

HAS GOD CAST AWAY ISRAEL? Romans 11:1-12

by Dr. Jack L. Arnold

A unique phenomenon of our day is the existence and preservation of the nation of Israel. The eleventh chapter of Romans throws a great deal of light on the “miracle of Israel.” Today we view Israel against the background of over forty centuries of anti-Semitism, that dark, unexplainable, yet consistently recurring pattern of hatred against the Jews. They have been unmercifully persecuted throughout their history, climaxing in the atrocities committed against them in Hitler’s Nazi Germany in this century. At least six million Jews were murdered in this holocaust, and yet today the nation of Israel exists and is prospering. The existence of the nation of Israel today is best explained in light of the fact that the Jews are still in covenant with God, and that God still has a spiritual purpose for them in the future.

God chose Israel to be his people thousands of years ago, and made hundreds of promises to them in the Old Testament which have not yet been fulfilled. These promises must be fulfilled if God is to be faithful to his own promises. Some scholars believe that these will be fulfilled through the church, but my own belief is that they will be fulfilled specifically through the nation of Israel. I believe that Paul’s point in Romans 11 is that God will convert the nation of Israel when Christ returns.

I recall a story of the King of Prussia who was having a discussion with his chaplain on the veracity of the Bible. The king said to the chaplain, “Give me a word proof that the Bible is the inspired Word of God.”

The chaplain replied, “Your Majesty, it is possible for me to answer your request with great literality. I can give you proof in one single word that the Bible is the Word of God.”

The king looked at him in amazement and said, “What is this magic word which carries such a weight of proof with it?”

The chaplain replied, “Your Majesty, that word is Israel.”

BACKGROUND

About 4,000 years ago God called a man named Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees and said that from him would come the nation of Israel. He made an unbreakable covenant with Abram (calling his name Abraham) in which his physical seed would possess the land of Canaan forever and would be a great nation. God dealt in covenant relationship with Israel, and outside the

covenant there was no salvation. A Jew was under the covenant by birth and entered the covenant through faith in God's promise of Messiah to come who would reign over Israel on the throne of David.

Israel looked for the Messiah, but when he came in the person of Jesus Christ they rejected Him. The message of Messiah, his salvation, and the establishing of his kingdom was taken to Israel first.

“These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:5-6).

Israel rejected the message.

“And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:14-15).

Therefore, God took the promise of salvation and the kingdom from the Jews and gave it to another nation, the church.

“Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:42-43).

Thus, the gospel went to the Gentiles. This was God's discipline upon Israel for rejecting Messiah. Romans 11 tells us that God yet has a future for Israel as a nation. Israel has been temporarily set aside in God's plan, but he will again deal with her and fulfill all his promises to her.

Romans 9 shows that in his sovereignty God has set Israel aside to bring the good news of Christ to the world. In Romans 10 we see that Israel's rejection of Messiah was her own fault, for they knew and understood plainly the claims of Christ. We discover in Romans 11 that God still has a future for national, political Israel because he has chosen them and has entered into covenant relationship with them, and he must fulfill his promises to them.

ISRAEL'S REJECTION IS NOT TOTAL OR COMPLETE — Romans 11:1-10

“I say then, Hath God cast away his people?” This section is written to explain to the Gentiles God’s dealings with Israel. In light of the fact that the gospel is now going to Gentiles and in this age there is no difference between Jew and Gentile for all must receive Christ by faith, is God finished with the nation of Israel? Will He not fulfill His promises to them and maintain His covenant relationship to them?

“God forbid.” *Me genoito* is the strongest negative in the Greek language. It is unthinkable that God has cast away Israel. In light of this verse, I cannot see how there are many theologians who give no place in their system for a future revival of national Israel!

“For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.” Paul relates this to himself, for he was a Jew with all the blood lines back to Abraham. He was saved so it indicates that God still is dealing with Jews. Even in the church age, God has converted Jews who are heirs of His promises to Israel. There is always an elect remnant!

“God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew.” Here is an emphatic statement that God is not finished with national Israel. The word “foreknowledge” is related to God’s eternal plan, and in this context has to do with his loving relationship to Israel because of his election of them. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2). God chose Israel and will fulfill his covenant with them.

“For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: 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. Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations” (Deut. 7:6-9).

A king may be rejected by his subjects, but the king never rejects his subjects. God will never cast away Israel even though now they are in rebellion to him as a nation. Some time ago it was my privilege to become acquainted with Alford Beardsley who was chaplain at Hollins College. Dr. Beardsley spoke at the ministers conference in Roanoke on the subject of the Jew. He turned to this verse to show that God has not cast away Israel because they are his chosen people. He concluded that the Jew today is saved because the Jew has never been lost; Jews being corporately chosen of God do not have to believe in Messiah to be saved. While I respect Dr. Beardsley as a man and a scholar, I cannot agree with his interpretation of this verse. I asked him why Paul said in Romans 10:1, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that

they might be saved.” He never gave me an answer, but said that this is a difficult verse and open to interpretation. When I turned to other verses he gave me the same answer. Here is a case of what I believe to be a failure to read the context of a passage. Paul’s whole point is that Israel is a chosen people and God does have a national future for them, but now they are set aside by God’s sovereignty based on their rejection, yet God will deal with them again in the future.

“[Know] ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.” Here Paul shows that there has always been an elect remnant in Israel, even in the day of Elijah when the nation was in rank apostasy. Elijah thought he was the only believer left but he did not know everything, for God had preserved 7,000 for himself.

The promises to Israel are valid only to the elect remnant who believe in Messiah. In this day of apostasy in Christendom, we sometimes think that we are the only believers around. But God still has many who have not bowed their knee to the devil. The true church will exist until Jesus comes again.

“Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.” At the time of Paul’s writing there was an elect remnant of Jews who had trusted in Christ. The same is true today. Based on nothing but his sovereign grace, God has preserved for himself an elect remnant of Jews. If God had not saved an elect remnant from Israel, no Jew would be saved in this present age.

During my college days, I was invited to give my testimony of faith in Christ at various fraternity and sorority houses. We entered these societies under the direction of Campus Crusade for Christ. One night a group of us went to the ZBT house, which is a Jewish fraternity. They were typical fraternity fellows, and were cutting up before the meeting. I remember how strange I felt when I heard them using the Lord’s name in vain and calling one another Jesus Christ. They mockingly made fun of Christ. It was obvious that they thought of Jesus Christ only as an imposter and a man. Well, we gave our testimonies and they were polite, but as far as I know that night there were no conversions to Christ.

About eight years later, my good friend Hal Lindsey, who was the director of Campus Crusade at UCLA, was invited to speak at the ZBT house. He chose as his subject “God’s Future for Israel.” He explained to these men how they were chosen of God, but because of their rejection of Messiah they were being disciplined by God. God required them to come to faith in Jesus Christ, and had a future for the nation of Israel. That night the whole ZBT house gave Hal Lindsey a standing ovation. And that night there were four or five positive decisions for Jesus Christ among these Jews. They had never heard this message before. Out of this meeting came a Jewish convert that became one of the leading evangelists among Jewish students on the campuses of America. It is true that God is saving an elect remnant of Jews today.

“And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.” Election according to God’s grace brings Paul’s thoughts to the grace of God in salvation. For any person, salvation is totally by God’s grace. None deserve it; all should have been condemned for all are sinners. Works and grace are antagonistic systems, and no person can be saved by works. God’s grace moves upon an individual and that person responds through faith in Jesus Christ apart from any works.

“What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for [righteousness]; but the election [elect remnant of Jews] hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded [hardened].” When the nation rejected their Messiah, in grace God chose a remnant among them for himself and he hardened the rest so that they could not believe. God did not just arbitrarily and maliciously harden hearts, but he did it as just retribution for their unbelief and rejection of Messiah. God has the right to select and elect a remnant for himself based purely on his grace, but he hardens men on the basis of their unbelief.

“(According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.” Paul quotes from Isaiah 29:10 and Deut. 29:3-4 to show that the Old Testament predicted the hardening of Israel’s heart during this time of rejection.

Israel has double blindness on them but God in his electing grace can still save some. We should never give up on our witness to the Jew.

“And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling-block, and a recompence unto them.” The “table” is a place of blessing. Paul quotes from Psalm 69:22 to show that God’s blessing on Israel has become her own stumbling block, a judgment because of rejection of Messiah.

“Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back away.” This is a restatement of Israel’s blindness.

ISRAEL’S REJECTION IS NOT FINAL — Romans 11:11-12

“I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall?” Has Israel stumbled in such a way that they will not rise again? Has Israel’s rejection finished them in God’s program? Is God no longer in covenant relationship with them? A great many Bible scholars feel that God is finished with national Israel and that he will continue to judge the nation for her rejection of Messiah. This interpretation has led many sincere Christians to perpetrate anti-Semitism and stir hatred against the Jews. This is particularly true of the Roman Catholic Church, which for years taught that the Jews alone put Christ to death. Chrysostom, an early church father, said in essence, “Christians should burn down all Jewish synagogues, and if Jews are in the syangogue, so much the better!”

During the Crusades when the Roman Catholic Church attempted to free the Holy Land from the Moslems, the saying among Christians was, "If you can't kill a Moslem, kill a Jew!" No person who reads his Bible with understanding, however, can be anti-Semitic, for God still has a purpose for Israel.

"God forbid." Israel is under divine discipline now for her rejection of Messiah and has been temporarily set aside in God's program, but God will again deal with the nation at the second coming of Christ.

"But rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy." God has worked it out that through the rejection of Messiah by Israel, the gospel of Jesus Christ has come to the Gentiles. This will someday provoke the Jews to turn to Christ, for they will see the blessings they have missed in their rejection.

"Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" If Israel's rejection meant that the Gentiles were to become rich through the gospel, how much more will the world be blessed when God converts the nation at the second coming of Christ! That final generation of Jews will become a blessing to the world because by God's grace they will turn to Messiah, their God and King.

CONCLUSION

The Jew's rejection is the Gentile's opportunity to hear of Christ. If you are a Gentile, God is offering you the forgiveness of sin, eternal life and assurance of heaven in Christ if you will but trust the Saviour.

If you are of Jewish blood, God is still saving an elect remnant for himself in this present day. But the Jew must also receive Jesus Christ as Messiah in order to be saved.

I ask both Jew and Gentile, "Is Christ, the Messiah, your personal Saviour?"