½ years but was secretly a thief. At last he betrayed his master for 30 pieces of silver. When the Lord told his disciples that one of them would hand him over to the Jews, Judas asked hypocritically: *Master, is it I?* – Then he completed his betrayal and finally he hanged himself. In Heb.6,8 the heart of such people is compared to a soil that produces only thorns and thistles.

In God's judgment over his servants, the fruit and not the gift of the Spirit is important.

Matt.7,20-23 *Therefore, by their fruits you shall know them. Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? and in your name have cast out demons? and in your name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity.*

The seed that fell on good land bore good fruit. Whoever brings forth the fruit of the Spirit is sealed with the Holy Spirit and is thus a child of God for eternity.

### **The Judgement over the Living out of the Nations.**

Mt.25,31-34 *When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:*

This kingdom is the messianic kingdom.

Mt.25,40 *And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'*

These brethren stood next to the throne of the King of Kings. Those from the nations who helped Jews during the most intensive tribulation of all time (Dan.12,1; Mt.24,15,21) – the tribulation of Jacob (Jer.30,7) – will be justified; they have believed the eternal gospel proclaimed by the angel



and have only worshipped God (Rev.14,6). Everyone else faces eternal damnation.

Mt.25,45-46 *Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

The justified from the Jews and the Nations will go to eternal life after the messianic kingdom without further judgement.

## **Conclusions**

The prophetic word of our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 24 and 25 contains God's this threefold plan for Israel.:

- 1) The Bride is the believing part of Israel to whom God has added the believing Children of Abraham out of the nations. Before the beginning of the day of God's wrath, the bride will be raptured to the Father's house where the Lord Jesus has prepared a place for her (Joh.14,2-3). That is the first phase of the old, oriental wedding. The parable of the ten virgins begins with the preparation of the second phase of the wedding.**
- 2) The sealing of the 144,000 elect out of Israel must occur, before the day of the wrath of God can begin. (Rev.7,2-3). The five wise virgins have oil for their lamps (a picture of the holy spirit). They are therefore a witness to imminent arrival of the Messiah. They proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom to the whole world and go with the bridegroom to the marriage supper (compare. My essay: The Mystery of Glad Tidings in the Darkest Days).**
- 3) The five foolish virgins are excluded from the marriage supper. They still have a mandate before the visible return of Jesus Christ: They will purify the 3rd Temple and recommence the daily sacrifice like the faithful Jews with Judah Maccabee in the Year 165 BC. (compare. My Essay: The Future of the Temple in Jerusalem). After the return of the Messiah, they will then live in the messianic kingdom on the Earth.**

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