

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Four Great Things in the Bible: A Great Nation - Genesis 46:3

Over the centuries, there have been many nations which have aspired to greatness. Some leaders have sought to rule the world. In Biblical times, the Grecian Empire led by Alexander the Great had a good measure of success. This was followed by the Roman Empire which was very extensive and covered many countries. This empire lasted for many centuries, well into the Christian era, but eventually it crumbled. In more recent times, Napoleon made an attempt but failed, ending his days in exile. More recently still there was the British Empire, Russia and Germany. These powers were short-lived. Let's turn now to our Bibles!

In Deuteronomy 32, Moses recounts the history of Israel, their sad failures and God's ultimate mercies toward them. Verse 8 is a remarkable verse. Let's listen to it, *"When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel"*. Here we learn that the land and people of Israel were, from the beginning, the appointed centre in God's dealings with the nations.

The first mention of the words '**great nation**' is in Genesis 12:2. God had called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, a people given up to idolatry, and He made promises to him. They were made to Abraham alone. Listen to verse 2, *"I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing."* This was in the form of an unconditional covenant which depended entirely upon the Giver. This '**great nation**' we are to talk about today began with an individual. Abraham took the journey from Ur to the land of Canaan. When he arrived there, God appeared to him saying, *"Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him"* (Genesis 12:7).

The scripture just read shows very clearly that the promises made to Abraham depended upon Abraham having a family. It is with good reason that we are told, *"But Sarai was barren; she had no child."* Not only was there a problem with regard to Sarai, but Abraham was old. Hebrews 11 tells us that he was as *good as dead*. Naturally speaking there was little hope of any family. Later, in Genesis 18, God appeared to Abraham and a direct promise was made to him, *"Lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door... Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh...? Is any thing too hard for the LORD?"* It was not until Abraham was 100 years old that the promised son, Isaac, was born. The beginning of the nation of Israel was a miracle. It was life out of death!

Abraham, the first recipient of the promises, was also the beginning of a family. These promises passed on to Isaac, Abraham's son and then to Jacob. There were twelve sons in Jacob's family and they formed the basis of the nation and became known as the twelve tribes of Israel. The eleventh son of Jacob was Joseph. Most of us are acquainted with the history of Joseph, maybe in our younger days, in Sunday School. The story has always appealed to young people. He was the favourite son of Jacob, and because of this his brothers hated him. There was an occasion when Joseph's father sent him to see how his brothers fared. When they saw him, they plotted to kill him, but God had different plans for Joseph and eventually he was sold as a servant in Egypt. Joseph had many experiences in Egypt but in God's purpose he became second to Pharaoh in the kingdom. This was due to a mighty famine in that part of the world and Joseph was given the task of distributing the food available. Jacob and his family in Canaan were affected by this famine and sent to Egypt for food. In this way Jacob's sons came face to face with Joseph, not knowing who he was. Eventually, there came a time when Joseph made himself known to his brethren. This led to their repentance and the whole family of 75 souls going to live in Egypt. For the second time we find the words '**great nation**' occurring, *"And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, 'Jacob, Jacob.' And he said, 'Here am I.' And He said, 'I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation.'"*

The family increased and became a nation in Egypt. Because of a change of Pharaoh they became slaves. Their burdens were hard to bear, but God heard their cry and sent Moses to lead them out. At first, the king in his stubborn will would not let them go. As the result of many plagues sent by God upon the land of Egypt, Pharaoh told them to go. They crossed the Red Sea into the wilderness. By now, the nation numbered between 1 and 2 million people. The years in the wilderness, apart from the care that God had for them, were a tragedy. God gave them the law which they did not keep. Instead of an eleven days journey to Canaan, because of their unbelief they wandered for forty years.

They tempted God and complained of the food God provided for them. At long last they did cross the river Jordan into the land of Canaan. Their years in that land were also a failure; they never put the idolatrous nations out. Instead they turned to idolatry of the worst kind themselves. Because of this, the ten tribes were eventually taken as captives to Assyria. After about 100 years, Judah was taken into captivity in Babylon for 70 years.

Following the 70 years captivity in Babylon, a small remnant returned to Jerusalem under the edict of Cyrus. The temple was repaired and the altar set upon its base and worship restored. Later, another group went out to build the city and the walls under the leadership of Nehemiah. It should be pointed out that the captivity in Babylon marked the beginning of the "times of the Gentiles" referred to by the Lord Jesus in Luke 19:24. Ever since, Israel as a nation has been under Gentile domination.

A greater test was to be imposed upon the two tribes now back in Palestine. God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus, to fulfil the promises made to Abraham so long ago. He fulfilled the prophetic word in every detail, but the nation refused Him. We read, *"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."* John 1:11. After a life of thirty three years, including three and a half years of public ministry, the people, led on by wicked leaders, crucified Him. Pilate the Roman governor appealed to them, *"Shall I crucify your king? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar."* After three days God raised Him from the dead, a mighty Victor. A way of escape was opened to the Jews. This was announced on the day of Pentecost to all who would repent and believe. Three thousand souls were saved. The rest went on in their antagonism to Jesus and the Gospel. In AD 70, Jerusalem and the temple were utterly destroyed by the Roman armies with a fearful loss of life. For 2,000 years, the nation has been scattered and dispersed among the nations. The sufferings of Israel have been great during this 2,000 years; history records it. It is nothing short of a miracle that they have survived at all! Some of us can remember the awful atrocities under Nazi Germany.

During these long years of Israel's dispersion, many have thought that they were finished as a nation. However, this is not true; God will accomplish His promises to them. Romans 11:29 says, *"The gifts and calling of God are without repentance."* In the mean time, God has sent the Gospel of His grace to the Gentiles. The church is being called out, composed of Jew and Gentile, forming the body of Christ. The presence of the church on earth does not fulfill the promises made to Israel, because the destiny of the church is heaven. Its hope is 'Glory with Christ above'. The Lord Jesus will come to take it there. He said, *"Behold, I come quickly"* Revelation 22:12. When this event takes place, the calling of the church will be complete and God will resume His dealings with Israel. The promises made to Abraham will be fulfilled. Let's refer again to Romans 11, *"For if the casting away of them (Israel) be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?"* But the Jews in Palestine must pass through times of trouble much more severe than anything they have known previously. Let's listen to the words of Jesus in the Olivet discourse, *"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."* Matthew 24:21 and 22.

During this time of tribulation, the majority of the nation will have returned to idolatry. Eventually judgement will be their end. There will also be a godly remnant still in Palestine who will suffer at the hand of the majority. Others will have obeyed the instructions given by the Lord Jesus at the time of the Olivet discourse. Listen to what He said, *"When ye see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand) Then let them which are in Judaea flee unto the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house..."* Matthew 24:15-20. These instructions point out the beginning of the great tribulation. The godly remnant will be faced by enemies within and without. Palestine will be surrounded by nations that hate Israel; the majority will be in league with the Anti-Christ. At the end of the tribulation, when everything seems hopeless, Jesus will appear! *"...and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."* Matthew 24:30 and 31. However, the guilty part of the nation who crucified their Messiah must be brought to repentance.

Let's think now of this national repentance. We will read from the Old Testament. *"And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn."* (Zechariah 12:9 and 10) This moment must come for that nation who crucified their Messiah. As this passage goes on to tell us, the repentance will be deep, not only national, but also individual. As a result of this repentance, *"There shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness."* Zechariah 13:1. This is not a fountain of blood as the Gospel hymn puts it; but water for cleansing. The water speaks of the word of God giving new life and renewal. They will be a nation born again. They will be brought under the New Covenant. Jeremiah 31 is an important chapter, Let's listen to it, *"But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people...for I will*

forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." It is, however, the blood of Christ which will be the means of forgiveness for their terrible guilt. They will be a completely changed people able to take their place as the '**great nation**' that God had in His mind for them from the beginning. The terms of Israel's salvation then, are the same today, no matter what nationality we are. Just listen to the apostle Paul as he lays down the terms of the Gospel to his hearers, "*Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*" As you listen to this Gospel verse, I trust you have submitted to God's terms and received forgiveness of sins and a new life in Christ.

Some of us can remember May 1948, a momentous date! Israel became a nation in its own right. Many Jews from all over the world sought a home in Palestine. As the scriptures predicted, they returned in unbelief. The rise of Zionism was largely responsible for this movement and was politically motivated. At the moment, the nations surrounding Israel are beginning to show their old hatred for them again. It is a very tragic situation. Hearing news coming out of Israel, we understand that many Jews are becoming very despondent. The fact is, according to the Bible, it is God who will bring them back to their land, not in unbelief, but in repentance and faith. Just listen! "*When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered...then shall they dwell in their land that I have given to my servant Jacob. And they shall dwell safely therein...*" Ezekiel 28:25 and 26.

These events will lead to the bringing in of the millennial kingdom of the once rejected Christ. There are many scriptures which point to that occasion. Psalm 2 is well known, "*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us...Yet have I set My king upon My holy hill of Zion.*" The centre of rule in that day will be Zion - Jerusalem. Reading others of the psalms we find the delight the various writers had at the very mention of Zion. "*Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth...the city of the great King.*" Psalm 48. Further on in that same psalm, "*Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces.*" It will not be Washington, London or Moscow in those days. Many people will go up to Jerusalem in that day and say, "*Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*" Isaiah 2:3. And again, "*In those days...ten men out of all nations, will take hold of the skirt...of a Jew, saying, We will go with you...for God is with you.*" Zechariah 8:23. Israel will be the **great nation** God meant it to be! There will be a righteous rule in the hands of Christ, the desert will blossom like a rose and the lion and the lamb will lie down together. Let us make sure that, in our day, our trust is in the Living God whose word is sure.

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