

The Future of Israel: An Assurance of God's Faithfulness

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Israel continues to dominate the headlines on an almost daily basis. For a small nation with a population of just over seven million, whose land area is about the same size as New Jersey, it holds a remarkable position in world affairs. Some of the brightest minds of Europe and North America have spent the better part of the past sixty years trying to devise a solution to the problems of this tiny democracy. At first glance, all of this attention seems unwarranted. Why is this country so important? Of course, God's promises to biblical Israel do not justify everything going on in the modern state of Israel or its policies; nevertheless, it is clear that God has a plan for the Land and the Hebrew people.¹ This future design has great implications, which extend far beyond the borders of that nation. Furthermore, the Almighty's will for the Jews is tremendously important for the Gentile world as well. It may be safely (and biblically) said that if the Lord does not carry out His plans for Israel, then there is no assurance of the fulfillment of anything else that He promised in the Bible. Thus, upon the fate of the Jews hinges the credibility of the sovereign God of the Universe. Moreover, His usage of the Gentiles in connection with the Jews displays His incomparable wisdom and mercy.

Why Doesn't Israel Recognize Christ Now?

Regrettably, Romans 9-11 has become a controversial part of the Bible. Leaving aside the theological polemic that often accompanies discussion of this passage, it is important to see its context in Romans. The preceding chapters explain the principles of the Gospel with copious quotations from the Old Testament bolstering each point. The eighth chapter concludes by talking about nothing separating the believer from God's love in Christ (v. 39.) One can imagine the critic of the gospel countering: "If this gospel is according to God's plan why don't more Jews believe it? If they are not saved, then why should Gentiles pay any heed to this message?" Moreover, the Gentile believers in Rome may have wondered why they should care about Israel. Chapters 9-11 answer these queries.

Paul responds by explaining the historical purposes of God with the nation of Israel. First, he points out the great privileges that they enjoy, including: "...the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all..." (9:4-5.) In spite of these great blessings, physical descent from Abraham is no guarantee of spiritual relationship with God. A survey of the patriarchal period shows that many

¹ Some well-meaning Western Christians equate present-day Israel with the prophecies regarding restored Israel. It should be noted, however, that the bulk of Israel's citizens reject the notion of God, let alone the Messianic claims of the Lord Jesus. Someday a believing remnant will be restored to the Lord (e.g. Zech. 12:9-14.) Until then, we should not link our affections and agreement to any particular regime in the state of Israel. Like every other nation, they do good things, as well as bad things. Also like other nations, they are not in the habit of seeking God's opinion for their current policies.

of those associated with Abraham did not share his faith in Jehovah. It never was the case that all of those who physically descended from Abraham were saved. Only the children of the promise were brought by faith into the promises that God made to the patriarch.

The Gentiles Receive God's Mercy

In the matter of God's selection of tools, He chose to use Israel as His instrument in the world prior to the dawning of the Church age. Hosea is referenced, envisioning the time when "*Not my people*" will become "*My people*" (Rom. 9:25-26.) With what astonishment would the pious Jew read this prophecy and the succeeding quotation from Isaiah being applied to a remnant of Jews and Gentiles becoming righteous through faith! Yet this mercy is extended to those who do not stumble at Christ the stumbling-stone, but through faith call on Him as Lord for salvation (Rom. 9:33; 10:9-13.) What is more, by faith the Gentiles are brought into the service of God. These verses demonstrate that when salvation comes to Israel, it will be a remnant that believes it, instead of the unbelieving multitude. So it should not surprise one that in Paul's day only a remnant believed. This has been the ordinary state of affairs throughout history and will be so again in the future.

Salvation in Christ through faith alone was the major obstacle to the Jews of Paul's day. They were passionate for the Law; nevertheless, they sought to establish their own righteousness by keeping the commandments. They balked at the truth that "*...Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone that believeth*" (Rom. 10:4.) In keeping with the teaching of the first eight chapters, Paul argues that the gospel is the story of what Christ freely offers man, as opposed to human religious effort; it requires faith, not human works. One may suggest that maybe it was just ignorance on the part of these pious Jews. This is not so, however, for the message was proclaimed to them, but they did not obey it (the citations from Isaiah affirm this; cf. Rom. 10:16 with Isa. 53:1.) Therefore, God turned to a different tactic: provoking Israel to jealousy by extending His mercy to the Gentiles.

Man's Failure Employed In The Extension of Divine Mercy

Rather than an interruption of God's plan, the gospel of Christ with its inclusion of the Gentiles is actually a broader fulfillment of it. The current unbelief of the Jews affords the Almighty the opportunity of saving many Gentiles. This does not rule out, however, the future fulfillment of the promises made to the patriarchs. Even now, Paul points out that there is "*a remnant according to the election of grace*" (Rom. 11:5.) In the future this remnant will expand to include the beleaguered nation of Israel at the end of the Tribulation – as it is put in Rom. 11:26: "*And so all Israel shall be saved...*" It is the ingenuity of the Lord to use Israel's failure as the means of showing mercy to the Gentiles, who were once "*...strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, without God in the world...*" (Eph. 2:12.) He can then use these same strangers to turn the Jews back to Himself through jealousy, as they behold His gracious dealings with those who previously were afar off.

This blessing should not breed haughtiness in non-Jewish hearts, for Israel will one day reclaim center stage in the dealings of God. Whereas currently the numerical majority of Christians are Gentiles, during the Tribulation believing Israelites will comprise the bulk of believers. God is not forgetful of His promises to Israel. What is more, the fulfillment of them will entail blessings that involve more than just one ethnic group; when God performs His promises they will encompass the entire world. The Scripture sums up this expansively gracious program in these words: *“For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all”* (Rom. 11:30-32.) Thus, God’s promises are faithful and true, and His credibility is beyond question. Whether Jews or Gentiles, believers of every epoch can rejoice in the steadfast mercy of the covenant keeping Lord.