

## ***PROMISED LAND 2: Lesson Thirteen, The Restoration Period*** ***Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi***

**Subject:** The restoration period following Israel's exile involved challenges, but also a hope of a better future.

**Main Idea:** Restoration is the believer's hope.

**Principles:**

1. *When we become involved in God's renewal program, we can expect to face opposition.*
2. *Until God's promised renewal program is fully completed, the Holy Spirit will keep renewing us inwardly.*

### **Introduction**

In 2015, our house suffered a great deal of damage from ice. It was extensive enough that all of the exterior walls and roof and some of the interior walls will be torn down and replaced. Even though I was very involved in the project, I had no experience as a builder, and therefore, it was difficult for me to fully envision how all the details would come together. However, I completed the small projects the builder assigned to me, trusting that he knew what he was doing and that the end product would be a fully restored home.

As we come to the end of the Old Testament and look back over it, we realize that, in large part, it is the story of the great amount of damage done to the world by sin. With the entrance of sin, death came to the world, not only to Adam, Eve, and every human being since their time, but also to all of nature. Romans 8 says that creation was subjected to frustration and is groaning, waiting to be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory that we ourselves will experience one day. It says that we, who will be the first to be renewed, also groan inwardly as we await the redemption of our bodies. This restoration is the hope for which we were saved (verses 19-25). In other words, God will one day renew the heavens and earth and also fully restore *us* to the dignity in which He created us (physically, mentally, and spiritually). Even though we are participants in God's great restoration project and may read the details of it given to us in the Bible, only the Builder has the clear picture of the end result. Some things we can imagine and others we have a great deal of trouble trying to imagine. Ultimately, we must simply do the jobs that God has assigned us and trust that the end product will exceed our wildest imagination.

The first clue that God planned to restore all things was given immediately after the Fall. God said He planned to send a Deliverer who would one day crush the head of our ultimate, evil enemy (Genesis 3:15). Other restoration promises followed. One of these was God's promise to restore a remnant of Jewish exiles to their homeland after seventy years in captivity (Jeremiah 25:12-14, 29:10). Their return is often termed the Restoration Period in Israel's history. The purpose of this lesson is to consider this period in Israel's history in the context of God's greater restoration project. We may not be able to clearly envision how all the details concerning Israel's restoration and God's greater restoration project fit together, but we can trust that the end result will be glorious. First, we will review the Jews' 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century BC restoration to their homeland from exile, the last of the history of the Old Testament before 400 "silent years." Then we will consider how God's greater plan to restore *all* things might play out and fulfill any Old Testament prophecies of restoration that were not fulfilled in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.

# I. The Restoration Period Following Israel's Exile

## A. The Promise of Land

- i. Patriarchal Promise: By way of review, God made specific, unconditional promises to Abraham and his descendants. Through this family (Genesis 12:3, 2 Samuel 7:12-16), the Israelites, the entire world would be blessed with the Deliverer, the Messiah. This was critical to God's restoration plan. He promised Abraham the whole land of Canaan as an everlasting possession (Genesis 17:8), and as we have seen in the writings of the prophets, the land is often mentioned in connection with Israel's restoration.
- ii. Settlement through Exile: Although God's promises to Abraham had been unconditional, the Mosaic Covenant was clear that enjoyment of the land and blessing in the land was contingent upon their obedience to Him (Deuteronomy 28-30). In our *Promised Land 2* study, we have discovered that under David and Solomon, Israel reached its political and spiritual zenith and finally occupied all the land God promised to Abraham. For roughly 650 years, God was patient with the Israelites' pride and idolatry, but eventually, He passed judgment: the Assyrians deported the peoples of the Northern Kingdom, and 136 years later, the Babylonians deported the peoples of Judah.
- iii. Exile and Resettlement of Ten Northern Tribes
  1. Samaria was the capital city of the Northern Kingdom, but the name was also used to describe the entire northern vicinity. The Assyrians repopulated Samaria with deportees from other conquered nations. These people intermarried with the small number of helpless Israelites who remained in the land and became known as Samaritans.
  2. The people of the ten northern tribes of Israel only began returning to their homeland in recent history. Over time, they had migrated into Europe, Russia, and beyond. After the 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish holocaust, a Jewish political group known as Zionists stirred up interest among Jews worldwide in reclaiming Palestine as their homeland. On May 14, 1948, the Jews declared independence and established the State of Israel. Bible scholars who expect prophecies concerning Israel to be fulfilled in a very literal way generally believe that the establishment of the State of Israel opened the door for Old Testament prophecies concerning the full restoration of the land and people of Israel to a glorious state to be fulfilled in the future. But as we will see, some of these prophecies could have already been or may presently be in the process of being fulfilled in Christ and His church in a spiritual sense.

## B. The Exodus from Persia

### i. Cyrus' Edict

1. The Jews of Judea did not wait nearly as long to resettle in Palestine. A remnant of them returned to Jerusalem only seventy years after the Babylonians had exiled them (just as the prophets had foretold [Jeremiah 25:12-14, 29:10; Isaiah 44:28, 45:1, 13]). In 583 B.C., Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, published an edict (known today as the "Cyrus Cylinder" and kept in the British Museum) that allowed captive people groups to return to their respective countries and freely worship their gods. According to Ezra 1, Cyrus specifically directed the Jews to return to Judah and instructed them to rebuild the Lord's Temple. Cyrus was not a worshipper of Yahweh, but he wanted to curry the favor of the people he ruled. He believed his policy would cause foreigners under Persian domination to remain supportive of Persian rule. Similar support was later offered to the Jews by the Persian kings Darius I and Artaxerxes (Ezra 1:2-4, 6:3-12, 7:12-26).
2. Jerusalem was a ruined outpost of the Persian Empire and apart from the movement of God's Spirit, the exiles had no motivation to return. The younger generation had been born in exile and felt at home there. Returning meant leaving their extended families and making a long journey, only to be faced with the task of rebuilding a devastated former warzone once they arrived. The work was painstakingly difficult and time-consuming. However, as Ezra 1:5 informs us, God moved the hearts of a remnant of the Judeans and they returned.

### ii. Three Waves of Re-Settlement: Three main groups of Jews from Jerusalem and Judah returned, no more than 50,000 people in total.

1. *The First Wave of Re-Settlers*: The first group returned at the time of Cyrus' edict under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, a royal descendant of King Jehoiachin.
  - a. *Zerubbabel* was also part of this group and he too was a royal descendant of Jehoiachin. He is a reminder to us that God had not forgotten His promise that a descendant of David would again, one day, sit on the throne. That descendant is the Messiah. Some have suggested that since both men served as governors of Judah at the time of the Temple rebuilding, they are perhaps different names for the same individual. However, 1 Chronicles 3:18-19 lists them separately (Shenazzar is a variant of Sheshbazzar). Perhaps Sheshbazzar was the Persian appointed governor while Zerubbabel actually functioned in the capacity, or

Zerubbabel may have completed what Sheshbazzar started.

- b. *Jeshua*: Another important individual in this first group was Jeshua (alternately referred to as Joshua), the high priest. Zechariah said Jeshua's priestly role was symbolic of the priestly role that would be fulfilled one day by the Messiah (3:8). In Jesus, the offices of priest and king were united, making Him the perfect ruler of His people.

## 2. *Zerubbabel's Temple*

- a. *Opposition*: Zerubbabel and Jeshua jointly oversaw the rebuilding of the Temple. In addition to the discouraging work of rebuilding in such poor conditions, local Samaritans opposed them. Only two years after this first group returned (Ezra 3:7-13), the people were so discouraged that they stopped working on the Temple altogether for a period of almost twenty years (Ezra 4:1-5; 4:24). Ezra 4:6-13 gives two examples of political opposition that occurred at a later date, apparently included to underscore the theme of opposition.
- b. *Haggai and Zechariah*: The prophets Haggai and Zechariah provided spiritual encouragement during this period.
  - i. *Haggai* urged the people to prioritize the building of God's Temple over their own homes and to courageously complete the Temple. It may have seemed greatly inferior to Solomon's temple, but Haggai told them, "The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former" (1:9). As it turned out, Zerubbabel's temple (later expanded by Herod) was the temple in which the Lord Jesus would one day stand.
  - ii. *Zechariah* received visions and presented sermons and prophecies that also encouraged those who were tempted to doubt the significance of rebuilding the Temple. He told them not to "despise the day of small things" (4:10), as they believed their work to be. Zechariah likened their work to the work of another Temple-Builder, the Messiah (6:12-13). The last half of Zechariah's book is filled with Messianic prophecies. How could they accomplish such a difficult task in the face of so many obstacles and opposition? "'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty" (4:6).

c. *Completion*: Solomon's temple had been destroyed in 587 B.C. 72 years later, roughly approximating the period of time Jeremiah said the exile would last (25:12-14; 29:10), Zerubbabel completed the rebuilding (Ezra 6:13-18). When the foundations were laid, the older Jews wept aloud. What they saw paled in comparison to the glory of Solomon's Temple (Ezra 3:12-13, Haggai 2:3). However, many others shouted for joy.

### 3. *The Second Wave of Re-Settlers*

- a. The second wave of exiles made the four-month journey back to Jerusalem from Babylon (Ezra 7:8-9) in 458 B.C. under Ezra's leadership. Although Ezra recorded the earlier events of the rebuilding of the Temple under Zerubbabel, he himself did not arrive in Jerusalem until 80 years after the first group and 57 years after the temple was completed (thus, 57 years transpire between the end of Ezra 6 and the beginning of Ezra 7).
- b. Ezra was a teacher of the Law, a priestly descendant of Aaron, and a Jewish scribe. Scribes were a class of specialists that developed during the period of the Exile and who studied, interpreted and copied the Scriptures. Most scholars attribute the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles to Ezra, as well as Ezra/Nehemiah, which are one book in the Hebrew text.
- c. Ezra was responsible for bringing the Mosaic Law back to Jerusalem. He instructed the people in it, called them to return to their covenant obligations, and insisted they reform their ways. The Exile seemed to cure the Jews of idolatry, but not of other sins. A specific example of needed reform concerned intermarriage with pagans, a practice that had previously led to Israel's judgment and exile. Ezra called the Jews who returned back to holy living.

### 4. *The Third Wave of Re-Settlers*

- a. Thirteen years after Ezra's arrival, in 445 B.C., Nehemiah led the third group to Jerusalem from Susa. He had been the cupbearer to the Persian king, Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:11). Nehemiah's important contribution was the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem. He faced opposition from local politicians in completing this task (Nehemiah 2:19, 4:1-23, 6:5-9), just as Zerubbabel and Jeshua had in completing the Temple. "The Judean province was probably included under Samaritan rule since its defeat by Babylon...in 586 B.C..

Nehemiah's determination to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem was in essence an assertion of Judean independence from Sanballat and Samaritan control."<sup>i</sup> The opposition he faced was fierce. Nevertheless, only 52 days after they began rebuilding the walls, they completed them (6:15).

- b. After governing Judah for twelve years, Nehemiah returned to Persia. When he came back to Judah in 432 B.C., he was astonished to find the Sabbath being ignored, the people intermarrying with pagans, and the priesthood corrupted, and he worked to fix these problems.
- iii. The Book of Malachi: A number of ancient sources state that "Malachi" was a title taken by Ezra since "Malachi" means "my messenger." Others have suggested that the author of Malachi was an angel, some anonymous person, a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah, or an individual who prophesied a few years after their time.
  1. Whoever Malachi was, he witnessed a decline in zeal for proper worship and personal moral integrity in Jerusalem, addressing the same specific issues Ezra and Nehemiah battled (Malachi 3:8-10 and Nehemiah 10:32-39; 13:10-13; Malachi 2:10-11 and Ezra 9:1-2 with Nehemiah 13:1-3, 23-27; Malachi 3:5 and Nehemiah 5:1-5). Malachi posed a series of rhetorical questions, which he then answered, in an attempt to confront the Jews with their apathy and stir them to worship their loving and holy God, as He deserved. Social justice, personal finances, and marriage are timeless issues. The way we treat others and the way we handle our money reflects the true condition of our hearts. Our worship can only please God if we view him as Lord over the most intimate areas of our lives.
  2. Malachi was the last prophetic voice until the appearance of John the Baptist, 400 years later. Interestingly, the last verses of his book foretell the coming of John the Baptist in the spirit and power of Elijah (4:5-6).

**Summary Statement:** The pre-exilic prophets had foretold the restoration of Jerusalem. Despite opposition, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah helped to rebuild it.

**Principle:** *When we become involved in God's renewal program, we can expect to face opposition.*

**Application:** Satan is absolutely opposed to God's plans for restoration, especially the restoration of human lives, but this is one of the jobs in which God has required our involvement. Opposition can come from without and from within.

- Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite were probably Samaritan politicians. They are examples of those who oppose us *outwardly*. They ridiculed Nehemiah and God’s people (Nehemiah 4:1), plotted to stir up trouble for them (4:8), and ultimately planned to attack and kill them (4:11). How did Nehemiah handle this outward opposition?
  - First, he cried out to God, spilling out his frustrations (4:4-5), and the Jews joined him in praying (4:9). When we are facing opposition, we too should involve others in praying with us.
  - Second, Nehemiah spoke words of encouragement to those who were suffering the insults and threats along with him (4:14, 19-20). He told them not to be afraid but to remember the Lord’s awesome greatness. Nehemiah kept his eyes on God and encouraged others to do the same.
  - Third, Nehemiah took practical steps. Some people mistakenly think that trusting God means doing nothing but praying. In certain situations, prayer alone is the right thing to do. However, Nehemiah 4:9 says, “We prayed to our God *and* posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.” Later on, Nehemiah explains that half of the men worked while the other half stood guard with weapons. Those who had to carry material did so with one hand while holding their weapon in the other (4:16-18). This is a beautiful picture. In many cases, especially in situations where we are responsible for others, we must pray with all our might and also take practical steps to resist. The work may be intense, and we may not always *feel* God’s presence, but we can know that He *is* present with us (Deuteronomy 31:6, Hebrews 13:5).
  
- Haggai and Zechariah observed opposition to God’s work *within* God’s people in the form of fear and discouragement. Fear and discouragement are among Satan’s most effective weaponry. They can paralyze us and render us totally ineffective. That’s what happened to the Jews. They gave up and stopped working on the Temple. What was the prophet’s answer to the people’s discouragement? Haggai told them to stop thinking about themselves and their own needs (1:3-6). Fear and discouragement make us inwardly focused. The best remedy is to keep working at the jobs God has given us, staying focused on the work to be done, not our own feelings about it. Haggai reminded the Jews that God was with them (1:13) and told them to go up into the mountains, get the timber they needed to build the Temple, and start building. Sometimes, the hardest part of doing a difficult job is just getting started (or re-started). If we wait until we feel up to the task, it will probably never get done.

**Transition:** According to these final books of Old Testament history and prophecy, a remnant of Jews resettled Jerusalem and the Temple and walls of the city were rebuilt. Was this the glorious re-gathering and restoration of Israel that the prophets had predicted?

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi didn't seem to think so. They describe a quick slide into extreme legalism, religious ritualism, and social injustice. As we come to the end of the Old Testament, the question concerning how and when Israel will be fully restored lingers. A fair conclusion is that the post-exilic period in Judah represented a *partial* fulfillment of God's promises, but many aspects of the glorious restoration the prophets foretold still awaited fulfillment. For example, Micah tells of many nations streaming to the mountain of the Lord to worship Him in His temple and to have their disputes settled (4:1-3). Has this yet occurred? It certainly didn't in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C., or any Old Testament period, for that matter. Prophecies of Israel's judgment were largely fulfilled in the exile and many of those concerning the Messiah were fulfilled in Christ's earthly ministry. But what about prophecies of a glorious restoration? Before we finish the Old Testament, a short discussion of how such Old Testament prophecies might play out is in order.

**II. Our Blessed Hope** – “Eschatos” means “last.” Eschatology is the doctrine of last things. It is an attempt to interpret what the Bible has to say about the future for the purpose of impacting us in the present. By nature, such a study will lead to controversy. We can be hopeful that greater mutual agreement and understanding will eventually come as these prophecies continue to be studied and debated. For the present, it is important to remember that those who ascribe to the historical viewpoints I am presenting all agree that the Bible is the inerrant word of God and (presumably) desire to obey it.

**A. Common Ground:** All orthodox believers agree upon a number of doctrines related to the future. For example:

- i. Death, Heaven, Hell, and the Eternal State: The Bible is clear that all will die as a direct result of sin (Romans 3:23, 6:23). All orthodox theologians agree on the existence of two eternal destinies: heaven and hell.
  1. *Use of the term “heaven”:* The Bible uses the term “heaven” in three ways: To describe the radius around the earth that we call our atmosphere, to describe the sun, moon, and stars (the celestial universe), and to describe the place where God lives. According to the Bible, this is a very real *place*, not merely an ideal. Jesus said, “My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:2-3).
  2. *The New Heavens and Earth:* One day, the earth as we know it will be destroyed and replaced with a new heaven and a new earth (Matthew 24:35, 2 Peter 3:7, 13, Revelation 21:1). In the eternal state, God will “dwell with redeemed humanity on the new earth, and since God’s home is heaven, the new earth becomes part of the new heaven.”<sup>iii</sup> Believers will enjoy permanent fellowship with God and one another, peace, joy, and an absence of all sin.

3. *Hell*: The Bible uses several different terms to refer to hell (such as “the lake of fire” [Revelation 20:14]). It is the place where those who reject God and His Messiah will remain throughout eternity. Following judgment, unbelievers will not be annihilated but will face an eternal state in which there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:12; 13:50, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30).
- ii. The Second Coming of Christ: Although significant differences of opinion about the details of Christ’s second coming exist among orthodox believers, there is common agreement that Christ’s return to earth will be sudden, personal, visible, and bodily, should be eagerly anticipated by believers, and will occur at a time we cannot predict.
- iii. Resurrection of the Dead: The bodily resurrection of every person who has ever lived is another clear Biblical teaching. Christ’s own bodily resurrection from the dead is evidence of it (1 Corinthians 15:12-57).
- iv. Final Judgment: Although many judgments occur on earth as the natural consequences of sin (Romans 1:18, 24, 26, 28), the Bible plainly teaches that all people will face a final evaluation and judgment one day . Believers will face a judgment of their life’s deeds and be rewarded accordingly (2 Corinthians 5:6-10) and unbelievers will also face a judgment of their deeds and be condemned accordingly (Revelation 20:11-14). Satan and the demons will also be judged and condemned (2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 20:7-10). The Bible does not directly address the question concerning those who die without ever hearing of Christ. However, it is clear that every individual’s guilt can be established solely on the basis of their rejection of their own God-given conscience and their refusal to humble themselves before the Creator, to whom nature attests (Romans 1-2). And it is clear that God’s assessment of each life will be fair and according to truth (Romans 2:2, 11).

**B. Controversial Points** – Although there is common agreement on these important issues, distinct viewpoints exist about the details and order of certain future events and whether certain prophecies will be fulfilled literally or have been (and are being) fulfilled symbolically. It may help you to remember that, like with my home restoration project, we may not be able to clearly envision how all the details given to us by the prophets about God’s restoration plan will be worked out. Only God, the Builder, has the clear picture. Some things we can imagine and others we have a great deal of trouble trying to imagine. But we can trust that the end product will be far more satisfying than we can imagine.

- i. Debates Concerning Christ's Second Coming and the Millennium
  1. Revelation 20:1-6 tells of a 1000-year period in which believers will reign with Christ, commonly known as the Millennium ("millennium" is not a word found in the Bible, but means "1000 years"). Most scholars agree that we cannot be certain whether the 1000 years is representative of a long period of time or literal. However, believers debate when Christ's second coming will occur in relation to this Millennium. Their solutions to this question shape their understanding of the Millennium. Most agree that this is the time in which many of God's promises concerning Israel's restoration will occur, they just don't agree about who "Israel" is and what this restoration will look like.
  2. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 says that a trumpet will sound, the dead in Christ will rise, and those believers remaining on earth will be "caught up" together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. The concept of a "rapture" comes from the words "caught up," in this verse (like "Millennium," the *term* "rapture" does not exist in the Bible, only the concept). Christians debate whether this event is synonymous with Christ's second coming or whether it is a secret event that will occur prior to or during the period of great trouble (the Great Tribulation) that will come upon the earth.
- ii. Debates Concerning the Tribulation: Revelation 7:14 refers to "The Great Tribulation." Some scholars have held that the intense period of evil the New Testament warns believers to expect (Matthew 24:6-13; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-11) is the present age in which we live. Certainly, Christians in several large parts of the world have suffered intense persecution for their faith. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. was at least a partial fulfillment of this warning. However, many Bible scholars agree that a specific period of tribulation, greater than any the world has yet known, will occur in the future as part of the "end times" events. Among those who think this way, the question is debated concerning when Christ's return will occur in relationship to it.
- iii. Debates Concerning Resurrection and Judgment: Christians debate whether bodily resurrection will occur for people of all times in a single event or whether it might occur in stages. The same questions are debated concerning final judgment. Those who believe these events will occur in stages, debate what these stages will be.

iv. Debates Concerning Israel and the Church: The debate over the roles of Israel and the Church is central to one's viewpoint of Old Testament prophecies of Israel's restoration. In answering the questions in your lesson, you looked up some passages that foretell a period of peace, prosperity, and spiritual enlightenment. As mentioned, it is difficult to see a complete fulfillment of these in the post-exilic resettlement period. Christians debate whether we should expect these prophecies to be literally fulfilled in every detail or whether they are meant to be understood figuratively. Generally, those who prefer to interpret these prophecies in a very literal way hold a strong opinion that these promises concern ethnic Jews. However, a number of New Testament passages indicate that at least some of these prophecies have been fulfilled in a spiritual way in Christ and that God intended the Church (not ethnic Jews) to inherit them.

1. *Dispensationalism*: A recent view that developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is known as Dispensationalism. Dispensationalists believe that unfulfilled Old Testament prophecies about Israel's restoration will be fulfilled in a very literal way during the 1000-year Millennium. Ethnic Jewish people will come to believe in Christ and will live in the land of Israel as a 'model nation' for all nations to see and learn from.<sup>iii</sup> They see the Church Age (the time since Christ completed His work on earth and returned to Heaven, the age in which we currently live) as a parenthesis in God's plan for the nation of Israel. Thus, their view is that God has separate purposes for Israel and the Church.<sup>1</sup> Certain Christian novels, movies, and teachers have greatly popularized Dispensationalism in the US and the UK in recent years.
2. *The "New Israel"*: The longer-held position is that God does not have a separate purpose for Israel and the Church, and that Old Testament prophecies of Israel's restoration are being fulfilled in a spiritual sense in the Church, the "New Israel," so to speak.
  - a. Indeed, many New Testament passages indicate that God has bestowed on the Church almost all the blessings promised to Israel in the Old Testament. Galatians 3:28-29 emphasizes, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then *you are* Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Referring to Israel and the Church, Ephesians 2:15 says, "His purpose was to create in Himself one new humanity out of the two" (see also 2:19-21).

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<sup>1</sup> Those who call themselves "progressive dispensationalists" do not believe God's *purpose* for Israel and the Church is different.  
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- b. However, not all of those who hold to this traditional view necessarily discount the possibility of *some* distinctions between Israel and the Church, to include a future widespread conversion of ethnically Jewish people. Romans 11:25-32 seems to indicate that many ethnically Jewish people will be saved in the “end times.” Those who take this position simply insist that salvation of any and every Jewish person will be by individual choice to receive Christ (just as it is for Gentiles) and will result in Jewish believers becoming part of the one true Church of Christ.

**C. Three Viewpoints Concerning the Millennium:** All of these debated issues have been traditionally resolved in one of three ways (although a number of crossover views exist): Postmillennialism, Amillennialism, and Premillennialism. The prefix in each term refers to the time of Christ’s second coming relative to the Millennium. Again, one’s conclusions about these details are greatly secondary in importance to the central orthodox teachings of the Scriptures. *In whatever way* the details play out, the final outcome of God’s renovation will thrill us.

- i. Postmillennialism

1. Postmillennialism teaches that the world will eventually embrace Christianity and become a universal “society of saints” through the preaching of the Gospel. Christian influence will eventually permeate all parts of society, the world will continue to become a better and better place, and gradually, a “millennial age” of peace and righteousness will occur on earth. Christ will not physically reign on earth, but it will be a time when the believers who are currently living will have worldwide influence. At the end of a long period (not necessarily a literal 1000 years), Christ will return to earth (*Post-millennium*), all the dead will be raised, a final judgment will occur, and believers and unbelievers will enter their eternal state (heaven or hell).
2. Postmillennialists do not see any distinction between God’s plan for the Church and Israel in the future. The promises of Israel’s restoration are promises to the Church, some of which are being fulfilled now spiritually and some of which will be fulfilled in the Millennium.
3. This view has been popular view in periods of great revival and freedom from widespread international conflict. Since World War II and the Holocaust, it has fallen out of favor.

ii. Amillennialism

1. The Amillennial perspective has a long history. It was the view of Augustine and is still the view of Roman Catholicism and many main-line protestant denominations.
2. Although “a-millennial” means “no millennium,” this viewpoint actually does not contend that no millennium will occur. They simply believe it is a description of the present Church Age (for this reason, some proponents of this view prefer the term “actualized millennialism” to “amillennialism”). Like Postmillennialists, they believe the Church has inherited all the promises and prophecies concerning Israel in a spiritual sense, and no separate future program exists for the two. Old Testament promises of Israel’s restoration are all being spiritually fulfilled today in the Church as believer’s reign with Christ in a spiritual sense, rather than in any future physical, earthly kingdom. Since they are being fulfilled now, there is no need for a future Millennium.
3. Near the end of the Church Age (the Millennium), a period of Great Tribulation will occur, followed by the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of all people of all time, the Final Judgment, and the beginning of the eternal state. In other words, all these major end-time events, leading up to the eternal state, will occur at once.

iii. Premillennialism: Premillennialism traces its roots to the early church fathers and teaches that Christ’s second coming will precede the Millennium, which is the time frame in which many Old Testament prophecies concerning the restoration of Israel will be fulfilled. Two main lines of premillennialism exist: one in which Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel consistently refer to ethnic Jews and one in which they often refer to the “New Israel,” the Church.

1. *Historical (or Classical) Premillennialism* does not see the need to make a distinction between the Church of Christ and Israel and is not obligated to interpret difficult passages all literally or all symbolically in order to maintain consistency with its viewpoint. Accordingly, some Old Testament restoration prophecies are being fulfilled now, in a spiritual sense, in the lives of believers. Others will be fulfilled literally in the Millennium or in the eternal state.
  - a. Its position is that the present church age will continue until a time of great tribulation and suffering comes on the earth. After that time, Christ will return, dead believers will be resurrected, and together with living believers, they will receive glorified bodies. Christ will establish an earthly Millennial reign (which could last a literal 1000 years or just a long period of time).

- b. The nature of this Millennium is very different than that pictured by Postmillennialists. Christ will be a literal King, present on earth bodily, and although believers reign with Christ in a symbolic sense presently, in the Millennium, glorified believers will reign on earth with Him literally. Satan and his demons will be bound and have no influence on the earth at this time and Christ's wonderful reign will result in the conversion of most unbelievers still alive on the earth.
  - c. At the end of the 1000 years, Satan will be released from his bondage and lead unbelievers who are alive in a great and final rebellion, but they will be defeated. This event will be followed by a separate resurrection and judgment of all unbelievers. Following their judgment, the eternal state of unbelievers and believers alike begins.
2. *Dispensational Pre-Millennialism* has two emphases that distinguish it from Classical Premillennialism. The first is an emphasis on interpreting prophecies literally. The second is its emphasis on the separate, unique programs that God has for Israel and the Church. Accordingly, it sees the "Rapture" as a separate event from Christ's second coming, and as a secret event, with the purpose of removing the Church from the world prior to the seven-year "Tribulation" (although some believe it will occur at the midway point). In order to maintain consistency with its point of view, a number of different periods of judgment will have to occur, not only separate judgments for believers and unbelievers, but also separate judgments for Jews and Gentiles.

**Summary Statement:** What can we conclude from all of this?

- We can know with certainty that God has a plan for restoration, one in which we will enjoy the unbroken fellowship that Adam and Eve enjoyed with Him in the Garden of Eden, before the Fall.
- Secondly, God's restoration program is one that is occurring in stages: It began when He chose Abraham. Later, He settled, and even later re-settled, Israel in Canaan. Most importantly, He sent Jesus to complete His work of deliverance. But we still await full restoration and the fulfillment of all God's promises.

Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life." No doubt, part of God's planned restoration has been deferred. Until the time of complete fulfillment, He has given us a deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance. That deposit is the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5, Ephesians 1:13-14). Paul says that "the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints" is this:

“Christ *in* you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:26-27). Until the final restoration, we will continue to waste away outwardly (physically), but inwardly, the Holy Spirit is renewing us day by day. Therefore, we do not lose heart (2 Corinthians 4:16).

**Principle:** *Until God’s promised renewal program is fully completed, the Holy Spirit will keep renewing us inwardly.*

### Conclusion

Ezra 1 tells us that the restoration of the exiles to Judah was at God’s initiative. We are now participants in God’s renovation program, involved with Him in renovating our own lives and the lives of others, but ultimately, it all happens at *His* initiative.

Are you discouraged that you are not all you ought to be? Your personal renovation is God’s initiative. Outwardly, we are wasting away, but inwardly, the Holy Spirit is renewing us day by day. And then one day, *in a flash, at the twinkling of an eye... we will be changed... the perishable will be clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:52-54).* The renovation will be complete. All the details of the project will have been worked out and the result will be glorious, beyond our wildest imagination.

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<sup>i</sup> Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (1898). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House.

<sup>ii</sup> Enns, Paul (2008). *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (p. 389). Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.

<sup>iii</sup> Grudem, Wayne (1994). *Systematic Theology* (p. 860). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.