

God's purpose for the Church and the Jews

In 1970 while I was at university in England, the group of Christian students I belonged to had arranged a conference for the weekend. The subject was "The Eternal Purpose of God". Through the teaching that weekend I got a framework, which has guided and motivated me as a Christian ever since. I pray that the Holy Spirit will help me to share with you a little of what I learned then and in my studies since that time about God's purpose for the Church and the Jews. I pray that you will not only learn with your minds today but you will also come to share God's feelings about his people.

Let's begin by thinking what Jesus and the Bible tell us about God. The name Jesus most often used for God was "Father". We might expect this because Jesus is the Son of God and thus God is his Father, but it also reminds us that the very nature of God is to be a Father. What does a father most want? He wants a family. The same is true of God; he wants a family. We might ask "isn't it enough that he already has one son, his eternal Son, Yeshua, Jesus?" The answer in the Bible is "No". Paul writes these amazing words:

²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Romans 8v28-30.

God's purpose is that Jesus might be "*the firstborn among many brothers*". This means he wants a much bigger family than just one Son. The longing of God's heart is to have a great family in addition to his eternal Son Jesus. Once we understand this we have the key to understanding the whole Bible.

Many Christians think the Bible is the story of how God saves people so that they can go to heaven. This is true. But the reason that there is a plan of salvation is because God wants a family. Because we have sinned and lost the right to be part of his family, God has first to save us and make us clean so that we can be born again. Then we can become members of his family. If we had not sinned, salvation would not have been necessary. But his plan to have a family would have been unchanged.

In the very first pages of the Bible we find that man is given a choice either to be part of God's family, which means he must obey and trust the Father, or to reject the invitation to be part of God's family and to go his own way. Sadly man chose to go his own way. Just like a rebellious child he rejected the advice of his parent and went his own way. This is the message of the Garden of Eden. Many of us have had to face this same situation with own children. We know the pain of it. We know that they are bringing pain on themselves. We love them but we cannot stop them. We let them go but we long that they should come back. The gospel is the Father calling us back home and as Jesus told in his parable, the father is so happy when the lost son comes home.

When man rejected God, mankind got into all sorts of terrible sin. Archaeology has revealed how evil people became in ancient Mesopotamia, the area that we now call Iraq. In addition to their evil behavior, they also worshipped many gods. But in the middle of all this evil, about 4000 years ago there was one man who believed in one God. His name was Abraham. God said to Abraham, “I am going to make a covenant with you, if you will follow me and trust me, I will make you the father of a great family and through that family I will bless the whole world”.

Abraham had many children, including Ishmael the father of the Arabic nations, and God blessed all these children, but only in the case of Isaac was the birth of the child a result of faith. God said that it would be through Isaac that his purpose would be fulfilled. God’s purpose involved physical descendants of Abraham, but not all of them. It was also necessary that faith was involved. He also promised that through the descendants of Abraham all nations would be blessed but he did not explain how. Paul explains all of this in Romans 9 to 11.

The story of the Old Testament is how God tried to teach the physical descendants of Abraham to obey him and have faith like Abraham. Sadly most of those “children of Israel”, who we now call Jews, rejected God and went their own way. But there were some Jews who did have faith in God. There is a picture of them in Revelation 12. They appear as a woman about to give birth. This is what we read:

¹A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. ²She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. ³Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. ⁴His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. ⁵She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.

This woman symbolizes the people waiting and praying for the Messiah, people like the parents of John the Baptist and the parents of Jesus, like the old man Simeon and the widow Anna, who both recognized Jesus in the temple. These are the people who loved and followed Jesus during his time on earth. After his resurrection and ascension, 120 of them were gathered together praying when something amazing happened – the Holy Spirit came on them all.

Paul writing to the Galatians describes it:

¹⁴He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. Gal. 3v14

Paul describes the coming of the Spirit as the “blessing given to Abraham”. All 120 people at Pentecost were Jews, physical descendants of Abraham who had the same

faith as Abraham, and to them was given the Spirit promised to Abraham's descendents. Pentecost was a step in God's purpose for Abraham and his descendents.

But it did not stop there, Paul writes: "*that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ*". God's desire for a family means that he does not limit this family just to physical descendents of Abraham who have faith but also includes those who are not physical descendents, Gentiles, who have faith. Ten years after Pentecost in the house of Cornelius the first Gentiles were added into Abraham's family of faith and received the Spirit.

But then something very surprising happened. Most of the physical descendents of Abraham rejected the Messiah and the way of faith whereas thousands and thousands of Gentiles accepted it. Thus the church, which had initially been purely Jewish soon became mainly Gentile. This was very puzzling and Paul had to explain this in Romans 9-11. He showed that God is using the hardness of heart of the Jews to increase the effectiveness of sending the gospel to the Gentiles. If Christianity had been very much controlled by Jews and centered in Israel it might have been hard for Gentiles to think it was really for them. As the Jews rejected it, it spread to the Gentiles throughout the world.

Unfortunately the early church drew the wrong conclusion from this and they ignored the teaching of Paul in Romans 11. They concluded that God had rejected the Jews and that now the Gentile church was the center of his purpose. This negative attitude to Jews became anti-Semitism and for almost 2000 years has resulted in terrible suffering for the Jews. Has God rejected the Jews? Is the church something new in his purpose? Not at all writes Paul:

¹⁷If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, ¹⁸do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." ²⁰Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. ²¹For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

Paul is saying that the church is not something new and separate from the family of Abraham, which he pictures as an olive tree. There is still only one family of Abraham and we Gentiles who have faith are now included like wild olive branches grafted into the olive tree root that goes back to Abraham.

Then he continues:

²³And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

God has not rejected the Jews. Even now there are Jewish believers in Messiah who are being added back into the olive tree of faith. But Paul has more to tell us:

²⁵I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶And so all Israel will be saved,

One day all Israel will be saved. When will this happen?

as it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. ²⁷And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

It will happen when the Messiah comes. When the Gentiles have had their opportunity to receive Jesus and when the “full number of the Gentiles has come in” then the Jews will receive faith also.

John in Revelation tells us of that day:

⁷Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.

For the Gentiles whose time has passed, this will be a weeping for the judgment that is coming on them. For the Jews whose time has come it will be a day of mercy. The prophet Zechariah describes it with these words in chapter 12:

¹⁰“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

On that day the Spirit will be poured out on Israel and they will also receive the blessing promised to Abraham.

Then God’s purpose will be fulfilled. He will have his family, the descendents of Abraham by faith. Some of these will be Jews, physical descendents of Abraham who have faith, others will be Gentiles, who are not physical descendents, but who have faith. They will be one people, with one Spirit, led by the one Messiah, God’s eternal Son, Yeshua.

What is our part in all this? Our biggest responsibility at present is to preach the gospel, because until nations have heard the gospel the end cannot come. Jesus told in Matt. 24.14:

¹⁴And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

There can be no saving of all Israel until all the Gentiles have heard.

Secondly we need to prepare the Jews for their Messiah. We must love them and

support them. We must resist anti-Semitism and help to protect the Jews from it. We must ask forgiveness for all the evil Christians have done to them in 2000 years. We must show what a wonderful salvation their Messiah has given to us. Paul told that we need to make them jealous.

We especially need to support Messianic Jews as they are squeezed between the unbelieving world that persecutes them for being Jews, and the unbelieving Jews who persecute them for being followers of Yeshua. God will especially use Messianic believers to help prepare the rest of the nation for the coming of the Messiah. You can read about that in Revelation 11.

So this is God's purpose and our responsibility. Are we willing to seek to spread the gospel to all nations and to especially care for and support the Jews? God invites us to share his heart. It is he who loves the world and he who loves Jews. If we are willing, the Holy Spirit will put that love in our hearts so that we can share God's heart and do his will in this world. Are you willing for this?

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March 2009

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