How Ancient Israel Survived Between Superpowers

Israel’s place among the nations begins not with human achievement, but with God’s gracious choice. He brought Israel out of Egypt and called the people to be unto him “a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:4–6). Moses makes plain that this election was not for self-exaltation, nor because Israel was greater in number, but because the LORD loved them and kept the oath sworn unto their fathers (Deuteronomy 7:6–8). Their distinct calling was to belong to the Lord and bear witness to his name: “Ye are my witnesses,” saith he, “that I am God” (Isaiah 43:10–12). Yet Israel’s history also records disobedience, chastening, exile, and the rise and fall of empires. Judgment did not void the covenant; the Lord remained faithful, preserving a people through changing seasons and calling them back to himself. To consider Israel among the nations, then, is to behold both the seriousness of God’s holiness and the steadfastness of his mercy, through which his name is made known.

Israel’s calling begins within God’s purpose for all peoples. The Lord called Abram from his country and kindred, promising, “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:1–3). Israel’s election was therefore not a denial of the nations, but a means through which God’s promise would reach them, ultimately fulfilled in Christ. Israel’s history also bears witness to the faithfulness of the One who made that promise. The people sinned, forsook the Lord, and endured the judgments foretold in His word; preservation does not excuse their unbelief or lessen the holiness of divine judgment. Yet Moses spoke of the Lord gathering His people again and showing mercy (Deuteronomy 30:1–5). Paul likewise asks whether God hath cast away His people, and answers, “God forbid,” declaring that God hath not cast away His people whom He foreknew (Romans 11:1–2). Israel’s continued existence thus magnifies not human merit, but God’s mercy and covenant faithfulness, whose word standeth sure.

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