Question 4

What's God's Plan for Israel?

† Big Idea:

God chose Israel to bring Jesus into the world, and now everyone who trusts in Jesus belongs to God's people. God's plan was never two separate peoples with to separate paths to salvation—His plan for everyone has always been grounded in _____Christ.

Opening Discussion:

If you spend any time online, you've probably noticed there is a lot of noise about Jews, Israel, Zionists, violence in Palestine, war in Iran, politics in the middle east, and concerns and questions about the end times. Some people talk like faithful Christians must support everything the modern state of Israel does. Others speak with hostility toward Jewish people or act like Israel explains every problem in the world. And some Christians get caught up in nonstop prophecy speculation—temple rumors, red heifers, and trying to turn every headline into a sign of the end.

What should we think about such things? Is God working out some plan through all these modern happenings? Do we need to decode what hear in the news to understand God's will? Is modern day Israel the same thing as the biblical Israel? Who really belongs to God?

What are your thoughts or reactions to these questions?

Key Lutheran distinctions to keep in mind:

--We must never allow the Christ to be turned into a "plan B" for salvation. As if God originally intended to work another way. Here you could look at Ephesians 1:3-14 and see how God's plan has always been to save through Christ.

--We don't need to decode anything. Main question in confirmation: "what is the key to properly understanding the Bible?" Jesus! The Old Testament sacrifices and purification rites were given to point God's people to Christ. They seem strange and foreign to us, but their purpose was not different than God's purposes today through the ministry of the Church and the mysteries of the Sacraments.

-- The modern State of Israel has real historical connections with biblical Israel, but the two should not simply be equated. From our Lutheran reading of Scripture, the establishment of a modern nation does not itself demonstrate the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. God's saving promises center on Christ, and no modern government's policies carry divine approval merely because of its identity. It was believed by some that God's promises to ancient biblical Israel concerning the Promised Land could be fulfilled if modern ethnic Jews were living in Palestine. But we know that all God's promises to Israel are fulfilled in Sending Christ to suffer and die and rise again and ascend into heaven.

--Who belongs to God? All who are connected to Jesus by faith, both Old and New Testament people, Jew and non-Jews alike.

God's Plan Was Always Bigger Than Just One Nation

† Read Genesis 12:1-3 & Romans 9:6-13. What is the goal and final purpose that God begins to reveal to Abraham in these verses?

Answer: God calls Abraham and says that through him all nations will be blessed. The Old Testament is the history of God working this out thorugh Abraham's descendants—ancient Israel. But the goal was to bring the Savior for everybody.

Israel was important—not because God only cared about one ethnic group forever—but because through Israel He would send Jesus for the whole world.

And we shouldn't think there was something specail about Abraham that made him worthy... Joshua 24:2 clearly says that Abraham had been a idol worshiper before God called him.

In Romans, Paul shows that God's true people have always been defined by faith in His promise, not by bloodline alone (Romans 4 & 9).

† In Romans 9, Paul describes how even Jacob, Abraham's grandson, was chosen not based on any merit but simply by grace. It certainly wasn't based on anything Jacob had done, because God chose Jacob before Jacob was born. And the bible makes it clear that God continues to work in this way—by grace alone. But why do human beings often have trouble believing that God works this way? What does Romans 9:8 teach about who Abraham's true children are? Faith in the promise is what counts.

† Read Romans 9:30—10:4. What do these verses reveal about how God's people responded to the way God fulfilled His promise to Abraham?

Answer: Paul is addressing the tragedy that many within ethnic Israel missed their Messiah. Why? Not because they lacked zeal. In fact, they had plenty of zeal. The problem was that they sought righteousness through the law instead of receiving righteousness by faith.

This is a deeply Lutheran text because it exposes the difference between:

- works-righteousness & the passive righteousness of faith

Israel stumbled over Christ because Christ destroys boasting. He offers no ladder to climb, only a cross to trust. They wanted a ladder. God chose to work by grace alone.

† Now read Romans 11:1-2, 17–32 and Galatians 3:26–29. God does not have: one saving plan for Jews, another saving plan for Gentiles. There is one Savior and one family of faith. What is Paul saying with His illustration of the olive tree in Romans 11? Why does Paul warn Gentile Christians not to boast over Jewish people? How should that shape our speech about Jews today?

Answer: Gentiles who believe in Jesus are grafted in. So the message is not: "God has one important people and then a backup people." The message is: In Jesus, God brings people together into one family.

Personal connection – People often define themselves by categories: friend group, race, politics, style, school status, church background.

The Gospel does not erase those earthly differences, but it gives something deeper: your truest identity is that you belong to Christ.

Nothing in this study permits contempt for Jewish people, collective blame for Christ's death, or claims that Jews secretly control world events. Criticizing a government's actions is different from attacking an entire people.

† Read Hebrews 9:11-14. What does Hebrews 9 teach about purification rites and sacrifices now that Christ has come?

Answer: A lot of online Christian content can make students feel like they need to track every headline, temple rumor, or red heifer story to understand what God is doing.

But the New Testament keeps redirecting us to Jesus.

Some Christians get very focused on: modern Israel, a rebuilt temple, red heifer stories, prophecy timelines, but the main Christian answer is: Jesus is the fulfillment, He is the true sacrifice, He is the center.

You do not need a prophecy chart to know your future. You need Christ.

Hebrews 9:11-14 says Jesus was the once-for-all sacrifice.

So Christians should not act like our hope depends on old sacrifices coming back.

† What is the final picture the Bible paints of eternity? See Revelations 21:1-4, 22-27. See also John 10:16 and Ephesians 2:14-16.

To end with the biblical picture of eternity: not segregated peoples with separate eternal tracks, but one redeemed people dwelling with God forever.

Some dispensational systems continue the Israel/Church distinction into eternity itself. The Church is placed in the New Jerusalem, while Israel receives earthly national fulfillment below. Some even imagine a kind of two-tier arrangement in the final state.

The Lutheran reading of Revelation 21 is much simpler and more glorious: heaven and earth are united, and God dwells with redeemed humanity as one people.

Supporting Texts

John 10:16

- One flock, one shepherd.

- Not one shepherd with permanently tiered flocks.

Ephesians 2:14–16

- Christ has broken down the dividing wall.

- He creates one new man in place of the two.

Some Modern Day Issues and Concerns

- Does anything in our study today mean that the modern State of Israel has no right to exist?
  Political legitimacy is a civil question, not a messianic one. Christians may support peace, justice, and lawful order without turning the modern nation-state into a prophetic sacrament. There may many geo-political reasons for supporting a modern jewish state in the middle east. But we should be careful not to attach religious significance to it.

- Dispensational Premillennialism –

  Dispensationalism tends to divide what the New Testament unites:

  - Israel and Church

  - earthly people and heavenly people

  - present Church and future kingdom

  - shadow and substance

  From an LCMS perspective, this weakens the finality of Christ's work and fractures the Bible's unity.

  1. Fulfillment Argument

  Dispensational claim: Old Testament promises to Israel must be fulfilled literally and politically.

  LCMS response: The New Testament teaches that all God's promises find their Yes in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). Christ is the true Seed, true Temple, and fulfillment of the covenant promises.

  2. Unity Argument

  Dispensational claim: Israel and the Church remain distinct peoples.

  LCMS response:** Romans 11 gives one olive tree, not two. Galatians 3 says those who belong to Christ are Abraham's offspring.

  3. Grace Argument

  Dispensational claim: God's plan includes distinct dispensations and future restoration structures.

  LCMS response: Scripture presents one Gospel and one way of salvation across all eras: grace through faith in Christ.

  4. Temple Argument

  Dispensational claim: A future temple may play a central prophetic role.

  LCMS response: Hebrews insists Christ's sacrifice is once for all. A restored sacrificial system would be a regression to shadow after substance has come.

† What about the Temple? See John 2:19-21

† Can a Red Heifer raised in Texas really fix anything? See Numbers 19 and Hebrews 9:13-14

September 2022--- A Christian should not view a rebuilt temple or red heifer with messianic excitement. At best, such things belong to obsolete covenantal forms. At worst, cheering their return can function as a denial of Christ's sufficiency.

Jesus explicitly identifies His body as the Temple.

- This is a major interpretive key: the New Testament directs us to Christ as fulfillment.

Christians do not need to watch a cow to know whether redemption is near. We already have the perfect sacrifice.

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