

## A Renewed Relationship with God

### God will be Israel's God and they will be his people

[GOD:] *I will be their God and they will be my people.* For they will wholeheartedly return to me. JEREMIAH 24:7B

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

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

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

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

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

## Glorification

### God will glorify Israel

*Jerusalem, the nations will see your goodness, and all kings will see your glory.* ISAIAH 62:2A NCV™

### Israel's renewal will in fact display God's glory

*The desert and the dry land will be glad, and the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. <sup>2</sup>Like a lily the land will blossom. It will rejoice and sing with joy. It will have the glory of Lebanon, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. Everyone will see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.* ISAIAH 35:1–2 GW

God's glory and majesty will be evident in Israel's wonderful and glorious restoration.

## 20. God's Plans for His People

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## 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.

### God Has Plans 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 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

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *You have made many wonderful plans for us. I could never speak of them all—their number is so great!* PSALMS 40:5B GNT

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. ACTS 13:36 ISV

#### These plans include work for God's people to do

[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.* EPHESIANS 2:10 GNT

[PAUL, TO THE BELIEVERS AT CORINTH:] What is Apollos, really? Or what is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, and each of us *in the ministry the Lord gave us.* 1 CORINTHIANS 3:5

## Physical Renewal and Peace

### Israel will be physically restored

*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."* <sup>36</sup>Then 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!* EZEKIEL 36:35–36

### Joy will accompany God's renewal of Israel

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.* ISAIAH 51:3

### The Messiah will rule Israel forever in righteousness and peace

*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. ISAIAH 9:7 ESV

### Israel will have lasting peace

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

## Spiritual Renewal

### God will cleanse Israel of sin

[GOD, THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL:] This is what the sovereign LORD says: *In the day I cleanse you from all your sins ...* EZEKIEL 36:33A

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

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

## II. God's Plans for Israel

The OT prophets speak of a great, future renewal of Israel by God. Opinions differ as to whether these are literal and physical, as opposed to figurative or spiritual. If they are literal, then they speak of Israel and Jerusalem (or Zion), most likely immediately preceding and during the thousand years spoken of in Revelation 20:1–7. 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. 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.

In reading the following, 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 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.

### Return to the Land

#### God will return home the remnant of exiled Israel

[GOD:] *I’ll gather the remnant of my flock from all the countries where I’ve driven them, and bring them back to their pasture where they’ll be fruitful and increase in numbers.* JEREMIAH 23:3 ISV

Note that some commentators see a fulfillment of prophecies such as this one in the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948.

#### The people of Israel will possess the land forever

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

#### God's plans are not dependent upon his people's backgrounds

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

### God Fulfills His Plans for His People

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

[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. <sup>8</sup>The LORD will complete what his purpose is for me.* PSALMS 138:7–8A ISV

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. <sup>11</sup>For 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.* JEREMIAH 29:10–11

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 even initiate seemingly bad things to fulfill his purposes for his people

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. <sup>5</sup>Don’t worry or blame yourselves for what you did. God is the one who sent me ahead of you to save lives. <sup>6</sup>There has already been a famine for two years, and for five more years no one will plow fields or harvest grain. <sup>7</sup>But God sent me on ahead of you to keep your families alive and to save you in this wonderful way. <sup>8</sup>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. GENESIS 45:4–8 CEV

## God Works through His People

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.

### God moves his people to do his work

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

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.* EZRA 1:5

### God equips his people for the work

[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, <sup>21</sup>*equip 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.* HEBREWS 13:20–21

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

[JEREMIAH:] I answered, “*Oh, Lord God, I really do not know how to speak well enough for that, for I am too young.*” <sup>7</sup>The LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ But *go to whomever I send you and say whatever I tell you.*” <sup>8</sup>*Do not be afraid of those to whom I send you, for I will be with you to protect you,*” says the LORD. <sup>9</sup>*Then 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.*” <sup>10</sup>*Know 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.”* JEREMIAH 1:6–10

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.

### God's power for his people is great

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

ACTS 4:33

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *You will also know the unlimited greatness of his power as it works with might and strength for us, the believers.*

EPHESIANS 1:19 GW

## God Guides His People

### God guides his people always . . .

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

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

Note that 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.

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

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

DEUTERONOMY 8:15A GNT

[DAVID:] *When I am ready to give up, he knows what I should do.*

PSALMS 142:3A GNT

The implication of the second clause is that God not only knows but also guides in what one should do.

### God also guides them in doing his work

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.* ACTS 7:44 NCV™

[CORNELIUS, TO PETER:] So now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to *everything the Lord has commanded you to say to us.*

ACTS 10:33B