ISRAEL IN PROPHECY – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

ISRAEL IN PROPHECY – PAST

Israel – God’s People
The Bible reveals much about the nation and people of Israel. There are many Bible prophecies that relate to the fortunes both past, present and future of this unique people. Isaiah 43:10 says that the people of Israel are God’s witnesses. Their history testifies to the accuracy of God’s Word and provides evidence that God is alive and bringing about His purpose with this earth.

The people of Israel occupy a special place in the purpose of God because they are the natural born descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to whom God made special promises. Though they have often proved to be a rebellious and disbelieving people, “they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes” (Rom 11:28). God chose Israel to be his special people and set his love on them because of certain promises he made to their fathers (Deut 7:7-8).

The first thing that God promised to Abraham (2000 BC) was: “I will make of you a great nation” (Gen 12:2). At the time when God made this promise nations were forming and developing, but they were going astray from God (Gen 10 & 11). So at this point of history God said that He would make a nation from Abraham. The remarkable thing about this promise was that Abraham had no children and his wife Sarah (aged 65 years at the time) was barren (Gen 11:30) – she couldn’t have children. The promise of a nation was therefore a human impossibility – it was reliant upon God to intervene and develop a family and nation from Abraham that ultimately “in Abraham shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 12:3).

God did intervene and Isaac was miraculously born to Abraham and Sarah. Through Isaac and then Jacob has come the nation of Israel. God’s hand has been at work with the people of Israel right from their birth as a nation when they were delivered from slavery in Egypt and brought into the promised land.

God promised Abraham that from him would come “a great nation”. The greatness of this nation was not to be through superior military or economic strength but from following God’s ways as Moses told Israel in Deuteronomy 4:6-8:

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“Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go into possess. Therefore be careful to observe them, for this your wisdom and your understanding is the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’

For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?

And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgements as are in all this law which I set before you this day?”
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The history of the people of Israel shows that they mostly failed to live up to this calling. Being merely the natural born descendants of Abraham did not automatically qualify Israel to be the great nation promised to Abraham. They had to develop the faith and works of Abraham to be ultimately included in his family and nation (Jn 8:39, Rom 2:28-29, 9:6-7, Gal 3:7, Rom 4:11).

God also outlined to Abraham the short term future of his descendants in Genesis 15:13-16
- His descendants would be strangers in a foreign country
- They would serve the people of that foreign country
- They would be afflicted by them for 400 years
- God would judge the nation they served
- After which they would leave with great possessions
• In the fourth generation they would return to the land of Canaan

These prophecies were remarkably fulfilled in detail
• Jacob and his family went down into Egypt where they multiplied (Exod 1:1-7)
• The Egyptians enslaved them with hard bondage (Exod 1:8-14)
• God intervened and brought judgments upon Egypt with 10 plagues (Exod 6-12)
• The Egyptians, devastated by the plagues, urged the Israelites to leave Egypt and gave them gifts etc (Exod 12:31-36)
• 40 years later Israel were led by Joshua to take possession of the land of Canaan (Josh 24:8-13)

When God delivered the people of Israel out of Egypt he brought them to Mount Sinai (BC 1500). There He constituted them as His people and Kingdom (Exod 19:5-6) and made a covenant with them (Exod 24:3-8). God gave Israel laws and commandments that were to govern their national, civil and religious life in the land of Israel. With the privileges and calling that God gave to Israel came special responsibilities. If they obeyed God they would be blessed (Lev 26:3-13; Deut 28:1-14), but if they disobeyed and turned from their God, they would be cursed (Lev 26:14-39; Deut 28:15-68).

The Prophecy of Curses
God told Israel through Moses (BC 1500) that the following curses would come upon them if they disobeyed him when in the land of Israel:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leviticus 26</th>
<th>The Curses upon the people of Israel</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V14-26</td>
<td>Hardships would come upon them if they disobeyed</td>
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<tr>
<td>V27-29</td>
<td>In the extremities of being besieged by other nations they would eat their own children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V30-32</td>
<td>Their land would be made desolate by an invading nation</td>
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<tr>
<td>V33</td>
<td>They would be removed from their land and scattered among the nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>V38-39</td>
<td>They would suffer among the nations</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deuteronomy 28</th>
<th>The Curses upon the people of Israel</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V15-35</td>
<td>Hardships would come upon them if they disobeyed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V36-37</td>
<td>They would be brought into a foreign country</td>
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<tr>
<td>V49-51</td>
<td>A foreign nation from afar would invade them</td>
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<tr>
<td>V52</td>
<td>Their cities would be besieged</td>
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<tr>
<td>V53-57</td>
<td>In the extremities of the siege there would be scarcity of food and they would eat their own children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V64</td>
<td>They would be removed from their land and scattered among the nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>V65-67</td>
<td>They would suffer distress among the nations</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Israel did prove to be unfaithful and disobedient to their God and the prophecy given through Moses (BC 1500) of the scattering of Israel among the nations was echoed by prophets in later times as can be seen from the following references:

1Kings 14:15
“For the LORD shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves, provoking the LORD to anger.”
Jeremiah 9:16

“...I will scatter them also among the heathen, whom neither they nor their fathers have known: and I will send a sword after them, till I have consumed them.”
Ezekiel 12:15

“And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall scatter them among the nations, and disperse them in the countries.”

The Lord Jesus Christ echoed the words of Deut 28 in a prophecy he gave on the Mt of Olives prior to his death. He said that “Jerusalem” would be “compassed with armies” and be desolated, and that the Jews “would fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations” (Luke 21:20-24).

Israel’s History
Because Israel did disobey and refused to repent despite God’s repeated appeals, their history is a fulfilment of these curses and prophecies in detail and shows that God is true to His Word.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date / Period</th>
<th>Israel’s History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BC 1400</td>
<td>Israel took possession of the land of Canaan</td>
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<tr>
<td>BC 1400 – 1000</td>
<td>The period of the Judges was one of turmoil – the people went astray so God let the surrounding nations invade and oppress them</td>
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<tr>
<td>BC 1000</td>
<td>The Monarchy was established with David as King</td>
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<tr>
<td>BC 930</td>
<td>After the death of Solomon the Kingdom was divided (1Kings 12:12-20) – the northern kingdom (known as Israel) and the southern kingdom (known as Judah)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BC 722</td>
<td>The Assyrians invaded the northern kingdom of Israel and destroyed it and scattered the people throughout the nations because of their persistent waywardness (2Kings 17:5-23)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BC 586</td>
<td>The Babylonians invaded the southern kingdom of Judah, overthrew it, besieged and destroyed the city of Jerusalem, and took the people captive to Babylon because of their wickedness (2Kings 25:1-11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BC 536</td>
<td>Some of the Jews returned from captivity in Babylon and rebuilt the temple and Jerusalem (Ezra 2-6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>AD 70</td>
<td>The Romans invaded the land of Judea and besieged Jerusalem. During the siege the Jews became desperate and the Jewish historian, Josephus, records how mothers ate their own children. Jerusalem and the temple were finally destroyed by the Romans. The surviving Jews were scattered throughout the Roman Empire</td>
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<tr>
<td>AD 70 – 1948</td>
<td>The Jews have been scattered throughout nations and have suffered in every century persecutions and expulsions of some kind in just about every place where they have been scattered</td>
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The above map (Jewish History Atlas) shows the dispersions of the Jews by the Assyrians and later by the Babylonians.

Martin Gilbert, a historian, compiled a history of the Jewish people (from 2000 BC to 1985 AD) and portrayed their history by a series of maps. When the maps of the Jewish wanderings
amongst the nations are considered it is evident that they have suffered much. The words that God spoke through Moses have been accurately fulfilled: “among these nations you will find no ease”, “your life shall hand in doubt before you”, “you will fear day and night” (Deut 28:64-67). Martin Gilbert wrote the following in the preface of his book which confirms the words of this prophecy:

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Jewish History Atlas
Extract from Preface

“My original concern was to avoid undue emphasis upon the many horrific aspects of Jewish history. I wished to portray with equal force the construction, achievements and normalities of Jewish life through almost four thousand years. In part I believe that I have succeeded, for there are many maps of traders, philosophers, financiers, settlers and sages. But as my research into Jewish history progressed, I was surprised, depressed, and to some extent overwhelmed by the by the perpetual and irrational violence which pursued the Jews in every century and to almost every corner of the globe. If, therefore, persecution, expulsion, torture, humiliation, and mass murder haunt these pages, it is because they haunt the Jewish story”

Martin Gilbert
5 February 1985
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The following maps taken from Martin Gilbert’s book give a sample of the terrible history the Jews have suffered, being scattered amongst the nations. Perhaps their worst sufferings were during World War 2 when about six million Jews were slain by Nazi Germany led by Adolf Hitler.
Map (Jewish History Atlas) showing places where Jews were forced to live AD 1215 – 1870

Map showing locations and numbers of Jews murdered in Nazi occupied Europe AD 1939 – 1945

Mass grave for Jewish Holocaust victims

Jewish Holocaust survivors
ISRAEL IN PROPHECY – PRESENT

The history of the nation of Israel shows the truth of God’s Word that He would scatter them among the nations. The people of Israel have been scattered into all nations, they have ceased to exist as a nation in their own land. They have also suffered among the nations just as God said they would. The same God who said that He would scatter Israel because of their rebellious ways has also declared many times that He will gather them from nations and bring them back to the land of Israel. Consider the following verses from Scripture:

Jeremiah 30:3
"For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it"

Jeremiah 31:10
"Hear the word of the LORD, O you nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock"

Ezekiel 37:21-22
"And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD: Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and I will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel: and one king shall be king to them all"

The return of the Jews from all nations where they have been scattered and their restoration as a nation in their own land is in two stages:

1. A partial return of the Jews to their own land to become a nation before the return or advent of the Lord Jesus Christ
2. The complete regathering of all Jews from the nations and their full restoration as the nation and Kingdom of God after the return of the Lord Jesus Christ

The majority of the Bible prophecies regarding the return of the Jews relate to the 2nd stage when the heart of the nation will be changed and the Kingdom will be restored to Israel. A Mr John Thomas, a Bible student of the nineteenth century, understood that some Bible prophecies referred to the 1st stage i.e. the Jews returning to their land before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. On the basis of this understanding he wrote the following in 1850 (before Jews started returning to Palestine and almost 100 years before the modern nation of Israel came into existence):

There is, then, a partial and primary restoration of Jews before the manifestation (of the Lord Jesus Christ), which is to serve as the nucleus, or basis, of future operations in the restoration of the rest of the tribes after he has appeared in his Kingdom. The pre-adventual colonization of Palestine will be on purely political principles; and the Jewish colonists will return in unbelief of the Messiahship of Jesus, and of the truth as it is in him. They will emigrate thither as agriculturists and traders, in the hope of ultimately establishing their commonwealth, but more immediately of getting rich in silver and gold by commerce with India, and in cattle and goods by their industry at home under the efficient protection of the British power.

But to what part of the world shall we look for a power whose interests will make it willing, as it is able, to plant the ensign of civilization upon the mountains of Israel? … I know not whether the men, who at present contrive the foreign policy of Britain, entertain the idea of assuming sovereignty of the Holy Land, and of promoting its colonization by the Jews; their present intentions, however, are of no importance one way or the other, because they will be compelled, by events soon to happen, to do what, under existing circumstances, heaven and earth combined could not move them to attempt. … The finger of God has indicated the course to be pursued by Britain which cannot be evaded, and which her counsellors will not only be willing, but eager, to adopt when the crisis comes upon them.

(Elpis Israel, page 441-442)
Below are two prophecies that refer to the partial restoration of the nation of Israel before the return of Christ:

**Ezekiel 38:8,12**

"After many days you (Gog: the leader of a group of nations v2-7) will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those bought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all them dwell safely"

Gog’s evil plan is “to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, and dwell in the midst of the land"

Ezekiel chapter 38 prophesies a latter day invasion of the land and people of Israel by a group of nations led by Gog (Ezek 38:2-7,15-16). The prophecy clearly indicates:

- The land of Israel would be desolate and waste for a long time (v8)
- The people of Israel would be gathered out of the nations to inhabit their desolate land (v8,12)
- They would acquire wealth and goods (v12,13)
- They will dwell in their land safely (v8,11,14)
- They will be invaded by Gog and his multinational forces (v8-12,15-16)
- God will intervene (through His Son) and overthrow the armies of Gog (v18-23)

**Zechariah 12**

Zechariah 12 describes the gathering of all nations against Judah and Jerusalem (Zech 12:2,3,6,9) and God’s intervention (though His Son) to fight against those nations (Zech 12:4,6,9) and to “save the tents of Judah first” (v7), and to "defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (v8). Afterwards the Jews will be brought to mourning and repentance when “they shall look on me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him” (v10-14).

It is clear from this prophecy that for God to save the tents of Judah from the invasion of the nations, then Judah (or the Jews) must be dwelling in their land at that time (i.e. before the invasion of the nations and the intervention of Christ at his return). And for the Jews to visibly look upon the wounds of Christ after he has intervened to save them, they must have already been in the land prior to his intervention.

The Rebirth of the Nation of Israel
The above prophecies have been remarkably fulfilled in part with the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland and the recreation of the state of Israel in 1948.

Since the overthrow of Judah’s Commonwealth and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70 the Jews have been scattered throughout the nations. Their land has been occupied by many foreign powers. The city of Jerusalem has been trodden down by various Gentile powers as Jesus prophesied (Luke 21:24). The Ottoman (or Turkish) Empire occupied the land of Israel or Palestine (as it became known) for a period of six centuries up to 1917. During their occupation the land of Israel became desolate and largely unproductive.

The following is a list of significant developments and events in the past 100 years or so that has led to the modern revival of the nation of Israel in fulfilment of Bible prophecy.

1897
A group of Jews from different countries held the first Zionist Congress at Basle, Switzerland. The Congress set out a vision for the establishment for a national homeland for the Jews.
Theodor Herzl: founder of the political form of Zionism, a movement to establish a Jewish homeland. He organised a world congress of Zionists that met in Basel, Switzerland in 1897.

1917 – Britain’s General Allenby, leader of British & allied forces, enters the streets of Jerusalem during campaign to free Palestine from Turkish occupation.

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Foreign Office,  
November 2nd, 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty’s Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object. It being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

[Signature]

A copy of the original “Balfour Declaration”

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1917
During the course of World War I (1914 – 1918), British, Australian and New Zealand forces pushed back the Turkish occupation of Palestine. At the same time the British Government issued a policy, known as the Balfour Declaration (named after Lord Balfour, British Foreign Secretary), which favoured “the establishment in Palestine of a national homeland for the Jewish people”. The role of Britain in establishing a homeland for the Jews was anticipated by a Bible student, John Thomas in 1850 based on his understanding of Bible prophecy.

1922
The League of Nations (forerunner to the United Nations) gave Britain a mandate over the territory of Palestine. Jews were permitted to migrate to Palestine though they did not do so in large numbers.
With world sympathy turning to the Jewish cause three years after the overthrow of Nazi Germany (which killed six million Jews) the United Nations voted for a partition plan for Palestine which allowed portions of Palestine to be established under Jewish sovereignty.

In May 1948 the State of Israel was declared. Jews from all nations began returning in large numbers. This was a remarkable development – a nation was reborn about 1900 years after it disappeared from history. For all those centuries the Jewish people have maintained their identity and have survived as a people despite being scattered everywhere and despite the many attempts to exterminate them. Upon returning they have revitalised and inhabited a once desolated land as prophesied by Ezekiel (Ezek 38:12).

Since 1948 the modern Jewish state has remarkably survived attacks from all sides by the surrounding Arab nations desiring to drive the new Jewish state into the Mediterranean Sea. In the wars of 1948-49, 1956, 1967 and 1973 the Arab nations had superior numbers and established armies, whereas Israel was only in its infancy as a nation. Yet after each war Israel has come out the stronger and occupying more territory. Clearly the hand of God has been behind the modern revival of the nation of Israel and its survival against all odds. But though great things have been achieved in relation to the nation of Israel since 1948 their troubles are far from over. It will only be when the people of Israel are truly humbled, when they recognize their past sins (particularly in rejecting their Messiah) and fully turn to God with their whole heart that they will experience the real peace and blessings that God has promised for them in their own land.
The map above shows Jews returning from many nations back to their ancient homeland of Israel as prophesied.

1948 – The newly born nation of Israel survived the invasion of 5 established Arab armies

1967 – In six days of war Israel was victorious over 6 Arab armies and recaptured the city of Jerusalem

1967
In the six day war of 1967 Israel took control of the city of Jerusalem. This was a partial fulfilment of Christ’s prophecy in Luke 21:24
ISRAEL IN PROPHECY – FUTURE

After his resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ was with his disciples for 40 days “speaking of things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). Before his ascension to heaven the disciples asked Jesus “Lord, will you at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6). The disciples correctly associated the kingdom of God with the restored kingdom of Israel. Jesus reply was that it was not for them to know when the kingdom would be restored (Acts 1:7).

Later, when the Apostle Peter was preaching to Jews he said:
“… he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:20-21).

This restitution or restoration of all things involves the reestablishment of the kingdom of God on earth which will be the restored kingdom of Israel. There is a time appointed for this restoration by God. He has a set time to favour Zion [i.e. Jerusalem] (Psa 102:13). The return of the Jews and the rebirth of the nation of Israel in the past 60 years is a clear sign that “the times of restoration of all things” is near at hand. The rebirth of the nation of Israel in 1948 is only the first stage of the restoration. There is much yet to happen before the restoration is complete.

Though the Jews have been scattered and persecuted among the nations for many centuries and many have tried to exterminated them, God has preserved them and will ultimately save them as the following words of God to Israel recorded by Jeremiah show:
“Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with thee to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations withee I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished” (Jer 30:10-11).

The scattering and persecution of the Jews among the nations has been part of the measured correction God has brought upon them, but God will move to save and restore them. This is spoken of in great detail by the Bible prophets. Their national salvation will be brought about at a time of great trouble for the Jewish people described in the Bible as “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer 30:4-7). A large group of fully armed nations described in Ezekiel 38 will come against them and their land “in the latter days” Ezek 38:16). The modern nation of Israel will almost be annihilated with only one third of the population surviving the invasion (Zech 13:8-9). The city of Jerusalem, Israel’s capital and much loved city, will be taken by the invading nations (Zech 14:1-2). It will be at this crisis that God will intervene through the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to save his people and to destroy the invading armies (Zech 14:3-4; 12:4-8). The experience of this horrific crisis and subsequent amazing deliverance will lead to the humbling and repentance of the Jewish people and their acceptance of Jesus as their Messiah and King (cp Zech 12:9-14).

A key element in the restoration of all things will be the conversion of Jews. It has been because of their wayward, proud, rebellious and unbelieving heart (or mind) that God has scattered them. This state of mind will need to be changed as an important prerequisite to the restoration of all things.

The prophet Elijah will play a key role in the restoration of Israel. Jesus clearly affirms that “Elijah truly shall come first, and restore all things” (Matt 17:11), though there was a sense in which the future work of Elijah was seen in the ministry of John the Baptist (Matt 17:12-13). The prophet Malachi shows the nature of Elijah’s future work:
“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of
the LORD:  And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (Mal 4:5-6).

The heart of the nation will be turned back to God. A complete conversion of the Jewish people will be effected as illustrated by the following:

- They will be turned away from ungodliness (Rom 11:26)
- They will greatly mourn what they have done to God and His Son (Zech 12:10-14)
- They will loath themselves in their own sight and be ashamed of all their past sins (Ezek 6:8-9; 20:42-43; 36:31; Zeph 3:11)
- They will call on God’s Name (Zech 13:9); and trust in His Name (Zeph 3:12)
- God’s law will be written on their hearts (Jer 31:33)
- All the house of Israel will serve God (Ezek 20:40)

As a converted people completely regathered from among the nations to their own land, the Jewish nation will become “the first dominion” (Mic 4:6-8). The Lord Jesus Christ will reign over them as king from David’s throne in Jerusalem (Lk 1:31-33; cp Matt 5:35). His disciples will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28; Lk 22:28-30). They will thus become “the great nation” promised to Abraham.