

ALL ISRAEL SAVED

“For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” (Rom. 11:15).

Some Christians believe that although a plain reading of Romans 11:1-32 indicates that in the last days, there will be a big spiritual awakening in Israel. The passage should be interpreted spiritually so as to give the view that the Church is to be thought of in this passage, not physical Israel. This view is replacement doctrine (teaching). The nation of Israel is now replaced by the Church. God has no further plans for physical Israel under this view.

This paper will show that replacement doctrine is not supported in the following areas:

- The immediate text.
- Other passages of Scripture.
- Respected Bible commentators.
- Historical events.

The immediate text

There is no clear statement in the Romans 11:1-32 passage which directs the reader to read ‘Israel’ figuratively so that ‘Church’ is meant. In an Ephesians passage, Paul tells his readers that past biblical events that he refers to can be taken figuratively. “These things may be taken figuratively, ...” (Ephesians 4:24). However, similar statements are missing from the Romans passage.

Paul begins the Romans chapter eleven passage by declaring his feelings of love toward the Jews whom he makes clear are his countrymen. He says, “I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. ...” (11:1). Having made it clear at this point that he identifies himself with the Jews, he then goes on to explain what God is going to do with Israel as a nation.

Paul explains to the predominantly Gentile (non-Jewish) readership in Rome. “...Did they [the Jews] stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!” (Rom.11:11-12).

The apostle sets before his readers two groups. Gentiles and Jews. The current spiritual loss suffered by the Jews has meant spiritual riches for the Gentiles. When the Jews receive fullness - probably the thought here is of Israel receiving her fill of spiritual blessing - the Gentiles will also be spiritually blessed. The news of a large spiritual awakening in Israel will bring great encouragement to the Gentiles.

A little further on, the apostle says of the Jews, “For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” (11:15). The news of Israel coming to Christ in large numbers will strengthen, that is, bring new life to the Gentile Churches.

Toward the end of the passage, the apostle says of the Jews, “... as far as election is concerned, they are loved on

account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.” (11:28-29). God will not fail in bringing many Jews to Himself.

Other passages of Scripture

The turning of rebellious Israel to Jesus Christ in the last days is supported by other passages of Scripture. Jesus looked over rebellious Jerusalem and declared, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (Matt. 23:37-39).

Jesus states the spiritual environment which will prevail in Jerusalem when he returns in glory upon the earth when he declares it will be one in which Jerusalem says, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’

Biblical statements revealing God’s plans to turn the heart of Jerusalem so that it brings praise to him are not limited to the NT. The Lord declares through the prophet Isaiah, “I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.” (Isaiah 62:6-7). Jerusalem being the praise of the earth is not simply a faint possibility, but an absolute certainty that Christians are to pray for in eager expectation that it will come to pass.

Respected Bible Commentators

The Expositors Bible Commentary says regarding the figurative reference to the olive tree (11:16-24). “The figure of the olive tree emphasizes that Gentile salvation is dependent on Israel’s covenant relationship to God. Gentiles have to be grafted into the olive tree. The purpose of Gentile influx into the church is not merely to magnify the grace of God toward outsiders, but to evoke envy on the part of Israel as a factor in leading to her ultimate return to God as a people. This in turn prepares the way for the climax in 11:25-27.” Any failure of Israel to turn to God would be an anticlimax. It would not make sense.

The Expositors Bible Commentary deals with the Romans chapter eleven passage in a very thorough and scholarly manner. It does not take the view that the passage should be interpreted in a special way so as to negate the obvious, that being that God will turn the nation of Israel to Himself in the last days.

The Commentary says regarding Israel “‘Now that the people have eyes that do not see, are they doomed to stumble so as to fall and rise no more? ‘Not at all.’ The stumbling is admitted; an irreparable fall is not. This is a broad hint of the future salvation of Israel that Paul goes on to affirm. ... God is bringing good out of apparent evil. Israel’s stumbling has opened the way for Gentile salvation on such a scale as to make Israel envious (cf. Acts 13:42-47). That envy, though it may involve bitterness, will ultimately contribute to drawing the nation to her Messiah.’”

A little further on, the commentary says on 11:26-27. "The expression, 'all Israel', when taken in the light of the context, must be understood of the nation Israel as a whole, in contrast to the present situation when only a remnant has trusted Christ for salvation. The language does not require us to hold that when this occurs every living Israelite will be included, but only that Israel as a nation will be saved.

Not all interpreters agree, however, on the meaning of 'all Israel.' It was the view of Calvin, for example, that the entire company of the redeemed, both Jew and Gentile, is intended. But 'Israel' has not been used of Gentiles in these chapters, and it is doubtful that such is the case anywhere in Paul's writings, even in Galatians 6:16 (cf. Richardson, pp. 74-84)."¹

It is clear however, from Romans chapter two that Christians are to be thought of as Jews in a spiritual sense. There we read, "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God." (2:28-29).

John Calvin

John Calvin is in basic agreement with *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. On Romans 11:1 he says, "For I am also an Israelite, etc. Before he [The apostle Paul] proceeds to the subject, he proves, in passing, by his own example, how unreasonable it was to think that the nation was utterly forsaken by God; for he himself was in his origin an Israelite, not a proselyte, or one lately introduced into the commonwealth of Israel. As then he was justly deemed to be one of God's special servants, it was an evidence that God's favour rested on Israel. He then assumes the conclusion as proved, which yet he will hereafter explain in a satisfactory manner."

John Calvin in his commentary said regarding Romans 11:26, "And so all Israel, etc. Many understand this of the Jewish people, as though Paul had said, that religion would again be restored among them as before: but I extend the word *Israel* to all the people of God, according to this meaning, — When the Gentiles shall come in, the **Jews also shall return from their defection to the obedience of faith**; and thus shall be completed the salvation of the whole Israel of God, which must be gathered from both; and yet in such a way that the Jews shall obtain the first place, being as it were the first-born in God's family. This interpretation seems to me the most suitable, because Paul intended here to set forth the completion of the kingdom of Christ, which is by no means to be confined to the Jews, but is to include the whole world."²

I have placed in bold "The Jews also shall return from their defection to the obedience of faith" because this statement summarizes what Calvin clearly taught in his commentary. A note on Calvin's use of the word 'religion'. 'Religion' should not be confused with saving faith. That is clear from his statement 'as before'. The Jews were, 'religious' before, they were not true believers.

Some believe the Jews must at some stage revert to the old sacrificial system in order to fulfil some of the OT

prophecies. It is even believed by some that King David must raise from the dead in order to fulfil prophecy. They fail to appreciate that as the Bible was written under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it must be spiritually discerned. It is not necessary for King David to raise from the dead to conduct another ministry on this earth, as the promises given to King David are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Those who want to follow up on that point are encouraged to read the paper on my web site titled, "*The Hand of God*". See the chapter titled, "*God's Covenant With King David*". John Calvin did not support the view that the old religion of Israel with its sacrifices should be restored.

Some think Israel must extend its territory in order to fulfill Old Testament promises to Abraham regarding the land, but the testimony of scripture is that those promises have been fulfilled. The Bible says, "...the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them. Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled." (Joshua 21:43-45. See also 23:14 and Psalm 145:13). For more on God's promises to Abraham and their fulfilment, see my paper, "*God's Covenant With Abraham*" on my web site.

Some Christians want the Islamic Mosque in Jerusalem with its golden dome removed so that the Jews can build a temple on the site and resume animal sacrifices. I will relate a testimony I read some years back which illustrates the folly of such a move.

A woman who is a Jew - a direct descendant of Abraham - pondered on the fact that a Roman army under the command of Titus destroyed the sacrificial system with the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in AD 70.

The elimination of sacrifices was completed after the failed second Jewish revolt (AD 132-135). After the rebellion, under the leadership of Bar Kokhba was crushed, Jews were forbidden to enter Jerusalem. Jerusalem was renamed Aelia Captiolina until Christianity became the official religion in the fourth century.

She believed that if God is the powerful God that she believed him to be - she certainly understood him to be much more powerful than the Roman army, then for some reason unknown to her, God *allowed* the Romans to destroy the sacrificial system. She searched for an answer to the puzzle, and found the answer in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the fulfilment of the sacrificial system. John the Baptist proclaimed to a crowd upon seeing Jesus coming towards him, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29).

Rome destroyed the sacrificial system because it was the will of God that it do so. The destruction was secured by the building of a temple to Jupiter on the site of the ruins of the Jewish temple. The Islamic mosque is now in Jerusalem under the work of the unseen hand of God to prevent a return of the Old Testament sacrificial system. God has done these things in order to give glory to His Son.

After that brief digression, I must present some more wisdom from John Calvin who in commenting on Romans 11:15 says, “‘For if their rejections...’, etc. This passage, which many deem obscure, and some awfully pervert, ought, in my view, to be understood as another argument, derived from a comparison of the less with the greater, according to this import, “‘Since the rejection of the Jews has availed so much as to occasion the reconciling of the Gentiles, how much more effectual will be their resumption? Will it not be to raise them even from the dead?’” For Paul ever insists on this, that the Gentiles have no cause for envy, as though the restoration of the Jews to favour were to render their condition worse. Since then God has wonderfully drawn forth life from death and light from darkness, how much more ought we to hope, he reasons, that **the resurrection of a people, as it were, wholly dead, will bring life to the Gentiles.**”³

New Bible Commentary Revised

The highly respected *New Bible Commentary* also supports the view that God will turn the heart of Israel in the last days. It says of the apostle Paul, “... he is confident that, as the Jews have led to the conversion of the Gentiles, so the Gentiles will be the agents of the conversion of the Jews. The issue of the divine purpose will be to include all under grace.” (IVP, p. 1037). *The New Bible Commentary* says on verse fifteen, “The description of this recovery of Israel as *life from the dead* may suggest that it will take place as part of the preparatory events leading up to Christ’s return and the resurrection of the dead.”⁴ The plain teaching of scripture is supported by good Bible commentaries, but not by many heretical groups such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Beware the Jehovah’s Witnesses

The Jehovah’s Witnesses use a text of scripture in isolation to bolster their argument that God has no future plans for Israel. That scripture is Matthew 21:43 where Jesus told the Jews, “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.” This statement was made in the context of the Jews - particularly the leaders - rejecting the work of Christ. The previous verse says, “...The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes”? In response to the JW’s argument we should note the following:

- No scripture should be used without considering the context of the rest of scripture. In this case, particularly Romans chapter eleven.
- Matthew 21:43 is not telling us that the kingdom of God will be taken away permanently.
- Matthew 21:43 has been fulfilled. For nearly 2,000 years, the kingdom of God has been taken away and given to the Gentiles. There is nothing more that needs to be done to fulfil this passage of scripture. The fulfilment of the Romans prophecy is not going to detract in any way from the Matthew prophecy.

Christians who support the claim that God is finished with Israel are not in good company when they are supporting

Jehovah’s Witness doctrine.

The Apostle Paul

Paul, towards the end of his life, was captured and transported to Rome. “‘Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. Three days later he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: ‘My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans.’” (Acts 28:16-17). Paul went on to explain, “... It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.” (28:20). This last sentence is very helpful for our subject.

- Firstly, it should be noted that Paul proclaimed a different message to the religious authorities, otherwise he would not have been arrested. They wanted a politically successful Messiah who would deliver physical freedom. Paul proclaimed a spiritually successful Messiah who would deliver spiritual freedom. Deliverance from sin, Satan and punishment.
- We note that at the end of his ministry on earth, Paul still thinks of the ‘hope of **Israel**’. Israel has not dropped from his thoughts to be replaced by the Church. The hope of the nation he still loves, and believes has a future destiny, is Jesus Christ.

Historical Considerations

The State of Israel

The State of Israel was created in 1948 surrounded on three sides by enemies. Not many expected the weak and vulnerable state to survive. It has not only survived, but prospered. This is an amazing development. Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain has this to say. “No nation in history has ever survived a two thousand year exile to begin again in its ancestral homeland”⁵

Not only has Israel needed to fight several nations to come to birth, it has also successfully fought off several nations to continue its existence. In June 1967, Israel faced great danger from the combined weight of the Arab world. One magazine reports. “In the weeks before the conflict President Nasser of Egypt announced that his country had been in a state of war with Israel ‘since 1948’. On 30 May, after he and King Hussein of Jordan signed a defence pact, Nasser announced: ‘The armies of Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon are poised on the borders of Israel ... while standing behind us are the armies of Iraq, Algeria, Kuwait, Sudan and the whole Arab nation... the Arabs are arranged for battle, the critical hour has arrived.’

Just five days later, on 4th June 1967, President Abdur Rahman Aref of Iraq joined the military alliance stating: ‘Our goal is clear - to wipe Israel off the map’. The following day, in the face of clear and present danger, Israel launched a pre-emptive strike against the combined forces of Egypt, Syria and Jordan. After three days the Jordanian forces surrendered, the next day the Egyptian army conceded defeat and the following day, 132 hours and 30 minutes after the war

began, Syrian forces surrendered.”⁶ In the light of recent historical events, it is hard to come to the conclusion that God is finished with the nation of Israel.

Revival

The work of God in the past in bringing large groups of people to himself points to the fact that he can bring about a great spiritual awakening in the land of Israel. He will not be hampered by present dark spiritual conditions.

Regarding the revival in Scotland, one Church historian wrote, “The Church of Scotland hath been singular among the churches. And, first, it is to be admired that, whereas in other nations the Lord thought it enough to convict a few in a city, village, or family to himself, leaving the greater part in darkness, in Scotland the whole nation was converted by lump; and within ten years after popery was discharged in Scotland, there were not ten persons of quality to be found in it who did not profess the true reformed religion...”⁷

The revival in Scotland was so great that some people declared that the whole of Scotland was saved. It would seem rather odd for God to work powerfully in Scotland, and in other parts, but not work powerfully in Israel in his own good time. When mention is made of Scotland being saved, or Israel being saved in the future, the thought is not of every single person being saved, but a significant portion in the country so as to change the whole tone of the country in general.

England

There are many examples of the work of God in the lives of people south of the boarder in England. The example I will relate now is one of my favourites. It concerns the ministry of Laurence Chaderton (c. 1536-1640). He lectured at St. Clement’s, Cambridge, and when he laid down this charge in 1618, at the age of seventy-two, it is said that forty ministers begged him to continue, attributing their conversions to him.

“Thomas Goodwin reports the words of a Cambridge friend who, speaking of the conviction of sin which accompanied Chaderton’s preaching, declared that ‘when he heard Mr. Chaderton preach the gospel, his apprehension was as if the sun, namely Jesus Christ, shined upon a dunghill’ [figuratively a place of spiritual darkness]. On one occasion when Chaderton had preached for two hours and promised to stop, he was interrupted by a cry from the congregation, ‘For God’s sake, Sir, Go on, go on!’”⁸

The work of God in England produced a Godly group of men known as ‘The Puritans’ - a name first coined in about 1564 for men who wanted further reformation of the Church of England. On the subject of the conversion of the Jews, Ian Murray reports, “From the first quarter of the seventeenth century, belief in a future conversion of the Jews became commonplace among the English Puritans. ... the subject not infrequently was mentioned by Puritan leaders.”⁹ The Puritans, with their God-centred thinking could easily appreciate that God would bring Jews to himself in the last days. Arminianism by contrast is man-centred in its thinking.

Arminianism

I must point out that the Romans chapter eleven passage does not sit well with Arminian teaching. Arminianism fails to appreciate the sovereign hand of God in the salvation of sinners, either individually, or in large groups. The teaching of Arminius with its man-centred approach to the salvation of sinners was declared to be heresy at the Synod of Dort in 1618-19.

The testimony of our Lord

Finally, I will return to the words of Jesus recorded at the beginning of this paper. Jesus said regarding Jerusalem, “... For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (Matt. 23:37-39). Quite clearly, Jesus is foretelling a change in Jerusalem which in the past had killed the prophets. A time will come when Jerusalem will praise Jesus Christ and look forward to His coming.

Further Reading

Ian H. Murray, “*The Puritan Hope*”, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1971.

Randall Price, “*Fast Facts on the Middle East Conflict*”, Harvest House, Oregon, 2003. Very helpful for an up-to-date perspective on the Middle East. Randall has a Ph. D. In Middle Eastern Studies. Highly recommended.

End Notes

1. Frank E. Gaebelien, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Zondervan, DVD.
2. *Calvin’s Bible Commentaries*, Ages Digital Library, Ver. 1.0
3. *Calvin’s Bible Commentaries*.
4. Ralph P. Martin, *New Bible Commentary*, IVP, London 1970, p. 1038.
5. Jonathan Sacks, quoted in *Christian Witness to Israel*, June-August 2007, p. 3.
6. Mike Moore, *Christian Witness to Israel*, June-August 2007, p. 3.
7. Kirkton, quoted in “*The Puritan Hope*” by Ian H. Murray, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971, p. 5.
8. “*The Puritan Hope*”, p. 9.
9. “*The Puritan Hope*”, p. 43.

Bold: Unless otherwise stated, text in bold reflects an addition to the original for emphasis.

Scripture, unless otherwise indicated is taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version ®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Copyright © David Holden
November 2007

Aletheia Publishing
Box 641
Albany Creek 4035
Australia