

28. Israel, still God's chosen people

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Many people around the world do not understand how God works with Israel in His master plan, so they somehow think that the Jews in the first century killed Jesus. A couple of very important things they forget:

- 1) Jesus was a Jew.
- 2) The actual people who killed Jesus were the Roman soldiers. So should we boycott eating Spaghetti, Lasagna and Pizza for that?

These people are very anti-Semitic and they even deny Holocaust by Nazi during the World War II. I just don't know how they can deny the mass murder of 6 million Jews by the hands of one crazy evil man. But they and many others like the Iranian President and his cohorts still do.

You cannot delete the nation of Israel from the world history, because it pretty much wraps around the conflicts of Israel in the Middle East, especially the modern day world history.

In our last study, we've learned that the rejection of Israel regarding the Messiah Jesus Christ led the salvation and blessings of God to the Gentiles which was originally offered to Israel exclusively. But we also learned that God is not done with Israel. He didn't write them off from His book, rather He is going to restore them in the future. That is what the Holy Spirit is going to teach us today.

A. WHAT WOULD COMING BACK FROM THE DEAD BE LIKE?

Romans 11:15 For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

The hows and whys of God's plan, we may never fully comprehend. In many ways, His plan is beyond understanding. As an old preacher once warned, "It's unwise to try to fathom the unfathomable or unscrew the inscrutable."

However, some of the practical implications of God's dealings with the nations are within our reach. One has to do with how Jews and Gentiles should get along. In this section of Romans 11, Paul draws powerful word pictures to help us learn how to relate to one another in humility and grace.

B. POWERFUL WORD PICTURES

Romans 11:16-21 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. 17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, 18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." 20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

1) The lump of the first fruit

The first word picture compares the Jewish nation to a lump of dough. You are wondering, "OK preacher, where did you get 'dough'? My Bible says, 'the first fruit.'" Well, I am glad that you are thinking. To understand what apostle Paul is talking about here, we must go to Numbers 15.

Numbers 15:17-21 Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 18 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land to which I bring you, 19 then it will be, when you eat of the bread of the land, that you shall offer up a heave offering to the Lord. 20 You shall offer up a cake of the first of your ground meal as a heave offering; as a heave offering of the threshing floor, so shall you offer it up. 21 Of the first of your ground meal you shall give to the Lord a heave offering throughout your generations.

This is what Paul was talking about. The first part of the fruit of the ground was to be offered up to God as a symbol that the entire lump belonged to Him. The basic idea is that when God accepts the part He sanctifies the whole.

Applying this to the history of Israel, we understand Paul's argument. God accepted the founder of the nation, Abraham, and in so doing set apart his descendants as well. God also accepted the other patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, in spite of their sins or failings. This means that God must accept the "rest of the lump" – the nation of Israel.

2) The root and branches

As some of you have heard me saying this, I am not much of a green thumb guy. As a matter of fact, my thumb is either brown or black, because I consistently killed the plants inside and outside of the house. The only plants grow well around my house are weeds. My wife wanted a green lawn like our last home. This time I told her if she really wants green, I would spray green paint on the rocks in the backyard for her. She gave me that look only a wife can give.

We find apostle Paul using the olive tree which is a symbol of the nation of Israel according to Jeremiah 11 and Hosea 14. We need to keep in mind that Paul was not discussing the relationship of the individual people of Israel, but rather the nation in the plan of God.

The root supports the branches. In this case, the root represents the patriarchs who founded the nation. God made His covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and He cannot deny them or change them. Consequently, it is God's promise to Abraham that sustains Israel even today.

The Jewish people at the time of Jesus' death rejected God's plan for them. Paul pictured them as branches broken off the tree. But he saw an amazing thing taking place: other branches were grafted into the tree to share in the life of the tree. These branches were the Gentiles.

Here is an interesting fact I've learned about grafting:

Because the branch contains the fruit-bearing capacity, a gardener normally grafts an orchard-quality branch to a wild stock, never the opposite. By reversing the usual procedure, Paul shows us that, in God's orchard, the true value is in the root, not the branch, and even a worthless branch can produce good fruit when the divine life flows through it.

In other words, the Gentiles took the place of the Jews, not because they were worthier, but because of God's grace alone.

This reminds me what Jesus said in one of His parables:

Matthew 22:1-9 And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: 2 "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a

marriage for his son, 3 and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. 4 Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding."' 5 But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. 6 And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. 7 But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. 8 Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 9 Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' 10 So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.

That is exactly what happened to the Israelites. They rejected Jesus, so they were rejected temporarily until the right time.

In v20, apostle Paul gives a stern warning to any Gentile who thinks that he was chosen because of his own worthiness.

1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

C. THE GOODNESS AND SEVERITY OF GOD

Romans 11:22-24 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

As I already stated before, this study is not about individual salvation rather it is about the position of Israel and the Gentiles in God's plan. So when v22 says 'cut off', we should not think that a person is going to lose salvation.

It is worth noting that, according to Bible prophecy, the professing Gentile church will be "cut off" because of apostasy. 1 Timothy 4, 2 Timothy 3, 2 Thessalonians 2 and the church of the Laodiceans in Revelation 3, all indicate that many of the professing churches in the last days will depart from the faith. There is no hope for the apostate church, but there is hope for apostate Israel! Why? Because of the roots of the olive tree. God will keep His promises to the patriarchs, but God will break off the Gentiles because of their unbelief.

No matter how far Israel may stray from the truth of God, the roots are still good. God is still the "God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". He will keep His promises to these patriarchs. This means that the olive tree will flourish again.

D. GOD'S PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

Romans 11:25-27 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; 27 For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."

What has happened to Israel is all a part of God's plan, and He knows what He is doing.

I asked you to underline 'mystery'. The Greek word for this is 'mysterion'. Don't think that it is one of those 'Twilight Zone' movie stuffs that makes you have a spooky feeling. The definition of 'mysterion' is a hidden thing or secret. It is like not having enough security clearance to know the secret that God has for you. But once you accept Jesus' invitation to know the truth, you have enough clearance to access the secret.

In other words, apostle Paul wants us to know about God's plan that allowed Israel to follow her dumb course of rejection and consequence, then turn around to come back to the Lord when the time is right.

Some people use v25 to insist their theory – the rapture will not happen until the last Gentile gets saved. However, their theory brings up a couple of important points:

- 1) If they limit the last Gentile person to be saved within the Church Age before the rapture, that would be correct. Because there will be other Gentile people who will continuously be saved during the Great Tribulation according to the Book of Revelation.
- 2) The spiritual awakening of Israel as a nation would not happen until the antichrist sets up his statue in the temple in Jerusalem right in the middle of the Great Tribulation which is known as the 'Abomination of Desolation'.

What does "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" mean? In one sense, it may refer to the full number of Gentiles whom God is calling as a people for His name. When all of the Gentile elect have come to faith, the Jewish hardening will be over.

It may also allude to what Jesus called "the times of the Gentiles" in Luke 24 – a period of Gentile domination that began when Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Ever since that time, no king from David's line has ruled in Israel. But after the fullness of Gentile supremacy is complete, the Jews will have their Davidic king who is Jesus Christ.

E. THE CALLING OF GOD IS IRREVOCABLE

Romans 11:28-29 Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

In a way, the Jewish people are enemies and brothers in the same God. At this point, the nation Israel is against their Messiah Jesus, but they will come to Him in later days. Let's make one thing very clear. Even though the nation Israel as whole will come back to God, but the individual choices will be still honored by the Lord. I am sure that there will be the Jewish people who still would go against God for whatever reasons they have.

However, from the viewpoint of election, Jews hold a unique place in God's heart. He will never recant, because of His oath to Abraham.

Some charismatic denomination pastors and preachers use v29 as a base to bring their authorities and positions as something cannot be challenged or examined even if they do wrong things. That would be completely out of context. This is about Israel, not the Holy Spirit's gifts and callings for individuals.

When a person isolates verse (s) out of context to prove his point, we call it "eisegesis" in theological terms. It can be a dangerous way to interpret the Bible. The way we study the Bible – going from verse to verse, chapter to chapter – is known as 'exegesis' which is a very objective way to study the Word of God and we get to have a full counsel of God through it.

Allow me to take you back to Matthew 22:

Matthew 22:11-14 But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. 12 So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 For many are called, but few are chosen."

This portion of the Scripture tells us clearly that to enter into the heaven you must wear the robe of righteousness which is known as a wedding garment here. You can not produce your own garment of righteousness, but it has to be Jesus' righteousness. Do you have His garment of righteousness?

F. APPLICATIONS

1) God will be consistent with Himself and true to His word no matter what men may do, especially for Israel.

2) Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

The true peace of Jerusalem will come when the Prince of Peace, Jesus sets up His kingdom on earth.

Psalms 122:6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you."