

Is God Finished with Israel?

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Series on Israel

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Romans 11:26. The title of this first in a series of messages on Israel, "Is God Finished with Israel?"

26 And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

The nation of Israel is in the news today largely because of her struggle with the Palestinian terrorists. The word of God teaches that ancient Israel was God's chosen nation and that God has a special program and purpose for her to fulfill in history but Israel rejected Jesus Christ, her Messiah. When he came, they rejected him. John 1:11 says that, "He came unto his own," meaning Israel, "and his own received him not." Ultimately Israel crucified her Messiah. At that time, the Lord Jesus told her in Matthew 23:38 that, "your house is left unto you desolate." And in Matthew 27:25 the people of Israel said to Pilate concerning the Lord Jesus whose crucifixion they were demanding, "His blood be on us, and on our children."

For this reason, time and again throughout history, Christians have found themselves asking is God finished with Israel? Many Christians teach that God is through with the Jews and that he's not going to have anything else to do with them. These people believe that God has abandoned the nation of Israel. This question came up in the ministry of the Apostle Paul not long after the death and resurrection of our Lord. In Romans 11:1 Paul asks the question, "Hath God cast away his people?" So important is this question that Paul included three chapters, chapters 9, 10 and 11, in his letter to the church at Rome to discuss God's dealings with the nation of Israel. Paul was anxious that the Gentile believers should not be ignorant of God's dealings with Israel, and if we had no other chapter in all of God's word to tell us about God's program for Israel, Romans 11 would be sufficient.

In our text which is found in this 11th chapter, Paul answers this question: is God finished with Israel? In this message, I shall seek to explain Paul's answer to this question by asking three more questions in relation to our text, "And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob."

First question: who is Israel here? And my friends, this is probably the most important question that needs to be asked if we're going to understand God's dealings with Israel. Who is Israel to whom Paul refers in Romans 9, 10 and 11? Well, the word "Israel" occurs 68 times in the New Testament. In almost every case, it refers to the old covenant nation or the physical descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. In Romans 9, 10 and 11, there are 12 references to Israel, Israelite or Israelites. If you'd like to write these down, Romans 9:4, twice in Romans 9:6, twice in Romans 9:27, Romans 9:31, Romans 10:1, also in the 10th chapter verses 19 and 21, then Romans 11:1, 2, 7, 25, 26. Let me read them again Romans 9:4, twice in Romans 9:6, twice in Romans 9:27, Romans 9:31, Romans 10:1, 19, 21, Romans 11:1, 2, 7, 25, 26. Now when Paul speaks of Israel in Romans 9, 10 and 11, he is clearly speaking of ethnic Israel. He is speaking of Jews in distinction from Gentiles.

Now let's read some verses in these three chapters that clearly identify Israel as ethnic Israel in distinction from the Gentiles. Look first at Romans 9:3-5. Note very carefully that there's always a contrast between the Jews or Israel and the Gentiles. Paul is writing,

3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: 4 Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; 5 Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

Now obviously if words mean anything, Paul is speaking here of the physical or natural seed of Israel when he refers to Israel as "my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites."

Then look at Romans 9:30 and 31.

30 What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. 31 But Israel [by way of contrast], which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.

Did you see the contrast? The contrast requires that if Gentiles means Gentiles, then Jews or Israel means Jews or Israel.

Next look at Romans 11:1.

1 I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Now look at verse 25 in Romans 11. The scripture here says,

25 that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

And so it is clear from these statements that Paul is speaking of ethnic Israel as distinct from the Gentiles. An important rule for proper scriptural interpretation is that the same word in the same context has the same meaning throughout. In other words, if the same word occurs in a list of scriptures or a passage of scripture, if the same word occurs over and over again it always has the same meaning all the way throughout. That's one of the cardinal rules of scripture interpretation. This is certainly true of the term "Israel" in Romans 9 through 11. It would be a violation of this rule of interpretation if Israel in verse 26 had a different meaning than Israel in verse 25.

Israel in our text does not refer to the church. Roman Catholicism teaches that all of Israel's promises, all the promises God gave to Israel in the Old Testament and all their blessings have been transferred to their church, and so they say that the church at Rome is Israel now. Amillennialism is a current theological fad or trend. Did you know that a lot of people are being swept up in this trend today. Amillennialism is a johnny-come-lately on the theological scene. Amillennialism came into existence about the turn of the 19th century into the 20th century and it came into being as an offshoot of postmillennialism. It's something new. Amillennial means "no millennium." The word atheist, a-theist, means "a-no, theist-god, no god." Atheist means "no god." Amillennial means "no millennium." Amillennialists argue that since Israel sinned and rejected Christ the first time he came, she has forever forfeited her place as God's people and her blessings have been transferred to the church.

Now I'm going easy on them. I'm just telling you exactly what they teach. Any one of them would be proud to stand up and say, "Yes, that's what we teach." Amillennialists teach that God has cast away his people Israel and he has taken unto him the church instead. In spite of Paul's emphatic denials, these people teach that God has cast away his people Israel. In their system, the earthly blessings promised to Israel in the Old Testament are spiritualized for the church. I find that quite interesting because they're willing to take those blessings that God promised to Israel and apply them to the church but they leave the curses that God threatened on Israel literally to Israel. They want to take the blessings literally and they want to transfer them to the church but they want to leave the curses over there with the Jews. These people are saying that Christ transferred Israel from being a physical nation in the Old Testament to being a spiritual nation in the church.

Most of our so-called Reformed brethren also teach that ethnic Israel has no future in the plan of God for his people. One of the main differences in Baptists and those who call themselves Reformed is that the Reformed believe that Old Testament eschatology or prophecy concerning the future of Israel is fulfilled in the church. The fundamental question on which Baptists and the Reformed have divided is what is the church. The Old Testament church, as well as the New Testament church, are founded on the covenant of grace made with Abraham according to these Reformed brethren. The New Testament church is just an extension and further development of the Abrahamic covenant, they

teach. The Reformed view of the church is that from the time of its formal organization under Abraham until the end of the world, the church continues to be one church. Israel was the church in the Old Testament, the church is Israel in the New Testament.

God's word, however, distinguishes between Israel and the church. The church is not the same as Israel, first of all, because the church was explained by the Apostle Paul as a mystery of God. God's word specifically states, and I wish we had time to read these, write them down, Ephesians 3:1-10, and Colossians 1:24-27. Ephesians 3:1-10. Colossians 1:24-27. God's word specifically states that the church was a mystery. Paul says the church in his day was a mystery. Now we have a different concept of mystery when we hear that word today. A mystery to us is a whodunit, but the biblical word "mystery" means "something unknown or unrevealed up until the time it was revealed." In a mystery, the unknown is made known and so Paul specifically states in these two passages that the church was a mystery not known in Old Testament times.

The church was both non-existent and unrevealed in the Old Testament. Now let me just say that again in plain everyday language: the church is not in the Old Testament. You will not find the church revealed in the Old Testament. The church is something new to the New Testament. The church is something entirely new in the New Testament and is distinctly different from Israel in the Old Testament. The church is a radical departure from the Old Testament order instead of being an extension of that old order into the new order. Now one of the outstanding features of the Baptist view of the church is that there is a radical break between the testaments rather than a continuation of the old into the new as an external form. Now it is true that the Old Testament did announce the gospel to the Gentiles. That's true, but it did not announce the church.

Secondly, Israel is not the church because the Lord Jesus spoke of building his church as future. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus spoke of his church as future organism when he announced "upon this rock I will build my church." That's future, isn't it? I will. Jesus Christ himself said that he would build his church and at that time the Old Testament had already been closed for 400 years. The church was not under construction before the coming of Jesus Christ into this world. The New Testament church is an entirely new creation, it is therefore not a continuation of or an extension of Old Testament Israel.

Thirdly, Israel is not the church because the church today is made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Today, Christ is forming from both Jews and Gentiles an entirely new body called the church or the assembly. Paul says in Ephesians 2:11-22 that the church is an entirely new entity made up of elect Jews and elect Gentiles. Israel as a nation, Israel is a nation, Israel is an ethnic group. The church is Christ's assembly. Israel did not become the church. Israel did not merge with the church. The church did not replace Israel in God's plan. This present gospel age is not a fulfillment of the great promises to Israel in the old covenant. Old Testament Israel continued into Christian times as a separate entity from the church.

In the New Testament, Christians as a group are never called spiritual Israel. Nowhere does the New Testament say that the church is now spiritual Israel. I hear preachers

telling that all the time. I can't find it in the New Testament. God's promises to Israel cannot be spiritualized away, my friends. All the prophecies concerning Israel are literal and accurate. God has separate programs for Israel and for the church even though people in both are always saved the same way. That brings us to the second question we need to consider in answering the question is God finished with Israel: what does God have in store for Israel in the future? The climax of this 11th chapter of Romans is in our text in verse 26 where Paul says, "And so all Israel shall be saved."

The spiritual condition of Israel in this present age is according to God's word one of spiritual blindness. Look at what Paul says in Romans 11:25,

25 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, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

Then in verse 8 of this same chapter, Paul says of the spiritual condition of Israel in this present age,

8 ...God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear; unto this day.

Right now, most Jews are in a condition of spiritual blindness as scripture says. Then in 2 Corinthians 3:14-15, Paul says of Israel in this present age that there is a veil which remains on their hearts so that they do not understand the word of God. Look at that, 2 Corinthians 3:14-15. It speaks of Israel's present spiritual condition. 2 Corinthians 3:14-15,

14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. 15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart.

Paul says in verse 25 of Romans 11 that this spiritual blindness of the nation of Israel is only partial. You know, some people mistakenly believe that no Jews are being saved because all Jews are totally blinded. Not according to the scriptures. He says in verse 25 that "blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." A few Jewish people are being saved in this present age. I've known some. We've all known some, including men such as Hyman Appelman and Charles Happ but they are, relatively speaking, not many.

In Romans 11:5 Paul says that,

5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

He's talking about Israel. There are some. There is a remnant, a small number of believers according to the election of grace, but as our text tells us, that someday God is going to save ethnic Israel. He's going to save them.

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." In Isaiah 45:9 and elsewhere, God calls Israel his elect. Now we're fond of calling ourselves that because we are, but he also calls Israel his elect. You look it up sometime, Isaiah 45:9, and there are other scriptures where God calls Israel his elect. Israel's election by God was, according to Romans 11:29, an irrevocable election. Let me read Romans 11:29, or you can look at it there if you've got your Bibles open to this 11th chapter. Now remember he's talking about Israel.

29 For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

That means God doesn't change his mind about these things concerning salvation.

Turn to Deuteronomy 7:7-8. God tells Israel here that his election of Israel was purely a matter of his great grace, not because of anything in them, just a matter of his grace. Why did God love Israel? God said, "Just because I loved Israel." Deuteronomy 7:7-8,

7 The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you [Moses says to Israel], because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: 8 But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

God's election is unto salvation. And by the way, you know, a person can say he's elect all he wants but if he's never been saved, he's not elect and he's not going to make it to heaven. There's a difference in election and salvation as we usually use the term salvation. We are elected unto salvation. God chose us in order to save us. God's election, according to 2 Thessalonians 2:13, is unto salvation and all of his elect will most certainly be saved.

Now when Paul speaks of the salvation of the Jews, he's not talking about what some of our dispensationalist brothers say he's talking about. When Paul speaks of the salvation of the Jews, he speaks of the same salvation as that which the Gentiles now experience. To be saved always means to be delivered from sin, to be delivered from guilt, to be delivered from death by faith in Jesus Christ. To be saved means to be justified and sanctified through the blood and righteousness of Christ and by the Spirit of God.

There never has been and there never will be but one way of salvation. There's only one meaning of salvation. God's word says in our text, then, that a day is coming when God will forgive his people Israel and bring them under the new covenant under which

believers now stand. In verse 27 of this 11th chapter of Romans, Paul quotes God as saying,

27 For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

The case of the nation of Israel being saved looks pretty hopeless right now, doesn't it? It looks pretty hopeless. It's just as hopeless today as it was, it's just as hopeless as that of the dry bones in the valley of Ezekiel's vision. Remember that account, Ezekiel 37? How ridiculous to think that this valley full of dry bones could stand up and live and breathe. That's the way it looks today as far as the salvation of all Israel is concerned. How will the Jews ever let go of their Talmudic traditions? How shall their hard hearts ever be broken and melted? How shall their hatred of Jesus Christ ever be removed? But my friends, the word "shall" in our text speaks of certainty, "And so all Israel shall be saved."

And not only shall Israel be saved, all Israel shall be saved, Paul said. "All Israel" here does not refer, as the amillennialists say, to the totality of those who will be saved in this age made up of Jews and Gentiles, it has no reference to that, it refers instead to the totality of ethnic Israel. The nation as a whole is going to be saved some day. "All Israel" here refers to all Jews who shall be living at the time to which Paul's referring here not, of course, to Jews who have lived in the past. It refers to those Jews who shall be living when the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in.

Look at verses 25 and 26 together, "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, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved." Many scriptures teach the salvation of Israel of which Paul is speaking here. In the context of our text, Paul speaks and I wish I had time to really get into this, Paul speaks of the olive tree, which is Christ, and the natural branches broken off, which is Israel. In verse 23 and 24, Paul says that these natural branches, you know, the natural branches, Israel, was broken off and the wild olive branches were grafted in, that was the Gentiles, and in verses 23 and 24, Paul says that these natural branches shall once again be grafted in, which speaks of the future salvation of Israel.

The latter part of our text in verse 26 refers to an Old Testament prophecy in Isaiah 59:20 that teaches that all Israel shall be saved. "And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written," or in other words, just as Isaiah 59:20 says, "There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." Now let's look at some other scriptures that prophesy that ethnic Israel shall someday be saved.

Look first at Jeremiah 31:33. We'll read verses 33 and 34 here, scriptures that prophesy that ethnic Israel shall someday be saved.

33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and

every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

That ought to thrill every Jew that reads it.

Now turn to Jeremiah 33:14-15, another prophecy that God is someday going to save Israel. Jeremiah 33:14-16.

14 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. 15 In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he [the branch, Messiah] shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. 16 In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness.

The book of Ezekiel is full of passages that prophesy the future salvation of Israel. Again, there are so many of these, I just ask you to write them down and look at them later. Ezekiel 11:17-20, 36:24-28, 37:1-10, and 39:28-29. There's also reference to the salvation of Israel in Hosea 3:4-5 and Zechariah 12:10, both of which we'll read presently.

This brings us to the last question that we ask in seeking to answer the question of our text, is God finished with Israel, and that is: when shall all Israel be saved? When is this radical change in the nation of Israel going to take place? It is in some future time period, not in this present time. As we look at the scriptures, it is apparent that the salvation of all Israel of which Paul speaks here will take place when the Lord Jesus returns to this earth. We'll just answer the question right out at the beginning: it will take place when the Lord Jesus returns to this earth.

Our text says that it shall be when the Deliverer comes out of Sion. Let's read the text again. "And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." Now this Deliverer coming out of Sion refers to the Second Coming of Christ, not to the First. One reason we know this is because our text speaks of this event as future when Paul wrote it and Paul wrote it after the First Coming of Christ. It had to be after the First Coming of Christ because Paul wrote it after that and he spoke of it as future. Besides, Christ's First Coming has not turned away ungodliness from Jacob, and that's another name for Israel, but his Second Coming will. It is when the Lord Jesus returns to Sion or Jerusalem that he will turn away ungodliness from Israel.

Jesus Christ, the scriptures tell us, will remain in heaven until the day he returns. Right now he's seated at the Father's right hand. He's going to stay there until all of his enemies are made his footstool and then he's going to come back. He's going to stay there in heaven until the day he returns and so Israel will not be saved until he returns. When the Deliverer comes out of Sion, he will then be fully recognized and accepted by the Jews

as their Messiah. Israel's conversion will happen suddenly and dramatically at the revelation of Christ from heaven. Isaiah 66:8 says that a nation will be born in a day.

As we've already noted, Paul says in Romans 11:5 that even now there is a remnant in Israel, those Jews who believe in Jesus Christ, that according to our text, when Messiah returns, the whole nation is going to believe. Many scriptures teach that it is at the Second Coming of the Lord that all Israel shall be saved. Let me read for the sake of time, let me just read Hosea 3:4-5 which says that in the latter days Israel shall "return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king." Now this passage is describing Israel in its present day, as you will note, and then it says that after that they will return and seek the Lord their God, "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days."

Then turn to the book of Zechariah, next to the last book in the Old Testament, chapters 10 through 12 of this book of Zechariah deal with the return of Jesus Christ in connection with the salvation of Israel. Look what Zechariah 12:10 says will happen. Zechariah 12:10.

10 And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

They're going to look at the one they've pierced with the nails of crucifixion and they're going to mourn for him. Israel shall with regenerate eyes look on the one that they've crucified and when Israel sees her Messiah like this, she shall mourn the mourning of repentance.

Revelation 1:7 is talking about the very same thing, the very same time, when it says,

7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him [that's Israel]: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

Look now at Zechariah 13:1, it says concerning this say time,

1 In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.

Then look at Zechariah 14:4-5 which speaks directly of the Lord's Second Coming. Zechariah 14:4-5,

4 And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. 5 And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.

Now think about that with me. The Lord Jesus has never to this day appeared on the Mount of Olives in connection with any catastrophic event. That's a catastrophe. When he sets his feet down, the book says that mountain is going to split in two and the water is going to rush in and join the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea. The Lord has never appeared on the Mount of Olives in connection with any calamitous events like that, nor did he split that mountain in two when he did set his feet on the mount. From his First Coming onward, he has not become king of all the earth either like that verse says that he will.

In Matthew 23:38 when the Lord Jesus was about to leave the temple for the last time, he said to the Jews,

38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

Jehovah's Witnesses teach that God is finished with Israel because Christ's last words to Israel here, his last word to Israel here was "desolate." You know, their problem is they don't understand the rule of context. They've missed what the Lord goes on to say in the very next verse, the 39th verse. Here's what he says after saying "your house is left unto you desolate," he says,

39 For I say unto you, Ye [Israel] shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

It was talking about the Second Coming of Christ. When confronted with this verse, the Jehovah's Witnesses will usually say, "Well, Christ was referring to spiritual Israel."

So hath God cast away his people? Is God finished with Israel? "God forbid," Paul answers in Romans 11:2, "God hath not cast away his people whom he foreknew." Underline that in your Bible, God hath not cast away his people whom he foreknew. It is clear from the scriptures that God is not finished with Israel. There are many things God has in store for his ancient people Israel, and the Lord willing, we'll be looking at some of these in future messages.

Let us pray.

Our Father, we're grateful for the nation of Israel because we receive so many wonderful benefits from the existence of this your chosen people. We're grateful that the law came through Israel. We're grateful that the fathers and the promises and the covenants and the adoption and all of these blessings came through Israel. Most of all we're thankful that the Lord Jesus Christ came through Israel and was a Jew. Our Father, because of his coming into the world for this people, we Gentiles can be saved. Our Father, we pray today that you would help us to look forward to that time when our wonderful Savior, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, is coming back and all Israel is going to be saved. What a thrilling thing it is to think about your chosen people. Help us, our Father, to stand fast for what the word of God says about Israel. And we pray these things in Christ Jesus' holy name and for his sake. Amen.