

The Future of Israel

Many will say that the title of this discourse is incorrect. They will dismiss anything written on this subject because in their theology, Israel does not have a future. The thought here is that all the promises and blessings God promised Israel are transferred to the Church. The term I have heard much today is that the Church is “Spiritual Israel”. They do not believe there is any significance in making a distinction between the two groups as dispensational theology does. What would lead them to the conclusion that Israel and the Church are forever one? There are two sides on this issue. Are Israel and the Church distinct entities before God? In this discourse, we will begin to explore these questions. Ultimately, how you answer these questions will determine many of your theological positions. The direction of your eschatology will be decided when you answer these questions. I say the direction because there are many views of eschatology (end time theology) out there in every direction.

We will explore these questions in more detail. Does Israel have a future? Is the Church distinct from Israel? I am persuaded that Israel does have a future. That statement is only important in understanding why I hold to this position. Some would appeal to Church history as their justification for taking a position. I have heard some say things like, “dispensational theology only began in the 19th Century”. And for this reason, they conclude that it is not authentic Christianity. They would cite such names as *John Nelson Darby* (1800-1882), as the one who originated this dispensational thought with its Rapture theology. It is true that Darby did teach and preach this doctrine extensively. However, he is preceded by *Joseph Mede* (1586-1638), who also taught dispensationalism in his day.

Well, we could continue to cite men who as history say had the thought of dispensations, but there is a better way. Before we say what that better way is, we should note that the thoughts of all men are not recorded for us to have an accurate record. We cannot possibly know who did or did not understand and believe in dispensations. If our judging the doctrine’s veracity is based on what some men in history believed, then we are already on shaky ground. If any thing is believed at all, it should be firmly taught in the infallible Word of God. That should be the reason for believing or rejecting any idea. Allow dispensationalism to stand or fall based on the Word of God. If the Apostle Paul taught this doctrine, then it doesn’t matter if we can or cannot point to others in history to confirm it (see 1 Co. 9:17; Eph. 1:10; 3:2; Col. 1:25; 1 Tim. 1:4). On the other side, there cannot be appeals to obscure texts which stretch and twist them to suite a pre-conceived idea. I do not say this lightly, because many have done just that. When we approach the Word, we cannot bring our opinions and ideas; we must allow God to give us His understanding.

Some may be reading this and thinking, “Please get on with it.” As important as it is to have the correct understanding of this issue, it is more important that we handle the Word of truth accurately. Everyone wants to believe they have a great foundation based on sound theology. No one wants to entertain the thought that they are wrong about some

foundational truth they hold. However, both sides cannot be correct. So, if you are on one side or the other, there is a possibility that you could be on the wrong side. Or, we must leave room for the idea that both sides could be wrong. In other words, we need to hear from God. In order to hear from God, we must put aside our formerly held assumptions, or be willing to submit them to the scrutiny and reason of the Word of God. I have asked many about their position on this issue. Many have no idea about the issue, but are firmly on one side or the other because that is simply what they grew up believing. Others can tell you where they stand, but they cannot give a good biblical answer for the stance. Still there are others who have pointed to definite passages of scripture and have based their reasoning from this standpoint, but they are *not* willing to consider other passages which might point in another direction. And of course, there are those who allow God to tell them what to believe and why. What group are you in?

Where to start

We can start with Israel. God created Israel. Israel was the name God gave to Joseph, one of Isaac's sons (Gen 32:28). Israel had 13 sons, which is where we get the 12 tribes of Israel. Israel is God's chosen nation. The subject of Israel is very broad. We could discuss their beginnings but we really want to get to their future. I would like to go over Paul's assessment of the issue. He was an Israelite and very zealous for his people. In fact, Paul even had Christians jailed and put to death because he was so zealous for Israel.

³For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, ⁴the people of Israel. Rom 9:3, 4a.

Paul was very serious about Israel. I would say more zealous than anyone I know today. As Paul himself was on the wrong side, he knew how the mind of an Israelite worked and he figured he could convince them of their error and they would receive Christ. One thing Paul did not take into account, their hardness of heart. You cannot reason from the word with someone who is not reasonable. They refused to consider the evidence. They refused to see that the scriptures pointed to one person- Christ. We cannot recount Israel's entire history here. There are many works out there already to which I would simply appeal. What I would like to start with is some directional verses that speak to Israel having a future.

A Burning Question

There is an interesting question asked by the disciples just before our Lord ascended into heaven. "*So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"*" (Acts 1:6). What a great question for our discussion! The disciples did not know anything about the Church, since it had not really been fully revealed. They believed that Israel would be restored, but why? Israel had crucified their Christ. Why should they be restored to anything? Well, they knew the end of the story. They could read the Old Testament and know how it would all work out. They knew that the Word of God could not fail. In the Word of truth, it clearly says that Israel has a future. There was no New Testament so they would not know anything but the scriptures

in the Old Testament. There is clearly a future for Israel if you read the Old Testament. How does our Lord answer the question?

⁷He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1: 7, 8.

We must first note that Jesus does not say that Israel has no future. This would have been a good opportunity for Jesus to tell the disciples that Israel was finished, but He did not. If the disciples were thinking incorrectly, Jesus could have corrected their thinking at this point. His answer was somewhat positive. He said essentially, Israel would be restored, but it is not for you to know the "*times and dates*" of this restoration. We could just stop here and accept the answer from our Lord. But, more information has been revealed and we should take advantage of this new information. Then, the Lord focuses them on what they would need to know at the present time. They would receive the Holy Spirit in 10 days and be witnesses all over the world. Let's continue our investigation with Paul, where we will begin in Romans 11:25-29.

²⁵I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited:

Paul is addressing Gentiles in Romans 11, he made this pretty clear from his statement, "*I am talking to you Gentiles*" (Rom 11:13a). Paul is writing to them concerning Israel's being cast away or rejected by God. An important factor in understanding Israel in Paul's mind is knowledge of The Mystery. Without this knowledge, a person would be ignorant. I also think this is the key in understanding the future of Israel. In fact, if one doesn't know The Mystery, I do not believe they can know the future of Israel and be one "*who correctly handles the word of truth*" (2Tim 2:15b). If one is ignorant of "*this mystery*" it could result in conceit, which is arrogance. We do not want to end up arrogant from ignorance of The Mystery. We need an understanding of how The Mystery relates to Israel.

The Mystery

We need an understanding of The Mystery in order to fend off the arrogance of ignorance. We need to look at some of the passages where The Mystery is defined. This will help us understand its significance in determining the direction of God's plan. Take time to read these passages regarding The Mystery.

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of The Mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him.
Rom 16:25, 26

In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into The Mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. Eph 3:4, 5

Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. Eph 3:8, 9

I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— The Mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. Col 1:25, 26

The first thing we can know about The Mystery is that it *was* hidden, but it is *now* revealed. To whom was it hidden? It was hidden to *everyone* prior to it being revealed. This means that no one in the Old Testament knew *anything* about The Mystery, no man and no angel. It was not revealed in prophecy, or type or any form at all. I am amazed by how many look right past this point and hold to a view of The Mystery which was really found in the Old Testament Scriptures. All of the passages above make it clear that it was hidden, not disclosed; it was hidden in God. We do not have to wonder if it was revealed in the pages of the Old Testament- it was not! This can save you much time in trying to figure out The Mystery. A second critical point is that God did not want people to be ignorant of the mystery or not understand it. Paul specifically wrote that God wanted his people to have insight into The Mystery. I must say then, that since many Christians do not know what The Mystery is about, even though it is revealed, they are in danger of the arrogance of which Paul mentioned earlier. Since Paul is speaking to Gentiles, the arrogance must be directed towards Israel. Israel had the favored position and lost it, so we must assume that this arrogance will be on the part of the Gentiles toward Israel, boasting of their current position and favor with God (see Romans 11:18-22).

Israel has experienced a hardening in part

We come to the problem Israel experienced when their Christ was revealed. It is said to be "*hardening in part.*" This means that Israel did not believe in their Christ, but also that they were resistant and against Christ. God prepared the stage for Christ to walk on and perform. God did this by creating a nation which would bring forth the Christ. More than this, God told Israel to expect Christ and gave definite signs which should have settled the matter for them. The law and their entire culture were created to reveal Christ, but they still did not see Him. Jesus Christ himself said this when He confronted them. He speaks of witness after witnesses who all tell the same story- that He is the Christ!

³³"You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. ³⁴Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. ³⁵John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.

³⁶"I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. ³⁷And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, ³⁸nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. ³⁹You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰yet you refuse to come to me to have life. John 5:33-40.

What we see in this passage is proof that Jesus is the Christ. Not just proof to anyone, but proof specifically to Israel. Jesus gives four undeniable evidences that He is Christ. They are: 1. The witness of John the Baptist (v33-35), 2. The work He is doing, signs, miracles (v36), 3. The Father Himself has testified of Christ (v37), 4. The Old Testament Scriptures confirm that He is the Christ (v38-40). This proof was overwhelming. The hardness of heart comes in because even in the face of all of this evidence, they refused to believe. Their refusal was not reasonable and revealed a heart condition which is here said to be hardness or blindness. We see that this was a pattern for the ruling religious body of Israel for some time. Luke records these words of their ancestors.

⁵¹"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵²Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— ⁵³you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it." Acts 7:51-53

Stephen had this testimony just before a religious mob stoned him to death. Hard heartedness resists the Holy Spirit. Not only did they resist the Holy Spirit as He was trying to reveal the Old Testament scriptures to them, but there was a pattern of resistance which they maintained from their ancestors. Hardening leads to blindness. Blindness here is not physical, it is spiritual. It is one thing to refuse to see Christ through the scriptures, but when He walks in your presence and looks you in the eye, that is another thing. They saw His works and heard his words and they still refused to believe. That is spiritual blindness. "*Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains"* (John 9:41).

Our text says that Israel experienced a "*hardening in part*". This can only mean that not all of Israel refused to receive their Christ. In fact, Paul, the writer of Romans reasons, "*I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant*

of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin” (Rom 11:1). Paul brings out that this hardening is not universal; it is only partial since he declares that he is a believer in Christ. Some may have looked upon Israel and thought that there is nothing good at all in it. But, at every low point in their history, there were those faithful believers. Paul reminds us of the time of Elijah. Here is another low point in Israel’s history, and even then, there was always a remnant of faithful believers in Israel (see Romans 11:3-5 and I Kings 19:18). We do not have the scriptures to back this up, but I believe the same thing applies to the Church. There may have been bleak times, but there are always faithful believers who have believed God and the testimony of the Word of the promised Messiah by accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and not bowing the knee to Baal. There was hope for Israel; there has never been a time when there was no hope. However, when they rejected Christ, the number of faithful was not enough to turn aside the judgment of God against the Nation of Israel. Keep in mind, this judgment does not erase Israel from a future restoration as we shall see.

until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.

The word “*until*” gives us the understanding of duration. Something will happen at the end of that duration to change the existing state. It is like saying I will continue to write this paper until I am finished. Something will happen at the end of the “*until*”. One important key to allowing the Word to interpret itself is to pay attention to time. “Until” is a “time” word that calls our attention to WHEN something will happen. Israel will be hardened in part, “*until*” tells us that it will not always continue in this state. There will be a change in Israel when “*the full number of the Gentiles has come in.*” This is similar to the pronouncement of our Lord, “*They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*” (Luke 21:24). Again, we have the word “*until*”. When will Jerusalem be restored? When the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. What state will it be in “*until*” then? It will be trampled on by the Gentiles. Paul confirms what Jesus also believed and taught.

Gentiles coming in?

Gentiles coming in to what? There is much speculation here. Much of what others say is that the Gentiles will be the recipients of salvation now. Or that the Gospel has to go out to the Gentiles first. I would look at this from the standpoint of what has happened. When someone believes in Christ today and is saved, one result is that they are now a part of the Church. The Church is made up of Jews and Gentiles, but they no longer hold this distinction once they are in Christ (Gal 3:28). So, where are the Gentiles coming in to? The Church. The Church is certainly not Israel, and is not under the law as was Israel. The Church is not Jewish at all and the time we live in is characterized by the term- Gentiles. Christ calls this time the “*times of the Gentiles.*”

Purpose

I believe we must approach this from the standpoint of purpose. God has a purpose for the Church, just as He has a purpose for Israel. The Church is not complete until it has

reached that fullness, not relating to number, but purpose. When the Church fulfills the purpose God had in His heart from eternity past, it will be fulfilled. *“But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!”* (Rom 11:12). Israel’s fullness refers to the time when they will be restored and fulfill the purpose for which God choose them. Paul uses this concept again when referring to the Church. We are to grow as a Church, *“until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”* (Eph 4:13). When this happens, God’s purpose for the Church here in this world will be complete. Remember, the Church is a part of the mystery, and is not revealed in the Old Testament.

⁹and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, Eph 3:9, 10
See also I Cor 2:6-10

God is accomplishing something GREAT in the Church. This is not our subject here but we should note that it should be known by us since it is our destiny. So, I would look at this part of the verse as the Church reaching the purpose for which it was called into existence. Paul says as much when he mentions that God is working everything out for the good of those who are *“called according to his purpose”* (Rom 8:28c).

²⁶And so all Israel will be saved,

According to this verse, Israel has a future with God. We are talking about national Israel and not the Church. Remember, right now the Church is being built up and will one day be presented to the Lord Jesus as *“a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless”* (Eph 5:27b). This is the final state of the Church, and it does not revert to Israel, but remains distinct as the glorious bride of Christ. It is made of majority Gentiles but also Jews. But, once in the Church, we are baptized into Christ and lose our identity as Gentiles or Jews. If you are in Christ,

²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28

¹³For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 1Cor 12:13

¹¹Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Colossians 3:11

There are no racial distinctions in Christ. Each race has direct access to God. The Church is Christ's body and we are said to be "*In Christ*" which is a unique distinction. "*His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace*" (Eph 2:15). In the Church, there is no superior or inferior position because of race. The Gentiles are coming into the Church, not Israel. So, when this verse says, "*all Israel will be saved,*" it is not referring to Gentiles coming into Israel. What Israel is this referring to? It is the same one where hardening in part has occurred, that is, national Israel. When Paul refers to Israel, he does not have in mind some hybrid organization, he is referring to national Israel. Recall that the hardening is only "*until*" the fullness of the Gentiles come in the Church. Well, after that period of duration, we would expect a change in God's program and that is exactly what we will see. God will save Israel. Do you mean godless Israel? Yes, "*he will turn godlessness away from Jacob*" (Rom 11:26b). This godlessness is that hardening or blindness that has come over Israel. No one will be saved apart from personally putting their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. No one can be reconciled to God without trusting the matter of their soul salvation to Christ.

The Only Way

Many have questioned the idea of God saving Israel at some future date. They wonder how this can be. When we look at Israel today, we see for the most part a rejection of Jesus as their Christ. We know that Jesus is the way, and this from His answer to Thomas, "*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"*" (John 14:6). Now, when Paul says that all Israel will be saved, we must understand what He means. Earlier when he spoke about *hardening in part*, he did not mean that the entire Israel was blinded, but just part. The part he is referring to is the majority. After all, Paul says that he himself was an Israelite. In fact, many others did come to believe in Christ. However, this must have been just a fraction of the whole. A small part of Israel is not enough to turn aside the judgment of God from Israel for rejecting their Christ.

The word is clear that Israel as a nation rejected Christ, their only hope of salvation. John presents a perfect balance to our understanding.

¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— John 1:11, 12

John makes it a point to note that "*his own*" did not receive Him. He is referring to Israel. Then he declares that to those who did "*receive him*", were given the right to become children of God. However, there were not enough believers for God to continue with the nation of Israel. One thing we can trust- God's promise. God looks forward to a future Israel and sees them saved by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Some have even questioned that Israel cannot be distinguished anymore. They refer to the lost tribes and lost records. Thus, they say it is impossible to assemble Israel again. I say to them, leave this to God. When it comes to believers, "*The Lord knows those who are his,*" (2Tim 2:19b). God knows every believer in this world; and He also knows every Israelite. Trust that work to the Lord, for He will gather his elect.

as it is written:

This portion of the text draws us back to something written in the Old Testament. If it is referring to something written, then it is not a part of The Mystery doctrine. Paul notes that after The Mystery has passed, then all Israel will be saved. You may have been looking at the Old Testament to understand end time events, but Paul is pointing out that you must factor The Mystery into your calculations. If you have not factored it in, you will not be able to correctly understand God's program and purposes. You see, if you read the Old Testament, it speaks of the Christ coming into the world. It speaks of many of His characteristics. It speaks of His works, His lineage and His victories. It speaks of how He would be a light to the Gentiles. Then, it speaks of His sufferings and death, His burial and resurrection. It speaks of His ascension and session at the right hand of the Father. It speaks of His coming back to earth and reigning as King. The Old Testament speaks of all these things, but it does *not* speak of The Mystery. It does not speak of the Church and the doctrines that belong to it. So, it appears that God interrupts Israel's revealed, written chronological order of events and inserts this mystery age. He inserts this special time in which we are living right now. After this period, then things will resume to "*as it is written*".

The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

Paul goes on now to tell us how "*all Israel will be saved.*" He quotes from the Old Testament, but he paraphrases what he gleans from primarily Isaiah 59:20, possibly the following passages as well – Isa 11:11-16, Isa 45:17, Isa 54:6-10. From Paul taking us back to prophetic passages in the Old Testament, it gives us further evidence that Israel does in fact have a future. Why would Paul mention that Israel would be hardened in part, but only until the fullness of the Gentiles come into the Church. And then, he directly says that "*all Israel will be saved*"? If the Church and Israel are already one, why is Paul pointing to the future and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies for national Israel? What is meant by the deliverer coming out of Zion? Obviously this is a reference to the Christ coming to deliver Israel at some future time. One important point of interpretation is it is still future.

So then, after the fullness of the Gentiles have come into the Church, all Israel will be saved. The word saved has two major meanings. One is eternal salvation (Eph 2:8). The other is physical deliverance (Matt 24:13). From the passages where Christ comes back, it refers to Him directly coming to rescue those in distress in the world. Jesus Christ does not come to rescue unbelievers; therefore, Israel must have come to faith in Jesus Christ. From this we can see that God saves Israel in two ways, first eternally as they trust their soul salvation to Jesus Christ, and second when He physically comes out of the sky to rescue them from their enemies in the world. We cannot put the cart before the horse

here. Turning godlessness away from Jacob here refers to Israel's salvation as we shall see more in the context later.

⁸ In the whole land," declares the LORD, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. ⁹ This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.' " Zech 13:8, 9

This passage is interesting because it shows *how* God will turn ungodliness away from Jacob. The result of this is an Israel which belongs to God in a right relationship. There are many other passages which speak of God saving national Israel (Jer 23:5, 6; 30: 7-11; 33:14-17). They speak of a deliverer coming to save Israel and them living safely in the land. It is interesting how some will not take literally many of the prophecies concerning Israel. These prophecies are intertwined with the prophecies of Jesus coming into the world. We can look back and be certain that Jesus *did* come into the world literally. Of course, most Christian scholars agree that the prophecies concerning Jesus Christ have been fulfilled literally, for we have the benefit of hindsight. However, prior to Jesus' coming, there was much speculation regarding His coming and work. Is it a spiritual coming? Will He over-throw the Romans? How would He accomplish this? Those questions were answered with a *literal* Jesus actually being born in Bethlehem. What is amazing to me is, after all of this, Jesus says He is coming back to this earth and the speculation begins all over again. How will He come, is it spiritual or literal? Will He redeem Israel? The answers will soon be revealed. If His first coming and the literal nature of the prophecies fulfilled are any indication of *how* God operates, we are in for some *very* interesting events in the future.

²⁷And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

The fact that God would make a new covenant with Israel is not a surprise. The phrase "*covenant with them*" certainly refers to Israel. It can be confirmed in the immediate context as well as in other passages of scripture. Let us take a look at the covenant.

³¹ "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them, "declares the LORD. ³³ "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from

the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."
Jeremiah 31:31-34

Here we find that the new covenant was directed toward Israel. I don't think anyone would disagree with this fact since there was no Church to confuse the issue. Israel understood this as a promise to them and expected it to happen just as God declared by His prophet. It is important to note that Paul refers to this covenant and places the timing of it *after* the fullness of the Gentiles come into the Church. Paul believed in the literal fulfillment of this covenant at a time when Israel was not a people of God. Israel at the time of writing is an enemy of God and the Church as we shall see from the next verse. Paul is certainly not referring to the Church when he says "*this is my covenant with them...*" The "*them*" is referring to national Israel and its fulfillment is still future.

The Church under the New Covenant principles

The Lord has come and died for the sins of the world. The Church is not under the old covenant with its animal sacrifices and temple services. We are under a new covenant. However, we are not under the new covenant to Israel. This is important to note since the prophecy for the new covenant to Israel contains features designed especially for that nation. For instance:

³⁴ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."
Jeremiah 31:34.

Note that under the new covenant to Israel, there will no longer be a need for them to teach his neighbor or brother. No evangelism is going to be necessary under this covenant because "*they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest*". Certainly this is not happening now for we are encouraged to go out and preach the gospel to every creature. We are ambassadors on behalf of God. No evangelism will be needed when the Lord Jesus is present on earth and ruling the world. Just as the new covenant is future, that time when Jesus Christ rules is also future. If you do not believe that Jesus Christ will rule the earth, you will have to figure out for yourself how these verses apply, because they will not fit anywhere else in my opinion. Consequently, the Church is enjoying the benefits of the new covenant now, while the new covenant to Israel is still to be fulfilled at a future date.

²⁸As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account;

We must be sure we understand who "*they*" refers to. By now, I'm sure you have followed along and see that it refers to national Israel. If there was any question or equivocation prior to this, we can be absolutely sure now. They, Israel are enemies of the Church. In fact, they are the ones who brought Christ to Pilate to be crucified. They are

the ones who persecuted the followers of Christ. Saul persecuted the Church with such a vengeance that he got the attention of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul has been contrasting Israel and the Church throughout this passage. Paul really does not have to tell them that Israel is an enemy at the present time. It is a known fact that they hate the gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ. Even though that is so, Paul has been saying that God is not yet finished with Israel. He still has a purpose for them and it will be fulfilled. Even though they currently reject the gospel, they will on day in the future receive it and “*all Israel will be saved...*” Right now, they are hardened in part, but this condition will change later and they will again be God’s people and God will be their God.

but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs,

Israel was chosen by God for a purpose. This is a well know fact by many. Some hate this fact and persecute the Jews because of it. We have all read their rebellion and apostasy in the pages of the Old Testament. We also know that “*He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him*” (John 1:11). National Israel rejected their Christ, but God has not rejected national Israel from His purpose and plans. While they are enemies as far as the gospel is concerned, they still have a purpose to fulfill. The election refers to God’s choosing, His selecting some for a certain purpose. The patriarchs refer to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and I’m sure we could include David in that list. God made promises to them which He plans to fulfill. Israel plays a part in God’s overall plan for mankind. We must remember that God is omniscient. If He makes unconditional promises to a people, they will be fulfilled. God does not have to adjust His plans because of unforeseen happenings. We may have to make adjustments to our plans, but an omniscient God does not. Israel’s failures cannot thwart God’s plans, purposes and motivations for that nation. If they could have, God would have never gone in that direction.

Unconditional Promises

We should take the time to look at least one of the promises from God to Israel. Promises may be conditional or unconditional. If there are conditions they will be stated in the terms of the promise. Let’s review this passage filled with commitments from God.

³⁵This is what the LORD says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar— the LORD Almighty is his name: ³⁶“Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,” declares the LORD, “will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me.” Jeremiah 31:35, 36

The LORD speaks and man can only pay attention. He declares that the sun, moon and stars would have to vanish before Israel would ever cease to be a nation before God. In other words, God will *never* cast away Israel. This is a strong promise to Israel that God

was their God. There is more in the next phrase to confirm His promise which is certainly *unconditional* and guarantees a future for Israel.

³⁷ This is what the LORD says: "Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done," declares the LORD. Jeremiah 31:37

The first analogy, the sun, moon and stars are outside of man's abilities, for certainly nothing man can do will cause these great bodies to vanish. The second analogy is further confirmation and shows the impossibility of God ever casting away Israel even if they are disobedient! No disobedience can cause God to change His mind about Israel- *declares the LORD!* I can see how Israel was very confident in God and their role as the called of God. Man may not be faithful, as Israel has proved throughout their history, but God is faithful to do what He says He will do.

The Mystery is the Answer

We have just said that Israel is not a nation under God now, and has not been for a long time. If this is so, it would appear that the promises in Jeremiah have failed. Not so, for God's word is true and will never fail. What is the answer to this dilemma? The Mystery! We are living in The Mystery age now. This age, Israel knew nothing about and is not on the radar of Israel's future. There was no indication that there would be a Church where Jews and Gentiles are together in one body. In Christ, there is neither Jew or Gentile, but we are one in Christ. If you read the Old Testament, there is no mention of the time period we are living in right now. It was never discussed in the Old Testament because it was hidden in God. It is as though there is a prophecy clock given to us in the Old Testament, and during this mystery age, the clock has stopped. If the clock was still ticking, then there would be a breaking of the promise in Jeremiah. The Mystery is not a part of the timetable and therefore not part of the original promise. Paul made this very clear in the verses we covered. If you are ignorant of this mystery, then you will not understand how to rightly divide the word of truth. The only exception to God dealing with Israel as a nation would be His own, found in Deuteronomy 29, where God promises to discipline the nation for disobedience.

This Generation

There is another statement we can see from our Lord which is definite, "*I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened*" (Matt 24:34). There are many events in the 24th chapter of Matthew, but what is very significant to us is the tribulation *and* the second coming of Christ. There is no doubt that there is a great tribulation coming (v21) which will be greater than all tribulations of the past. Then it clearly says that "*immediately*" after those days Jesus Christ is coming out of the sky into this world (see v27-30). Now, note that all these things happen in "*this generation*" (v34). That means the great tribulation and second coming will happen right in the same generation! If your theology says that the tribulation has already occurred, (with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD. 70), then you have a problem with the words of Jesus here. He says for sure these things will happen in "*this generation*", meaning the same generation. I'm not sure what a generation is, but it cannot be 1935 years!

Therefore, if the second coming has not occurred (and it most certainly has not), then the tribulation has not occurred.

Jesus' Assurance

I would imagine if I was there on the Mount of Olives hearing the Olivet discourse that I would find Jesus' words hard to believe. The disciples questioned him and people are still second guessing His infallible words today. Jesus Himself understood this and gives us confirmation that what He is saying can be trusted. "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away*" (Matt 24:34). He made this statement in the next breath after saying that all these things would happen in *this generation*. I would urge you to trust His words and if you have a theology which contradicts them, drop it and cling to the promises of Jesus. The only way Jesus' words can fit into the events of history is to incorporate The Mystery doctrine into your theology. This age was not revealed (1Cor 10:11; Eph 3:9), the body of Christ was not revealed (Eph 3:6), what we think during this age was not revealed (1Cor 2:7), our fantastic blessings were not revealed (Eph 3:9, 10), and our calling and destiny were not revealed (Eph 1:4, 5). Since we now have and understand of The Mystery, we must modify our understanding of end time events which were given to us in the Old Testament. Many have not done this but have tried to blend the two revelations together. This results in rationalizing His promises and spiritualizing what is literal. Something happened that the Old Testament prophecies did not unfold as prophesied. Instead of assuming things unwarranted, why not listen to God's explanation- The Mystery!

²⁹for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

God's "*gifts and his call*" refer in context to the fact that He called Israel and He blessed them. God will never change His mind about what He promised national Israel. In fact, far from God turning His back upon Israel, our text says He *loves* them, even though we read that they are *enemies* as far as the gospel is concerned! This may shed light on the phrase "*love your enemies...*" (Matt 5:44). We can expect man to fail. We can expect that man would cast away national Israel for all they have done. However, God is not a man and He is faithful. Many have transferred their feelings of disappointment and rejection of Israel to God. If we want to know what God thinks of Israel, we can read the word. God will *never* recall, repeal or revoke what He promises Israel. We should not have to say this at all when God is the subject, but we must be clear since some may get the idea that He has turned His back on Israel.

Salvation a gift

It is interesting to note that salvation is a gift given by God (Eph 2:8). God will never withdraw this gift in spite of the fact some have the belief that it can be withdrawn. The gift is the new life itself in Christ. This is certainly not the subject, but we can make the application that God fully knows what we are going to do when we receive the gift of salvation. Some are so disobedient that they think God will certainly not save them in the end. Thank God His gifts are irrevocable! I do not say this to try to put one over on God, or use His kindness for weakness. We must remember, we don't have God, but God has

us! We belong to God (1Cor 6:19, 20). As far as Israel is concerned, God is not surprised by their failure and even predicted it. He will not revoke their special calling and gifts because they failed. God knew they would fail *when* He called them and yet He still called them. He will fulfill his purpose in calling them; of this we can be sure.

³⁰Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience,

The Gentiles were characterized by disobedience. They were the enemies of Israel in most cases. Gentiles were “*strangers to the covenants of promise*” (Eph 2:12). The Jews developed a superiority complex and looked down on the Gentiles. God was using the Jews to bring the gospel to the world. However, they certainly failed at this task. God has always had his visible people in the world. God has a physical witness in the world in every generation. For many years, Israel was God’s Olive Tree. However, when Israel failed to receive their Christ, God broke off the natural branches and grafted in the Gentiles, a “*wild olive shoot*.” (Rom 11:17). Gentiles were now grafted into the visible people of God into the world.

The Olive Tree

We need to discuss just what exactly is this Olive Tree mentioned in Romans 11. The way I see the analogy of the Olive Tree is the visible people of God in the world. The root of the tree is Jesus Christ, who is holy. Israel is said to be the “*natural branches*”, which were broken off because of unbelief. They are the natural branches because of Jesus Christ, who came from Israel. Israel and the hope of believers of all previous ages were built on Christ and the promises that He would one day come. Prior to Israel, the Olive tree was those in the world who believed the promises of the coming Christ, from Adam to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Olive tree is always based on Jesus Christ, either as a promise or Him coming into the world. This is why the natural branches are broken off, “*they were broken off because of unbelief*” (Rom 11:20). You cannot be a part of the Olive tree if you do not believe in the Root. God’s plan changed as “*hardness*” came over Israel, and He turned to the Gentiles.

The Jews were natural branches because their entire culture was based on the coming of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Their scriptures, their promises, their covenants were all based on the Christ. Their holy days, their sanctuary itself and the sanctuary services were all based on Christ. The natural branches are those whose entire culture speaks of Christ. However, “*He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him*” (John 1:11). Therefore, they were broken off.

The Olive Tree is not Israel

When Israel was a nation under God, they were the Olive Tree. However, we cannot exclusively say that the Olive Tree is Israel. For instance, the Gentiles (*wild olive shoot*) are grafted into the Olive Tree. What are they grafted into? Israel? No. The Church is now the Olive Tree. Gentiles are not grafted into Israel at all. We are not under the law and certainly not living in a Jewish manor. Paul confronted Peter concerning this very

thing, he told Peter, “*You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?*” (Gal 2:14). The Church is not Israel and is not under the law at all. The Gentiles must not boast in their position just as the Israel should not have boasted in theirs. If the Gentiles fail to properly represent God in the world, God they also can be broken off. Branches are broken off because of unbelief. The visible people in the world can be removed if they are not properly representing God in this world.

Repent

God always has his visible people in the world. If, through disobedience, they do not properly represent God in this world, God will warn and discipline them. He warned Israel many times in the Old Testament (see Deut 29), and God did administer His discipline to Israel. When God was ready to send His Christ into the world, He sent a herald in the person of John the Baptist. John called the nation to repentance in order that they might receive their Christ. In the same way, individual local Churches are now God’s visible witnesses in the world. However, God reserves the right to discipline as He sees fit. “*For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either*” (Rom 11:21). It is a fundamental role of the Christian Church to represent the Lord Jesus Christ in the world. In fact, the Church is said to be by analogy “*his body*”. Therefore, the warning is carried forward to the Church, the visible witness of God in the world. “*Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off*” (Rom 11:22). To represent the Lord is an awesome responsibility. Just as Israel failed at times, the Church would also find itself under the warning and discipline of God.

⁴Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.

⁵Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place. Revelation 2: 4, 5.

³¹so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you.

They, Israel have become disobedient through their willful blindness. Currently, their state is characterized by disobedience, even though there are many who have understood and believed in Christ. Through their disobedience, God took the opportunity to unfold His plan for the Church. Notice the words, “*they*” (Israel) and “*you*” (Church) again in this verse, clearly identifying the two significant groups. Just when it was the darkest for Israel, God had a hidden plan which took advantage of even the negative decisions of that disobedient nation. Perhaps this is what it means when David says; “*surely the wrath of man will praise thee*” (Psalm 76:10). God cannot be *defeated* by any creature from His hand. Satan thought he embarrassed God when he finally managed to get Jesus Christ on that cruel cross. But God had another plan and in fact, it was His finest moment. “*And*

having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col 2:15).

Mercy

The Jews may now receive mercy because of the mercy expressed toward Gentiles. For many years, Gentiles could receive mercy as a result of the Jews. As the Jews look toward what God is doing in the Church, they will perhaps see that “*salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious*” (Rom 11:11b). I believe that they will receive mercy just as it is written, “*all Israel will be saved*”. They will finally receive their Christ, the same Christ which has been preached these many years.

³²For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

God’s plan is magnificent! There is great wisdom in the plan of God. I think Paul goes back to the fact that all men are condemned at birth and receive a nature that is disobedient. There are no exceptions, and since all men are equally lost, God can dispense His mercy to all. If some were condemned and others were not, there would have to be two ways of dealing with man, one way for Jews and another for Gentiles. “*What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin*” (Rom 3:9). There is no favoritism with God when it comes to salvation of Jew or Gentile, for “*There is no difference*” (Rom 3:22b). There is no need for arrogance or boasting for any group since God has not given any advantage to either group. Israel represented God’s Olive Tree and now Gentiles are holding forth the torch. It is like an Olympic relay race and the baton is the Olive Tree. The Gentiles started out with the baton from Adam to Abraham. But then, it was passed off to the Israel and they ran with it for a long time. However, they passed it to the Church and we are now running our part of the race. Later, we will hand it off to Israel again and they will finish out the race. In all this, God always has His visible witness in the world.

In Conclusion

There may be one objection in the minds of many concerning the idea of spiritual Israel. We developed why this is not the case, but I would like to cover another passage which many may use to support that belief. Many will refer to the passage in Galatians where Abraham’s seed is in view.

¹⁶The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed, meaning one person, who is Christ. Gal 3:16

The idea many get from this is that we who are Abraham's seed are spiritual Israel. However, Paul is making the point here that the promise is not to "seeds" but to one person- Christ. The word "seeds" plural would refer to the descendants of Abraham, or Israel. The promises of salvation were given to Abraham and Jesus Christ. These promises precede the law, which Israel took pride in and thought they were to receive the promises *because* they were the recipients of the law. Paul's point is to show that the promises are not dependant on keeping the law; therefore, Gentiles could be justified by faith, just as was Abraham.

²⁶You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Gal 3:26-29

God has united us with His Son in such a way that we are said to be *one* with Him is very interesting. We are sons of God. This is so because we have believed in Christ. It does not matter if you are a Jew or Gentile as long as you belong to Christ. Notice another benefit of this is that we are said to be "*Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*" What does it mean for us to be Abraham's seed? It certainly does not mean that we are Israel or spiritual Israel. He described what and who the "*seed*" was in verse 16. The seed is Christ. This verse is saying that you are so united to Christ, that you are here identified as the SEED (Christ), not many seeds, but the seed, who is Christ. Many have said that we are Abraham's spiritual descendants. But this thought is the same thought the Jews had, and Paul corrected this by saying that it referred to ONE seed, not many. We, who belong to Christ, are not many descendents, but ONE in Christ. In fact, Paul is trying to tell us of the uniqueness of the Church being united to Christ in a special relationship which was never revealed to Israel.

We have gone through the scriptures and found that we cannot erase Israel from God's landscape. We have studied some key verses in Romans 11 and found that Paul is convinced that Israel has *not* been rejected by God. Paul is not looking for the promises of Israel to be fulfilled in the Church, for he looks beyond the Church to a future time when Israel will again be a nation before God. If you look closely in Romans 11, you will see that Paul sees two groups. It is very clear that these groups are not united in one, but in fact, Israel is said to be our enemies. What is interesting here is those same enemies are also loved by God because of the patriarchs and that God will never revoke his calling and gifts regarding Israel. Paul explains how this whole thing works, and gives great detail. Many theologies have been created to explain what Paul here explains in detail. We should simply adopt his divinely inspired explanation.

I realize that many on both sides of this issue appeal to the same passages in Romans 11 to support their view. I do not write this as the last word on the subject. In fact, there are many other passages to consider which bear on this subject. Let's use this discourse as an introduction and basis to discover the subject in more detail. I would like to know what questions you have, and have an opportunity to answer them (see email address

below). I would encourage you to trust God to get to the bottom of this important and directional issue. Do not allow this to linger without taking the energy to see it to the end. We are in God's hands and He is the one who has the wisdom and knowledge. He is pleased to reveal His will to us according to our desire to know.

³³Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ³⁴"Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" ³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. Romans 11:33-36

In Christ, Doug
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