

## HISTORY OF JEWS SERIES – PROPHECY

### “The Jews and the Early Church” (Acts 3:13-26)

As Christianity advanced from Pentecost, the first and greatest opposition came from unbelieving Judaism. After the manifestation of power on the Day of Pentecost and the healing of the lame man at the temple in Acts 3, the Apostle Peter preached a powerful sermon of warning and hope to the Jews,

**The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by Him hath given Him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. (Acts 3:13-19)**

Peter then explained that the OT Scriptures predicted this Messiah,

**And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities. (Acts 3:20-26)**

The time of the “*restitution of all things*” refers to the millennial age not to the supposed “apostolic restoration” of the Charismatic Movement. The gospel was sovereignly chosen to be to the Jews first in time (Luke 24:47). Peter concludes by giving the real reason for the miracle because God “*sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.*”

After this sermon exposing the sins of the Jews for killing Christ, the opposition of the devil manifested towards the work of God. This is first reflected in the leaders of Judaism,

**And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. (Acts 4:1-3)**

The message that was hated by these unbelieving Jews was the preaching of Christ crucified and resurrected, “*Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.*” Peter is summoned to defend his preaching. In a Spirit-filled address, Peter preaches Christ to them again,

**Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4:10-12)**

It is interesting to note that Jesus Christ had preached a similar message to Peter before from the OT Scriptures such as Psalm 118:22 -24,

**Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. (Matt. 21:42-43)**

The leaders of Judaism did not repent to this indictment. Instead we read, “*So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.*” (Acts 4:21) This apparent stalemate did not last long. In the next chapter the church was growing so fast with “*believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women*” (Acts 5:14) that physical persecution occurred, “*Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.*” (Acts 5:17-18)

The Jewish leadership seized them and threw them in jail foolishly imagining that this could stop the work of God. Whatever Satan tries to do, God uses for His own glory and the Lord releases them, “*But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.*” (Acts 5:19-20) The Sadducees (who dominated the leadership of Israel) denied the future resurrection and the existence of angels (cf. Acts 23:8). God taught them a lesson by utilizing an angelic creature they denied existed to free His disciples to preach a doctrine they denied.

The leaders of Judaism responded with more threats and this time physical beatings, “*...when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.*” (Acts 5:40) This was soon followed by the murder of Stephen by the leadership of Judaism in Acts 7 after they had conspired using false witnesses to accuse him of blasphemy. Stephen's death was a watershed moment as it unleashed all kinds of physical

persecutions by the unbelieving Jews on the early Christians, “*And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.*” (Acts 8:1b)

After getting a taste for murder by killing Stephen, the religious leaders in Jerusalem now empowered launched the first great persecution against the church. Prominent in this moment was the up and coming man in Jerusalem, Saul of Tarsus. It seems that the Church had been dealt a tremendous blow by the martyrdom of Stephen but God would turn it around in a manner no one on both sides could have imagined by saving a greater than Stephen in the person of the Apostle Paul. God will always making man’s wrath to serve His purpose as revealed in Acts 1:8 places like Samaria and the Gentile world were to be evangelised after Jerusalem. So of the scattered Christians we read, “*Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.*” (Acts 8:4) Persecution was the Holy prompting of heaven to push the gospel out as, “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

The opposition of organised Judaism continued right through the Apostolic era. One of the chief objects of their wrath was their former leader, Saul of Tarsus who was now known as the Apostle Paul. This man became the Jews’ greatest enemy. From the outset Paul had a ministry of suffering and rejection. His Christian brethren never really accepted him and the Jews wanted to continually kill him. Eventually, the latter managed to have him imprisoned and sent to Rome on trial.

## THE FUTURE FOR THE JEWS

Romans 9-11 are three of the most difficult chapters in the Bible. But they are three of the most interesting and rewarding if you persevere in prayerful study. These chapters reveal the flow of all human history for both Jew and Gentile. The nation of Israel is a puzzle that can only be explained through the light of the Scriptures. In Romans 9-11 the apostle Paul is demonstrating that the plan and purpose of God has not failed, especially for the Jews. He makes clear that it was never God’s purpose to save everyone born of natural Israel, “*For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.*” (Romans 9:6b) Paul drives this home in Romans 9 by showing that God has sovereignly decreed the salvation of the true Israel. Then in Romans 10 he switches to the other side of this truth by demonstrating that if any Jew is lost it is because of his own willful rebellion and unbelief.

Now after dealing in Romans 9-10 with the *past* and *present* causes of the spiritual state of Israel, in Romans 11 Paul is going to deal with the *future* of the Jew. Paul knows that his OT quotations in Romans 10:19-21 may lead some readers erroneously to deduce that God has now finished with Israel and turned exclusively to the Gentiles. He will deal with this using his usual logical and thorough manner by first anticipating the question and then answering it with conclusive evidence.

## ROMANS 11

In Romans 11:1a we get the anticipated question, “*I say then, Hath God cast away His people?*” Paul then immediately categorically responds, “*God forbid,*” as such a thought is unthinkable. Indeed, the very form of the question in Greek indicates a negative answer is expected. The fact that Paul calls Israel “*His people*” implies also that this could not be true. Throughout the OT Scripture,

God promised to preserve His unconditional covenant with Israel. For instance the Psalmist records in Psalm 89,

**I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations. For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens. I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah. (v1-4)**

However, the individual can place himself under the severe judgment of God by not participating in the covenantal blessings by unbelief,

**If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. (v30-32)**

The rejection of the rebellious individual does not nullify the national covenantal promises,

**Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah. (v33-37)**

These promises have not been broken nor will they ever be broken. That is why there are Christian Jews throughout this world today. They are not just God's ancient people, but they are His people today. All of the promises given by God to Abraham, Moses, and David must be fulfilled to the Jewish people. Nothing can thwart God's plans, purposes, and promises. That is why we must believe in a literal Millennial reign when these promises as to the salvation of Israel in the Promised Land will be fulfilled. Israel's future restoration as a nation is guaranteed.

Despite the fact that the Lord states, "*All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people,*" (Rom. 10:21) God has not rejected His people. He is never fickle or inconsistent. His immutable character guarantees His faithfulness to His promises. We are fickle, but He is never! If God's promises fail to Israel, God is not God! The answer that God could be inconsistent is always "*God forbid,*" as He cannot lie nor can He fail. The literal promises to Israel are not fulfilled by spiritualizing them into the church, as some erroneously conclude. In Romans 10:1 Paul exclaimed, "*Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.*" Now, if Israel now means the church, why would Paul be praying for the salvation of the church? No, in Romans 9-11 when Paul is speaking of Israel he means what he says!

Paul's argument that God has not negated His covenantal promises to Israel is proved by the fact that there are many Jews of his day who were believers, "*Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace*" (Rom. 11:5). Just as God preserved a remnant in Elijah's day, "*even so*" He has done so in "*present time*" of the NT era. This is by His unconditional sovereign election, "*according to the election of grace.*" From the beginning of the NT we see this remnant such as Elizabeth and Zacharias, Mary and Joseph, Anna and Simeon, the disciples, 120

in Upper Room, and the 3,000 saved on the Day of Pentecost etc. Indeed, it was Simeon who took the infant, Jesus and declared He was, “*a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel*” (Luke 2:32). Later in Acts 21:20 the leaders of the Jerusalem testified to Paul, “*Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law.*” We forget too easily that the Christian church began as a predominantly Jewish church.

Paul not only points to the factual historical evidence of the remnant to prove his point that God has not cast away Israel, but he also points to explicit OT revelation. So, he argues that Israel, as a whole, is not cut off but only those Jews that refuse to believe, “*Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded?*” (Rom. 11:7). So, if the remnant is saved, this proves that God is faithful to His promises. It is not that all Israel has been set aside now. But what happens to the rest of the Jews? In Romans 11:8-10, the apostle cites from 2 OT passages to demonstrate what happens to them. In v8 he quotes from Isaiah 29:10 and in v9-10 he uses Psalm 69:22-23,

**(According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day. And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway. (Rom. 11:8-10).**

This blinding in Romans 11:7b is a judicial blindness sent from God for Israel’s refusal to heed the Word of God. This verb “*blinded?*” is in the passive voice, where some other agent acts upon the subject of the sentence. Then in Romans 11:8 Paul makes it clear from the quotation from Isaiah 29:10 that it is God who does this blinding, “*God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear.*” Now, this blinding is like the hardening of the heart of Pharaoh in Romans 9:17-18. This blindness comes upon those who willfully refuse to see the truth of God’s Word first. We see this truth in Isaiah 29:13, “*Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.*” This tragic condition is witnessed over and over in the Old Testament,

**Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day. (Deut. 29:4-6; cf. Jer. 5:21; Eze. 12:2)**

The same heat can harden or melt a piece of clay. Likewise the Spirit of God can melt your heart but if you harden yourself to Him, then He will harden it. It is “*just recompense*” (v9) for those who sin against so great a light. Paul in Romans 11:9-10 turns to the Messianic Psalm of Psalm 69:22-23. He makes clear in this imprecatory psalm that those who reject the Messiah will find their privileges becoming a snare to them. The word “*table*” here signifies the blessings and privileges that Israel had – OT Scriptures, Prophets, Covenants, Temple and sacrifices, Promises, Patriarchs, Circumcision etc. But God’s privileges always demand a response one way or the other. All of these privileges had become a “*trap*” and a curse to them (cf. Malachi 2:2) – what a tragedy! MacArthur comments,

A person’s table is generally thought of as a place of safety, feasting, and sustenance. But the table of the ungodly and self-righteous will become a snare and a trap. The Jews

considered God's Word, in particular the Torah, to be their spiritual sustenance—which indeed it was. But because of their rebellious unbelief, that Word became a judgment on them, a stumbling block and a retribution. One of the saddest commentaries of history is that so many people place their trust in the very thing that damns them. All false religions—pagan, cultic, unbiblical Christianity, and every other kind—present counterfeit means of salvation. The more their adherents feed on the falsehoods, the more immune they become to the true gospel of Jesus Christ, the living bread of life.

The great nation of Israel that had such zeal and privileges, that could know so much about the Scriptures, yet walked in utter darkness. These very privileges instead of leading them to salvation in Christ became substitutes for the reality of salvation. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

**And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. (2 Cor. 3:13-15)**

However Paul held out the note of hope, "*Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away*" (2 Cor. 3:16).