

God's Gracious Covenant With Israel: The Foundation For Worldwide National Covenanting #7

Romans 11:16
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This Lord's Day we continue in answering the question that was asked in the previous sermon:

I. Does the restoration of Israel prophesied by Paul in Romans 11 speak only of a spiritual/gospel restoration or does it likewise include a geo/political restoration as well?

A. In the Covenant God made with Abraham (in Genesis 17:4-8), three blessings are promised by God to Abraham in that "everlasting" covenant: (1) God's blessing of a holy seed (both natural and spiritual seed), which has already been partially realized but which will be more fully realized in regard to the natural seed when "all Israel" shall be saved (Romans 11:26); (2) God's promised blessing to "many nations", which has already been partially realized but which will be more fully realized when "the fullness of the Gentiles" (or nations) comes into the Visible Church (Romans 11:25); and (3) God's blessing of the Land of Canaan to the natural seed of Abraham, which was partially realized at the time of Moses (Deuteronomy 1:8) and partially realized at the return of Israel from Assyrian and Babylonian captivity (Jeremiah 29:10), but which (I would submit) will be more fully realized when "all Israel" is restored both spiritually and nationally and grafted back into the Visible Church of Christ (Romans 11:16-26) and even more fully realized than that when we inherit the heavenly land as our actual possession (Hebrews 11:16).

1. Now, the first promised blessing within that "everlasting covenant" of a holy seed (both natural and spiritual) will yet be more fully

realized in the future (many if not most will agree upon). Likewise, the second promised blessing within that “everlasting covenant” of blessing to “many nations” (both spiritual and material blessings, see Philippians 4:19) will be more fully realized in the future (many if not most will agree upon). But there seems to be a greater problem in granting a fuller realization of the third blessing of the **LAND** in the future to the “all Israel” that shall be saved, even among those who will grant a fuller realization of the first two blessings promised in that “everlasting covenant” made between God and Abraham. However, I would submit that as there is in that “everlasting covenant” a holy seed that is both natural and spiritual and shall be more fully blessed when “all Israel” shall be saved, and as there are both spiritual and material blessings to be more fully poured out upon the kings and nations of this world when “the fullness of the Gentiles” comes into the Visible Church, so there is in all interpretive consistency a natural **LAND** and a spiritual **LAND** that is to be more fully realized to the natural and spiritual seed of Abraham. I would submit that these three promises cannot be so spiritualized that there is no longer a natural seed to be blessed, no longer a worldwide reformation among all the nations of this world to be realized, or no longer a geographical **LAND** to be restored to Israel since all three promised blessings are part and parcel of this “everlasting covenant” and all three promised blessing have both a natural and a spiritual realization.

2. Dear ones, to say that the **LAND** of Canaan promised to Israel by covenant a number of different times is yet to be realized is not to revert to a rebuilt temple, a restored priesthood, distinctive Old Covenant ceremonies, particular judicial laws of the Old Covenant, the reign of Christ upon the throne of David out of Jerusalem, an essential distinction between Israel and the Church, or the supremacy of Israel over every other nation of the world. Those would all be erroneous conclusions to draw from the fact that God shall yet convert His

covenanted **NATION** of Israel and bring it into the Visible Church of Christ (as an equal with all the covenanted nations of the world), and will also bless that covenanted **NATION** (when “all Israel shall be saved”) with Christian rulers, a Christian constitution, and the **LAND** He promised to give her in which to exercise dominion for the glory of Christ Jesus.

3. All too often, it seems that any mention of the promise of the **LAND** to Israel as a **NATION** in the future is (by many) intrinsically tied to the restoration of the Old Covenant. But I do not believe that there is necessarily and intrinsically an unbreakable bond between the promise and realization of the **LAND** to the future Christian **NATION** of Israel and a return to the Old Covenant. If all distinctions (without exception) between Israel and the Gentiles have been removed, then what is the point of Romans 11? For Paul argues that God shall be fulfilling His covenant to Israel that was made with them through their “fathers” when “all Israel shall be saved” (Romans 11:27, “For this is my covenant **UNTO THEM**”; Romans 11:28, “But as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes.”).

4. The fact that Israel may be spiritualized in the New Testament and become “the Israel of God” (or the New Covenant Church of Christ) consisting of a majority of Gentiles (Galatians 6:16) does not mean that there is no longer an Israel (both natural and national) upon whom God shall yet bestow His salvation when “all Israel shall be saved.” Nor does the fact that the **LAND** of Canaan may be spiritualized in the New Testament and become the heavenly country which all of His Church shall one day inherit (Hebrews 11:16) mean that there is no longer a **LAND** which God shall yet bestow upon the **NATION** of Israel when “all Israel shall be saved.” Especially since both of these promises are included in the “everlasting covenant” made with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and all Israel.

B. Along the same lines (as we consider our text from Romans 11:16), just because the Church of Jesus Christ is called a “holy nation” (set apart unto God) in 1 Peter 2:9 does not mean that Israel cannot be a “holy nation” by God’s election of them and covenant with them by means of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and all Israel, which election and covenant is “without repentance” and irrevocable (Romans 11:29). For Romans 11:16 does in fact teach this very point: namely, that Israel (both ethnically and nationally) is “holy” by means of election and everlasting covenant (“For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches”).

1. Paul’s Spirit-inspired use of the “firstfruit” and “lump” come from the commandment of the Lord (in Leviticus 23:9 and Numbers 15:19-21) wherein Israel is required to offer the first of their crops and the first of their dough to the Lord as a way of setting apart and professing not only the firstfruit, but the rest of the harvest or the rest of the lump of dough as God’s, belonging to God as well, and therefore to be used to glorify and enjoy Him, the Giver of all these good gifts. Thus, in Paul’s analogy, if the firstfruit (i.e. the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Israel at Mt. Sinai, see Romans 11:28) be a “holy” People and **NATION** set apart unto God by God’s election and everlasting covenant with them, then the greater part of the people and **NATION** that follow (i.e. the “lump”) are likewise “holy” and set apart unto God by God’s election and everlasting covenant with them through their fathers. Remember that Paul is not here speaking about an INTERNAL holiness, but rather about an EXTERNAL holiness (a COVENANTAL holiness or a FEDERAL holiness) by way of outward election and covenant as a People and **NATION** that belong to God. This is the same truth Paul conveyed in Romans 11:28.

2. Paul continues with another analogy teaching the same truth in Romans 11:16 wherein he says that if the root (i.e. the fathers,

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Israel at Mt. Sinai) is “holy” due to God’s election and everlasting covenant with them, then so are the many branches (both ethnically and nationally) that proceed from that election and everlasting covenant with the fathers (Romans 11:28). Again this is an EXTERNAL, COVENANTAL, or FEDERAL holiness that is in view, rather than an INTERNAL holiness.

3. Not only does Paul call Israel, considered as a People and as a **NATION**, “holy” in the past during their infancy under the Old Covenant (this is a most crucial point about which Paul teaches here in Romans 11:16), but also Paul calls Israel as a People and as a **NATION** “holy” in the present New Covenant age (even while they are still the enemies of God due to their rejection of Christ and the Gospel (Romans 11:28). And because Israel’s external holiness, dear ones, is based upon the “everlasting covenant” made with the fathers (including with Israel as a **NATION** at Mt. Sinai), I would submit that not only are the People and **NATION** of Israel externally holy, but the **LAND** of Israel is for the same exact reason externally holy: because of God’s election and everlasting covenant. Do you see that once it is granted that Paul teaches that Israel as a People and as a **NATION** are externally “holy” in this New Covenant age on the basis of God’s election and everlasting covenant with them (according to Romans 11:16,27-29), then there is no reason why the **LAND** ought not to be likewise externally “holy” in this New Covenant age on the basis of the God’s election and everlasting covenant (as found in Genesis 7:17-18 etc.).

C. Having now considered our text in Romans 11:16, let me emphasize that many expositors understand Romans 11 to teach the restoration of Israel as a **NATION** or that Israel as a **NATION** is still holy unto God. I wanted to make it clear that it is not just Premillennialists that understand Paul to teach the national restoration of Israel or the

external holiness of Israel as a **NATION** in this New Covenant age, but that a sizeable cross-section of Postmillennialists likewise understand Paul to teach a national restoration of Israel and an external holiness of national Israel in the present age. My point is simply this: If Israel is still a “holy” **NATION** before God by way of election and everlasting covenant and if Israel shall be restored as a covenanted **NATION** to Christ because she is “holy”, then where is that **NATION** to exercise its Christian government and laws without a **LAND**? Again, I submit that the present holiness of Israel as a **NATION**, and that the future restoration of Israel as a **NATION** implies the restoration of the **LAND** to Israel in covenant blessing when “all Israel shall be saved.” The following expositors are not exhaustive but representative of those who understand Paul to teach the restoration of Israel as a **NATION**:

1. *The Westminster Annotations* on Romans 11:16,23.

Verse 16: [“if the root be holy”] **The nation of the Jews** being considered in their stock and root, that is, in Abraham, is holy.

Verse 23: [“good olive tree”] Into the people of the Jews which God had sanctified of his mere grace: and he speaketh of **the whole nation** taken into covenant with God.

2. James Durham (1622-1658), *Commentary on the Book of the Revelation*, p. 788.

Add to them [i.e. to other passages of Scripture—GLP] Paul, speaking of their restitution, as to a **National state**, and of *all Israel* to be grafted in, as they were broken off, which cannot be so well without an outward **National civil State**, which confirmeth the former, Rom. 11.

3. Matthew Poole (1624-1679), *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, on Romans 11:26, p. 519.

But by *Israel* here (as in the precedent verse) you must understand, **the nation and people of the Jews**.

4. In his exposition of Romans (as found in *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments* by Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, p. 261), David Brown comments concerning Romans 11:26 as follows,

Clearly the meaning here is, *The Israelitish nation* at large. . . It can only mean the ultimate, ingathering of **Israel as a nation**, in contrast with the present “remnant.”

5. John Brown of Wamphray (1610-1679) states in his *Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* concerning Romans 11:26 (p. 462),

Then says he, All Israel shall be saved, that is, **The whole body of the nation of the Jews** shall be brought from under the plague of blindness, under which they lay, and brought under the gospel and the saving ordinances of Christ into a gospel covenant church-state. . .

6. Herman Witsius (1636-1708) writes in his *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* (2:414),

That when the fullness of the Gentiles is brought in, *all Israel shall be saved*: that is, as our Dutch commentators well observe [in the Dutch Annotations of the Bible—GLP], not a few, but a very great number, and in a manner **the whole Jewish nation**, in a full body. . . . From what we have said before, it appears, that they depart from the apostle’s meaning, who, by *all Israel*, understand the *mystical Israel*, or the people of God, consisting both of Jews and Gentiles, without admitting the conversion of the **whole Jewish nation** to Christ.

7. Wilhemus a Brakel (1635-1711) declares in his book, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service* (4:518), the following in his exposition of Romans 11:26,

It would not be the conversion of only a few—of a few individuals here and there—but it would be a conversion of **the entire nation**. “And so all Israel shall be saved”. . . .

8. Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) states with certitude in his *History of Redemption* (1:607),

Nothing is more certainly foretold than this **national conversion of the Jews**, in Rom. xi.

9. Charles Hodge (1797-1878) makes the following comment in his *Commentary on Romans* (p. 374), expounding Romans 11:26,

And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written. Israel here, from the context, must mean the Jewish people, and *all Israel*, **the whole nation**. The Jews, as a people, are now rejected; as a people, they are to be restored. As their rejection, although **national**, did not include the rejection of every individual; so their restoration, although in like manner **national**, need not include the salvation of every individual Jew. Πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ [All Israel—GLP] is not therefore to be here understood to mean all the true people of God, as Augustin, Calvin, and many others explain it; nor all the elect Jews, i.e. all that part of the nation which constitute “the remnant according to the election of grace;” but **the whole nation, as a nation**.

Hopefully, these few quotes (as representative of many more) might help you to realize that the restoration of Israel as a **NATION** is not the exclusive domain of mere Premillennialists, but has been taught from Romans 11 by Postmillennialists (without however importing a rebuilt temple, a literal Davidic throne in Jerusalem, or the reinstatement of various Old Covenant ceremonies and judicial laws into this restoration of Israel as a **NATION**).

D. Although Romans 11 is the most extensive passage of Scripture in the New Testament teaching the restoration of Israel as a **NATION** to Christ, it should be noted that other New Testament and Old Testament passages likewise shed light by way of confirmation on Israel’s national restoration as well (which national restoration implies likewise a restoration to the **LAND** of Israel due to the election of Israel as a **NATION** and due to the “everlasting covenant” made with them). We will only have time to summarize very briefly what light there is in these New Testament and Old Testament passages in regard to Israel’s restoration as a **NATION**.

1. **Matthew 23:37-39**. Here the Lord Jesus prophesies with strong words of judgment against Israel as a **NATION** for their rejection of

the Gospel sent to them through the prophets and through Christ Himself (specifically directing His words against “Jerusalem” in verse 37 as representative of the entire **NATION**). The temple is to be destroyed the Lord prophesies in verse 38 (which occurred in 70 a.d. at the hand of the Romans). But then hope is held out to Jerusalem and the **NATION** of Israel in verse 39 when the Lord says that they will not see Christ from this time forward (with spiritual eyes to behold him as their Savior as in Zechariah 12:10, or with physical eyes to behold him at His Second Coming after the millennium as in Revelation 1:7) **TILL** [i.e. until that time that—GLP] ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. The Lord holds forth the hope that Israel as a **NATION** will yet be restored to Christ and profess Him to be their Messiah and Savior (as taught by Paul in Romans 11:26, “And so all Israel shall be saved”).

2. **Luke 21:24.** Here again we find the Lord using the name “Jerusalem” as representative of Israel as a **NATION** (being the chief city of that **NATION**). Similarly, as in the previous prophecy from Matthew 23, Christ prophesies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans in 70 a.d. And again the Lord holds out the hope that this national judgment upon Israel by God for her rejection of Christ and the Gospel shall not be permanent, but shall only last “**UNTIL** [i.e. until that time when—GLP] the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” This language ought to sound very familiar to us having already spent several sermons in Romans 11. For there we find in Romans 11:25-26a, “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.” Again, there is the light of hope that Christ gives concerning the restoration of Israel as an entire **NATION** (which implies likewise the restoration of Israel’s national **LAND** as well).

3. **Acts 1:6-7.** During the 40 days after Christ's resurrection and before He ascended into heaven, He taught His disciples concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:4) which likely involved a preview of future redemptive history for both Israel and the Gentile Nations (and this would seem to be the reason the disciples put the question concerning the restoration of Israel as a **NATION** to the Lord). The question that the disciples ask the Lord implies two truths: (1) The Kingdom of God has indeed been taken away from Israel as a **NATION** (as the Lord declared in Matthew 21:43 and as Paul taught in Romans 11:17-21 concerning the natural branches being broken off from the Visible Church and Kingdom of God); (2) The Kingdom of God shall in the future be restored to Israel as a **NATION** (i.e. as Paul states in Romans 11:24: "For if thou [Gentiles—GLP] wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree [the Visible Church and Kingdom of Christ—GLP]: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches [Israel as a **NATION**—GLP], be grafted into their own olive tree?" Neither of these truths does the Lord deny or reject as false, but his silence actually confirms the truthfulness of the statements implied in their question. I would submit, therefore, that the Lord implicitly affirms that the Kingdom of God shall be restored to Israel as a **NATION**, but that the time at which this shall be fulfilled is entirely left with God and His redemptive plan. Again the restoration of Israel as a **NATION** implies the restoration of the **LAND** of Israel because of God's election of and everlasting covenant with Israel as a **NATION**.

4. **2 Corinthians 3:14-16.** Here Paul speaks of the hearts and minds of Israel as a **NATION** being blinded (or hardened, it is the same word used for Israel being blinded or hardened in Romans 11:7,25). The context of 2 Corinthians 3 reveals that Paul has in view Israel as a **NATION** (see verse 13 where it was the children of Israel as a **NATION** at Mt. Sinai that are in view in verses 14-16). Just as Paul teaches in Romans

11:7,25 that Israel as a **NATION** has been blinded or hardened, so he teaches the same truth here in 2 Corinthians 3:14-15. And just as Paul teaches in Romans 11:25-26a that the judicial blindness or hardness sent from God upon the hearts of Israel as a **NATION** is not permanent but will be removed when “the fullness of the Gentiles comes in; and so all Israel shall be saved”, so likewise here in 2 Corinthians 3:16, Paul holds forth the same hope that judicial blindness and hardness upon the collective heart of Israel as a **NATION** is not permanent for we read, “Nevertheless, when it [i.e. the collective heart of Israel as a **NATION**—GLP] shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away.” Again the restoration of Israel as a **NATION** implies the restoration of the **LAND** of Israel because of God’s election of and everlasting covenant with Israel as a **NATION**.

5. **Isaiah 19:18-25**. The prophet speaks of the conversion of Egypt as a **NATION** and the **NATIONAL COVENANT** which Egypt shall make with the Lord “in the land of Egypt.” The fact that this has not yet been fulfilled turns our hope for the fulfillment of this prophecy to the time spoken by Paul “when the fullness of the Gentiles comes in.” But since the prophet speaks of the conversion of Egypt as a **NATION** within “the land of Egypt”, does not the conversion of Israel as a covenanted **NATION** at that future time also imply that Israel as a **NATION** shall be restored to her own **LAND** and engage in a **NATIONAL COVENANT** to be the Lord’s people along with Egypt and Assyria (in verses 24-25)? I submit that it does. Next Lord’s Day we will consider a few more Old Testament passages that speak more directly to the **LAND** as a promise to Israel as a **NATION** and also seek to answer some objections against the future restoration of the **LAND** to Israel as a **NATION**.

E. In conclusion, let me make a an observation by way of application as we conclude the sermon this Lord’s Day.

1. Just as Paul teaches by inspiration of the Holy Spirit that Israel as a **NATION** is covenantally and externally “holy” by virtue of the covenant made with the fathers (Romans 11:16), so likewise the children of believing parents are said by Paul to be covenantally and externally “holy” by virtue of the covenant made with believing parents (1 Corinthians 7:14). Dear ones, the reason why the male infants (as representative of all infants, both male and female) were circumcised was in order to provide an outward sign and seal of God’s gracious covenant promises made to those whom God called “holy” by virtue of their covenant relationship to God through their parents. Circumcision did not make anyone internally holy, but rather they were circumcised because they were covenantally and externally a “holy” People and **NATION** to the Lord. Likewise, the reason why infants are baptized now is to provide an outward sign and seal of God’s gracious covenant promises made to those whom God calls “holy” by virtue of their covenant relationship to God through their parents. Baptism does not make anyone internally holy, but rather it is an outward sign and seal of the promises of God’s gracious covenant to us and to our children. Like Israel as a **NATION**, our children may ignore, neglect and despise their baptism and the covenant promises that their baptism signify and seal, but they cannot become unbaptized or alter the promises made unto them. Their baptism and the promises made to them will either be received by faith in Christ alone and be a great means of grace and encouragement to them, or their baptism and the promises made to them will be rejected and disbelieved and be the means of greater aggravation of their sin against Christ who graciously made these promises to them.

2. God has given to us (as adults) the outward sign and seal of baptism, dear ones, for our encouragement in the faith. Your baptism is not simply an event of the past, but is to be improved by reflecting upon what it means to be united to Christ by covenant, to have by

covenant Christ's death as your death to sin, to have by covenant Christ's life as your life, to have by covenant all grace you need to live the Christian life, to have by covenant the needs of your daily bread in this life met, and to have by covenant the certain hope and confidence of a resurrected body and everlasting life in the presence of Christ. The Lord has condescended to give to us this sign and seal of His gracious covenant, how often do we improve upon our baptism by way of such needful meditation?

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