

What Christian Israelites Believe ...

4. About the Israelites' Story

When God created Adam, he blessed him, and told him to be 'fruitful' and to have 'dominion over the earth' (Genesis 1:28-30). God later gave Noah the same blessing and promise, and made the first recorded covenant with him:

'And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth ... I will establish my covenant with you, neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.' Genesis 9:1, 11 (see also Genesis 6:18).

The next covenant he made was with Abraham, which was passed on to his son Isaac, and Isaac's son Jacob:

'He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations. Which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac; And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant: Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance.' Psalm 105:8-11. (For more details, see Genesis 17 (covenant with Abraham), Genesis 26:2-5 (covenant with Isaac), and Genesis 28:13-15 (covenant with Jacob).)

God promised that Abraham's descendants would be as numerous 'as the stars' (Genesis 26:4), and that he would bring them into a land of their own – the Promised Land. It was Jacob who became known as Israel, and from whose twelve sons the Israelites – God's chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6) – descended:

'Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel.' Genesis 32:28.

Jacob's eleventh son Joseph was despised by his older brothers, and they sold him as a slave. He was taken to Egypt and later rose to power. When there was a great famine across the land, his family joined him in Egypt, where there was plentiful food. There, the Israelites multiplied, as God had promised:

'And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.' Exodus 1:7.

66 members of Joseph's family had travelled to Egypt (Genesis 46:26); over 430 years, their number grew to more than 600,000 men (Exodus 12:37, 40). Because of this, the Egyptian pharaoh feared they might rise up against him, so he oppressed them and made them slaves (Exodus 1:8-12). The Israelites cried out to God to deliver them from their persecution, and he sent Moses to lead them to freedom. Moses negotiated with the pharaoh to let the people go, and after God sent ten plagues against him, the pharaoh finally agreed. Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and to Mount Sinai, where God gave him the Ten Commandments and many other laws, but Moses died before they reached the Promised Land. On the way, the Israelites committed evil and 'murmured against God' (Numbers 14:27). As such, God condemned their generation to die in the wilderness:

'For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord: unto whom the Lord sware that he would not shew them the land, which the Lord sware unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey.' Joshua 5:6.

After Moses' death, his deputy Joshua led the new generation of Israelites to the Promised Land and, through many battles, he and his men conquered most of the enemies that dwelt there and divided up the land between the 12 tribes of Israel. Judges (and Judgesses) were set up to rule over them, and there followed a period wherein the Israelites continually strayed from God, became oppressed by their enemies, and sought God to deliver them. The Israelites then asked to have a king rule over them instead, like other nations had (1 Samuel 8:5). Saul was anointed as king, but when he disobeyed God's instructions, he lost his anointing and it passed on to David, who united the Israelites. David's son Solomon succeeded him, but over time he strayed from God, leading to the division of the Kingdom of Israel:

'And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the Lord commanded. Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant ... Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant's sake.' 1 Kings 11:9-11, 13.

Solomon's servant Jeroboam became king of ten tribes of Israel in the north, while Solomon's son Rehoboam became king of two tribes of Israel (Benjamin and Judah) in the south. The division of the two kingdoms marked the end of a united Israel:

‘And there were wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually.’ 2 Chronicles 12:15.

Jeroboam's kingdom (known as the Kingdom of Israel) turned away from God and to idol worship, which caused God to turn away from them:

‘And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers ... Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight ... So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria until this day.’ 2 Kings 17:15, 18, 23.

The Assyrians performed several successful conquests against them until the 10 tribes were gradually integrated into other nations and lost, as predicted by Moses:

‘And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone.’ Deuteronomy 28:64.

Rehoboam's kingdom (known as the Kingdom of Judah) alternated between straying from God and returning to him under the rule of good kings. Overall, they were more loyal to God than Jeroboam's kingdom, but also struggled with idol worship. Their continual unfaithfulness led God to permit their destruction:

‘And the Lord said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem.’ 2 Kings 23:27.

Initiated by King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians carried out three invasions wherein they brought the southern Kingdom of Judah (and Benjamin) into captivity. They, however, never lost their identity and God sent Cyrus, King of Persia, to free them. They were able to return home and, with the help of Ezra, set up Israel as a holy nation. The combination of the two tribes became known as the Jews that Jesus knew, and which follow Judaism today, while the other 10 tribes faded from history, lost.

Throughout Israel's tumultuous history, God never forgot the covenant he had made:

‘And the Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his

covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet.’
2 Kings 13:23.

He made several promises to regather all of Israel:

‘When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies’ lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations; Then shall they know that I am the Lord their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there.’ Ezekiel 39:27-28.

‘And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinnar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall setup an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.’
Isaiah 11:11-12.

God also promised that he would make a new covenant with all Israel:

‘Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah ... I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.’ Jeremiah 31:31, 34.

Christian Israelites believe that, in the end times, 12,000 men (and their families) will be gathered from each of the 12 tribes of Israel, making 144,000:

‘And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.’ Revelation 7:4 (see also vs 5-8).