

God's Gracious Covenant With Israel: The Foundation For Worldwide National Covenanting #17 (Pt. 5)

Romans 11:26; Matthew 21:43

November 22, 2009

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In the past few sermons, we have considered how various interpretive systems understand that prophesied time of millennial blessing wherein the fullness of the nations and all Israel as a nation shall come into the Visible Church to live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. In our brief overview, we have considered the Amil, Premil, and Historic Postmil interpretive systems. This Lord's Day we will consider another distinctive interpretive system identified as Preterism. Let's first briefly consider what Preterism is and then review Romans 11 to see how that text refutes Preterism.

I. What Is Preterism?

A. Preterism as an interpretive system teaches that all or almost all of the prophesied events as found in the Book of Revelation have already occurred in the past from our present frame of reference. Although these prophesied events in the Book of Revelation were for the most part yet future when John the Apostle was given this inspired revelation, yet according to the Preterist interpretive system, all or almost all of the prophesied events in the Book of Revelation were soon to happen from John's temporal perspective and were fulfilled around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d.

B. There are two branches of Preterism: Full Preterism and Partial Preterism. The difference between Full Preterism and Partial Preterism may be summarized in this way.

1. **Full Preterism** promotes the view that ALL prophesied events in the Book of Revelation, and for that matter, all prophesied events in Scripture including the Second Coming of Christ, the final resurrection, the final judgment, and the new heaven and new earth, were all fulfilled in the events surrounding 70 a.d. so that there is no Biblical prophecy that must yet be fulfilled after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d. (we'll consider Full Preterism in greater detail in a future sermon).

2. **Partial Preterism** states that ALMOST ALL of the Book of Revelation is already fulfilled from our present frame of reference (but not entirely or absolutely all as Full Preterists allege). Partial Preterists may disagree among themselves as to which portions of Revelation 20-22 are already fulfilled or not fulfilled, and as to when in the past these events were fulfilled (some seeing the time of fulfillment to pertain to only the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d., other Partial Preterists seeing the time of fulfillment to include the events of 70 a.d. but also to extend beyond that to the cessation of Pagan Rome's persecution of Christians in and around 313 a.d. at the Edict of Milan).

C. It is generally recognized that Preterism was first systematized by the Roman Catholic Jesuit, Luis de Alcasar, in his commentary on Revelation (1614 a.d.). Alcasar applied the principles of Preterism to the Book of Revelation in identifying the Beast, the False Prophet and Mystery Babylon with past historical events in order to shield the papacy from the Protestant interpretive system (called "Historicism") which identified the man of sin, the antichrist, the False Prophet and Mystery Babylon with the papacy and the Roman Catholic Church. Even Professor Moses Stuart, one of the chief and earliest proponents of Preterism in the United States, noted in his commentary on Revelation (1845 a.d.) the following in regard to the Jesuit, Alcasar (Vol. 1, pp. 463,464):

It might of course be expected, that the Romish church would not be idle, while the Protestant interpreters were so busy in applying the beast and the false prophet of the Apocalypse to the papacy. . .

But no one had ever developed this idea [of Preterism—GLP] fully, and endeavored to illustrate and enforce it, in such a way as Alcasar. . .

It might be expected, that a commentary which thus freed the Romish church from the assaults of Protestants, would be popular among the advocates of the papacy. Alcasar met, of course, with general approbation and reception among the Romish community.

D. Before moving on, let me note that just as Preterism was systematized by a Jesuit (Alcasar) as a Counter-Reformation defense of the papacy by looking to a Roman Emperor (rather than to the papacy) as the antichrist, so likewise was Futurism systematized in the Book of Revelation by another Jesuit, Francisco Ribera, who published his commentary on Revelation (1590) wherein he likewise seeks to deflect the Scriptural light of Protestant Historicism from the papacy and makes references to the Beast and the False Prophet (in the Book of Revelation) to a yet future period of 3 ½ literal years, which would occur immediately before the Second Coming of Christ. Futurism is the view presently embraced by Dispensational Premillennialists (which has been popularized in the “Left Behind” series of books and movies). In sermons #12 and #15 of this present series, you will find Premillennialism briefly refuted from Scripture.

E. I’ll say more about Historicism in a future sermon, but let me add that Historicism as an interpretive system is the classic position of Protestantism that was systematized at the time of the Protestant Reformation. This interpretive system considers the prophesied events of Revelation as fulfilled throughout Church history (from the time of John to the Second Coming of Christ) not merely in the past (as the Preterist does) nor primarily in the future (as the Futurist does). Historicism received the hatred of the Church of Rome because it identified the Roman Catholic Church and its papacy with the False Prophet and his

image and with mystery Babylon as found in the Book of Revelation. In fact, one of the texts of Scripture so frequently used to justify separation from the Romish Church was the command found in Revelation 18:4 (“And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”) which the Protestant Reformers universally applied to the corrupt and unfaithful Church of Rome. This Scriptural truth was declared as a confessional article to be embraced by all Christians in 1647 in the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith (25:6):

There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ: nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof: but it that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God.

Having now given a brief overview of Preterism, let us consider for the remainder of our time how Partial Preterists interpret Romans 11, and review the Scriptural reasons from that text that refute the Partial Preterist position. In sermons to follow, we will continue our study of Preterism (both Partial Preterism and Full Preterism) and its refutation from various Scriptural texts in the Book of Revelation and elsewhere.

II. Partial Preterism and Romans 11.

A. Since we have already looked very carefully at Romans 11 in past sermons in this series (especially sermons #1-#7), I will now only mention how a Partial Preterist would approach this portion of God’s Word and then summarize why I believe the Partial Preterist interpretive system falls short in doing justice to the inspired words of Paul in Romans 11.

B. Although there is no uniform, monolithic interpretation of Romans 11 by all Partial Preterists, there is a common thread that seems

to tie Partial Preterists together when they come to Romans 11, and it is this: God is finished redemptively with Israel AS A NATION as indicated by the destruction and dispersion of Israel AS A NATION in 70 a.d.

1. According to the Partial Preterist, when the Lord prophesied that the Kingdom of God (i.e. the Visible Church) would be taken from Israel AS A NATION and would be given predominantly to Gentile nations (Matthew 21:43), it is usually understood by Partial Preterists that this was the taking of the Kingdom of God from Israel AS A NATION in a final and complete sense.

2. Likewise, the Partial Preterist sees a final judgment upon Israel AS A NATION when the Lord Jesus pronounces His woe upon Israel in Matthew 23, particularly in verses 33-38 (which I fully agree was fulfilled in 70 a.d., see also 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 where similar strong language is used against Israel AS A NATION).

3. According to the Partial Preterist, this is a message of final judgment upon Israel AS A NATION which was realized in 70 a.d. Moreover, according to the Partial Preterist, the Kingdom of God was forever taken from the Old Israel (i.e. Israel AS A NATION) and was forever given to a New Israel under the New Covenant composed of all those who trust in Him (predominantly Gentiles but also a remnant of believing Jews).

4. Now I want to affirm (as a Historic Postmillennialist) that I firmly believe that Christ brought this great and unspeakable judgment upon Israel AS A NATION in 70 a.d. for her rejection of Christ and the Gospel and that the Kingdom of God was taken from Israel AS A NATION. However, I do not believe the Scripture teaches that the Kingdom of God was taken from Israel AS A NATION permanently and forever or that Israel AS A NATION was permanently and forever cast out of the Visible Church of Jesus Christ, but rather that the Kingdom of God was taken away from her temporarily and she was temporarily blinded and temporarily cast out of the Visible Church of Christ.

5. I also firmly believe that the Lord did give the Kingdom of God to a New Israel consisting of predominantly Gentiles with a remnant of elect Jews under the New Covenant. However, I also believe there is nothing in any of these passages of judgment that make the judgment upon Israel AS A NATION permanent. In fact, Romans 11 and other New Testament passages (e.g. Matthew 23:39; Luke 21:24; Acts 1:11; 2 Corinthians 3:14-15 which are developed in Sermon #7 in this present series) teach the present judgment upon Israel AS A NATION will be lifted and the Lord will pour out His undeserved mercy upon this rebellious covenanted nation once again in receiving her back into her olive tree (which is the Visible Church of Christ) where she will stand together with all the nations of the world on an equal footing within the Visible Church of Christ by the Spirit of God and the Gospel of Jesus.

C. Thus, the Partial Preterist will generally understand the promises made to Israel in Romans 11 (and chiefly in Romans 11:26, “And so all Israel shall be saved”) in either one of two ways.

1. The first way some Partial Preterists would interpret Romans 11:26 is that God is presently saving a remnant of Israel that are described by Paul as “a remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:5). This remnant of Jews that are presently being saved is (according to the Partial Preterist) the “all Israel” that shall be saved in Romans 11:26 rather than the nation of Israel.

2. The second way some Partial Preterists would interpret Romans 11:26 is that God will in the future convert a vast majority of individual ethnic and racial Israelites that are scattered throughout the many nations of the world. However, this vast ingathering of Jews will not form a covenanted nation, for as a covenanted nation Israel is finished in God’s redemptive plan since the time of Jerusalem’s destruction in 70 a.d.

3. Thus, in the first view a small remnant of individual Jews are converted to Christ, whereas in the second view a vast majority of individual Jews are converted to Christ. But in neither view is Israel as a covenanted nation converted by Christ and brought into the Visible Church of Jesus Christ (as is taught by Historic Postmillennialists).

D. I believe both of these views of Partial Preterists are in error, for both of these views have (in my judgment) missed Paul's point in Romans 11: The same Israel AS A NATION that was cast out of the Visible Church of Jesus Christ (or from whom the Kingdom was taken according Matthew 21:43) is the same Israel AS A NATION that will be saved and received back into the Visible Church of Jesus Christ. Let us review and briefly summarize the reasons why the text in Romans 11:26 must be interpreted to mean that "all Israel AS A NATION shall be saved."

1. Who is the Israel referred to in Romans 10:21 ("But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people")? It is clear that Paul refers here to the unbelief and disobedience of Israel AS A NATION in rejecting the invitation of God through His Prophets. Paul is here citing Isaiah 65:2 where clearly the Prophet refers to the Nation of Israel.

2. As Paul then begins Romans 11:1 with the question, "Hath God cast away his people", the people in view must be the same rebellious people referred to in Romans 10:21 to whom God through His Ministers stretched out His hands all the day long, namely, the people of Israel AS A NATION. Thus, Paul begins Romans 11 dealing with the all important question as to whether God has cast away His people Israel AS A NATION.

3. Furthermore, in Romans 11:2-3 Elijah the Prophet intercedes against Israel AS A NATION (the northern kingdom) who had killed the Prophets and rejected the Gospel at that time.

4. Paul then teaches in Romans 11:5-7 that just as in the days of Elijah so in the days of the Apostles there was a remnant that God had chosen to save by His free grace out of the rebellious and unbelieving people and Nation of Israel.

5. Paul states in Romans 11:7: “Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it.” Here again, the term “Israel” must refer to the whole body of the rebellious Nation since the “election” (i.e. the chosen ones) was a smaller remnant of individual Israelites (like Paul himself) who were taken out of Israel AS A NATION.

6. Now as we come to the end of Romans 11:7, Paul teaches that although this smaller elect remnant of individual Israelites taken out of Israel was being saved and would continue to be saved, the greater part of Israel AS A NATION were blinded (“and the rest were blinded” or hardened in their rebellion and unbelief). This theme of God’s judgment upon Israel AS A NATION in hardening their collective heart and blinding their collective eyes for their unbelief continues in Romans 11:8-10. Note that all of the pronouns in the third person (“they”, “them”, “their”) refer to Israel AS A NATION being hardened to Christ and the Gospel even as we see to this very day.

7. Having demonstrated that Israel as a collective body and Nation have been hardened in their unbelief and rebellion against God, Paul asks the question in Romans 11:11, “Have they [i.e. unbelieving Israel AS A NATION—GLP] stumbled that they should fall?” Paul asks the very question that needs to be answered: “Has the nation of Israel stumbled in their unbelief and rebellion in order that they might permanently fall, never again to be restored from this fall?” The Partial Preterist says “Yes, Israel AS A NATION has been permanently hardened never again to be restored from their fall.” However, Paul’s answers in the strongest words possible, “God forbid” or literally “Let it not be” (just as in Romans 11:1). The answer to this question should completely settle the matter as to whether God is finished redemptively with Israel AS A

NATION: God forbid! To the contrary, God has wisely intended through the fall of Israel AS A NATION to provoke Israel (AS A NATION) to jealousy by bringing Gentile nations into Covenant with Him by means of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

8. We now move to two conditional sentences (in Romans 11:12 and Romans 11:15) that clearly set the stage for what is meant by Paul when he says in Romans 11:26, “And so ALL ISRAEL shall be saved.”

a. The first conditional sentence (Romans 11:12) states in the IF part of the sentence (the protasis) what is presently true, “Now IF the fall of them [who is the “them”? Israel AS A NATION—GLP] be the riches of the world [i.e. the spiritual riches of the Gospel to the Gentile nations throughout the world—GLP], and the diminishing of them [i.e. the loss or overthrow of Israel AS A NATION—GLP] the riches of the Gentiles.” And now we move to the THEN part of the conditional sentence (the apodosis) which holds before us what shall happen in the future: then (implied) “how much more their [Israel’s i.e. the nation of Israel’s—GLP] fullness?” In other words, how much more shall the Gospel blessings be realized among the Gentile nations of the world at that time in the future when that same nation of Israel that fell and was overthrown due to unbelief and rebellion during the time of Paul (and into the present time as well) comes to Christ in her full number? If the Gentiles were blessed by the fall of Israel AS A NATION, just wait until you see the blessing upon the Gentile nations throughout the whole world when Israel AS A NATION comes to Christ in her full number.

b. The second conditional sentence (Romans 11:15) states in the IF part of the sentence (protasis) what is presently true, “For IF the casting away of them [who is the “them”? Israel AS A NATION in accordance with Matthew 21:43—GLP] be the reconciling of the world” then (implied) “what shall the receiving of them be [the receiving of whom? Israel AS A NATION when she is received back into the Visible Church—GLP], but life from the dead?” In other words, when Israel AS A

NATION is received back into Visible Church of Jesus Christ through a national covenanted profession of her faith in Jesus Christ, it will be like a spiritual resurrection of souls that have come to life throughout the Gentile nations of the world.

9. In the interest of time, go with me to Romans 11:25 where the last reference to ISRAEL (in Romans 11) is mentioned just prior to the statement of Paul in Romans 11:26 (“And all ISRAEL shall be saved”). Paul states a mystery in Romans 11:25 (i.e. a truth that is made known only by the revealed will of God in Scripture). Paul declares, “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel [this is the same blindness referred to in Romans 11:7, and this is the same Israel AS A NATION that was blinded according to Romans 11:7 and throughout the whole chapter of Romans 11—GLP], until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.” Here in the immediately preceding verse to Romans 11:26, it is stated that this blindness that God has sent upon Israel as a Nation (during the present time) due to her unbelief and rebellion against Christ and the Gospel is “in part” because it will only continue “until” the time that the fullness of the Gentile nations comes into the Visible Church of Christ.

10. Thus, it is the same Israel AS A NATION that is meant in the immediately following verse when Paul concludes, “And so all Israel shall be saved” (Romans 11:26). And Paul does not merely say, “And so ISRAEL shall be saved.” That would have been enough to seal the point of Israel’s future salvation AS A NATION, but Paul goes even further and states unequivocally, “And so ALL ISRAEL shall be saved” i.e. not only the remnant of Israel AS A NATION will be saved in that time of millennial blessing, but “all Israel” AS A NATION will be converted and brought into the Visible Church of Jesus Christ.

11. It is the same nation of Israel that is called “Jacob” in Romans 11:27 and whose sins will be taken away according to God’s

gracious and everlasting covenant with them (Isaiah 27:9; Jeremiah 31:31 ff.).

12. Finally, it is the same nation of Israel that was at the time of Paul (and is at the present time) an enemy of the Gospel and of the Church of Christ (*de facto*) that yet was (and still is) at the very same time beloved by God due to her election AS A COVENANTED NATION (*de jure*) according to Romans 11:28. And for that reason the gifts and calling of God to Israel AS A COVENANTED NATION are without repentance (Romans 11:29).

13. Thus, I submit that when Partial Preterists approach Romans 11:26 with any other conception of Israel in mind than Israel AS A NATION, they are importing that conception from their own minds and not from the Scriptural context which is so clear in Romans 11. Even in the context of pronounced judgment upon Israel AS A NATION (in Matthew 23) is the confident hope of her salvation AS A NATION (in Matthew 23:39) as well in passages like Acts 1:11 and 2 Corinthians 3:14-15. Judgment “in part” (i.e. temporarily) has come upon Israel AS A NATION, not judgment permanently and forever.

Dear ones, if God is able to graft Israel AS A NATION back into covenant faithfulness to Christ after thousands of years of apostasy and unbelief and to do so on the basis of Covenant promises made to Abraham some four thousand years ago, is He not able to graft your covenant children back into the Kingdom of Christ from which they have turned to go in their own way through apostasy and unbelief? And just as God has not forgotten His Covenant with National Israel, so he will not forget His Covenant with any Nation (including the Solemn League and Covenant made with Britain and all her dominions).

Dear ones, let us always pray according to the Covenant. Let us always lift up our petitions and supplications to God on the basis of His Covenant.

When Moses acted as a Mediator for Israel in turning the just and holy wrath of God away from Israel and exalted the mercy of God upon an undeserving people in Exodus 32, to what did Moses appeal? He appealed to God's Covenant with Israel. And when the greater Mediator to which Moses pointed (the Lord Jesus Christ) turned the wrath of God away from us so that the mercy of God might be forever poured out upon us, it was and always will be on the basis of the Covenant of Grace which our Mediator perfectly fulfilled for us. Therefore, let us never despair as a covenant people, for God will remember His Covenant of Grace.

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