



A Publication of CJF Ministries and Messianic Perspectives Radio Network

Messianic Perspectives®

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.

Post Office Box 345, San Antonio, Texas 78292-0345

Cheshvan-Kislev-Tevet 5769 / November-December 2008

GOD HAS A PLAN

THE ONGOING PLACE OF ISRAEL IN GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN [ROMANS 9-11]

By Dr. Tim M. Sigler

Romans 11 further supports the claim made throughout our three-part series that a Gospel that obscures the story of Israel will soon obscure the story of Jesus. Though many believers in Jesus are unaware or unaffected by the fact that they believe in a Jewish Messiah, it is impossible to appreciate the Gospel fully without appreciating the role of Israel, the Jewish people. After all, the Gospel of the New Testament is founded upon

THIRD IN A THREE-PART SERIES

not jettison these promises, for to do so would be to jettison the gospel." Recognizing the link between Israel and her Messiah is critical in getting the Gospel story straight, and a proper understanding of Romans 9-11 helps us avoid obscuring its truth.

These chapters teach that in God's redemptive plan, Israel has a past, a present, and a future.² In our study of Romans 9, we learned of **Israel's past election**. Further, Romans 10 outlined **Israel's present rejection**. In our current study, Paul explains in Romans 11 the nature of **Israel's future reception** and encourages us that her current rejection is

the promises given to Israel in the Old Testament. If Jesus is not Israel's Messiah, He is not anyone's Messiah, for the Messiah was promised to Israel. As Douglas Moo points out in his famed commentary on the Book of Romans, "Paul could

only temporary. Far from being finished with Israel, God has a plan to bring His salvation full circle—from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the uttermost parts of the earth, and back to Israel again.

In Romans 11, Paul outlines God's ultimate reception of the Jewish people and the Jewish acceptance of the Gospel. He explains that Israel's rejection—the focus of Romans 10—is only temporary. Her future salvation is still an appointment to be kept on God's redemptive calendar.

The Preservation of a Remnant Within Israel (11:1-10)

When it comes to building an argument through the use of rhetorical questions, Paul is a master. This technique has been employed a number of times already in this section (see Romans 9:14, 19-24, 30; 10:8, 14-15a, 18, and 19), and he will continue this line of argument with more powerful questions (see Romans 11:1, 7, and 11). Paul opens Chapter 11 with just such a question: "I say then, has God cast away His people? . . ." (v. 1). Paul's consistent answer to questions he considers absurd is "Certainly not!" or "May it never be!" or "By no means!" (See Romans 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11; and in other Pauline texts such as 1 Corinthians 6:15, Galatians 2:17, and 3:21).

Such was his answer when he asked the illogical question of Romans 6:1, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" The obvious answer was "Certainly

not! . . .” (Rom. 6:2). In fact, his response comes from a Greek word from which we get the word *genesis*, meaning *beginning*. Paul’s answer is so strong against this illogical question that the essence of his answer should be understood as follows: “May it never even begin to begin! Don’t even think such a thing! It is not even a remote possibility!” This is the same answer Paul gives to the question of Romans 11:1, “*I say then, has God cast away His people? . . .*” Answer: “May it never even begin to begin! Don’t even think such a thing! It is not even a remote possibility!”

How can Paul be so certain that God has not cast away His people? Paul provides three lines of evidence that God has not rejected the Jewish people—all examples of a believing Jewish remnant. First of all, Paul himself is a Jewish believer. He says, “. . . *For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin*” (v. 1).

Second, even when Elijah thought that he alone was following God, there was a remnant of 7,000 faithful Israelites.

God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, “LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life”? But what does the divine response say to him? “I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal” (vv. 2-4).

During a time of Jewish resistance to God’s work among His people, even the Prophet Elijah wondered, “Is this it? Is there no acceptance of God’s message among His people? Am I the only one faithful, and now I could be killed as well?” Paul reminds his readers of the divine answer to Elijah’s questions, quoting 1 Kings 19:18, “*Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, . . .*”

This is a helpful reminder to Jewish believers in Jesus today. God has always provided a remnant. There are always examples of Jewish believers in God’s redemptive plan. Whether it was God’s redemptive plan before the revelation of Jesus as the Messiah, or at the close of His earthly ministry, or today, God has always preserved a remnant of Jewish people as believers—responders to God’s work. This is why Paul offers as his third example of God’s preservation that Jewish believers today compose a remnant of the faithful. He states, “*Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace*” (Rom. 11:5).

Upon mentioning the term “grace,” Paul takes a moment to expound on the significance of this important concept in Verse 6. Part of the Gospel’s good news is that it’s a free gift that simply cannot be repaid by any amount of good works. Intrinsic to the idea of a “grace” gift is the fact that one cannot “work” to earn it. Works and grace are, in Paul’s reasoning, simply incompatible. While most religious systems express a desire to do good works in order to deserve or merit divine favor, God’s Gospel of grace cannot be contaminated with such a system of earned approval. God gives His saving favor and approval, His grace, as a gift to those who trust in Him (see Verse 11:6).

Paul offers another rhetorical question as he concludes this section on the remnant. He asks, “What then?” His answer clarifies that within Israel, God is dealing with three distinct groups: “Israel” as a whole, “the elect” remnant, and the “blinded” majority whom he calls “the rest.” Notice these three groups in Verse 11:7, “. . . *Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.*” Earlier in Verse 9:31, Paul mentioned that Israel failed to attain a righteous standing with God. Though Israel sought God’s favor through observance of the law, only the elect of Israel obtained His favor—and this was obtained only as an act of God’s grace. As to the hardened majority—“the rest”—Paul appeals to no lesser authorities than the Prophet Isaiah, King David, and the *Torah* itself to make the point that Israel has often been spiritually blind and deaf—unresponsive and disinterested—when it comes to God’s invitations to salvation.

Notice how Paul substantiates his argument by citing Scripture. He introduces these quotations with the words, “Just as it is written,” or “And David says.”

“*Just as it is written: ‘God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day’*” (Rom. 11:8; citing Isaiah 29:10, and Deuteronomy 29:4).

“*And David says: ‘Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, And bow down their back always’*” (Rom. 11:9-10; citing Psalm 69:22-23).

These words sound final in their condemnation of the nation. But this is a temporary stumbling, as Paul will explain in Romans 11:11-32.

Messianic Perspectives®

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Messianic Perspectives is published bimonthly by CJF Ministries, P.O. Box 345, San Antonio, Texas 78292-0345, a 501(c)3 Texas nonprofit corporation: Dr. Gary Hedrick, President; Brian Nowotny, Director of Communications; Rachel Zanardi, Editor. Subscription price: \$10 per year. The publication of articles by other authors does not necessarily imply full agreement with all the views expressed therein. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Visit us online at www.cjf.org. Toll-free OrderLine: (800) 926-5397. © 2008 by CJF Ministries. All rights reserved.

The Purpose for Unbelief Within Israel (11:11-24)

Moving his argument forward with yet another rhetorical question, Paul asks, “*I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? . . .*” (v. 11). While one may predict Paul’s answer, it must be observed that this is a continuation of his argument and retribution in the previous verses about Israel’s falling away, stumbling, and becoming a snare, a trap, and a stumbling block. While this is the price for Israel’s rejection of God’s plan, does this condemnation spell out Israel’s ultimate destiny? Is the ultimate plan for Israel to stumble, to fall, to turn away from God? Paul’s answer: “*I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles*” (v. 11).

Notice that a *stumble* is different than a *fall*. It is much better to merely stumble than to completely fall. A fall could be damaging with long-term effects. It could be fatal and final. But a stumble is much less serious than a fall, and these words are important to distinguish in the text. Israel did not stumble, or begin to fall, so that they could ultimately fall, did they? “May it never be. But by their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make them jealous.” Paul explains that the purpose of Israel’s stumbling is to allow salvation to go to the Gentiles. Until now, salvation was to be found only within Israel. As Jesus explained to the Samaritan woman, “. . . *salvation is of the Jews*” (John 4:22). Likewise, Paul testified what this meant for Gentiles before the coming of Messiah Jesus:

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in

the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without [Messiah], being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2:11-12).

God has remedied the miserable condition of the Gentile world through Israel’s stumbling. Israel stumbled so the message of salvation could be spread among the Gentiles. Saved Gentiles will in turn “provoke them to jealousy” as Jewish people marvel in amazement when once pagan Gentiles enjoy God’s blessings and salvation.

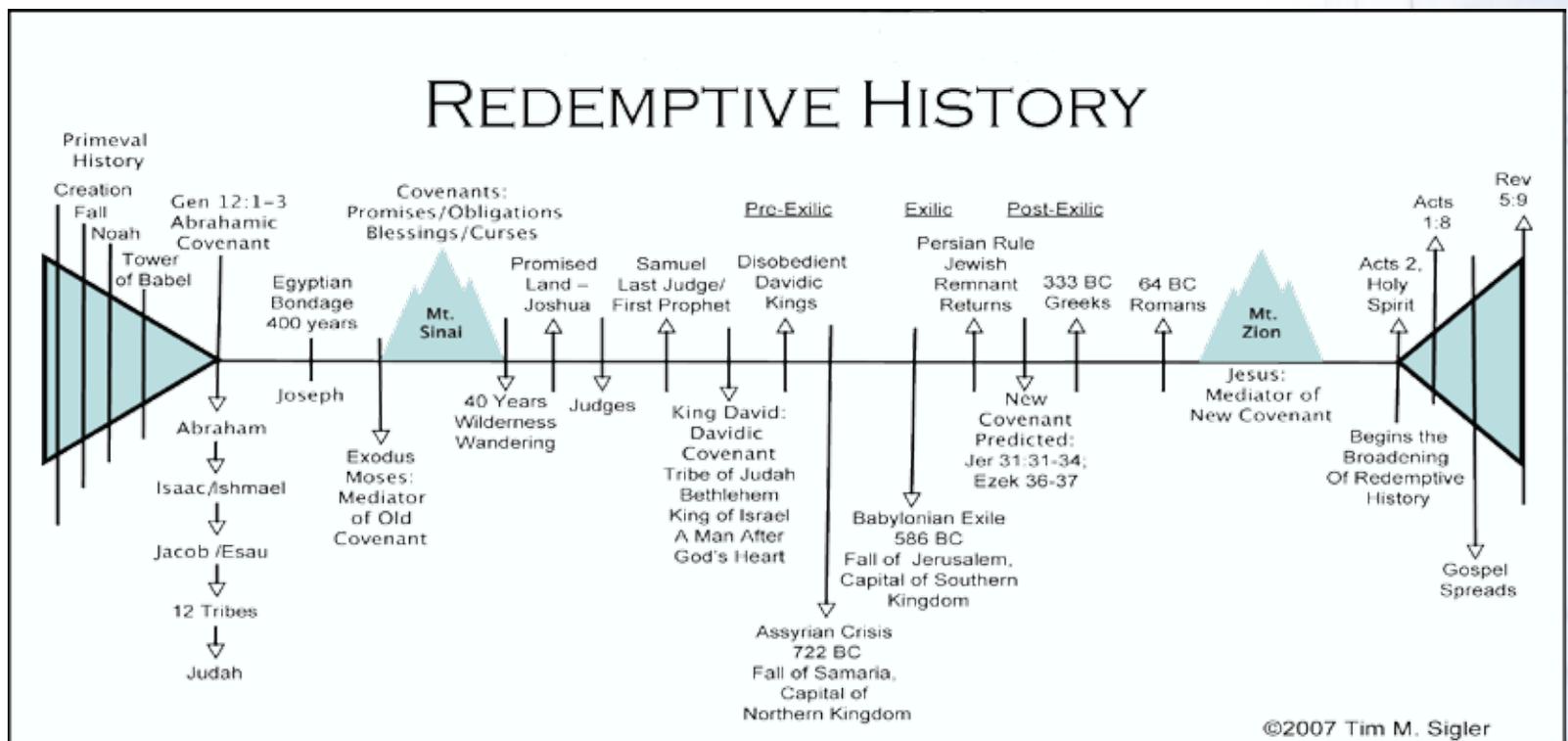
Kal Vachomer “the Light And the Heavy”

In order to appreciate Paul’s argument in Romans 11:12 (as well as in Verse 24), it is helpful to understand one of the common methods of logic and argumentation used among the rabbis of his day. Rabbi Hillel the Elder (c. 60 BC—AD 20) is credited with developing seven rules for biblical interpretation. His first is called *kal vachomer* (literally, “the light and the heavy” or “the lenient and the stringent”). This *a fortiori* style of reasoning is one that argues from a minor premise to a major premise and suggests that if A is so, then B is even more so. The *kal vachomer* rule says that what applies in a less important case—the lighter or more lenient—will certainly apply in a more important case—the heavier or more stringent. A *kal vachomer* argument is often, but not always, signaled by the phrase “how much more.”

Notice how Paul employs this rule of rabbinic interpretation in the current context:

Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! For I speak to you

God has remedied the miserable condition of the Gentile world through Israel’s stumbling. Israel stumbled so the message of salvation could be spread . . .



***It has been said
pride is the only
disease that
leaves the person
who has it
feeling well
while making
everyone around
them feel sick.***

Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? (Rom. 11:12-15).

Paul sets up his argument by mentioning the lighter premise (point A), “*Now if their fall [literally, transgression] is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, . . .*” (v. 12). In other words, when Israel rejects the Gospel, what is the outcome? The riches of God’s salvation become available to the whole world, and Gentiles are saved. Paul’s following phrase provides the heavier premise (point B) of the *kal vachomer* rule: “how much more their fullness!” This “fullness” refers to the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promises to the Jewish people. If the lesser is true—that when Israel transgresses and fails thus bringing good news for Gentiles—think how much more good news there will be for Gentiles when finally Israel is fulfilled in its accepting God’s promised Messiah.

Again employing the *kal vachomer* logic, Paul spells out the ultimate good news for the Gentile world that will accompany Israel’s salvation. “*For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?*” (v. 15). If it was good for the rest of the world that Israel rejected the Gospel, just think of the even greater salvation benefits that will come when Israel accepts the Gospel. Namely, the resurrection, “life from the dead,” will be enjoyed at the coming of Messiah Jesus.

Two Analogies: Dough and An Olive Tree (11:16-24)

Paul advances his argument by employing two analogies: the firstfruits and the whole lump of dough, and the root and the branches of a whole olive tree. He begins, “*For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches*” (v. 16). With this first analogy, related to bread making, Paul reminds his readers of the Feast of Firstfruits (see Leviticus 23:9-14, and Numbers 15:18-21). This agricultural festival celebrated God’s provision of the barley harvest by giving Him the first portion of the crops as a grain offering. This festival was later used by biblical writers to conceptualize how Israel was the first portion (firstfruit) of humanity—chosen to experience God’s holiness (see Jeremiah 2:3, James 1:18, and Revelation 14:4). Paul reasons that if the first part of what God chose out of humanity is holy, then the rest of humanity is going to enjoy the holiness that God provides as well.

God is taking a sample piece of humanity for Himself—by His choice—the nation of Israel. He called out Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He called out a remnant of people to save, like a little lump of dough, because His plan is to bring salvation to all the families of the earth. God will save some from all of humanity, both Jews and Gentiles, as they call upon the name of the Lord to be saved.

Paul’s second analogy is an olive tree and its branches. “. . . *if the root is holy, so are the branches*” (Rom. 11:16b). Paul’s two analogies in Verses 16-24—the firstfruits and the whole

DISTINGUISHING TERMS “THE FULLNESS OF THE GENTILES” VS. “THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES”

What does Paul mean in Romans 11:25 when he says that Israel has been temporarily set aside in God’s redemptive plan until “the fullness of the Gentiles has come in”? What is “the fullness of the Gentiles”? And when will it “come in”?

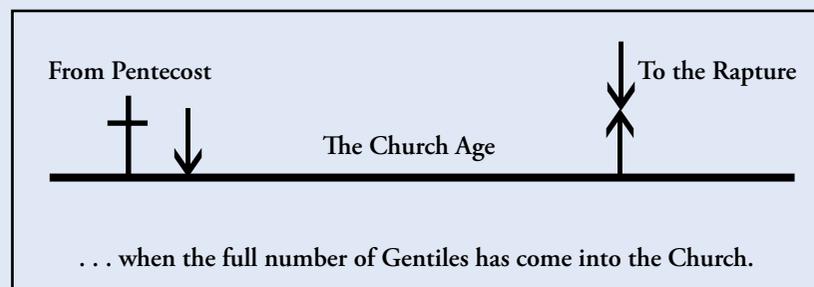
During the current age (which began on the Day of Pentecost; see Acts 2:1-47), God is calling non-Jews, along with a remnant of the physical seed of Abraham, to Himself. Together, believing Jews and Gentiles comprise the *Ekklesia* “called-out ones,” also known as “the Body of Messiah” (see 1 Corinthians 12:27) or “the Church” (see Acts 2:47).

However, this evangelistic process does not continue indefinitely. At a future, yet-unknown time, the last non-Jewish person will join the Body of Messiah, and the full number of Gentiles will have “come in.” The process will be complete.

This is what the Apostle is alluding to in Romans 11:25, when he says that Israel has been set aside nationally, partially, and temporarily until the full number of Gentiles has come in (that is, into the Church). It’s the process of building the true Church—not a denomination or institution, but the collective body of believers from the past 2,000 years—one person at a time.

When this process is complete, God will press the “resume” button on His redemptive plan cruise control, and His program will once again be primarily directed toward Jewish salvation, much like it was in past ages.

According to D. Stuart Briscoe in *The Preacher’s Commentary—Romans* (p. 210), “The fullness of the Gentiles (Rom. 11:25) refers to the time when the full complement of non-Jews will have believed and found their way into the kingdom. This fact has significance for Israel in that as Israel’s hardening gave opportunity for Gentile blessing so the conclusion of Gentile blessing will give rise to the new day of opportunity for Israel so great that ‘all Israel will be saved’ (Rom. 11:26).”



Douglas Moo, writing in the *New International Commentary on the New Testament—The Epistle to the Romans* (p. 719), recommends that “the Gentiles’ ‘fullness’ involves a numerical completion: God has determined to save a certain number of Gentiles, and only when that

lump of dough, and the root and the branches of a whole olive tree—illustrate one ultimate point. As Walter Kaiser points out, these two analogies “serve the same purpose . . . [signifying] the solidarity of the part with the whole.”³³ What is true for the part is true of the whole. The holiness God originally granted to the Israelites is now extended to the Gentiles. The Gentiles have not replaced the remnant of Jewish believers, but they do join in the benefits of saving faith. Since Gentile salvation presents such a change in the way God has worked throughout redemptive history, Paul warns that their new privileged position must not become a cause for boasting.

It has been said that pride is the only disease that leaves the person who has it feeling well while making everyone around them feel sick. Let us not join in this self-righteous pride against that which Paul warns. We have to realize that the only reason we have saving faith is because of God’s gracious plan to include us—whether Jew or Gentile. God’s program is not a cause for pride, as the image of God’s grafting work illustrates.

Individual or Corporate Salvation?

“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you [Gentiles], goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off” (v. 22). Some have used this verse to teach that it is possible for individual believers to lose their salvation after coming to the saving faith in Jesus. In this context, however, Paul is speaking about the responses of Jews and Gentiles as

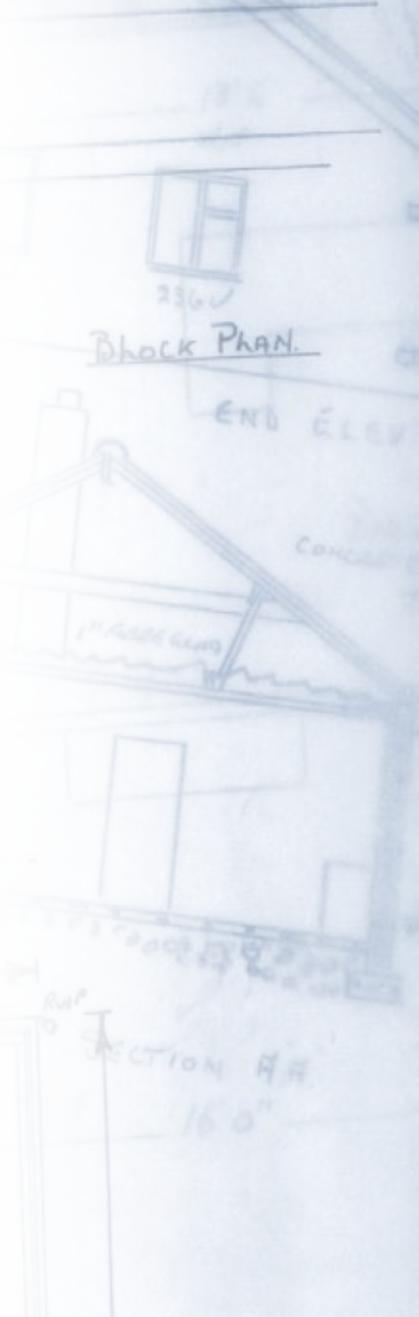
corporate people groups. He is not dealing with the responses of individual believers. Notice how this impacts the question about an individual believer losing his or her salvation. Paul is not claiming that it is possible for an individual to become saved and then lost again. Rather, he asserts that it is possible for God—who tore aside the natural branches and grafted in the wild branches—to remove the grafted-in branches and return the natural branches to their original state. Gentiles should, therefore, resist any temptation to think, “We, the Gentiles, have accepted God’s plan of salvation. Why can’t the Jews see it as clearly as we do? I guess they are just more stubborn than we are.”

Remember Paul’s admonition, “do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you” (v. 18). In other words, through whom did salvation come? Not through the Gentiles, but through the Jewish people. Don’t be arrogant against unbelieving Jews. If there weren’t Jews in the world, there would be no Jewish Messiah. If there was no Messiah for the Jewish people, there would be no Messiah for Gentiles.

God’s Grafting Work

How is God grafting people in? If a picture is worth a thousand words, and a chart is worth half a lecture, perhaps the following illustration will assist us in understanding the contrast Paul is employing by his use of the grafting analogy.

In this analogy, Israel represents the natural branches. They are the originally cultivated or tame olive tree branches—unbelieving Israel who



number has been reached will Israel’s hardening be removed. The ‘fullness of Israel’ (v. 12) is therefore matched by a ‘fullness of the Gentiles.’ Interpreted along these lines, Paul’s brief sketch of salvation history in v. 25b resembles very closely Jesus’ prediction of the sequence of events that would follow his death and resurrection:

“... For there shall be a great distress on the earth and wrath on this people, and they shall fall by the edge of the sword and they shall be taken captive into all nations, and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” (Luke 21:23b-24).”

Now what about the phrase “times of the Gentiles” (see Luke 21:24)? How does it differ from “fullness of the Gentiles”? The “times of the Gentiles” refers to an extended historical period of Gentile domination of Israel. It started with the Babylonians’ destruction of the Jewish Temple in 586 BC. Since that time, Israel has not exerted full sovereignty over all of Jerusalem. In the time of Jesus, Israel was a colony of the Roman Empire. And even today, parts of Jerusalem (most notably, the Temple Mount) are not under Israeli control. The “times of the Gentiles” continues.

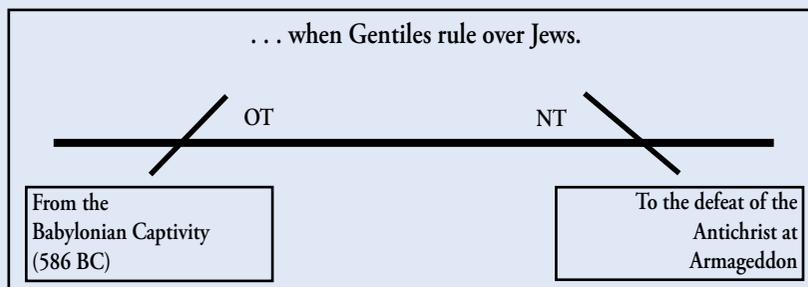
William MacDonald, in *The Believer’s Bible Commentary* (p. 263), explains: “The times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24)

really began with the Babylonian captivity . . . and will extend to the time when Gentile nations will no longer assert control over the city of Jerusalem.”

The Prophet Daniel outlined history as a succession of world kingdoms (see Daniel 2:36-43), each of which ruled over Israel (as well as most of the rest of the known world). However, the same prophecy goes on to declare that one day, God himself (through His earthly representative, the Messiah) will once again rule over His people Israel in the Land (see Verses 2:44-45)—and indeed, over the whole earth. And that Kingdom, we are told, will have no end (see Verse 44).

However, before that time comes, the Bible prophesies that there will be one more worldwide, anti-Semitic campaign against the Jewish people. Satan hates *Am Yisrael* (the “People of Israel”) because they represent God’s power and determination to keep His promises to Abraham and his descendants through the line of Isaac and Jacob. So during the coming Tribulation, Satan will come against Israel,

like a sinister serpent, to attack the “woman” and her “seed” (see Revelation 12:13-17). The defeat of the devil’s puppet, the anti-Messiah (NKJV, “Antichrist”), at the conclusion of the Armageddon Campaign (see Revelation 16:13-16) marks the ultimate failure of Satan’s plan and the close, at long last, of the “times of the Gentiles.”



... God chose Israel as the first family who would in turn be a blessing to “all the families of the earth”...

sees God’s severity. The Gentiles are the wild, grafted-in branches—they see God’s kindness. “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?” (v. 24). Notice that Paul again uses the rabbinic *kal vachomer* argument: if A is so, then B is even more so. If wild branches (Gentiles) can be grafted, “how much more” is God able to graft the natural branches (Israel) back “into their own olive tree?” It is “their own” because God chose Israel as the first family who would in turn be a blessing to “all the families of the earth” (see Genesis 12:3). At the climax of God’s redemptive plan, many Jewish people—the olive tree’s natural branches—will believe and be re-grafted into God’s salvation.

The Promise of Restoration For Israel (11:25-32)

The term *mystery* is a loaded theological term within the New Testament—especially in Paul’s writings. It is used somewhat differently than we use the term today. We often use the word *mystery* in reference to a mystery novel (e.g., Agatha Christie, the Hardy Boys, or Sherlock Holmes). The question in such mysteries often revolves around who may have committed a crime, or where to find a hidden treasure. However, in the New Testament, and especially in Paul’s writings, the term *mystery* refers to that which was previously hid-

Romans 11:25 is such an important verse. It should be known by all believers, marked in our Bibles, and committed to memory. There are three terms I would like you to consider underlining or highlighting in your own copy of the Scriptures: **in part**, **Israel**, and **until**.

God has blinded—literally, hardened—Israel. But Paul is careful to qualify this blinding in three ways. First, Israel’s blindness is partial—it is not complete. It is not that Israel cannot see at all, but her spiritual sight is hindered, as if by a veil. Recall Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 3:14-15, “But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in [Messiah]. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.” Thankfully, Paul holds out the hope that “Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (v. 16). Israel’s blindness is only partial.

Second, Israel’s blindness is national—this is not a setting aside of *all* Jewish people. God has set aside the Jews as a nation, as a people group. While many throughout the Church’s history have essentially said, “Good! God is done with the Jews, we’re moving on to the Gentiles,” Paul cautions that the setting aside of the Jewish people is only “in part.” As he stated in Verses 1-10, God has always preserved a remnant. Thank God that there are Jewish believers in many churches and messianic congregations around the world today. Many Jewish people—those naturally part of God’s “olive tree” plan of redemption—are com-

Israel	Gentiles
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. natural branches 2. sees God’s severity 3. cultivated (tamed) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. grafted-in branches 2. see God’s kindness 3. wild

The olive tree = the program of God

den but now revealed. That’s why Paul says in some passages, “Behold, I show you a mystery.” In other words, God is no longer concealing His plan. Rather, He is revealing what *has been* hidden but *is now* made plain. And so Paul says here:

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. 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; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins” (Rom. 11:25-27).

ing to saving faith in their Messiah. Paul says that only a part of the Jewish people is blinded to the truth of the Gospel. In any given age, you can still find Jewish people who are believers in the Jewish Messiah—there are individual exceptions to the national condition.

Third, Israel’s blindness is temporal—not forever. This is the ultimate good news for the Jewish people. God’s grafting work of cutting Israel off and setting her aside is not eternal, but temporary.

Please note these important words in the text. They are central not only to Paul’s argument about the promised restoration of Israel, but central to the Gospel. A presentation of the Gospel that obscures God’s plan for Israel will soon obscure the truth about Jesus. Such a distorted, Israel-free Gospel will misunderstand the Jewish Messiah; it will

put Him in a context foreign to the true context of His ministry. It will disfigure His person and work. We cannot omit Israel from God's redemptive plan in the past, present, or future.

Israel's Salvation: A Fulfillment of the New Covenant (11:26-27)

After the threefold limitation of his comment on Israel's blindness (partial, national, and temporal), Paul holds out the promise of ultimate restoration. "*And so all Israel will be saved, . . .*" (v. 26). Some have latched onto this phrase and taken it out of context. They reason, "Since all Israel will be saved anyway, we need not bother confronting Jewish people with the Gospel, and Jesus' claims to be their Messiah." After the tragedies of the Holocaust, many Roman Catholics and liberal Protestants began to suggest that there is no need to evangelize the Jewish people in light of God's promise to someday save all Israel.⁴ However, the context suggests otherwise.

What will it be like when God saves Israel? ". . . *The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; . . .*" (Rom. 11:26; citing the promise of Isaiah 59:20). Paul says that "The Deliverer," God's Messiah, will come out of Zion. And that is exactly how He will ultimately bring salvation to Israel in the end times. The deliverer will come not from Toledo, Washington DC, Paris, nor anywhere else—but from Zion. And He will remove ungodliness. He will provide personal salvation and the cleansing Jacob (Israel) needs.

On what basis will God cleanse His people? The covenant. "*For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins*" (Rom. 11:27; combining the quote from Isaiah 59:21 with Isaiah 27:9). Paul was not referring to a covenant that God will make in the future, but to the new covenant that was promised by the prophets, and the new covenant that Jesus said He came to enact. It is the same new covenant that we celebrate every time we participate in the Lord's Supper (see 1 Corinthians 11:25). Whether knowingly or unknowingly, we are commemorating the fact that Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of these new covenant blessings. This is the new covenant that He made with Israel and Judah (see Jeremiah 31:31-33, Ezekiel 36:24-32), and through which He will bless all the families of the earth. In the day of Israel's restoration, God declares, ". . . *I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the LORD*" (Ezek. 38:23).

Israel's Salvation: A Display of God's Faithfulness (11:28-29)

Why would God save Israel in spite of her rebellion? Paul took all of Romans 10 to spell

out Israel's rejection, and he further states in Romans 11, "*Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, . . .*" (v. 28).⁵ However, he also notes the counterpoint, ". . . *but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers*" (v. 28). Because of what God promised to the patriarchs of Israel, His covenant love carries down through their descendants. This is very much like our own salvation. It is not due to anything within you or me that God says, "They deserve salvation." Absolutely not. Rather, God loved us, ". . . *while we were still sinners, . . .*" (Rom. 5:8). So, too, with Israel.

Further, Paul reasons, ". . . *the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable*" (Rom. 11:29). Here is another verse to highlight, underline, and mark in your Bible. Memorize it, meditate upon it, and understand how you fit into God's plan—whether Jewish or Gentile—and appreciate how God's gifts and calling are irrevocable. God irrevocably gave gifts and called the patriarchs, just as He irrevocably gives salvation to us today.

Israel's Salvation: An Act Of God's Mercy (11:30-32)

God was clear in His messages to Israel's prophets about what prompted Him to rescue Israel from her enemies. He did not redeem the nation out of the exile because of their repentance. Rather, His own character as a loving and merciful God prompted His favor. So too, Paul states, "*For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy*" (11:30-31). God will not save Israel because she suddenly turns, believes, and obediently fulfills her role as a light to the Gentile nations. Rather, as suggested in Ezekiel's prophecy of the valley of dry bones (see Ezekiel 36—37), God will breathe life into Israel when she is spiritually dead. God will save Israel in spite of disbelief and unbelief—this will be an act of His mercy.

This promise of Israel's restoration is somewhat dependent upon understanding humanity's lost condition. Paul sees Israel's condition as a universal problem. "*For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all*" (Rom. 11:32). In other words, no one merits salvation. It is only God's mercy that keeps us from being consumed by His wrath. And in light of Paul's larger argument, we have to praise God for Israel's unbelief because this is how salvation has come to the Gentiles. At the same time we praise God for Gentile salvation, we can also know that this is part of the way that God will ultimately bring salvation to the Jewish people once again. God will use Gentile salvation to

(God) did not redeem (Israel) out of exile because of their repentance. Rather, His own character as a loving and merciful God prompted His favor.

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IS RABBINIC JUDAISM A CULT?

By Dr. Tim M. Sigler

Is Rabbinic Judaism a Cult?

As a religious system, how far afield is Judaism from the perspective of the New Testament? Is rabbinic Judaism a cult? Paul's statements on the Jewish rejection of Jesus, the Gospel, and God's plan of redemption—specifically his comments on Judaism's misguided "zeal for God," (see Romans 10:2), and unwillingness to submit "to the righteousness of God" (see Romans 10:3)—do give someone reason to wonder.

First, Judaism should not be equated with being Jewish as an ethnicity. Many Jewish people do not practice Judaism—the religious system developed by the rabbis. Second, rabbinic Judaism should be clearly distinguished from ancient Israelite faith. Historically speaking, Judaism did not exist during the Old Testament time frame. It emerged during the Second Temple period, often called the intertestamental period by Christians.

To be clear, Judaism *is not* a cult. From a Christian perspective, a cult is a counterfeit group that claims to hold to Christian teachings, but in actuality denies core doctrines of the faith (e.g., Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, etc.). Additionally, cult groups are often bent on exploiting and controlling the personal lives of their members through psychological manipulation. While many of rabbinic Judaism's teachings do not agree with those of Scripture—it is not a cult.

Messianic Believers and Rabbinic Judaism

As a religious system, Judaism grew out of the biblical faith of ancient Israel and emerged to answer key questions that arose as a result of the destruction of Solomon's Temple, the Babylonian exile, the return of the Jewish remnant to rebuild the Second Temple under Ezra and Nehemiah, and its subsequent destruction in AD 70. These questions include the following: "How can the Jewish people be faithful to God outside the Land of Israel (in the *Diaspora*), since the *Torah* only instructed us

... the New Testament is not anti-Semitic ... (it's) a Jewish book, written by Jewish people, for a largely Jewish audience, and mainly about Jewish issues.

on how to live in covenant relationship with God in the Land?" (See passages such as Deuteronomy 6:1.) Also, "How can we be faithful to God without a Temple, since the *Torah* demands that we worship God at the place where He caused His name to dwell?" (See Deuteronomy 12:11.)

These questions brought about the need for a reinterpretation of the *Torah*. Rabbis (teachers holding an office not specified in the Hebrew Scriptures) emerged to provide answers to these questions. They developed a system of life and worship that could withstand the above mentioned challenges of living outside the Land and without a temple. Over the years, these talented scholars produced many volumes of literature to explain how life was to be lived in observance to both the *Torah* and its reinterpretations made necessary by these challenges (e.g., *Midrash*, *Tosefta*, *Mishnah*, *Talmud*, etc.).

Believers who have a newfound appreciation for all things Jewish must be especially careful to not swing that pendulum of appreciation too far in the direction of Judaism. It's a common problem for many people who begin to develop an interest in Jewish ministry, Jewish evangelism, and Jewish worship and music styles. This interest might be called *Judeophilia*—the love of all things Jewish—and if it's Jewish, it must be right. In other words, "The Jews dress like this, maybe I should, too. The Jews observe this custom, maybe I should observe this custom." In fact, some have renounced key tenants of New Testament faith on the same basis: "Since Judaism does not recognize the Trinity, maybe it's not a biblical idea. Or, Judaism does not believe in the deity of Messiah, maybe I shouldn't either."

But be encouraged that first-century Jewish followers of Jesus did believe in His deity and in the tri-unity of God. While the term *trinity* is not found in the Bible, the concept was certainly taught in the New Testament text—it was not invented by a later Church council as some would claim. Rather, any truths that the councils later articulated were already embedded in the texts written by Jesus' Jewish disciples themselves. An uncritical acceptance of all things Jewish can easily cause a person to hold beliefs that are taught by the rabbis, but



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that contradict the Scriptures. Jesus often disagreed with the rabbinic religious establishment of His day. As followers of Jesus, we too will find rabbinic Judaism in conflict with some of Jesus' teachings.

Is the New Testament Anti-Semitic?

Many Jewish people, upon hearing Paul's condemnation of their religious system, could easily think, "See, we knew you were anti-Semitic!" But wait, being anti-Semitic assumes that Paul is not Semitic. However, Paul *is* Jewish. He is not anti-Semitic. His critique does not suggest that he or his listeners should hate the Jewish people, or that he is no longer Jewish. He did not claim to be a Christian as opposed to being Jewish, nor did he claim to be inventing a new religion. His critique is from within, and it is not against Jewish people with the intention that anyone should hate, harm, or destroy them. His critique is very much like an in-house family quarrel.

In good relationships, there are differences of opinion and honesty about those differences. In your family, perhaps, you have been exercised about differences of opinion and had one opinion while everyone else had another. Perhaps you have even expressed your difference of opinion in a somewhat agitated, concerned, and excited manner. Some people even engage in family fights and arguments. But this rarely means that they do not love their family or that they never want to see them again. Rather, it shows that there is a real point of disagreement, and that they are talking about it openly. Similarly, Paul is essentially saying, "There's a real point of difference, and we are talking about it openly!" Family squabbles can become ungodly, and people can treat one another in a sinful manner. Sadly, throughout the centuries, Christian-Jewish dialogue has at times reflected such ungodliness. However, in Romans 10, Paul lovingly shares a point of great concern—the fact that many of his Jewish kinsmen have rejected the Gospel.

To be sure, the New Testament *is not* anti-Semitic. The New Testament is a Jewish book, written by Jewish people, for a largely Jewish audience, and mainly about Jewish issues.

A very different question to ask is, "Is the New Testament anti-rabbinic?" At minimum, the New Testament challenges many of the presuppositions of rabbinic Judaism. However, the New Testament did not prohibit the followers of Jesus from: attending synagogue, following many rabbinic customs, or from worshipping with other Jews. Rather, we see the example that if you proclaim Jesus as the Messiah boldly within the Jewish community, you will be thrown out of the synagogue (see John 9:22, 12:42), and that there are certain things about rabbinic Judaism that are incompatible with a high and exalted view of Messiah Jesus (see Titus 1:14, 3:9; 1 Timothy 1:3-11). As followers of the Jewish Messiah, there is much we can appreciate from the rabbis, but their teachings must be weighed against the standard of Holy Scripture.



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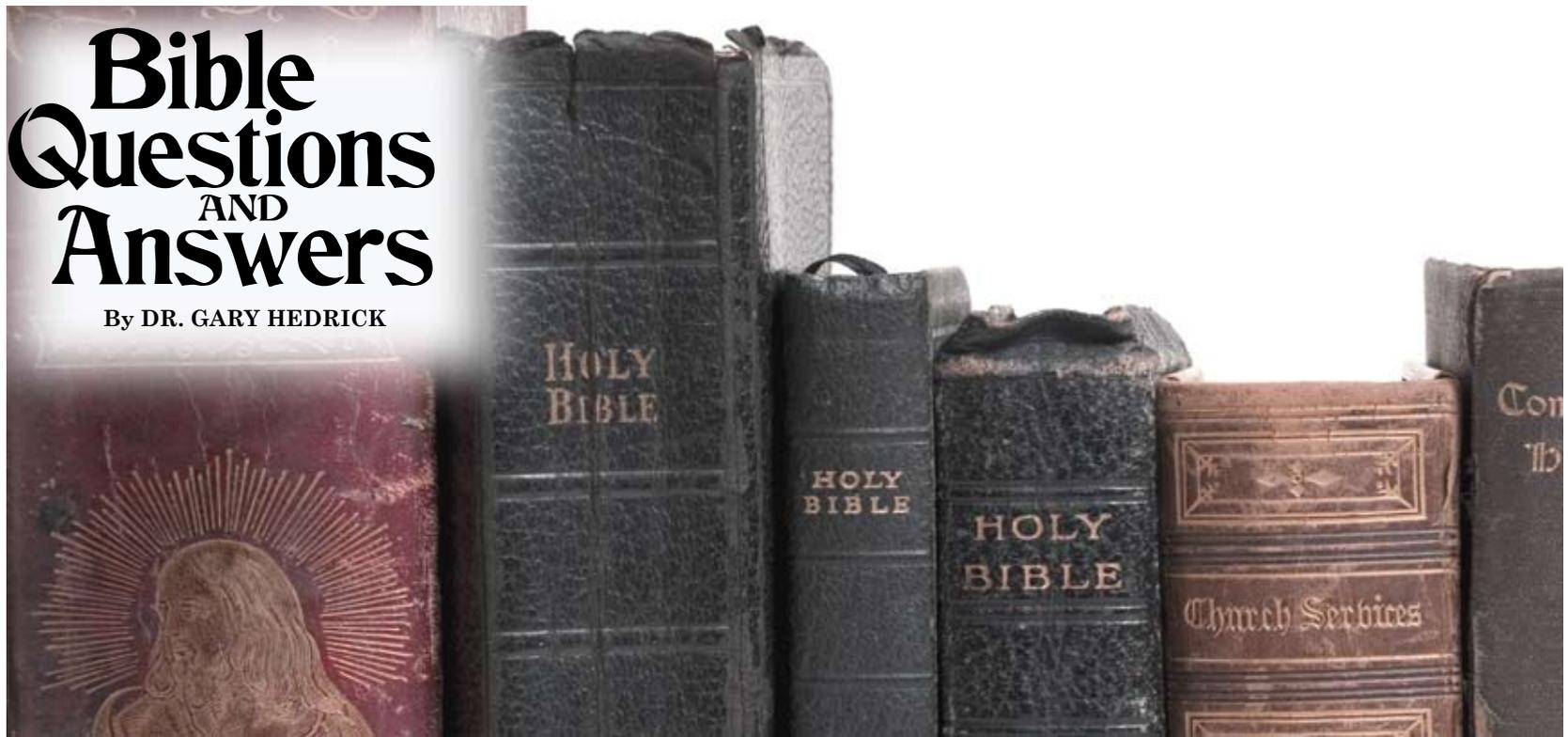
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Bible Questions AND Answers

By DR. GARY HEDRICK



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QUESTION: *During my personal Bible study time, I've been reading through the Book of Psalms; and quite frankly, I find passages like Psalm 35 troubling. Jesus Christ tells us in the NT that we should love and forgive our enemies; yet, in some of the psalms, David calls down curses and judgment on the heads of his enemies. Can you help me reconcile these two contradictory approaches?*

ANSWER: Theologians have wrestled with this question for ages. Some critics have alleged that David engaged in petty self-defensiveness and vindictiveness when he implored God to destroy his enemies in the so-called “imprecatory” psalms (Psalms 7, 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 109, 137, and 139). To these critics, this attitude contradicts the New Testament, where we are told to love our enemies and to do good to those who hate us (see Matthew 5:44). Yet, there may be more going on in these passages than what is immediately apparent.

Remember that God's covenant with David (see 2 Samuel 7:8-17) was an essential link in the divinely ordered chain of events that, through the centuries, finally led to the birth of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, in Bethlehem. The covenant's terms were clearly spelled out to David by the Prophet Nathan. Now, I seriously doubt that David understood the full scope of this covenant and every minute aspect of its far-reaching implications. David likely knew enough, however, to conclude that God had promised that one of his descendants (i.e., the

Messiah) would someday rule from his throne in Jerusalem over a kingdom that would have no end (see 2 Samuel 7:13,16).

We occasionally hear about someone who suffers from a “messiah complex”; that is, he's delusional and thinks he's on a mission to save the world. But in David's case, it wasn't a delusion—it was, in a very real sense, true. The Messiah, the Savior of the world, would be born through his family line. So if the forces of evil had succeeded in killing David and destroying his lineage, they (in effect) would have stopped God's redemptive plan dead in its tracks!

There are a few times in biblical history when the messianic, redemptive line seemed to hang, almost literally, by a thread. One was during the reign of Ahasuerus (also known as Xerxes I), King of Persia (485-465 BC). An evil man named Haman, an official in the king's court, conspired to destroy the Jewish people in a brutal act of genocide—and he might have succeeded except for the heroic intervention of Queen Esther. The Jewish people commemorate these memorable events each year during the festival of Purim.

King David's life was another epic time. The Messiah was to be his descendant; so if David and his family could have been destroyed, the messianic promises would have (at least theoretically) died with them.

So, when David cried out for God to destroy his enemies, it's unlikely that his

concern was limited to the threat they posed to him personally. He may well have understood, to some extent at least, that underlying these human machinations was a dark conspiracy intent on destroying the messianic line and confounding God's promise. David may even have known that there was a sense in which the fate of the entire world hung in the balance. His fear wasn't merely for his own personal safety.

Think about it. Does anyone truly believe that King David was afraid to die? This was the same man who, when he was a teenager, went out alone (and without armor) to face a nine-foot giant on the field of battle. Later in his life, David became a great warrior whose exploits were legendary in Israel (see 1 Samuel 18:6-7). He led armies into battle. In fact, he wasn't allowed to build the Temple because he had shed so much blood during his military career (see 1 Chronicles 28:3). He was intimately acquainted with death, conflict, and bloodshed.

Therefore, David's fears most probably were not as much about his personal safety as they were about the prospect that the forces of wickedness might stamp out the messianic line and thwart God's purposes. These concerns—among others—are reflected in the imprecatory psalms, where the Shepherd-King of Israel affirmed his trust in the LORD God (see Psalm 55:16-18); and prayed fervently for deliverance from evildoers who sought his downfall and destruction (see Psalm 55:22-23).

Fruit from the Harvest



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By Violette Berger

Answered Prayer

Michelle Beadle, CJFM Missionary (New Orleans), has had the privilege to disciple an elderly Jewish man and two Catholic women since last year. Recently, each of them expressed a desire to be immersed. Michelle writes, “The joyful ceremony was held in conjunction with a monthly Bible study that is affiliated with our messianic fellowship—Beth Hallel. The gentleman told me that he awoke the next morning feeling clean, light, and refreshed. He was thrilled, and had no idea it would make such a difference in his life. He boldly shared the Good News with the rest of his family who, although not believers, were very supportive.”

One of the women has been faithfully attending Michelle’s weekly Bible study after she prayed to receive the Lord during a Franklin Graham service in New Orleans (her daughter prayed with Michelle at the same service). Her husband also recently gave his life to the Lord. After he came to a Messiah in the Passover Seder, Michelle sent him a copy of CJFM’s *Chesed* pamphlet. He read the pamphlet, prayed the salvation prayer on the booklet’s back cover, and received Messiah Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

The second woman has known the Lord for a number of years but had never been immersed. Michelle said, “We are praying for her husband to also come to know the Lord. It is wonderful to see how God answers our prayers for friends, family, and colleagues. The Lord has been doing some amazing things during our Bible study time. This event was an inspiration to all who had gathered to witness it.”

Michelle was also recently blessed following her teaching on “Jesus in the Feast of Tabernacles” at a church service. When she gave an invitation, two men and three children gave their hearts to the Lord.

Just a Link

While witnessing on the city’s downtown streets, **CJFM Missionary Eric Chabot (Columbus, OH)** began conversing with “Adam,” who said that God had been sending him signs that he needed to be forgiven through Messiah Jesus. Eric recalls how God has often planted the seeds: “After I made a clear Gospel presentation to Adam, he was ready to turn his life over to our Lord. This is why we need to remember that

we are just one link in a long chain that God uses to reach people for Him.”

Who’s Knocking?

Brian Zuckerman, CJFM Missionary (Las Vegas, NV), relates an encounter he had with his neighbors Rick and Amy (not their real names). They recently knocked on his door and asked to use his phone. Upon completing their call, Amy asked Brian about a ministry to which she had donated \$2 and was now besieging her with requests for more money. After examining the literature she was sent, Brian pointed out its pitfalls. Brian writes, “This presented an open door for me to share the Good News with Amy. I’ve had many conversations with her boyfriend, Rick, but not with her. I explained that God is not a slot-machine deity into which you deposit \$2 and receive \$20 in return. As I explained that our lost condition is caused by sin, Amy confided in me that she struggles with a serious problem. I shared the Gospel message starting with the blood atonement. Amy responded with a confession of faith. What a blessing! The Lord has provided many opportunities to share the Gospel and lead people to Him, but this is the first time He brought someone directly to *my door!*”

One More New Child of God

Barry Berger, CJFM Director of Missions Emeritus (Phoenix), also experienced God’s providence when He brought someone to our home. I tutor Ricky, an 11-year-old boy, in reading comprehension and writing. On one particular day, Ricky asked whether it was okay for him to bring with him his 12-year-old cousin, Bobby. While Ricky was in his tutoring session with me, Barry and Bobby talked in the living room. During their conversation, God provided an opportunity to discuss spiritual matters. Barry said, “Bobby is a bright boy, and he asked me some very good questions. As I presented the Gospel in terms he could understand, he appeared keenly interested. When I asked him whether he would like to receive Jesus into his heart as his Lord and Savior, his immediate response was an emphatic, ‘Yes!’ We prayed together and he was so overjoyed that he ran to tell his cousin. We now have a new child of God in His family. Hallelujah!”

make His people jealous for that privileged place they once enjoyed (see Verse 11).

Paul's Proclamation of Praise To the God of Israel (11:33-36)

Paul concludes with a proclamation of praise to the God of Israel. "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (v. 33). The term depth reminds us that no one is capable of digging deep enough to completely figure God out. No one can know everything about His unsearchable ways, but this should not cause us to throw our hands up and resign ourselves to complete ignorance of God. The things we do understand should cause us to worship Him, and thank Him that His plan includes us.

Paul continues, "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?" (v. 34). God's wisdom has secrecy concerning human ability to understand it. And His wisdom is supreme in comparison to human wisdom. "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" (v. 35).

Paul's finale includes three prepositional phrases that describe God as the source, sustainer, and significance of all things. "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, . . ." (v. 36). These prepositions display God as the source of all things. "For of Him"—in other words, all things come from Him. "And through Him"—claims God as the sustainer of all things. He is the One by which everything continues to exist and holds together (see Colossians 1:17). "And to Him"—ultimately all things are pointing toward His glory, His majesty, His worship, and His recognition by Jews and Gentiles. Thus, He is the significance of all things.

Thanks Be to the God of Abraham!

Paul concludes this chapter, speaking to us about Israel's future salvation, as that which causes all people to praise God for His wise and righteous plan of redemption. It not only encourages us to rightly understand God's plan for Israel, but also to appreciate God's plan for the spread of the Gospel among all the nations of the earth. If Israel's failure resulted in salvation spreading to the Gentiles, how much more, how

much better—*kal vachomer*—will it be when God regathers Israel again and brings salvation to His people.

A failure to appreciate Israel's role in the larger scheme of biblical theology inevitably skews one's understanding of God's redemptive plan for all of humanity. As Ronald Diprose cautions, "When one or more of the foundational elements of Christian thought are neglected, the product of theological reflection no longer corresponds to 'the whole counsel of God' but rather to the intellectual climate of the moment."⁶ God's plan for Israel—past, present, and future—should be basic to the way that we understand and explain the Gospel, just as Paul modeled for us in the Book of Romans. Truly, a Gospel that obscures the story of Israel will soon obscure the story of Jesus.



Tim M. Sigler, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Hebrew and Biblical Studies at Moody Bible Institute. If you would like to schedule Dr. Sigler to speak to your group, please contact CJF Ministries. He often addresses issues related to Israel and the Middle East conflict, the feasts of Israel, Jewish culture, the Land of the Bible, and biblical archaeology.

This article was transcribed from a presentation delivered at Life in Messiah International.

¹ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans (The New International Commentary on the New Testament)*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 550.

² For a detailed treatment of the question of a divinely promised future for ethnic Israel and its implications for Christian theology, see Craig Blaising, "The Future of Israel as a Theological Question," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (2001): 435-450.

³ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Jewish Evangelism in the New Millennium in Light of Israel's Future (Romans 9-11)," in *To The Jew First: The Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History* (eds. Darrell L. Bock & Mitchell Glaser; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 46.

⁴ Such views are known variously as dual covenant or two-covenant theology, bi-covenantalism, or the German term *Sonderweg*—teaching that God has a special path for Jewish people to be saved (perhaps because of Messiah Jesus, but apart from faith in Him). Their previous covenant(s) with God is sufficient.

⁵ See the helpful explanation of this biblical tension of "Israel as God's Beloved Enemy" by Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged* (New American Commentary Studies in Bible and Theology; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 291-309.

⁶ Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church: The Origin and Effects of Replacement Theology* (Rome, Italy: Istituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, 2000), 173.

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