

HISTORICAL BACKDROP

The Lord Jesus Christ came to His own people (Matthew 1:21; 2:6) but the nation Israel did not receive Him as their Messiah, King, and Saviour (John 1:11). They wanted a King who could feed and heal their bodies (John 6:26), but cared not for a Saviour who could feed and heal their souls (John 6:58-66). Christ, through His miracles and mighty works, gave unmistakable and undeniable evidence that He was indeed the Messiah, the Son of the living God; yet the Jews in their unbelief still asked for a sign (John 2:18; Matthew 12:38-40; 13:58; Luke 4:23; 1 Corinthians 1:22).

Hundreds of years earlier Isaiah had predicted that the Messiah would perform such miracles (Isaiah 35:5-6; compare what Jesus said to John's disciples in Matthew 11:2-6). But even though the Jews saw His works (Matthew 12:13,22) and had clear proof that He was the Messiah (Matthew 12:23), they still refused to acknowledge who He was. In their wicked unbelief and blasphemy they dared to accuse Christ of performing His miracles by the power of Satan rather than by the Spirit of God (Matthew 12:24-37). Such rejection can only bring the judgment of God (Matthew 12:41-45).

The climactic rejection of the Messiah took place when the Jews said to Pilate, "Let Him be crucified" (Matthew 27:21-23). Even worse, they took full responsibility for their actions: "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). God indeed held them responsible for what they had done: "[Him] ye have taken, and by *wicked* hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23).

The Lord, because of His forbearance and long-suffering, did not judge the nation immediately. In fact, God graciously made known the gospel to the *Jew first* (Romans 1:16; Acts 2:5; 3:26). They should have been the last to hear! In fact, *they did not deserve to hear at all*. But God in His matchless grace reached out to the nation which had crucified His Son!

When Paul entered a city he normally went to the synagogue first, often encountering great resistance to the gospel (Acts 13:44-50; 18:4-6; 28:23-28; cf., Romans 11:28). Yet God patiently waited and gave the nation opportunity to repent. When Paul finally appeared in Jerusalem (Acts 21-22) the Jews once again rejected God's message and God's messenger. They even tried to kill him, crying, "Away with him" (Acts 21:36; 22:22), even as they had done to the Saviour years before (John 19:15).

The day of God's long-suffering must come to an end. Years before, the Lord Jesus had predicted that a terrible judgment of God would come upon Jerusalem because of their unbelief (Matthew 23:38; 24:2; Luke 21:5-6). About forty years after the crucifixion of

Christ this prediction was literally fulfilled. In 70 A.D. the Roman General Titus captured and *completely* destroyed Jerusalem with great slaughter. Since this time the nation Israel has been without a king, without a prince, without a sacrifice, without a priesthood, and without a temple (Hosea 3:4). For nearly 2000 years the Jewish people have been scattered and persecuted throughout the world. Instead of enjoying God's blessings, they have been under God's curse (see Deuteronomy 28).

In this century a remarkable event has taken place in Jewish history. A nation has been reborn! The Hebrew language has been revived! Hundreds of Jews have been returning to their homeland. God has providentially been setting the stage for the events which must shortly come to pass. Even though many Israelites now occupy the land, they are there, for the most part, in unbelief. Though a small Christ-rejecting remnant has returned, the vast majority of Jews are still dispersed throughout the nations of the world. During the Second World War, about one third of all the Jews in the world (six million) perished under German persecution. There is coming another day in which two thirds will die (Zechariah 13:9). Certainly Israel is still under the terrible curse of God. But a brighter day is coming in which the nation Israel will be delivered, forgiven, and purified (Jeremiah 30:7-9; Romans 11:26-27). At this time the nation will begin to enjoy the millennial blessings of God (Isaiah 33:17-24).