

What on Earth is God Doing in the Old Testament?

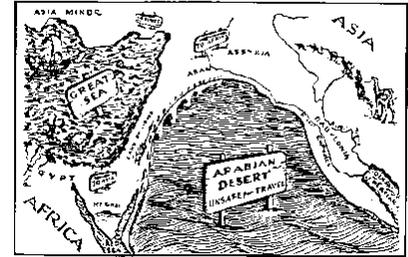
[Concepts basic to an understanding of what God intended to accomplish *for* & *through* Israel in the OT era]

1. The Intent and Importance of Israel's Influence

- The concept: God chose Israel to be salt and light in the midst of a wicked world (Gen 12:3; Exod 19:5,6).
- The significance: In choosing Israel, God was not neglecting or rejecting the rest of the peoples of the world.

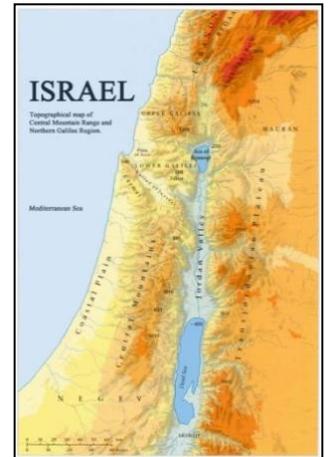
2. The Principle of Providential Placement

- The concept: God placed Israel at the most strategic spot on the most important inter national highway of the ancient world.
- The significance: Rather than sending Israel to the nations, God brought the nations to Israel.



3. The Dynamics of Distinctive Divisions

- The concept: The land of Israel, though very small, is marked by five (okay, maybe six) very distinct geographical divisions (from west to east: the coastal plains, [the Shephelah], the central hill country, the Jordan Rift, and the transjordanian plateau).
- The significance: Though military and commercial traffic was constantly marching through their land, Israel could enjoy remarkable seclusion in the central hill country where most of her life was lived.



4. The Wisdom and Will of God regarding the Worship and the Walk of Israel

- The concept: King Yahweh gave Israel a law code (the Mosaic [Old] Covenant) which touched every facet of public and private life, and which shaped the theology and testimony of the nation.
- The significance: That law code was intended by God to be the means by which individuals (Israelites or proselytes) could draw near to God, and by which Israel would be kept distinct from the nations (i.e., set apart, or "holy").

5. Regular Rainfall, Rapid Runoff, and God's Requirement of Righteousness

- The concept: By reason of the geology, geography and topography of the land, the people of Israel were constantly dependent upon the "former and latter rains" in order to survive agriculturally (Deut 11:10-12).

Note concerning the agricultural cycle of the land of Israel:

Winter rainy season (Oct/Nov – Mar/Apr)

Begins with FORMER RAINS (necessary to break up soil, get plow in the ground)

Concludes with LATTER rains (necessary to fully mature the grain, given very short growing season)

Must have regular rainfall in between these

Rain necessary to grow grain crops (hay, barley, wheat), which are...

Harvested in the springtime (after the latter rains, but must be in before heat of the summer)

Summer dry season (no rain at all)

Heavy dew each night, sufficient to grow vineyard & orchard crops (grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives)

These are harvested in the fall (after the former rains)

- The significance: God intended that abiding dependence upon regular and recurring rainfall to be to the people of Israel a very practical and compelling impetus to obedience (Deut 11:13-17).

6. The Cycle of Calendar, Climate, Crops and Celebrations

a. The concept: *the annual cycle of seven feasts* (i.e., the three pilgrimage feasts – see below)

(Note that each of these was necessarily related to the agricultural cycle.)

The Springtime Feasts

- The Primary Feast: Passover
- Included 3 distinguishable feasts
 - (1) Passover
 - (2) Unleavened Bread
 - (3) First Fruits
- Remembered the exodus from Egypt
- Celebrated the harvest of the early grain crops

RELATIONSHIP TO THE AGRICULTURAL CYCLE

- Former rains necessary to break up fallow soil, latter rains to mature the crops
 - Throughout the winter (rainy) season, all Israel longing for rain
- #### IMPORTANCE OF THE CYCLE

- God established the month of Passover as the first month of the year (Ex 12:2)
- Exodus from Egypt = greatest miracle of the OT; God intended Israel to remember it carefully
- First fruits—acknowledged that the harvest was from God, anticipated that the full harvest would be as the first fruits

The Summer Feast

- Pentecost
- Celebrated the harvest of the early grain crops

RELATIONSHIP TO THE AGRICULTURAL CYCLE

- Harvest occurs soon after the latter rains; the crops had to be taken in quite soon once those rains were past
- Came 50 days after the Sabbath of the Passover cycle (therefore, Feast of Weeks)
- After the latter rains, there is no rain whatever in Israel for several months (Mar/Apr – Oct/Nov)

IMPORTANCE OF THE CYCLE

- Again, acknowledged that the grain/bread/feed necessary to life came only from God

The Autumn Feasts (High Holy Days)

- Included 3 distinguishable feasts
 - (1) Trumpets (1st day of 7th month)
 - (2) Yom Kippur (10th of 7th month)
 - (3) Tabernacles (15-21 of 7th month)
- Tabernacles (Booths)
Remembered the wilderness wanderings, anticipated the Messianic Kingdom
- Celebrated the harvest of the summer or *hillside* crops (vineyards/orchards)

RELATIONSHIP TO THE AGRICULTURAL CYCLE

- Time of great rejoicing, as most delightful crop is being brought in
- Much prayer for rain (for former/early rains, which will signal beginning of winter growing season), especially at the Feast of Tabernacles (cf. Jn 7)

IMPORTANCE OF THE CYCLE

- Yom Kippur--most solemn day of the year; included fasting & contrition
- Tabernacles--most blessed period of the year; anticipated the day when every man would sit under his vine & fig tree (Mic 4:4)

b. The significance:

- (1) The cycle of feasts was designed to remind God's covenant people of their dependence upon Him:
 - in the early part of the (religious) year, the nation acknowledged that only Yahweh could send the rains for the crops
 - in the summer, after the grain harvest was in, the nation acknowledged God's goodness/justice in providing the harvest
 - in the latter part of the year, the nation rejoiced over God's provision of the summer/hillside crops
- (2) The reality thus set before the nation season by season: only Yahweh can make life possible (i.e., provide the grain crops necessary to *have* life, and only Yahweh can make life pleasant (i.e., give the hillside crops necessary to *enjoy* life).

7. The Struggle for the Soil and the Soul of Israel

- ### a. The concept: Because God has graciously provided this one people as the means by which He would put Himself on display to the world, He caused that people to be set apart from the world in many ways – to be uniquely and inevitably the people of Yahweh.

But the world despises and resents Yahweh, and thus the contempt and hatred with which they regard that one nation whom He chose to bear His name before them.

b. The significance:

- (1) Because of her position as the unique people of Yahweh, Israel has been especially hated and hounded by her neighbors in every place and in every age. Thus the struggle for the soil of Israel!
- (2) Because of that recurring and rabid hatred, Israel has been often tempted to abandon her distinctiveness – i.e., to assimilate. Thus the struggle for the soul of Israel!