

Israel: Past, Present, and Future #5

Zechariah 2:10-12

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There is often confusion or misrepresentation alleging that the future conversion/restoration of Israel was first promoted by dispensationalist teachers in the early 1800s. To the contrary, the biblical hope of Israel's repentance and turning in faith to Jesus as Savior and Lord was promoted throughout church history. Let me summarize that history for you briefly.

Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165), wrote that God will yet restore Israel and will

command the four winds to gather the scattered children [of Israel—GLP]; I will command the north wind to bring them, and the south wind, that it keep not back. And then in Jerusalem there shall be great lamentation, not the lamentation of mouths or of lips, but the lamentation of the heart; and they shall rend not their garments, but their hearts. Tribe by tribe [of Israel—GLP] they shall mourn, and then they shall look on Him whom they have pierced... (*First Apology* 52, ANF 1:180).

Tertullian (ca. 155-220), looked forward with joy at Israel's restoration:

[F]or it will be fitting for the Christian to rejoice, and not to grieve, at the restoration of Israel (*On Modesty* 8, ANF 4:82).

Consider next the confident expectation of **Augustine** (ca. 354-430):

The time will come, the end of the world will come, and all Israel shall believe; not they who now are, but their children who shall then be (*Sermons on New-Testament Lessons*, Sermon 72, NPNF 6:472).

What about the hope that **Jerome** expresses (ca. 342-420)!

[W]hen the Jews receive the faith at the end of the world, they will find themselves in dazzling light, as if our Lord were returning to them from Egypt (*Commentary on St. Matthew*, 2).

Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) speaks of

the future healing of the Jews... when the fullness of the Gentiles will be reached, all Israel will be saved (*Sancti Thomae de Aquino Sup Epistolam B. Pauli ad Romanos lecutura*, 11:4).

When we arrive at the Protestant Reformation in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, many declared the future conversion of Israel.

In the notes of the **Geneva Bible** (1560) on Romans 11:26, it is written:

He [i.e. Paul—GLP] sheweth that the time shall come that the whole nation of the Jews, though not every one particularly, shall be joined to the church of Christ.

George Gillespie, Scottish commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, preached this before the House of Commons (1644):

But there is a third thing aimed at in this prophecy [Ezekiel 43:11—GLP]... which is the repairing of the breaches and ruins of the Christian church, and the building up of Zion in her glory, about the time of the destruction of Antichrist and the conversion of the Jews; and this happiness hath the Lord reserved to the last times ("A Sermon Preached before the Honourable House of Commons", March 27, 1644, *Works*, 1:7).

That great light of the Dutch Reformed Church, **Wilhemus a Brakel** (1635-1711), declared concerning the future conversion of Israel,

It would not be the conversion of only a few—of a few individuals here and there—but it would be a conversion of the entire nation. “And so all Israel shall be saved” (*The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 4:518).

Let’s move across the ocean to North America where **Jonathan Edwards** (1703-1758) unequivocally stated:

Nothing is more certainly foretold than this national conversion of the Jews, in Rom. xi. (*History of Redemption*, 1:607).

Let us be clear then that historically, the future calling of the Jews to come to Christ was not invented by the dispensationalists of the early 19th century, but has been the hope of the New Testament Church from the earliest times in church history. Even in our own subordinate standards as Reformed Presbyterians we are reminded to believe and to pray for Israel’s future conversion to Jesus Christ.

The Directory for the Public Worship of God (approved by the Church of Scotland in 1645) states that public prayers on the Lord’s Day are to be made,

“for the conversion of the Jews”.

Likewise, the ***Larger Catechism*** (approved by the Church of Scotland in 1648) instructs us what we are to pray for in the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer (Thy kingdom come):

[W]e pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, THE JEWS CALLED, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in . . .

In past sermons on Israel, we have considered Israel in the past (from the Old Testament to the New Testament in being given the promise of the Messiah). We have also considered Israel in the present (her rejection of the Messiah and God’s severe judgment that has fallen upon her). We now look at Israel in the future and her blessed restoration to the Lord Jesus to become a Christian nation.

Though we have seen historically that the future conversion of Israel is not a novel eschatological position, we rest not upon history, but upon Scripture, to which we now turn. Our main points are: (1) Background to the Text; (2) Certain Questions to Be Answered from the Text.

I. Background to the Text.

A. We briefly summarized the historical circumstances surrounding the Book of Zechariah last Lord’s Day, so let me remind you that Zechariah prophesies after the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity in about 538/537 b.c. They returned to the land of Israel to rebuild the temple and the city, but it was not easy. Many obstacles were in their way (kings, enemies, distractions), but God blessed them.

B. This is a book of hope (Zechariah 4:6,10).

1. God gave Israel hope that they would see the temple rebuilt at that time, and He gave His people hope that He would save them and bless them even more fully through the Messiah in the future.

2. We all need hope or we will just give up—not mere wishful thinking or positive thinking about the future, but a confident, certain expectation that God will keep His promises (Philippians 4:19; Isaiah 26:3-4; Acts 16:31).

3. The Lord encourages the remnant of Israel to “sing” and “rejoice” (in Zechariah 2:10) by means of looking up from their present hardships in hope to a glorious time of future worldwide salvation in Christ that shall be enjoyed by Israel and the nations of the world.

II. Certain Questions to Be Answered from the Text.

A. Who Are the Recipients of These Promises?

1. There are two recipients: Israel as a nation and many Gentile nations.
2. Israel is identified in Zechariah 2:10 as the “daughter of Zion” and then in Zechariah 2:12 as “Judah” and “Jerusalem”.
 - a. Is the Lord speaking here of Israel as a nation, or is He speaking of the new Israel of God—the New Covenant Church (composed of both Jews and Gentiles as in Galatians 6:16)?
 - b. I submit the Lord has in view the Jewish nation of Israel, for Israel is here distinguished from the Gentile nations—there is an intended contrast between Israel and the nations (Zechariah 2:10-11). Note how “Judah” and “Jerusalem” are used for the country/city of the Jews in Zechariah 1:12 (and throughout Zechariah). This is what Paul prophesied would come to pass (Romans 11:25-26).
 - c. There is only one other time in the Book of Zechariah that “daughter of Zion” is used (Zechariah 9:9). Clearly, it refers there to the city of Jerusalem, the capital of the Jews (Matthew 21:4-5).
3. The world has not yet seen in the age of the New Covenant of Jesus Christ “many nations” of the world covenant with Christ to be His people (that is covenant language) at the same time that “Israel” as a nation turns to Jesus Christ and renews her covenant with Him to be His people. Therefore, this promise is yet unfulfilled and is yet future to us (as it was future to Zechariah and to Paul).

B. When Will This Promise Be Fulfilled?

1. The restoration of Israel promised here will be realized in the age of the Lord Jesus Christ (Zechariah 2:10). It is “the LORD” (Jehovah) who is said to make this utterance of dwelling in their midst.
2. And yet “the LORD” who makes this utterance is sent by “the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 2:11). Jehovah sends Jehovah. The Father sends the Son (this only makes sense if Jesus is God).
3. The Lord Jesus is the Divine Messenger of the Covenant (Malachi 3:1), and is the Divine Word of God sent by the Father to dwell in our midst (John 1:1,14). Thus, the time in which we anticipate the full realization of this promise is “in that day” (Zechariah 2:11)—at some time after the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Israel is here projected forward to a future hopeful “day” in which Jesus, the Messiah, will bring the nations into covenant with Him together with Israel.

C. What Are the Promises Made to Many Nations and to Israel?

1. Jesus promises that “many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people” (Zechariah 2:11). How is an entire Nation joined to the Lord to become His people?
 - a. A Gentile Nation is joined to the Lord in the same way that Israel of old was joined to the Lord, namely, by way of a National Covenant with the Lord (Jeremiah 50:5—where we find the same Hebrew word for “join” that is used here in Zechariah 2:11 in reference to the Gentile Nations that are joined to the Lord).
 - b. If for Judah to be joined to the Lord is to be joined in a perpetual and everlasting National Covenant to the God of their salvation, then likewise the same is true for the many nations mentioned here in Zechariah 2:11. This was what our blessed forefathers did as well in swearing the Solemn League and Covenant for themselves and for us, their posterity). Through such National Covenants, the nations of the world will serve Jesus (Psalm 72:11,17; Psalm 86:9; Revelation 11:15).
 - c. Carefully note also in Zechariah 2:11 that the many Gentile nations “shall be my people” which indicates that these many nations will become God’s covenant people by way of national covenants as was true of Israel (Leviticus 26:9,12). Gentile nations will covenant with Israel to be the Lord’s people in the future (Isaiah 19:24-25).
2. Christ promises to Israel that (1) He will come and dwell in her midst (Zechariah 2:10); and that (2) He will inherit Judah in “in the holy land” and will choose Jerusalem “again” (Zechariah 2:12).
 - a. How does Christ dwell in the midst of Israel? Just as He did in the Old Testament—

bodily, but spiritually (Leviticus 26:9). Remember that Christ was enthroned as Messianic King upon David's throne in heaven when He ascended and was seated on God's right hand (Psalm 110:1; Isaiah 65:20). He evidenced His enthronement by way of the blessings He poured out upon God's people (Acts 2:34-36). Jesus is not waiting to be crowned King upon David's throne in the earthly city of Jerusalem, for He already reigns as King from heaven (Acts 5:30-31). He is presently "the Prince of the kings of the earth" (Revelation 1:5) and is "King of kings" (1 Timothy 6:15). From His throne in heaven, Jesus spiritually (not bodily) comes with all royal authority and power (Matthew 28:18) to bring blessing upon His people (2 Corinthians 6:16; Revelation 3:20).

b. But as we turn back to Zechariah 2:12, the Lord Jesus promises that in that Messianic day when "many nations shall be joined to the LORD" that the "LORD shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again." I only note that this promise to Israel at that glorious time of restoration will include "the holy land" (Genesis 17:8—"for an everlasting possession" just as the covenant is an "everlasting covenant"). We will further consider in a future sermon whether the land is included in Israel's national restoration.

c. The word "again" (Zechariah 2:12) identifies this future Judah/Jerusalem as the same nation and chief city that covenanted with the Lord to be His people in the Old Testament. This "again" fits in beautifully with what Paul (in Romans 11) describes by way of the natural branches broken off from the olive tree of God's covenant and yet grafted in again when all Israel (Israel as a nation) shall be saved.

D. Application

1. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the younger son returned from wasting his inheritance in sincere brokenness, seeking the forgiveness of his father. The older brother, rather than rejoicing, sulked, indulged in self-righteousness, and charged his father with being unfair in not giving him his own feast. This illustrated to all who had ears to hear that the Jews at that time likewise sulked, indulged in self-righteousness, and charged the Lord with unfair treatment by freely welcoming sinners (publicans, harlots, Gentiles) into His household.

2. This is not a part of the parable, but if I might continue the same theme, the older brother (i.e. the Jews at that time) was filled with such self-righteous indignation over the grace extended to the younger brother (sinners from among the Jews and the Gentiles), and filled with hatred for Jesus that they crucified Him, and persecuted the younger brother. For their unbelief, hatred, and crucifixion of Christ, the older brother (unbelieving Israel) was cast out of the household of the Lord to wander in unbelief from one nation to another for 2,000 years.

3. But yet in the future, the older brother (unbelieving Israel) shall be restored to the household of faith by God's amazing grace, shall turn in faith to Jesus, shall embrace Him, shall weep upon His neck, and shall declare himself unworthy of the least blessing from Christ.

4. Our merciful Savior, Jesus Christ, will call for the fatted calf, the royal robe, the sandals, and the ring. He will bring the older brother (unbelieving Israel) back into His Church to be united with the younger brother. At that time, the younger brother (mostly the Gentile Church) will not sulk in self-righteousness or foolishly charge Christ with unfairness, but will stand beside the Lord to welcome the older brother (Israel) back into the family and so shall the Lord's house be made complete throughout that millennial kingdom (all nations will serve Him).

5. The words of Samuel Rutherford are most fitting (*Rutherford's Letters*, pp. 122,123):

O to see the sight, next to Christ's Coming in the clouds, the most joyful! Our elder brethren the Jews and Christ fall upon one another's necks and kiss each other! They have been long asunder; they will be kind to one another when they meet. O day! O longed-for and lovely day-dawn! O sweet Jesus, let me see that sight which will be as life from the dead, thee and thy ancient people in mutual embraces.