

Israel

Romans 9:4a

Second Title: Israelites – The Purpose of the Chosen People

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Do you know what our inflation rate was this past year? I think it was somewhere between 8 and 12 percent. It depends when you check it. We all felt things were pretty tight. How would you feel if it was 20 percent? How would you feel if it was 30 percent? Probably there would be revolution if it was 40 percent. Yet, that's what it is in Israel at the moment. Inflation is running at around 40 percent. So in a way, financially, life is almost unliveable in the nation of Israel at the present time. On top of that, of course, strikes and crippling taxes have almost destroyed the economy of Israel. Then when you look at the situation with the leaders, you feel that it is even more pathetic.

Many of us might feel like the woman who made a comment about Begin when he declared that Judea and Samaria are part of biblical Israel, and they would never surrender them. The woman whispered, "The days of the Messiah have come." Many of us might feel that way, but many others feel Begin, the new prime minister, is just an inflexible hulk, who will either have to withdraw from his present aggressive stance or will have to commit himself to a war without America's support.

It is even worse when you think of how he got into power. He really got in due to the general disgust that everybody felt for the majority of the leaders in the previous government. One of them was prosecuted for bribery and tax evasion and another committed suicide after he was accused of illegal land deals. The Prime Minister Rabin had to resign when they discovered he had an illegal bank account in the States. It is a far cry from the great leaders that we read about in Israel. Some of us tend to think, "But they did have some great leaders. Think of the Six Day War and Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan." Yes, until you realize that Golda Meir didn't believe in God at all.

Loved ones, the continued existence of Israel as a nation is one of the greatest arguments for believing that our Creator is as He is described in the Bible. Those of us who have begun to allow the Spirit of Jesus to run our lives, and certainly those of us who have not, all of us occasionally wonder, "Is this a perfect description of reality? Is this a perfect description of the Maker of the universe? I listen to it Sunday after Sunday, but there are other scriptures--the Koran, the Buddhist scriptures and the Book of Mormon -- that claim to tell us what the Creator of the universe is like. Why should we believe that this one is the only perfect picture? Why should we believe that Moses is right in what he says about God, and Joseph Smith, Mohammed and Buddha are wrong? After all, they all spoke about miraculous events and they all said that God spoke to them. Why believe this Moses above them? Why believe he is right and they are wrong?

Of course, the real issue is what really did happen when Moses said that God spoke to him. Was it actual fact or was it subjective fantasy? When Buddha sat under the bow tree, was it just a subjective vision or was it solid historical fact, God showing himself in a way that was undoubtedly God? When Mohammed had a vision, was that a historical fact or was it a subjective fantasy or illusion? When Joseph Smith claims to have received those golden plates that the Mormons base their religion on, is that historical fact or just a subjective fantasy? Loved ones, in our present age we are tending more and more towards irrationality. More and more men and women are saying there is no

rationalism anywhere, there is no reason anywhere. All you can have is some kind of experience under drugs, or some kind of experience that is hedonistic; that is all a man or woman can hope for for reality. You can't find reason anywhere now in our universe. You can't find reality by reason. At a time like this it is really important for us to hold solidly to reason. If you do, it will become clearer and clearer to you that the God who is behind our universe is exactly like the God who is revealed in the Bible.

Let me share with you what one of the old theologians said, a man called Leslie. He said there are certain common-sense guidelines to help people to determine what is historical fact and what is subjective fantasy. There are four criteria that a fact ought to satisfy if it is a historical fact. First of all, it should be such as can be judged by the senses, by eyes and ears. That eliminates all purely subjective visions that people have. Secondly, it should be something that is done publicly before the world. It should not be something that is done only in the presence of a small group who have a vested interest in believing it. It should be something that is done publicly for the world to see. Thirdly, and this is kind of interesting in regard to ancient history, there should be not only monuments and memorials to this fact, but there should be acts that have been performed down through the centuries to ensure that the public memory has never been distorted. That eliminates most of the myths and legends that gathered around the non-Christian religious leaders down through the centuries after their deaths. Fourthly, these memorials and monuments, or these customs, habits and practices should have been present ever from the time when the original fact took place. If you examine these books in this Bible under those four criteria, you will become convinced that the revelation of our Creator that you get here is the truth and the things actually happened as they are recorded here.

I went to a liberal seminary and we were taught to take this book [the Bible] apart. One of the methods we had was to suggest that Moses never received those miraculously advanced laws, because they were too advanced for that time. The state of New York only caught up with the laws of hygiene about forty years ago, as far as washing hands in hospitals is concerned. We used to argue that Moses didn't receive those miraculously advanced laws as he said he did from God, but they developed gradually over years and years and then someone gathered them together and forged his name to them years after he had lived. So it was really a very natural kind of creation.

Now brothers and sisters, the transmission of the law of God by Moses to the Israelites has so many civil and political connections that it couldn't have happened any other way than the way outlined by Moses. Look at Deuteronomy 17:18. Moses is talking about when there is a king in Israel. "And when he sits on the throne of the kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, from that which is in charge of the Levitical priests; and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by keeping all the words of this law, and these statutes, and doing them; that his law may not be lifted up above his brethren, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left; so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel."

The laws that Moses gave were not little religious laws. They were to be the laws of the whole nation. They were to be the civil and municipal laws that governed all the people of Israel. They weren't just little religious laws that were to be practiced by a few priests. Look at Deuteronomy 31:24: "When Moses had finished writing the words of this law in a book, to the very end, Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, "Take this book of the law, and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a

witness against you." If someone in Israel wrote these laws for the first time or collated them for the first time, all the people of Israel had to say was, "Listen, let's open the ark and look. Are they there? It says the king has them; has he got them? Are these the laws that govern our land?" In other words, it is like me trying to pass off a book on America. I'll write a whole lot of laws that every guy ought to have four leprechauns in his house, and he ought to feed them very well, and every woman should take a trip to Ireland every other year. Then I say these are always the laws that have governed America. You know I would not last long. You would send me off to be examined because you would say, "Listen, look at the laws. These are the laws that govern us, they are not these laws that you talk about." You would show me the Constitution and the other civil laws. In other words, loved ones, it is really difficult to argue that these laws were created in later years, by forgers, because these are the laws that the people of Israel regarded as the civil and the municipal laws in their land. You would have to bluff a whole people to persuade them.

Not only that, but when the laws were initiated Moses explained why they were initiated. He says, "You have to do this in memory of what God did for us." Turn to Exodus regarding the Passover feast. Exodus 12:21: "Then Moses called all the elders of Israel, and said to them, 'Select lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood which is in the basin; and none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. For the Lord will pass through to slay the Egyptians; and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to slay you. You shall observe this rite as an ordinance for you and for your sons forever. And when you come to the land which the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he slew the Egyptians but spared our house.' And the people bowed their heads and worshipped. Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did."

If that wasn't so, all the people had to say was, "We are not observing that feast. That never happened. God never slew all the firstborn in Egypt and passed over our houses. That is a fantasy that you are writing about there." Loved ones, it didn't matter when that forgery would have taken place. You can take it right from 1400 B.C. when Moses wrote the laws right up to 300 B.C. which is the latest time it could have taken place, because after that the law was being translated into Greek and being spread among other peoples who had no interest in keeping a conspiracy.

It is like me saying we are going to observe the seventeenth of August as Brazil Day in memory of the day that we annexed Brazil as the fifty-first state. You would say, "We are not keeping a dumb memorial like that. We never annexed Brazil. Our history books don't say that, the history books of Brazil don't say that." The Israelites would say, "No, we're not keeping the feast. We are not circumcising our children." How could you persuade a whole nation to circumcise the children in memory of something that they knew had not taken place? Especially when we regard the Jews as some of the shrewdest and most intelligent, most down-to-earth and practical people in our world.

You can't persuade a people like that to cut the bodies of their own children for a reason that they do not understand. Loved ones, it is impossible. We used to say, "Maybe these feasts and memorials did exist among the people of Israel. Moses, or some forger that used Moses' name, came along and made up a whole story to tell them why they were observing them." Well, it is just as impossible to believe as to believe that some con man forced them to observe them in the first place, because it

presupposes that they were practicing circumcision, they were observing the feast of Pentecost, they were observing the feast of Tabernacles, they were involved in all kinds of offerings in their temple service, they were governing their lives through the civil judgments of the priests, and yet they had no reason for doing all those things. You would have to assume that the Jewish people were doing all those things and had no reason for it.

Then suddenly this man comes along and says, "I will tell you the reasons for all these things."

Then he concocts a whole

story, beginning with the deliverance from the land of Egypt and the wanderings in the Wilderness, the entrance into the Promised Land and the capture of Canaan and then the exiles into Babylon, and says, "All these events took place and you have these twelve stones in the Jordan because this happened. It is because this happened that you circumcise your children. It is because this happened that you observe the feast of Pentecost."

Loved ones, do you see the impossibility of it? You have to persuade a whole people of a history that they never heard of before and that utterly contradicts all the history books they had. Not only would you have to say that their national archives had the details in them, but you would have to say that the Egyptian archives had the details as well. The contemporary histories of other nations would have to detail these things too.

Loved ones, it's like the explanation of the Resurrection is harder to believe than the actual history itself. That is why the Israelites, however pitiful and pathetic they are in this present day, however far removed they are from God, are the best possible argument for the existence of God, outside Jesus, that we have. The acts of God are written in their life-blood, in their ceremonies, monuments, customs, feast days, and in the habits and civil laws that they have observed for centuries. You can wipe out one page, you can wipe out a million pages, you might be able to burn two or three million pages -- but you cannot wipe out the millions of Jewish lives that have been lived for hundreds and thousands of years. It was those dear lives and customs that have come down to today that assure us that the things that happened according to Moses really happened. The things that God did in those days, He really did do. That is why Paul emphasises in Romans 9:4: "They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises." We need to thank God that He wrote His own existence so clearly and plainly as that.

I'd encourage you who have doubts about God's existence to see that you don't wipe out a book, which is difficult enough; you have to wipe out a whole nation, and it is one of the oldest nations in the world.