

## **Israel: Past, Present, and Future #9**

Romans 11:29  
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The ongoing bloody war between Israel and the Palestinians involves various issues, but one important issue surrounds who is entitled to the land inhabited by the Israelis and Palestinians. Is God's promise of the land to Israel their title to the land under all circumstances and conditions, or is the promise of the land of Canaan to Israel realized in the Church in our everlasting inheritance of heaven? Or is it both? Over the next couple sermons we will seek by God's grace and wisdom to answer these questions.

Our main points are: (1) An Historical Overview of the Land of Israel; (2) The Gifts and Calling of God Are without Repentance (Romans 11:29).

### **I. An Historical Overview of the Land of Israel.**

A. When God covenanted with Abraham to be his God and made promises to save Abraham and his posterity through faith in a chosen Seed (Jesus Christ) who would come to bring salvation to all of the nations of this world, the Lord also included in that promise the promise of the land wherein he dwelt (Genesis 15:5-7,18-21; Genesis 17:7-8).

B. That promise of salvation and of the land made to Abraham and His posterity through faith in the coming Messiah continued until the time of Moses, at which time God covenanted with Israel to be a holy nation set apart unto the Lord from all of the nations of the earth (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). At the end of Joshua's life, he made it clear to Israel (as had Moses in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28) that faith and obedience to the Lord would issue forth in God's blessing upon Israel with Israel dwelling in the land in peace; whereas, unbelief and rebellion against the Lord and His Word would bring God's judgment and being removed from the land (Joshua 23:15-16). Only by faith in the Lord,

repentance, and renewed love and obedience would Israel be restored under the blessing of God to dwell safely in the land (Leviticus 26:40-44).

C. Though the land was given by God to Israel as an everlasting possession, living at peace in the land was only enjoyed throughout Israel's history when Israel walked in faith and obedience to God's good commandments (Jeremiah 18:6-10). God reserved the right to judge and remove Israel from the land when they rebelled against Him (which occurred under the Assyrians in 722 B.C.). Judah was likewise judged by the Lord and led into captivity by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. However, God's promise of the land to Israel was not forever rescinded/terminated when they were driven from the land by the Assyrians and Babylonians, for God brought them back to possess the land under the Persians (ca. 537 B.C.) as a faithful remnant that returned to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem. God remembered His everlasting covenant (Psalm 105:8-11).

D. Though Israel returned to the land promised by God to Abraham as an everlasting possession, they were under the yoke of various nations—the Persians (CA. 638-330 B.C.); the Greeks with rule passing back and forth between the Syrians and Egyptians (330-140 B.C.); under the rule of the Maccabees Israel achieved a significant degree of autonomy (140-63 B.C.); the Roman and Byzantine Empires ruled over Israel in the land (63 B.C.- 600 A.D.). Under Roman rule, Israel revolted several times and sought its independence, but each time was crushed with devastating results in massive slaughter of its people and the scattering of Jews to the wind so that very few Jews dwelt in the land of Israel/Palestine: the first revolt (66–73), the second revolt (115–117), the third revolt (132–135—renamed Palestine), and a fourth revolt (351-352). All Jews were once again expelled from Jerusalem by Roman Emperor, Heraclius in 629.

E. The new religion of Islam conquered the land of Israel/Palestine in 640. The land passed back and forth from one Muslim caliphate to

another over the next four hundred years until the Islamic Turks conquered Palestine in 1073.

F. The Crusades (1095–1291) were sponsored by the Papacy in order to gain control of the Holy Land from Muslims and to make the Holy Land a Christian province. Control of the Holy Land passed back and forth from the Crusaders to the Islamic Turks and other Islamic factions during this time. By this time, very few Jewish families lived in the Holy Land—as few as a 1,000 poor Jewish families (“History of Palestine”, Wikipedia). Over the next 200 years the land again passed back and forth between different Islamic factions.

G. The Islamic Ottoman Empire gained control over the Islamic world and the Byzantine Empire and took control of the Holy Land in 1516. And though the Ottoman Empire ruled over the Holy Land for the greater part of the next 400 years, there were once again constant battles among Islamic factions with even Napoleon gaining control of the Holy Land in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

H. It was not until after World War I (1922) that the Holy Land was removed from control of the Ottoman Turks and placed under the rule of Great Britain by way of a mandate of the League of Nations. Britain administered control of Palestine until 1948 when the Charter of the United Nations recognized the State of Israel. According to records, about 95% of the population in 1900 were Arabs and 5% Jews. By 1948, 68% of the population were Arabs and 32% were Jews. The Jews, though in the minority, were divided the greater proportion of the Holy Land. The Arab Palestinians refused to accept the United Nations charter claiming the division of the land was unfair. 700,000 Palestinians fled their homes, cities, and villages that had been theirs for generations. The violence and wars have continued since then over who is entitled to the land—the Jews claiming a right to the land from the time of their ancient forefathers of Israel—the Palestinians claiming a right to the land by way

of being the vastly predominant inhabitants for the past 1500+ years (at least until 1948).

I. What a tumultuous history there has been over the land and still is. And yet is this not exactly what God promised would happen by way of the blessings and curses of God's covenant with Israel (the blessing of peace in the land when faithful to God, but the curse of removal and war in the land when unfaithful to the Lord, Joshua 23:15-16)?

1. It may be objected that the Lord is now blessing Israel (rather than judging Israel) since Israel has been re-established as a nation in the land.

2. But how can God be blessing Israel when Israel is yet a Christ-rejecting nation and an enemy of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 11:28)? Jesus pronounced judgment upon Israel and the destruction of the temple and the nation (Matthew 23-24). What has changed with Israel that the Lord has now lifted His judgment?

3. The promises of God's blessing upon Israel are not while Israel is in unbelief, but rather when Israel looks in faith to Christ and repents of her sin in rejecting Him (Zechariah 12:10).

4. There is yet coming a national judgment upon Israel in her unbelieving state when the nations will overcome her (Zechariah 12-14). God's judgment is still upon Israel even though she is in the land. The blessing of God is not simply being in the land, but being in the land in faithfulness to Christ/peace/safety/prosperity (2 Chronicles 7:14; Zechariah 14:11). The present nation of Israel in the land is not God's covenant blessing upon Israel, but is awaiting God's covenant judgment.

## **II. The Gifts and Calling of God Are without Repentance (Romans 11:29).**

A. The question of whether God's future blessing of Israel will not only include her national conversion, but also her national dwelling in the land is a question that divides Bible-believing Christians. I submit one's

position on this question is not a test of orthodoxy. And yet it is not a novel position that Israel will both be converted to Christ, become a Christian nation, brought into Christ's Church, but will also be restored to her land to dwell safely therein. James Durham (1622-1658), a faithful minister of the Church of Scotland, writes in his commentary on Revelation 16:12:

Neither can that promise made to Israel (Deut.30:2-4 [1-5—GLP]) that whenever they should repent the Lord would gather them from the nations whither they were scattered, **and return them to their own land**, be thought void and null after Christ's coming, especially considering the general repentance and mourning which is to accompany their conversion. **Therefore, it would seem by that promise they may expect their own land**, it being a part of God's engagement to the natural seed of Abraham.

B. Throughout Romans 11, the name "Israel" is used to refer to Israel as a nation (Romans 11:2,7,25,26). As the casting away refers to Israel as a nation, so likewise the saving of "all Israel" refers to Israel as a nation (not to the New Israel or to an elect remnant).

1. Now if Paul is describing the saving of Israel **as a nation** (which we have shown in past sermons is the case with much historical testimony as confirmation), then is it not most likely the Christian nation of Israel would have a land with borders? A people without a land may be ethnically related (like gypsies, or other people groups that have been dispersed), but a people that is a nation implies it has a government and a land. God has promised that He will not cause Israel as a nation to cease forever, but will fulfill His covenant promises to her as a nation (Jeremiah 31:35-37). Though Israel as a nation in the land has vanished for a greater part of its history by way of God's judgment, nevertheless, she has not perpetually ceased as a nation, for God has promised she will not cease.

2. If Israel did not possess the land at all times in the Old Testament let alone in the New Testament period as we have seen, how is it an everlasting possession? Even though God took the land away from Israel in judgment, He did not covenantally take it from them, but will restore it to them as promised by covenant when He brings them to faith and repentance as a nation.

3. Moreover, God promised that Israel will be restored to the “holy land” in the age of the Messiah (Zechariah 2:10-12). This is not a promise that has yet been realized, for entire nations have not covenanted with Israel to be God’s people (Romans 11:25-26).

4. Likewise, in Isaiah 19, we saw that God promised that Israel, Egypt, and Assyria as nations would covenant together to be God’s people—that has not happened yet, but it will. If Egypt is a nation with a land, so Israel as a nation will be blessed with a land in covenantal peace.

C. As we briefly consider Romans 11:29, remember what Paul has just said in Romans 11:28: Israel is an enemy of God in regard to the gospel of Christ, but that same Israel that is presently an enemy is at the same time elect and beloved for the sake of the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (which is the same in substance with the New Covenant). Thus, God’s judgment presently rests upon Israel as a nation due to her being God’s enemy, and yet her election as a nation through God’s covenant means God is not finished with her as a nation. God has a plan to save the nation of Israel (“all Israel”) through faith in Jesus Christ and the New Covenant in His blood (the gospel) and to be a blessing to all nations as she is brought into the Church of Jesus Christ.

D. In Romans 11:29, Paul’s reason “for” believing that God will save Israel as a nation is given here. It has nothing to do with Israel’s faithfulness, but with God’s faithfulness to keep His promise to a nation that He has called to be His people.

1. The “calling” of God speaks of Israel’s election as a chosen nation (Isaiah 45:4—“Israel mine elect”; Deuteronomy 7:7-8a). That’s irrevocable—without repentance.

2. The “gifts” to Israel include the promises made to her in the covenant God made with Abraham and the fathers (Genesis 17:7-8). The “promises” in Romans 9:4 include both spiritual blessings of salvation through Jesus, the seed of Abraham, but also the land as an everlasting

inheritance. We ought to assume the continuity of this promise unless God clearly abrogates it in the New Testament.

3. Paul says that the “calling” of Israel by God and the “gifts” graciously bestowed upon Israel by God (certainly the gospel blessings preeminently, but also the blessing of the land)—these are all without repentance—irrevocable. Both spiritual blessings and material blessings will also be poured out upon the Gentile nations when the fullness of the Gentile nations comes into Christ’s Church. They will be blessed together with Israel. We will consider some objections next Lord’s Day.

4. Praise God for His faithfulness to His promises (2 Corinthians 1:20). The Abrahamic covenant and promises were confirmed in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:17). It was a Christian covenant. Where would we be if God did not keep His promises—all of His promises? We would not be able to trust Him for He would not be trustworthy. If God was not faithful to His promises, all of society would fall for if God does not keep His promises, certainly no one else would. Our certain hope for our own salvation would vanish. Don’t you see that everything depends upon God’s faithfulness? Take that away and all that we have is condemnation and hopelessness. There is hope, my friend, for God is faithful (1 Corinthians 10:13).

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