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Thomas D. Ice

Liberty University, tdice@liberty.edu

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GOD'S PURPOSE FOR ISRAEL DURING THE TRIBULATION

Tom's Perspectives

by Thomas Ice

I recently engaged in a debate (May 26, 2006) against preterist Gary DeMar on the topic of "The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?" One of the points I made in favor of the tribulation as a future time was that one of the biblically defined purposes for that seven-year period, as it relates to Israel, did not occur in the first century. So just what is God's purpose for Israel during the tribulation?

PURGING OUT THE REBEL

One of the major Divine purposes for the tribulation in relation to Israel is the conversion of the Jewish remnant to faith in Jesus as their Messiah. This will take place throughout the tribulation, but by the end of the seven-year period the entire number of the elect remnant will become converted to Jesus. That number is likely a third of the Jewish people as noted in Zechariah 13:9. "And I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'" As part of the process of bringing the Jewish remnant to faith Zechariah 13:8 speaks of a purging out of the non-elect Jewish element from the nation. "'And it will come about in all the land,' declares the LORD, 'that two parts in it will be cut off and perish; but the third will be left in it.'" The Old Testament prophets speak frequently of the purging out of the Jewish non-elect during the tribulation.

Ezekiel 20:33-38 is a major passage that speaks of a Jewish regathering to their ancient land, which must take place before the tribulation, in preparation for the purging of the non-elect Israelites called in this passage "the rebels" (Ezek. 20:38). "'As I live,' declares the Lord GOD, 'surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you. And I shall bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out; and I shall bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I shall enter into judgment with you face to face. As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you,' declares the Lord GOD. 'And I shall make you pass under the rod, and I shall bring you into the bond of the covenant; and I shall purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me'" (Ezek. 20:33-38a). The phrase "to pass under the rod" is one of evaluation and separation. The purging process will result in removal of the rebel, leaving the believing remnant who will then be brought "into the bond of the covenant" (Ezek. 20:37).

In a similar vein, two chapters later, Ezekiel receives another revelation about a future regathering of national Israel (Ezek. 22:17-22). This time, the Lord is "going to gather you into the midst of Jerusalem" (Ezek. 22:19). Like the metallurgist, the Lord will use the fire of the tribulation to purge out the unfaithful. The Lord is going to "gather you [Israel] and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you will be melted in the midst of it" (Ezek. 22:21). In this passage, "My wrath" depicts the time of the tribulation. It also follows here that the nation must be regathered before that event can take place. The outcome of this event will be that the nation "will know that I, the LORD, have poured out My wrath on you" (Ezek. 22:22). Israel is back in her land, awaiting the purging fire of the tribulation that will remove the non-elect and reveal the remnant.

Again we read of “the time of Jacob’s trouble” in Jeremiah 30:7. It is said to compare to the sorrows that one faces in childbirth (Jer. 30:6), “but he will be saved from it” (Jer. 30:7, 11). The remnant will be saved through this time of trouble, which is clearly the tribulation. The Lord will chasten that nation of Israel during this time. “Only I will not destroy you completely. But I will chasten you justly, and will by no means leave you unpunished” (Jer. 30:11). This chastisement will result in Israel’s conversion: “And you shall be My people, And I will be your God” (Jer. 30:22). Jeremiah says that these things will occur “in the latter days” (Jer. 30:24).

The prophecies of Daniel 12 are set within the timeframe of the tribulation (Dan. 12:1). “Many will be purged, purified and refined; but the wicked will act wickedly, and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand” (Dan. 12:10). We see in this passage the continued theme of purging out the non-elect Jews during the tribulation but also see the rescue or salvation of the elect. These events are said to occur during “the end time” (Dan. 12:9).

A number of other passages speak of the need to refine the Jewish people, often in association with the city of Jerusalem (Isa. 1:22, 25; 48:10; Jer. 6:27–30; 9:7; Mal. 3:2–3). Arnold Fruchtenbaum tells us, “As a purified, believing nation, they will then turn to the Lord. Here again he speaks of worldwide regathering in unbelief in preparation for a specific future judgment, but the purpose of the judgment is to bring them to national repentance.”¹

THE CONDITION FOR THE SECOND COMING

Many Christians are surprised to learn that the second coming is a rescue event. Jesus will return to planet earth in order to rescue the believing Jewish remnant that is on the verge of being destroyed during the Campaign of Armageddon. I think this is what Paul speaks of in Romans 10 when he tells us, “Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:13–14). In other words, the Jewish people are going to have to be Believers in Jesus as their Messiah in order to be rescued by Him at the second advent. This is exactly what will happen.

The Old and New Testaments teach that before Christ can return to earth for His millennial kingdom the nation of Israel must be converted to Jesus as their Messiah and call on Him to save them. This is taught throughout the Bible (Lev. 26:40–42; Jer. 3:11–18; Hosea 5:15; Zech. 12:10; Matt. 23:37–39; Acts 3:19–21).

Hosea 5:15 tells us, “I will go away and return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.” “Until” tells us that the nation will one day turn to the Lord, as does the following context. Jesus Himself spoke an important “until” to the nation in Matthew 23:39 when He said, “For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” The Apostle Peter tells the Jewish nation that they will not see Jesus again until they: “Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time” (Acts 3:19–21). “This, then, is the twofold basis of the Second Coming; Israel must confess her national sin.” explains Fruchtenbaum, “and then plead for Messiah to return, to *mourn for Him as one mourns for an only son.*”²

THE NATIONAL CONVERSION OF ISRAEL

The Bible teaches that one day the nation of Israel will return to the Lord their God. This will occur by the end of the tribulation and is the purpose for the time of Jacob's trouble. Many passages teach the future conversion of the Jews to Jesus as their Messiah (Psa. 79:1-13; 80:1-19; Isa. 53:1-9; 59:20-21; 61:8-9; 64:1-12; Jer. 30:3-24; 31:31-40; 32:37-40; 50:4-5; Ezek. 11:19-20; 16:60-63; 34:25-26; 36:24-32; 37:21-28; Hosea 6:1-3; Joel 2:28-32; Zech. 9:11; 12:10-13:9; Rom. 11:25-27). Hosea 6:1-2 is one of the most interesting passages on the future conversion of the nation of Israel. "Come, let us return to the LORD. For He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us. He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day that we may live before Him."

CONCLUSION

The Bible clearly teaches that the time of Jacob's trouble (the tribulation), in which the non-elect Jews are to be purged out and removed, while the remaining believing remnant will be saved (both spiritually and physically), did not occur through events relating to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Sorry Mr. DeMar, but try as you might, through your naturalist interpretations, you cannot not ram, cram and jam these supernatural events into the first century. These texts of Scripture just do not fit! Instead, they require a future fulfillment for a literal nation of Israel. Fruchtenbaum says, "Only by faith in the Son of Man can Israel be regenerated. Only by calling upon the Name of the Lord can Israel be saved spiritually. Only by the return of the Son of Man can Israel be saved physically." Yet, that is exactly what will occur in the future in the tribulation.³ The Lord is setting the stage for these future events since He has brought His chosen people back to their land in anticipation of both the purging of the non-elect and the redemption of the elect. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003, [1982]), pp. 101-02.

² Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 312.

³ Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 345.