

The **Bible** Unpacked

Comprehensive Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers established in the faith

paul mallison

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A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers established in the faith

20. God's Plans for His People

Composed by Paul Mallison

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A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are 40 booklets in the series, based on the 40 chapters of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Comprehensive Edition*. Each booklet has two sections, which can be used for two or more studies.

See *Topics in This Series* towards the end of this booklet for a full listing of all the topics. Note that studying booklets alternatively from the two major sections (*What to Know* and *What to Do*) would add variety.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites out of Egypt and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse's context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.
- Answers need not be limited to only what is mentioned in the material.
- The group should feel free to diverge from the study if related issues arise.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?

If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

I. General

God has wonderful plans and purposes for his people. Many of these concern the work he does through his people, with his incomparably great power. God promises to fulfill these plans and purposes, equipping and guiding his people accordingly.

a) God Has Plans and Purposes for His People

Bear in mind that references to God's plans and purposes for his people include: general plans/purposes which apply to all Christians; and specific plans/purposes for each Christian. The various general ones – such as salvation and sanctification – are dealt with in a number of other chapters in this book. This section looks at topics which show that God has specific plans and purposes for each of his people.

Thus the verses have largely been interpreted as such, i.e. as speaking of God having plans or purposes for specific people, or specific groups of his people. However, note that a number of the verses are also applicable to God's general plans and purposes, and arguably may even have these foremost in view.

God has plans and purposes for his people . . .

Ps 40:5 [DAVID, TO GOD:] You have done many things for us, O LORD our God; there is no one like you! *You have made many wonderful plans for us. I could never speak of them all—their number is so great!* GNT

ACTS 13:36 For David, after *he had served God's purpose in his own generation*, died and was laid to rest with his ancestors, and so he experienced decay. ISV

. . . Notably, these plans and purposes include work for their people to do

EPH 2:10 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus *he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do.* GNT

1COR 3:5 [PAUL, TO THE BELIEVERS AT CORINTH:] Is Apollos important? No! Is Paul important? No! We are only servants of God who helped you believe. Each one of us did *the work God gave us to do.* NCV™

God's plans and purposes are not dependent upon a person's background

AMOS 7:14–15 Amos replied to Amaziah, *“I was not a prophet by profession. No, I was a herdsman who also took care of sycamore fig trees. ¹⁵Then the LORD took me from tending flocks and gave me this commission, ‘Go! Prophecy to my people Israel!’*

In spite of his people's troubles, God will fulfill his plans and purposes for them

PS 138:7–8A [DAVID, TO GOD:] *Though I walk straight into trouble, you preserve my life, stretching out your hand to fight the vehemence of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me. ⁸The LORD will complete what his purpose is for me.* ISV

JER 29:10–11 For the LORD says, *‘Only when the seventy years of Babylonian rule are over will I again take up consideration for you. Then I will fulfill my gracious promise to you and restore you to your homeland. ¹¹For I know what I have planned for you,’ says the LORD. ‘I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you. I have plans to give you a future filled with hope.*

Despite his people's exile in Babylon and the apparent decimation of Israel as a nation, God would fulfill his promise and plans for them.

God may actually use his people's troubles in fulfilling his purposes for them . . .

LUKE 21:12–13 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you, handing you over to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. ¹³This will be a time for you to serve as witnesses.*

This implies that at times God allows persecution, using it to spread the Gospel.

. . . God may even initiate seemingly bad things to fulfill his purposes for his people

GEN 45:4–8 Joseph told them to come closer to him, and when they did, he said: Yes, *I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into*

Egypt. ⁵*Don't worry or blame yourselves for what you did. God is the one who sent me ahead of you to save lives.* ⁶*There has already been a famine for two years, and for five more years no one will plow fields or harvest grain.* ⁷*But God sent me on ahead of you to keep your families alive and to save you in this wonderful way.* ⁸*After all, you weren't really the ones who sent me here—it was God. He made me the highest official in the king's court and placed me over all Egypt.*

CEV

Note: The plans of God's people are subject to his will

HEB 6:3 [THE WRITER TO THE HEBREWS:] *And this is what we intend to do, if God permits.*

1COR 4:19A [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] *But I will come to you soon if it's the Lord's will.* ISV

How specific do you think God's plans are for each Christian?

Why does God at times use people without a relevant background (cf. Amos 7:14–15) or even vital capabilities for particular tasks?

What examples do you know of, where God has worked in bad things for his purposes?

b) God Works through His People (I): General

As mentioned earlier, God's plans and purposes for his people include tasks or work for his people to do for him. In fulfilling these plans and purposes, God works through his people.

Note that while most of the headings do not refer to Jesus Christ, as is often the case in this book (particularly in Part D), the verses often show that what is said of God is also applicable to Christ.

God purifies his people to do his work . . .

ZEPH 3:9 [GOD:] *Then I will give all people pure lips to worship the LORD and to serve him with one purpose.* GW

The reference is to all nations in the future, but this is still illustrative of the fact that in all eras God purifies and makes his people holy for them to serve him.

. . . Jesus Christ effectively makes them priests to serve God

REV 1:5B–6 To the one who loves us and has set us free from our sins at the cost of his own blood ⁶and *has appointed us as a kingdom, as priests serving his God and Father* – to him be the glory and the power for ever and ever! Amen.

God sends them to do his work . . .

EZEK 2:3–4 [GOD, TO EZEKIEL:] *Mortal man, I am sending you to the people of Israel. They have rebelled and turned against me and are still rebels, just as their ancestors were. ⁴They are stubborn and do not respect me, so I am sending you to tell them what I, the Sovereign LORD, am saying to them.* GNT

MATT 28:19–20 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

. . . and God moves them to do his work

PHIL 2:12B–13 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Keep on working with fear and trembling to complete your salvation, ¹³because *God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey his own purpose.*

GNT

EZRA 1:5 Then the leaders of Judah and Benjamin, along with the priests and the Levites – *all those whose mind God had stirred* – got ready to go up in order to build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem.

God works with his people, helping them . . .

NEH 6:16 [NEHEMIAH:] When all our enemies heard and all the nations who were around us saw this, they were greatly disheartened. *They knew that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.*

MARK 16:20 The disciples went and preached everywhere, and the Lord [Jesus] worked with them and proved that their preaching was true by the miracles that were performed. GNT

. . . and God makes it possible for his people to do the work

2COR 2:12 [PAUL:] When I arrived in Troas to preach the Good News about Christ, *I found that the Lord had opened the way for the work there.* GNT

2COR 9:8 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] And *God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.* ESV

Thus, God works through his people . . .

HOS 12:13 Later *the LORD used a prophet to bring Jacob's descendants out of Egypt; he used a prophet to take care of the Israelites.* NCV™

2COR 13:3A [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] You will have all the proof you want that *Christ speaks through me.* GNT

. . . Notably, God works through his people in the spreading of the gospel

ACTS 14:27 When they [Paul and Barnabas] arrived, they called the members of the church together. *They reported everything God had done through them, especially that he had given people who were not Jewish the opportunity to believe.* GW

ROM 15:18–19 [PAUL:] I will be bold and speak only about *what Christ has done through me to lead the Gentiles to obey God. He has done this by means of words and deeds, ¹⁹by the power of miracles and wonders, and by the power of the Spirit of God. And so, in travelling all the way from Jerusalem to Illyricum, I have proclaimed fully the Good News about Christ.* GNT

In what sense are believers priests, in serving God?

How does God move his people to do his work? How do we know if God is moving us to do his work?

Are you aware of a particular role or kind of work that God wants you to do? If not, what could you do to discover what work God wants to do through you?

c) God Works through His People (II): Empowerment

God empowers his people to do his work

ACTS 1:8 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth.*

EPH 3:7 [PAUL:] *I became a servant of this gospel according to the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the exercise of his power.*

It is more apparent in the Greek that the role of God's power in Paul's ministry was an ongoing one (cf. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

As such, God equips his people for the work . . .

HEB 13:20–21 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] *Now may the God of peace who by the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹equip you with every good thing to do his will, working in us what is pleasing before him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen.*

EPH 4:11–12 *It was he [Jesus Christ] who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, . . .*

God's people are given spiritual gifts for various ministries, preparing them for the work of building up the body of Christ.

. . . and God strengthens his people for the work

JER 1:17–18A [GOD:] *Jeremiah, get ready! Go and tell the people what I command you to say. Don't be frightened by them, or I will make you terrified while they watch. ¹⁸My power will make you strong like a fortress or a column of iron or a wall of bronze. CEV*

2TIM 4:17 [PAUL:] *But the Lord [Christ] stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message would be fully proclaimed for all the Gentiles to hear. And so I was delivered from the lion's mouth!*

God helps and empowers them to do his work even if they feel inadequate . . .

JER 1:6–10 [JEREMIAH:] I answered, “*Oh, Lord GOD, I really do not know how to speak well enough for that, for I am too young.*” ⁷The LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ But go to whomever I send you and say whatever I tell you. ⁸Do not be afraid of those to whom I send you, for I will be with you to protect you,” says the LORD. ⁹Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “I will most assuredly give you the words you are to speak for me. ¹⁰Know for certain that I hereby give you the authority to announce to nations and kingdoms that they will be uprooted and torn down, destroyed and demolished, rebuilt and firmly planted.”

To signify that he had given (or would give) Jeremiah his words to speak – and as part of his appointing and empowering of Jeremiah – God touched Jeremiah’s mouth (v. 9). This may have occurred in a vision; some think it actually took place.

. . . In fact, Jesus Christ’s power works through his people in their weaknesses

2COR 12:7B–10 [PAUL:] Therefore, so that I would not become arrogant, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to trouble me – so that I would not become arrogant. ⁸I asked the Lord three times about this, that it would depart from me. ⁹But he said to me, “My grace is enough for you, for *my power is made perfect in weakness.*” So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me. ¹⁰Therefore I am content with weaknesses, with insults, with troubles, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

Having weaknesses and acknowledging them, makes us more open to Jesus Christ’s power working through us.

God’s power for his people is great

ACTS 4:33 *With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on them all.*

EPH 1:19–20 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *You will also know the unlimited greatness of his power as it works with might and strength for us,*

the believers. ²⁰*He worked with that same power in Christ when he brought him back to life and gave him the highest position in heaven.* GW

Note: The empowerment to perform miracles

ACTS 19:11–12 *God was performing extraordinary miracles by Paul's hands, ¹²so that when even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his body were brought to the sick, their diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.*

1COR 12:28 *God has appointed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then those who perform miracles, those who have gifts of healing, those who help others, administrators, and various kinds of tongues.* ISV

In what sense does God empower believers to do his work? What power do they have?

Are miracles still performed by people of God? Why aren't they as prominent today as in the New Testament church?

Pick a verse or concept that should make an impact on a Christian's approach to serving God. What impact should this have?

d) God Guides His People

(⇒ *The Holy Spirit leads God's people . . . , in 17. Keys to God's Interaction with His People; . . . and the Holy Spirit directs them in doing God's work, in 17. Keys to God's Interaction with His People; Being Guided by God, in 28. Serving God*)

The Bible speaks of God guiding his people in fulfilling his plans and purposes for them. More specifically, it tells of God guiding them in: living righteous lives; doing his work; and making choices in other matters.

God leads his people . . .

Ps 23:2–3 [DAVID:] He makes me lie down in green pastures. *He leads me beside still waters.* ³He restores my soul. *He leads me in paths of righteousness* for his name's sake. ESV

ISA 48:17 This is what the Lord, who saves you, the Holy One of Israel, says: “I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to do what is good, *who leads you in the way you should go.* NCV™

. . . and so God guides his people

Ps 73:24 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *You guide me with your counsel,* and afterward you will receive me to glory. ESV

God guides them always . . .

Ps 48:14B *He will guide us forever.* ESV

ISA 58:11A *The LORD will continually lead you;* he will feed you even in parched regions.

. . . As such, God guides them in difficult circumstances

DEUT 8:15A [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *He led you through that vast and terrifying desert where there were poisonous snakes and scorpions.* GNT

Ps 142:3A [DAVID:] *When I am ready to give up, he knows what I should do.* GNT

The second clause suggests that God not only knows but also guides in what one should do.

God commands and directs them in doing his work

ACTS 7:44 The Holy Tent where God spoke to our ancestors was with them in the desert. *God told Moses how to make this Tent, and he made it like the plan God showed him.* NCV™

ACTS 10:33 [CORNELIUS, TO PETER:] Therefore I sent for you at once, and you were kind enough to come. So now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to *everything the Lord has commanded you to say to us.*

Examples of God giving guidance through visions

ACTS 16:9–10 *A vision appeared to Paul during the night: A Macedonian man was standing there urging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!”* ¹⁰*After Paul saw the vision, we attempted immediately to go over to Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.*

ACTS 18:9–11 *The Lord said to Paul by a vision in the night, “Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent,* ¹⁰*because I am with you, and no one will assault you to harm you, because I have many people in this city.”* ¹¹*So he stayed there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.*

What advice would you give a fellow Christian who was seeking God's guidance on a particular issue?

God's directions to Moses (cf. Acts 7:44) were both explicit and specific. How explicit and how specific do you think God's guidance is generally?

Have you experienced God's guidance? If so, how did it occur?

II. God's Plans for Israel

Large portions of the writings of the OT prophets speak of a wonderful, future renewal of Israel by God. There are differences of opinion as to what degree these are literal and physical, as opposed to figurative or spiritual. If they are largely meant to be understood literally, then they speak of the actual Israel and Jerusalem (or Zion), most likely immediately preceding and during the thousand years or Millennium spoken of in Revelation 20:1–7 (cf. *Prelude: The thousand years*, in 15. *'The Last Things'*). As such the time of a renewed Israel would largely correspond with that of a physical universal rule of Jesus Christ and would precede the final judgment. If instead the prophecies are basically figurative and spiritual, then they are more likely to be referring to all believers – the “new” Israel (cf. *As such, Gentiles have been included in the true “Israel”*, in 13. *Salvation through Jesus Christ*). As such they would be portraying God's people and kingdom following Jesus Christ's mission and/or quite possibly anticipating heaven or the new Jerusalem (cf. *Note: The new Jerusalem is linked with the renewed Jerusalem prophesied in the OT*, in 15. *'The Last Things'*).

In reading the following sections, bear in mind that some prophecies are understood to be progressively fulfilled throughout history, culminating in a final fulfillment at the end of the age. For example a number of the passages refer initially to the Jew's return after the Babylonian exile, but also appear to have a future era in view. Many probably also have an application to the experience of God's people in all periods. As such – and with the hope that they provide for the future – they are a great source of encouragement to all believers.

Note that while the subheadings speak of Israel, many of the verses refer to Jerusalem in particular.

a) Return to the Land

Some commentators see a fulfillment of some of the following prophecies in the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948.

God will gather the remnant of exiled Israel from the nations and bring them home

JER 23:3, 7–8 [GOD:] Then *I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. . . .*⁷“Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when they shall no longer say, ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’⁸but ‘As the LORD lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.’ Then they shall dwell in their own land.” ESV

In so doing, God will aid them on the journey home . . .

ZEC 10:10–12 [GOD:] *I will bring them home from Egypt and Assyria, then let them settle as far as Gilead and Lebanon, until the land overflows with them.*¹¹*My people will go through an ocean of troubles, but I will overcome the waves and dry up the deepest part of the Nile. Assyria’s great pride will be put down, and the power of Egypt will disappear.*¹²*I’ll strengthen my people because of who I am, and they will follow me. I, the Lord, have spoken!* CEV

. . . and the nations also will assist in bringing the exiled Israelites home

ISA 66:20 [GOD:] *They will bring back all your countrymen from all the nations as an offering to the LORD. They will bring them on horses, in chariots, in wagons, on mules, and on camels to my holy hill Jerusalem,” says the LORD, “just as the Israelites bring offerings to the LORD’s temple in ritually pure containers.*

This appears to be speaking of people of other nations bringing the exiled Israelites home.

The people of Israel will possess the land – forever

ISA 60:21A [GOD, TO JERUSALEM:] All of your people will be godly; *they will possess the land permanently.*

Judah and Israel will be reunited

HOS 1:11A *Then the people of Judah and the people of Israel will be gathered together. They will appoint for themselves one leader, and will flourish in the land.*

What is so significant about the people of Israel coming back to their land?

Do you consider that the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948 to be a fulfillment of some of such prophecies? If so, why?

b) Physical Renewal

Israel will be physically restored . . .

EZEK 36:35–36 *They [people] will say, “This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; the ruined, desolate, and destroyed cities are now fortified and inhabited.”* ³⁶Then the nations which remain around you will know that *I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruins and replanted what was desolate. I, the LORD, have spoken – and I will do it!*

. . . and the land will be fruitful

ISA 30:23 *The Lord will send rain to water the seeds you have planted—your fields will produce more crops than you need, and your cattle will graze in open pastures.* CEV

Israel’s population and area will be increased

ISA 26:15 *Our nation has grown because of you, our LORD. We have more land than before, and you are honored..* CEV

Joy will accompany God’s renewal of Israel . . .

ISA 51:3 Certainly the LORD will console Zion; he will console all her ruins. *He will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the Garden of the Lord. Happiness and joy will be restored to her, thanksgiving and the sound of music.*

. . . and Israel’s sorrow will be no more

ISA 65:19 [GOD:] Jerusalem will bring me joy, and my people will bring me happiness. *The sound of weeping or cries of sorrow will never be heard in her again.*

Have you experienced a physical or spiritual renewal?

The prophecy in Isaiah 51:11 was a key part of what was once at least a popular Christian song. To what extent are the aspects of it applicable to Christians today and/or in the future?

c) Deliverance from Enemies

God will save Israel . . .

ISA 45:17 *Israel will be delivered once and for all by the LORD; you will never again be ashamed or humiliated.*

. . . and God will take vengeance on those who persecute Israel

ISA 35:4 Tell those [in Israel or Jerusalem] who panic, “Be strong! Do not fear! *Look, your God comes to avenge! With divine retribution he comes to deliver you.*”

Siege and deliverance of Jerusalem – with judgment on its attackers

REV 20:7–9 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be set free from his prison. ⁸Then he will go out to trick the nations in all the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. There are so many people they will be like sand on the seashore. ⁹*And Satan’s army marched across the earth and gathered around the camp of God’s people and the city God loves. But fire came down from heaven and burned them up.* NCV™

Two of the most prominent interpretations of “the camp of God’s people and the city God loves” are: a spiritually renewed Jerusalem; and God’s people in general. Note that there are a number of OT passages that similarly speak of a future siege and deliverance of Jerusalem, followed by judgment on its attackers (cf. Isa 29:1–8; Zec 12:2–9; Zec 14:1–14).

Israel will defeat its enemies

ISA 11:14 *They will swoop down on the slopes of Philistia in the west. Together they will loot the people of the east. They will conquer Edom and Moab. The people of Ammon will be subject to them.* GW

Israel will greatly rejoice in God’s salvation

ISA 52:8–9 The voice of your [Jerusalem’s] watchmen—they lift up their voice; *together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the*

return of the LORD to Zion. ⁹Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem. ESV

ISA 61:10A *I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; I will be overjoyed because of my God. For he clothes me in garments of deliverance; he puts on me a robe symbolizing vindication.*

The speaker is probably Jerusalem or Zion personified.

What encouragement can believers today draw from these verses?

Do you think prophecies of siege and deliverance of Jerusalem will have a fulfillment in the modern state of Israel? Why?

Should Israel be one focus of our prayers?

d) Everlasting Peace

God will protect and care for Israel

ISA 27:3 *I, the LORD, protect it [Israel]; I water it regularly. I guard it night and day, so no one can harm it.*

ZEPH 2:7 The coast will belong to the faithful few from the nation of Judah. There they will graze their sheep. In the evening they will lie down in the houses of Ashkelon. *The LORD their God will take care of them and will restore their fortunes.* GW

The Davidic Messiah will reign over Israel . . .

EZEK 37:24 [GOD:] *My servant David will be king over them; there will be one shepherd for all of them.* They will follow my regulations and carefully observe my statutes.

. . . The Messiah will rule forever over Israel, in righteousness and peace

ISA 9:7 *Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.* The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. ESV

Thus, Israel will have peace – and no fear – forever . . .

ISA 32:17–18 [GOD:] *Fairness will produce peace and result in lasting security.* ¹⁸*My people will live in peaceful settlements, in secure homes, and in safe, quiet places.*

ZEPH 3:15B The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; *you shall never again fear evil.* ESV

. . . Never again will Israel be invaded or destroyed

JOEL 3:17B Jerusalem will be holy – *conquering armies will no longer pass through it.*

ZEC 14:11B *Jerusalem will always be secure and will never again be destroyed.* CEV

In what sense have the prophecies of the Messiah's reign already had a fulfillment in Jesus Christ?

What reasons do you know of for seeing the prophecies of the Messiah's reign to refer primarily to: (a) a physical reign on earth; and, in contrast, (b) the afterlife?

To what extent or in what way do believers have peace that persists now?

e) Spiritual Renewal

God will cleanse Israel of all impurities and sin . . .

EZEK 36:25, 33 [GOD, THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL:] *I will sprinkle you with pure water and you will be clean from all your impurities. I will purify you from all your idols. . . .*³³“This is what the sovereign LORD says: *In the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will populate the cities and the ruins will be rebuilt.*

. . . and God will forgive the people's sins

JER 50:20 The LORD says, “*At that time people will try to find Israel's guilt, but there will be no guilt. People will try to find Judah's sins, but no sins will be found, because I will leave a few people alive from Israel and Judah, and I will forgive their sins.* NCV™

Israel will be holy . . .

EZEK 37:28 [GOD:] *When my Temple is among them forever, the nations will know that I, the LORD, make Israel holy.* NCV™

. . . and Israel will be righteous

ISA 60:21 *Then all your people will be righteous, and they will possess the land permanently.* GW

The people of Israel will be given God's Spirit . . .

EZEK 39:29 *I will no longer hide my face from them, when I pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the sovereign LORD.*

. . . and they will be given spiritual understanding

ISA 29:18, 24 *When that day comes, the deaf will hear the words written in the book. The blind will see out of their gloom and darkness. . . .*²⁴*Then those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding, and those who complain will accept instruction.* GW

Verse 18 appears to be speaking primarily of those who had been spiritually deaf and blind.

How does the Bible's promise of Israel's spiritual renewal mirror the renewed relationship of God and his people that has followed what Jesus Christ accomplished?

God poured out his Spirit on his people (cf. Ezek 39:29) at Pentecost. What evidence is there today of God continuing to "pour out" his Spirit on his people?

f) A Renewed Relationship with God

Israel will turn to God

HOS 3:5 After this, *the people of Israel will return to the LORD their God and follow him and the king from David's family. In the last days they will turn in fear to the LORD, and he will bless them.* NCV™

Israel will worship God – and trust in him

ISA 27:13 At that time a large trumpet will be blown, and the ones lost in the land of Assyria will come, as well as the refugees in the land of Egypt. *They will worship the LORD on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.*

ISA 12:1–2 At that time you [the people of Israel] will say: *“I praise you, O LORD, for even though you were angry with me, your anger subsided, and you consoled me. ²Look, God is my deliverer! I will trust in him and not fear. For the LORD gives me strength and protects me; he has become my deliverer.”*

Israel will be devoted to God

JER 50:5B *They will come and bind themselves to the LORD in a lasting covenant that will never be forgotten.*

EZEK 20:40A For there on my holy mountain, the high mountain of Israel, declares the sovereign LORD, *all the house of Israel will serve me, all of them in the land.*

These verses demonstrate Israel's devotion to God, in speaking of the people: having an unwavering commitment to live in accordance with God's will (cf. Jer 50:5b); and serving God (cf. Ezek 20:40a).

God will be as a husband to Israel, renewing his relationship with her

HOS 2:16, 19–20 “It will come about at that time,” declares the LORD, *“you will address me as ‘My husband,’ and you will no longer call me ‘My master’. ... ¹⁹“I will make you my wife forever. I will make*

you my wife in righteousness, in justice, in gracious love, and in mercy. ²⁰I will make you my wife in faithfulness, and you will know the LORD. ISV

The people of Israel will be God’s people and he will be their God

JER 30:22 [GOD:] *Then you will again be my people and I will be your God.*

This denotes the consummate fulfillment of a key aspect of the first covenant which God made with Israel – that he would be their God and they would be his people.

God will dwell in Jerusalem, living among his people forever

ZEC 8:3A *The LORD says, ‘I have returned to Zion and will live within Jerusalem.*

EZEK 48:35B *The name of the city from that day forward will be: ‘The LORD Is There.’*

What aspects of a believer’s life with God in the afterlife are reflected here?

In what sense is God a husband to his people?

g) Exaltation and Glorification

Israel will be exalted among the nations because of what God will do for her. In fact God will glorify Israel.

Israel will be dominant among the nations, who will serve it

ISA 14:2 Nations will take them [people of Israel] and bring them back to their own place. *Then the family of Jacob [Israel] will make foreigners their servants as they settle in the LORD's land. They will make their captors captives and rule over the ones who oppressed them.*

The nations will come to Jerusalem to worship God . . .

PS 102:21–22 And so his name will be proclaimed in Zion, and *he will be praised in Jerusalem* ²²*when nations and kingdoms come together and worship the LORD.* GNT

. . . and nations will be established with Israel as God's people

ISA 14:1 The LORD will show mercy to the people of Jacob, and he will again choose the people of Israel. He will settle them in their own land. *Then non-Israelite people will join the Israelites and will become a part of the family of Jacob.* NCV™

ZEC 2:11A [GOD:] *Many nations will join themselves to the LORD on the day of salvation, and they will also be my people.*

God himself will exceedingly bless Israel

JER 32:40–42 [GOD:] *I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.* ⁴¹*I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.* ^{42c}*For thus says the LORD: Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good that I promise them.* ESV

Moreover, God will glorify Israel

ISA 62:2–3 *Jerusalem, the nations will see your goodness, and all kings will see your glory. Then you will have a new name, which the LORD himself will give you. ³You will be like a beautiful crown in the LORD’s hand, like a king’s crown in your God’s hand.* NCV™

Note that the “new name” (v. 2) appears to refer to one or more of the new names Zion is called later in vv. 4, 12 – which speak of God’s new relationship with her in terms alluding to marriage.

Israel’s glory will primarily be God, with the glory of his presence

ISA 60:2, 19 Darkness now covers the earth; deep darkness covers her people. But *the LORD shines on you [Jerusalem], and people see his glory around you. . . .*¹⁹ *The sun will no longer be your light during the day nor will the brightness from the moon be your light, because the LORD will be your light forever, and your God will be your glory.* NCV™

Israel’s renewal will bring God glory

JER 33:9 [GOD:] *All the nations will hear about all the good things which I will do to them. This city [Jerusalem] will bring me fame, honor, and praise before them for the joy that I bring it. The nations will tremble in awe at all the peace and prosperity that I will provide for it.*

How have prophecies in this section concerning the nations been fulfilled, (at least in a partial sense)?

How will God's presence with his people in the future be different to what it is now?

How do you interpret or understand the OT prophecies of Israel's future renewal?

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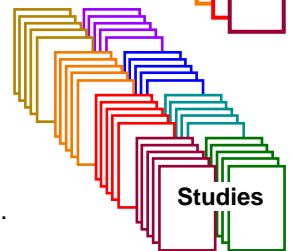
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Over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied basic human rights solely because of their faith. (Source: World Evangelical Alliance) Every year many Christians are killed because of their faith.

Through prayer, encouragement and practical assistance we can assist and fellowship with persecuted Christians in their suffering. You can play a vital part in this through contacting one of the organizations listed below. Most produce regular news/prayer letters.

Barnabas Fund – www.barnabasfund.org

It provides material and spiritual support in response to needs identified by local Christian leaders.

Christian Faith and Freedom – www.cffreedom.org

It advocates on behalf of and aids persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity International – www.csi-int.org

CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk

It advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Compass Direct – www.compassdirect.org

This is a Christian news service providing news, reports, interviews and analyses of situations facing persecuted Christians.

Open Doors – sb.od.org; www.opendoors.org.au

It provides Bibles and other Christian materials, to prepare believers for persecution and equip them to maintain a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/; www.ea.org.au/ea-family/Religious-Liberty.aspx

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org
Receive weekly updates by sending a blank email to join-rlpb@hub.xc.org.

The Bible League – www.bibleleague.org/persecuted; www.bibleleague.com

It supplies Bibles to persecuted Christians and also provides training.

Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com; www.persecution.com.au

VOM provides Bibles, literature, radio broadcasts and other assistance to help persecuted Christians spread the gospel. They also send material aid.

Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.' Matthew 25:40 NCV

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