

The Future of Israel Re-examined

by James B. Jordan

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According to almost all Biblical expositors, Romans 11 predicts a future conversion to Christianity by the Jews as a nation. Premillennial expositors see this event as occurring during the tribulations they believe will come just before our Lord's return. Amillennial expositors hold the same view. Postmillennialists see the conversion of the Jews as the event that inaugurates the "latter-day glory." There are a few who hold out against this interpretation of Romans 11. Some go with the opinion that the phrase "all Israel will be saved" in verse 26 refers to the Church, the new Israel of God. In general, this view holds that since the history of Old Testament Israel is fulfilled by the transformation of Israel into the Church, this is what verse 26 is referring to. This interpretation has relatively few advocates, however, since throughout Romans 9-11, "Israel" means the Jews. It is unlikely that Paul changes his meaning in Romans 11:26. Others hold that the conversion of Israel as described in Romans 11 is not an event, but simply points to the fact that throughout the history of the New Covenant, Jews will be converting all along the way, and in this way the sum total of "all Israel will be saved." The problem with this view is that throughout the passage events are what is being discussed. It is unlikely that Paul suddenly shifts to a generality in 11:26.

Thus, the "future conversion of Israel" interpretation continues to hold sway.

About three years ago I began to question this interpretation. It seems to me very odd that this is the only place in the New Testament where a future conversion of the Jews is predicted. Almost every book in the New Testament speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem. Many speak of the gospel's going out to all the world and transforming it. Many also speak of our Lord's Final Advent at the end of the present age. But nowhere else is anything said about a future conversion of the Jews.

It occurred to me that perhaps Romans 11 predicts an event that was future to Paul, but not future to us; to wit: that Romans 11 predicts a conversion of many Jews to Christ just before the destruction of Israel in A.D. 70. The more I thought about it, the more sense this interpretation made.

As I shared my thoughts with several theologian-friends, I found that others had begun to think along the same lines. I was encouraged to write up my new thoughts and publish them in this newsletter. I have been reluctant to do so, however, because so many other friends have strongly propounded the futurist view of Romans 11. Finally, however, I have been persuaded to share my thoughts with a wider audience.

Of course, for years I have taught the futurist view of Romans 11, arguing that the Jews and all the nations of the world (though not every individual) will be converted to Christ and this event will usher in a period of prosperity (not perfection) for Christendom. This is the "Puritan" interpretation, and I have been an advocate of it for years. Now I no longer think it is correct. I ask my fellow "Puritans" to grant me the space to set out my thoughts, and to consider these things with me.

I believe that a postmillennial, or optimistic, view of the future course of Christian history is taught or assumed in many passages of the Bible. I used the entire second half of my book [Through New Eyes \[PDF\]](#) to argue that an expansive view of the kingdom of God is woven into the warp and woof of Biblical revelation. The parables of the leaven and of the mustard seed are enough to show that Christianity is destined to grow and grow. And such Biblical predictions as that all the nations will come to Zion to receive the truth, and that the knowledge of God

will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, establish in my mind that there will be a long period of gospel prosperity before the Lord's final return. All nations will convert eventually, and this includes the Jews.

What I now question is whether the Bible predicts a time when suddenly all nations will turn to Christ, an event capped off by the conversion of the Jews. All I see in the Bible is general progress over time. It may be that the Christianization of the world will proceed along the same lines it has for the past two millennia, gradually building towards the latter-day glory. On the other hand, there may be a crisis that ushers in the golden age; but if there is, I don't think Romans 11 has anything to do with it.

I hope that I have set my postmillennial and Puritan brethren's minds to rest by these comments.

PRETERISM

Before going any further, I need to explain for any new readers that I am committed to the "preterist" approach to the interpretation of prophecy. The preterist school holds that most of the predictions in the New Testament concern the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Anything spoken of as "near" or "at hand" was fulfilled in the first century, as was anything connected with special signs. Matthew 24-25 make it clear to me that there are no special signs of the Final Advent; the Master returns without warning after a "long time."

In particular, the preterists maintain that the Book of Revelation was written around 65 A.D., and that it is mostly concerned with the destruction of Jerusalem. My own lectures through Revelation are available from Biblical Horizons. A thorough study of the dating of Revelation is available in Kenneth Gentry's "Before Jerusalem Fell", an excellent commentary on Revelation is available in David Chilton's 'Days of Vengeance', and a fine introduction to the preterist view is Chilton's 'Paradise Restored'. [These three books are available from the [Institute for Christian Economics](#), Box 8000, Tyler TX 75711.] (As my lectures on Revelation show, I don't agree with Chilton at every point, particularly in his interpretation of Revelation 14:14-20.) Preterism takes note of the fact that the Temple and Jerusalem are related typologically to the Church, In Revelation 2-3, Jesus promises to visit and inspect His churches from time to time. Each church is said to be in a city. Jesus threatens to eliminate churches that have apostatized, and to judge their cities. Then Revelation 4-19 show what Jesus is talking about by describing the destruction of the church (Temple) in the city of Jerusalem. Moreover, the coming of Christ to pass judgment on the old covenant and the old creation in A.D. 70 is typologically related to His future coming to judge the new creation at the end of time. Thus, the view that most New Testament prophecy has been fulfilled in A.D. 70 does not make it irrelevant for us today.

There is a school of thought that goes by the name "consistent preterist." Advocates of this view hold that every prophesied event in the Bible was fulfilled by A.D. 70, and that the Bible does not teach any Final Advent of Jesus Christ. The "consistent preterists" deny the resurrection of the physical body, and hold that this present world will continue forever and that there will be no such Last Judgment as the Church has taught.

This view was proposed by a few exegetes of the last century, most prominently by J. Stuart Russell, whose book 'The Parousia' has been reprinted by Baker Book House. The most noted advocate of this viewpoint today is the Church of Christ theologian Max R. King. The Church of Christ is a largely preterist denomination, and some of their theologians have done good work in the area of interpreting prophecy. Most are very unhappy with King's extreme position, and within Church of Christ circles there is a growing body of literature arguing against "consistent preterism." I have dealt with the "consistent preterist" viewpoint in my lectures on "The A.D. 70 Question," and my lectures on Matthew 24 can be consulted for my thinking on that

chapter.

I mention King because his recent book 'The Cross and the Parousia of Christ' [Parkman Road Church of Christ, 4705 Parkman Road, Warren, Oh; 1978] contains within it a helpful exposition of Romans 9-11. King's theology is badly confused, and I cannot give a good recommendation to his book, but his discussion of Romans 9-11 I have found to be of some help. Since King believes every New Testament prophecy was fulfilled in the events around A.D. 70, he naturally sees Romans 11 as fulfilled then as well. On this latter point I think he is correct though my interpretation of Romans 11 differs significantly from his.

WHO WERE THE JEWS?

Most Christians think of the Jews as a race of people descended from Abraham. In this section of this essay, I want to call this assumption into question, by looking at the history of Israel in the Old Testament. When God called Abraham and made him a priest to the gentile nations, He commanded him to use the sign of circumcision to mark out the Hebrews from the other nations. Abraham's household at this time included at least 318 fighting men (Genesis 14:14), as well as their wives and children, possibly many more servants. All of these men were circumcised. We see these servants mentioned in the book of Genesis several times (Gen.26:19ff.; 32:16), and when Jacob went down to sojourn in Egypt, so many people went with him that he had to be given the whole land of Goshen to dwell in. Genesis 46 provides a list of only 70 actual blood descendants of Abraham who went into Egypt. Thus, from the very beginning, the Israelites were defined by covenant, not by blood and race.

The same was true for each of the tribes within Israel. A Levite was not necessarily a blood descendant of Levi, but more likely was a descendant of one of the patriarchs' servants who was a part of Levi's company. Only a small percentage of Levites would actually have been descendants of Levi.

These several thousand people became over two million by the time of the Exodus 215 years later. Only a small percentage of the people who came out of Egypt had any racial connection with Abraham. Moreover, added to the company of Israel at this time was a vast mixed multitude, many of whom became circumcised members of the nation, and therefore members of individual tribes as well.

There was another admixture of converts in the time of David and Solomon. Think of Uriah the Hittite, for example. Then again, the book of Esther tells us that during and after the Exile many more gentiles became Jews (Esther 8:17).

What this means is that very few Jews at the time of Christ had any of Abraham's blood in them. They were a nation formed by covenant, not a race formed by blood. To be sure, Jesus Himself was a true blood descendant of Abraham, and His genealogy is important for theological reasons, but few other Jews could trace their genealogy to Abraham. What I seek to establish by this survey is this: With the passing away of the Old Covenant, there is no longer any such thing as a Jew in the Biblical sense, unless by "True Jews" we mean Christians. There is no covenant, and therefore there is no nation, no "race."

What, then, are modern Jews? Modern Jews are people who choose to think of themselves as descendants of Israel. Most modern Jews are not Semites but are descended from Eastern European tribes that converted to Judaism in the Middle Ages. Arthur Koestler's 'The Thirteenth Tribe' provides much information about this. Modern Jews do not worship the God of the Old Testament. They are either secular humanists, or else Talmudists, and the Talmud has no more relation to the Old Testament than does the Quran or the Book of Mormon. Like the Quran and the Book of Mormon, the Talmud and Mishnah are designed to add to and reinterpret the Old Testament in such a way as to obliterate completely the revelation of God

through Jesus Christ (compare Luke 24:27). The “God” of Judaism is as much a fiction as the “God” of Islam and the “God” of Mormonism.

It is entirely possible that there is not one drop of Abraham’s blood in any modern Jew. Of the tiny percentage of Israel that had any of Abraham’s blood in the first century, it is possible that all such either became Christians or were slain in the Jewish War of A.D. 70. No one can know for sure about something like this, and it does not matter in the slightest.

Modern Jews are a separate nation of people with a self-identity, spread out among many other nations. The closest analogy to them are the Gypsies. The only difference between Modern Jews and Gypsies is that the Modern Jews claim to have a relation to the Biblical Jews, a claim I maintain is false.

An analogy may help. Mormons think of themselves as Christians, and call themselves Christians, but they are not Christians. They are counterfeit Christians. Just so, Modern Jews think of themselves as Jews, but they are not Jews. They are counterfeits of Biblical Jews. I say this not to disparage them, but to be accurate. In fact, I shall argue later in this paper that this business of treating Jews as special is directly related to the persecution the Jews have so frequently experienced.

TRANSFORMATIONS

Let us return to history for another slant on this matter. When God called Israel out of Egypt, most of the people refused to follow Him and died in the wilderness. The old Hebrew people ceased to exist and were transformed into Israel, their new name. (I have discussed this succession of names in my book, ‘Through New Eyes’.) The Israel that entered into the promised land was a new people made up of a mixture of Hebrews and converted gentiles, the mixed multitude. Their leaders were Joshua, a converted Hebrew, and Caleb, a converted gentile Kenizzite (Genesis 15:19; Joshua 14:6). (By “conversion” I mean that they entered the Mosaic Covenant.) According to Numbers 13:6, Caleb’s family had not only been adopted into the tribe of Judah, but had risen to prominence in it. This event is directly analogous to the New Testament situation. The wilderness wanderings lasted 40 years, as did the span between A.D. 30 and 70. The Jews were called by Jesus and the apostles, and many converted (that is, they entered the New Covenant). Some reverted to Judaism, turning into apostate Judaizers, and like the apostates in Moses’ day, they “died in the wilderness by A.D. 70. Meanwhile, many “mixed multitudes” gentiles joined the kingdom. By A.D. 70, it was time to enter the promised land, and the old Jewish people ceased to exist, being transformed into Christians, their new name.

The same kind of event happened at the Exile. A study of the book of Ezekiel will show that God called His people out of Judea into the wilderness of exile, where He tabernacled with them. The people were given a choice: either move forward with God or perish by looking backward to the old ways. During the time of exile, as we have seen, many gentiles were converted into the nation. By the time the Exile was over, and the people returned to the Promised Land, the old Israel ceased to exist, being transformed into Jews, their new name.

Let us return to the Mosaic transition and examine the phenomenon of “falling away.” At Mount Sinai, all the people accepted the new Mosaic Covenant. Before too long, however, a large group of people were objecting to one of the most distinctive features of the Mosaic Covenant. During patriarchal times, any man might offer sacrifice at an altar to God, but the worship of the Tabernacle was “closer” to God and therefore holier and more dangerous. It is dangerous for a sinner to get too close to the Consuming Fire, and so the only people allowed to approach the new Mosaic altar were the priests, who were specially ordained and anointed for this purpose. God forbade all sacrifice except that conducted at the Tabernacle, which meant that the Hebrew people were no longer permitted to build and sacrifice at altars. As it

became clear that the people had “lost” this “right,” those who did not perceive that the Mosaic Covenant was in fact more glorious than the Abrahamic Covenant had been, rebelled. Their argument was that “all the people are holy and all are priests” (Exodus 19:6) and that Moses and Aaron were exalting themselves over the congregation (Numbers 16-17). They were drawing the wrong inferences from Exodus 19:6 because they were clinging to the older covenant. This group of rebels is closely paralleled by the Judaizers of the New Testament era. The Judaizers were people who became Christians and then realized that the leaders of the Christian community were changing the rules on them. Just as Korah, Dathan, and Abiram did not want to give up the old Hebrew ways in order to become Israelites, so the Judaizers did not want to give up the old Jewish ways in order to become Christians.

Just as Korah and company accused Moses and Aaron of inventing their own religion, so the Judaizers accused Paul. Just as many of the Israelites in Moses’ day wanted to return to Egypt, so the Judaizers wanted to return to Judaism. This is the “falling away” to which the New Testament refers a number of times.

Korah and his followers were killed, and the rebels of Moses’ day died during the 40 years in the wilderness. Their beliefs, however, continued to find expression in Israel. From the time of the Conquest under Joshua to the Exile under Nebuchadnezzar, there were many people who insisted on worshipping “God” on high places. They insisted that they, and not those who served the Tabernacle/Temple, were the true Hebrews. They insisted that they were the true sons of Abraham, and that the promised land belonged to them. They worshiped God, they claimed, in the same way Abraham and the patriarchs did: at altars they made themselves with sacrifices they offered themselves. They claimed that they were preserving the old ways, but the prophets said they were idolaters who had become corrupted with paganism.

How true was the claim of the “high placers”? It was not true at all. The true sons of Abraham were those who accepted the Mosaic Covenant. The true owners of the promised land were those who moved into the new covenant at Mount Sinai, and who set aside patriarchal worship for something better. At the Exile, God removed the “high placers” permanently from His land, and gave it to those who would be loyal to the Temple worship.

The same is true in the New Covenant. The Judaizers and those Jews who would not accept Jesus were killed at the end of the 40-year “wilderness” period from 30-70 A.D. Their beliefs, however, continued to find expression among the Jews who survived. The Ebionites carried on the heresies of the Judaizers, and the Talmudic Jews carried in the heresies of the Pharisees. They insist that they, and not the Christians, are the true Jews. They insist that they are the true sons of Abraham, and that the promised land belongs to them. They worship God, they claim, in the same way the Jews of Jesus’ day did: through Passover and synagogue. They claim that they preserve the old ways, but the New Testament and the Christian religion say that they are idolaters who have become corrupted with paganism.

How true is the claim of post-New Covenant Judaism? It is not true at all. The true sons of Abraham, and of the Biblical Jews, are those who accept the New Covenant. The true owners of the promised land are those who moved into the New Covenant with Jesus, and who set aside Passover and synagogue for something better. At the Holocaust (A.D. 70), God removed the “Jews” from His land, and gave legal title to it to those who would be loyal to Him. (Notice that Modern Jews occupy the land of Palestine only because the Christian West supplies them with money, arms, technology, and legal treaties. The Promised Land belongs to the sons of Abraham - Christians - and the only reason Modern Jews are there today is because Christians let them be.)

The upshot of our survey of Israel’s history is this: The Hebrews ceased to exist when they were transformed into Israelites. The Israelites ceased to exist when they were transformed into Jews. And the Jews ceased to exist when they were transformed into Christians. The continuing

existence of people calling themselves Jews and claiming to represent the old order does not change these facts. "Jew" is an English contraction of "Judahite," which was the name given to God's priestly nation after the Exile. Calling yourself a Jew does not make you one, and in the Biblical sense of the term Jew, there were no longer any Jews after A.D. 70, unless by "True Jews" we mean Christians.

What about the land? Well, consider this: Suppose in Moses' day the blood-line Hebrews had gone to the circumcised descendants of Abraham's servants and said this: "The land was promised to us, not to you. We have legal title to it; you don't." Or suppose they said this to the converts among the mixed multitude? It is clear that they would have been wrong to say this. All Israelites were the same as far as their inheritance was concerned (save for the Levites).

Similarly, Christian Jews have no special claim to the land of Palestine. There is only one kind of Christian, and all Christians are in Christ, and all Christians have exactly the same rights. The idea that there are two kinds of Christians is a Satanic heresy, one that Paul anathematizes in the book of Galatians. In my opinion, the notion that the Jews, after they convert, will have a claim on the land of Palestine smacks of just this heresy.

Now, what I have written above is the logic of Biblical theology, and it is basically what the New Testament teaches everywhere except possibly Romans 11. The futurist interpretation of Romans 11 will counter what I have written above by saying, "True, when Israel came into being, the Hebrews ceased to exist, and when the Jews came into being, Israel ceased to exist, as you have put it. But Romans 11 reveals a mystery, which is that this time the old people continue to exist as an apostate nation, which will someday convert to Christ. Thus, you are wrong, Jim, when you say that the Modern Jews are no different from any other people. They are indeed special."

I answer: Obviously, I need to expound Romans 11 and argue my case. But before doing so, let me say that the mystery of Romans 11:25 needs to be understood in the light of everything else the New Testament says about the gospel mystery. Ephesians 3 makes it clear that the mystery is that in Christ there is no longer any distinction, as there was in the Old Covenant, between priestly Israelite and non-priestly God-fearing gentile. That is the whole point of the mystery. Thus, the meaning of the mystery runs against any notion of a continuing distinction between Jew and gentile. According to the mystery, the only distinction any longer is between Christian and unbeliever. The futurist interpretation of Romans 11 tends to contradict the meaning of the mystery.

There is another point that emerges from this historical survey. Paul's whole argument in Romans 11 is that the entrance of gentiles into the Kingdom will provoke the Jews to jealousy. This was possible in the first century, but it is not possible now. The reason it is not possible now is that Christians do not have what Modern Jews want. The minds of Modern Jews are set by their traditions, not by the Old Testament. In order for them to be jealous, they would have to perceive that Christians have the Kingdom they expect to inherit. This was true of first century Jews, but it is not true of Modern Jews. Talmudic Jews are looking for a completely different kind of kingdom.

In short, Romans 11 makes sense if it applies to the first century; it does not make much sense if we try to apply it to "Jews" since that time. The valid application of Romans 11 today is to liberal Christians, a point I shall return to later in this study.

The Problem of "Anti-Semitism"

Before turning to Romans 11 and its meaning in the context of New Testament prophecy, I want to set down my thoughts on the problem of "anti-Semitism." First, very few Modern Jews

are Semites, and very few Semites are Jews, so the term “anti-Semitism” is a very misleading term. In English, however, “anti-Semite” means “anti-Modern-Jew,” and so I shall use it that way here.

I am indebted to the work of Rene Girard for the discussion that follows. Girard is a liberal Christian who has done some marvelous studies on the phenomenon of the scapegoat in religion and culture. I do not by any means agree with him at every point, but his book *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1986) has provided me the insights that follow.

When times get tough in a society, people seek someone to blame. They might blame themselves and say, “God is punishing us for our own sins,” but since people are wicked, they don’t say that. Instead, they look for someone to blame, saying, “Everything was fine until these people came along. They are different, and therefore they are criminals, and therefore they are to blame for these distresses and catastrophes.”

In times of distress, people turn against outsiders and strangers. In Romania today, Gypsies are being treated this way. Throughout history, both Jews and Gypsies have often been made the scapegoats for society’s problems. This is because they are different. They have their own laws and customs. They don’t mingle with other people well. They seem obnoxious because their customs are strange. People suspect them of bizarre practices, like incest, stealing babies, poisoning wells, and the like.

People want to feel superior to other people. I grew up in the Old South, and the attitude of white trash people was this: If we are not better than niggers, we are not better than anybody. The reason for the Jim Crow laws was to make white trash people feel better than blacks. Many educated Christian white people were unsympathetic to these laws, but such good people were in the minority. Democracy lets trash rule, because democracy allows demagogues to appeal to the mob. This phenomenon also plays a part in the continuing persecution of Gypsies and Jews.

But there is more. Girard shows that envy plays a large part in scapegoating. Those who are rich are admired and imitated by society, but when they fall, everyone rushes in to gloat. Job experienced this, and you need only read the newspaper to see how “rich and famous” people are treated when they fall. Historically, the Jews have been a disciplined and provident people, which means they have often had wealth, which means that they have been the object of envy, though usually not of admiration.

Now, let us bring in the catastrophe. The mob wants someone to blame. They blame the strangers, the Jews. They blame those they want to feel superior to, the Jews. They blame those they envy, the Jews. When times got tough in Germany after World War One, the mob found it easy to go after Jews, Gypsies, Poles, Catholics, and Godly evangelicals – all the people who were “different.”

Now, this is bad enough but now enters another factor. Unlike Gypsies, the Jews claim to be the continuing racial expression of God’s chosen people. This kind of claim is naturally offensive to other people. It only makes matters worse when the Church adds her voice to this claim.

In short, I am arguing that by giving Modern Jews a privileged place in history and prophecy, the Church has reinforced rather than undermined the foundation of antisemitism and persecution. If the Church had strongly maintained that the claim of the Jews was mythical, and that Jews were no different from any other exceptional group in society, the persecutions against the Jews might have been milder. The Jews would have been treated like Gypsies. They would still have been persecuted, but perhaps not as severely.

Of course, the only real and lasting solution to the problem of persecution is for the Church to do her work of remaking people into kind and charitable human beings. But until we have a Christian world, there will be persecutions. I believe that the futurist view of Romans 11, whether espoused by premillennialists or postmillennialists, distorts society's understanding of the Jews, and sets them up for persecution when times get tough.

Background to Romans 9-11

We now come to a survey of Romans 9-11. Because of this newsletter format, I simply want to set out how I see these chapters at present. I shall not try to argue the case in depth all along the way, but rather my intention is to make a credible case for a preterist view, a case that can be expanded and defended in detail later.

To understand Romans 9-11, we have to bear in mind some background matters that are often overlooked by expositors, concerning the origin and purpose of Israel. God called Abraham to be a priest to the nations right after the incident at the Tower of Babel. These two events are intimately related (compare Genesis 11:4 with Genesis 12:2). After the call of Abraham, there were two distinct kinds of believers in the world: Hebrew and Gentile (Noahic) – but this was not God's original purpose. The bifurcation of humanity had a special and limited purpose: to manifest God's covenant until the coming of the Messiah and the restoration of the world (Ex. 19:6; Dt. 4:6-8).

During the Old Covenant there were many Gentile believers who did not become Israelites. There was no reason why a Gentile believer should become circumcised, unless he felt some calling of God to join the priestly nation. As an uncircumcised "God-fearer" he had access to the Tabernacle (Numbers 15) and to all the feasts except Passover. (For a full discussion, see chapter 2 of my book *Sabbath Breaking and the Death Penalty*; and chapter 3 of my book *The Sociology of the Church*.)

In the Book of Romans, Paul is concerned about this bipolar world from start to finish. The burden of Paul's "mystery" is that in the New Covenant, this bipolarity no longer can exist. All believers are one in Christ. There can no longer be any such thing as a Jew, and since Gentiles are defined in relationship to the Jews, there can no longer be any such thing as a Gentile either. There can only be Christians and non-Christians. Yet though this bipolarity was judicially overcome in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it was not actually overcome until later. Just as individual salvation has a beginning, a development over time, and a culmination in glory, so the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile as One New Man in Christ had a point of inception at Pentecost, a development during the period of the Interim, and a culmination in A.D. 70.

The calling of Israel all along was to minister God's promises to the Gentiles. That is what Abraham was called to do, and we see him doing it. Joseph did it. Moses married an Ethiopian. Samson offered marriage to a Philistine. David converted the Philistine city of Gath. Elijah went to a Gentile widow. Elisha cured a Gentile soldier of "leprosy." Thus, it is no surprise that when Jesus appears on the scene, as the True Israelite He ministers to the Gentiles, warning Israel in Luke 4:18-30 that they may well lose the privilege of being priests.

The ascended Christ, as True Israel, sends the gospel to the Gentiles. On the day of Pentecost, the gospel was preached in every language except Hebrew, a sign that True Israel was going about His priestly work. This was also a sign, however, that the Babelic world was being overcome, and if there is no longer a Babelic curse, there is no longer any need for a priestly nation of Israel. Remember, the two go together. As Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 14:21-22, speaking in tongues was a sign to Israel that her history was over because her purpose had been accomplished by True Israel.

It was still necessary, however, for believing Jew and believing Gentile to be united as one people in Christ. As I mentioned, this was effected judicially in A.D. 30, but the outworking of the restoration of the world took some time. The events leading down to A.D. 70 brought about the end of the Babelic/Jewish world in the judgments of both Rome and Jerusalem. It brought about the filling up of both Gentile and Israel and ended in a harvest of fulfilled Gentile and Jewish believers. The end result of this process was that after A.D. 70, the bipolarity no longer exists.

The reason this bipolarity had to be overcome is that the rent body of the human race is a form of death. God's scattering judgment on Babel was a manifestation of death, and the continuing presence of both Jew and Gentile in the world manifested the presence of death. Just as the individual's physical body dies if ripped to pieces, so does the body politic. God's scattering of Israel at the Exile, and His regathering of her at the Restoration, is pictured as death and resurrection in Ezekiel 11:17; 22:15; 36:19; 37:1-28. God's resurrective regathering of Israel overcame the judgment-division of the nation into two halves (Ezekiel 37:15-22), a type of the future union of Jew and Gentile.

A man rent his garments to symbolize rending himself, identifying himself with death. Similarly, rent garments could symbolize the ripping apart of the body politic (1 Samuel 15:27-28; 1 Kings 11:30-31). Such images as these establish the conceptual correlation between individual death and political death, both through tearing, and lead to a correlation between individual resurrection and political resurrection. Individual death happens when the life (soul, personality) is torn from the body, and individual resurrection happens when the body is revived. Political death happens when a society is torn apart, scattered. Political resurrection happens when a society is reunited.

Two further points need to be noted. First, Ezekiel 37 establishes for us that it is only believers who experience resurrection in the positive sense. It is believing Ephraim and believing Judah who are reunited in the resurrection of Ezekiel 37. Similarly, it is believing Jew and believing Gentile who are reunited in the New Covenant gospel.

Second, during the time between Rehoboam's reign and the Restoration from the Exile, believing Ephraim and believing Judah were kept apart by God. It took God's action to reunite them after the Exile. Similarly, after Babel, it was God's will for believing Jew and believing Gentile to be in separate bodies politic. It took God's action to reunite them after the Cross. Any divisions and separations within the believing community today are not caused by any judicial act of God, and are solely the fault of sinful Christians.

The purpose of the gospel is not simply individual salvation, but also cosmic salvation. The rent body politic of humanity has to be restored. The reuniting of believing Jew and believing Gentile in one body undoes the death-judgment of Babel and thus is a political resurrection. This resurrection occurred in A.D. 70, as an outworking of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in A.D. 30, and as a foretaste of the eventual physical resurrection of all believers at the Last Judgment.

After A.D. 70 the gospel has no more message of reconciliation between believing Jew and believing Gentile. That reconciliation has been accomplished once and for all. Babel has been undone. Now what the Church must do is call all men into herself, to be reconciled to God.

In other words, the work of reconciling all things to God has two states. The first stage, during the Interim (A.D. 30-70), reconciles the Church to herself. The Old Testament Church, which had two different companies, is gradually united during the Interim. The second state, after A.D. 70, is the reconciliation of all humanity to God. During both stages, those who refuse reconciliation are allowed to develop and are eventually judged. Accordingly, the judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70, because she refused to be reconciled, is a type of the eventual judgment

on impenitent humanity at the Last Judgment.

In A.D. 70 the Babelic/Jewish world was put to death and resurrected in Christ as the Unified Church. At the Last Judgment, the whole history of humanity will be put to death and resurrected in the Eternal Kingdom. The former typifies the latter, and both are historical outworkings of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ at the cosmic-political level.

Thus, throughout the New Testament there is a constant expectation that Christ is coming soon to render a judgment on the Church and on the old Babelic/Jewish order. He is “near,” “at the door,” “coming soon,” because it is the “last days,” even the “last hour.” Jerusalem will be destroyed, as will the Roman Beast, and the Church will yield a first-fruits harvest. This event will usher in the New Covenant in a fullness not previously seen, because now at last the residue of the Old Covenant will be gone. The events surrounding A.D. 70 happen “in Christ,” as a sign of the completion of His work. “In Christ” both the Interim Church and the Babelic/Jewish world die, and “in Christ” the Church is resurrected. These events illustrate the nature of Christ’s ensuing work throughout future ages until His Final Return.

The failure to understand the Babelic context of Israel’s history results in a failure to understand the purpose of tongues in the New Testament, and a failure to understand the historical transition that took place between A.D. 30 and 70. God judged Babel because if the people were united, nothing would be withheld from them (Genesis 11). Jesus prays that His people would be united, so that nothing will be withheld from us (John 17). It was necessary for Jewish and Gentile believers to overcome the Old Covenant bipolarity and be united, before the Gospel could really go forth in full power. After A.D. 70, with Jew and Gentile united in one Church, nothing can be withheld from us, unless we choose by our sin to be disunited. After A.D. 70, there is no longer any God-instituted historical disunity in operation.

We need to push this discussion back one more step before we move to Romans. The bipolarity of Jew and Gentile came into being because of the sin at the Tower of Babel, but what made it possible for God to do this was the design of the world in the first place. The Garden of Eden, in the Land of Eden, was the center of the world, with other lands downstream from it. Apart from sin, the world should have been united by a geographically central sanctuary. Because of sin, that world unity was slain, and the bipolarity of Eden and Outlying Lands became an expression of death. The destruction of Temple and Jerusalem in A.D. 70 ended that whole first creation by removing the geographically central sanctuary. Now the sanctuary is with Christ in heaven, and there is no center on earth; or rather, there are as many centers as there are churches.

For this reason, Jesus said that the destruction of Jerusalem would pay for all the murders since that of Abel (Matthew 23:35). All the prophets murdered by God’s people in His land, from the murder of Abel in Eden forward, would be put in Jerusalem (Revelation 18:24, “earth” = “land”). By implication, all the murders outside the land from Lamech forward (Genesis 4:23) could be put upon the Beast. The entire bi-polar world of the first creation would be destroyed.

A Glance at Romans

The Letter to the Romans is not a piece of systematic theology. It is full of systematic theology, but that theology is adduced to demonstrate a Biblico-theological point. We fall short of an understanding of Romans if all we see in it is a discussion of justification, sanctification, election, and holy living, with a “little parenthesis on the Jews” stuck in the middle. A full understanding of Romans needs to take into account that the redemptive-historical concern overarches everything else. Justification, sanctification, election, and holy living are implications of the Coming of the Kingdom, and they are laid out in Romans to make the point that the Coming of the Kingdom overcomes the Jew/Gentile distinction and creates One New

Man in Christ.

Paul starts in Romans 1 by saying that his ministry is to Gentiles, though the gospel is to the Jew first (Romans 1:13-16). The gospel is necessary because of the fall of man into idolatry (Romans 1:17-32). The gospel is the revelation of the righteousness of God at this time in history (Romans 1:16-17). Romans concerns the implications of that revelation, which includes the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the inner man, the coming of the Spirit, and climactically the resurrection of the political order of the world.

All men come under judgment, but in the Old Covenant Gentiles could be saved if they trusted God and followed His ways apart from the Law, while Jews were saved if they trusted God and followed His ways revealed in the Law. Moreover, the faithful Noahic Gentile believer had a true inward circumcision, while the faithless Jew had negated his own outward circumcision (chap. 2). In other words, as far as salvation was concerned, the Jew had no special place in the Old Covenant order.

So then, why did Jews exist? They were set aside to minister the oracles of God as priests to the nations (Romans 3:1-8). These oracles of God were the Law-Word of the Old Testament. Apart from a living faith-relationship to God, however, the Law-Word only killed men by condemning them. The living faith-relationship, which existed provisionally in the Old Covenant, has now arrived in its fullness because of the work of Jesus Christ. This faith-relationship establishes the Law-Word in a sphere of life instead of death (Romans 3:9-31).

In the Old Covenant, the faith-relationship was something Jew and Gentile had in common, as we see from the fact that Abraham had it as a Noahic believer before he was circumcised (chapter 4). The benefits of resurrection-life, seen in the opening of Sarah's dead womb, came to both Jew and Gentile through the faith-relationship.

One of the purposes of the Law, considered in redemptive-historical terms, was to put sinners to death. It showed men their need of resurrection and thereby pointed to the need for the faith-relationship. The Law came in a context of death, not only the death that came from Adam's sin, but also the political death-context that resulted from the Jew-Gentile split. The Law could never overcome that political death, because it was part of it. Only when the Jew-Gentile split had been overcome through resurrection could the Law be re-established in a sphere of life. Those who are united to Christ through resurrection have a new positive relationship with the Law (chapters 5-6).

Being raised from the dead, we are no longer subject to the total killing force of the Law, seen especially in the laws of uncleanness and sacrifice, but since we are still sinners, the partial killing force of the Law is still necessary for our personal mortification and sanctification (chapter 7). The Law helps show us our wickedness, purges us, and drives us to Christ in the quest for renewed experience of resurrection life. The work of the Holy Spirit continually serves to deliver us from the old world of the flesh into the new world of resurrection life (chapter 8).

I have only surveyed these chapters in a cursory manner, obviously, but I have done so to show that Paul is concerned from the beginning with the Jew-Gentile bipolarity, so that the idea that Romans 9-11 is a parenthesis is nonsense. Romans 9-11 carries forward the redemptive-historical themes of Romans 1-8. Romans 9-11 shows the outworking of the resurrection in its political dimension, the overcoming of the Babelic order by the reuniting of believing Jew and Gentile into one body. The climax of the whole first eleven chapters is the Amen at the end of chapter 11.

Then Paul applies his theme. In chapters 12-13 he applies the fact that we are now one body in Christ to righteous living in the Church and in the world. In chapters 14-15 he addresses the

conflict that existed in the Interim Church between converted Jew and converted Gentile. The Jews tended to want Gentiles to come under the Law, a tendency that went to seed among the apostate Judaizers. The Gentiles, rejoicing at last to be in the Kingdom on an equal basis, tended to react against the Jewish believers and mistreat them. This was a problem unique to the Interim Church, though of course the Post-Holocaust Church faces similar problems and so these chapters are still very relevant to us today. Paul's argument to the Romans is this: The night is almost over, and the day is at hand, so bear with one another for the present, because in a few years this phase of redemptive history will be over (Romans 13:11-12).

If we look back now at Romans 9-11, we can see that Paul is concerned with those Gentile believers who were reacting against the Jewish believers. He warns them not to despise the Olive Tree, and tells them that the history of Israel is not quite over yet. There is at present, he says, a Remnant in Israel, and before Jerusalem is destroyed, many Jews will be saved and there will be a great harvest. He says that this "fulfillment" of Israel will work a great benefit to the Gentile believers, for it will be a political resurrection that finally overcomes the Jew-Gentile bipolarity for all time (Romans 11:12).

Romans 9 and 10

Paul begins by speaking of the duties and privileges of Israel. Only in Romans 9-11 does Paul use the term "Israel," while everywhere else in Romans he uses the term "Jew." The word "Jew" is associated with the Restoration Covenant and was the peculiar term for the people at that time, for the New Covenant superseded the Restoration Covenant. In social and political terms, the bipolarity in the New Testament Church was between Jew and Gentile. Paul goes back to the term "Israel" here because his stress is on the calling of these people to be priests to the nations, a calling made most explicit at the time of the Mosaic Covenant, which was when the term "Israel" replaced "Hebrew" as the name for these people. Paul is saying that the special relationship of Israel to the nations is not yet over. Jerusalem continues to be the center of the world until A.D. 70.

Paul then moves to a discussion of the Remnant. Not every Israelite was a true Israelite, for being a member of true Israel was never a matter of race but of calling and election (Romans 9:6-13). The Remnant is to the ungodly nation as Jacob to Esau, and as Israel to Egypt. The refusal of Israel to enter the New Covenant is analogous to Pharaoh's refusal to hear God. Just as God raised up Pharaoh, so He raised up Israel. God dealt with Pharaoh by showing Him mercy between each plague, with the result that Pharaoh got harder and harder against God. Similarly, Israel became harder and harder under the judgments God visited upon her throughout Old Covenant history. Each time God withdrew His judgments, Israel became worse than she had been before (Romans 9:14-18).

The Remnant had readily confessed that God was the Potter and they were the clay (Is. 64:8). They were ready to change under God's reshaping hands, and enter the New Covenant. Apostate Israel, however, resisted God and became a broken pot, henceforth good for nothing but unclean uses (Romans 9:19-22). God was mixing the soft Remnant clay with the Gentiles and making a new, more glorious pot (Romans 9:23-26). (Remember, man is made of earth, so clay is a pregnant analogy.)

During this Interim, however, the Remnant still existed and had a function. They had not yet become completely blended with the Gentiles into the Church. The Remnant within Israel protected her from wrath. God was willing to spare Sodom if only ten righteous people were found in it. Jerusalem is called Sodom (and Egypt) in Revelation 11:8, and Paul says that it is Remnant in Sodom that preserves her (Romans 9:27-29). When the Remnant flees, and the rest of it slain, then Sodom will have no more protection. The Man of Sin will no longer be restrained (2 Thessalonians 2).

In Romans 10 Paul argues that the Law should have led them to faith. Romans 10:4 says that Christ is the goal of the Law, so that anyone who kept the Law in faith would be led to Christ. Verse 5 says that anyone who kept the Law in faith would find life, and verses 6-11 expand that thought. (Verse 6 should begin with “and,” not “but.” The Greek word is a simple connective, *ho de*, not the adversative, *alla*.)

Anyone who really understood the Law, says Paul, would see that salvation is by faith, both for Jew and Greek (Romans 10:11-13). The peculiar task of the Jew (Israelite) was to be a preacher to the Gentiles (Romans 10:14-15). God sent prophets to Israel so that Israel would be faithful, and by becoming faithful, minister to the Gentiles. When Israel refused to fulfill her calling to be priests to the nations, God would take His message directly to the Gentiles in order to provoke Israel (Romans 10:16-21).

Taking the gospel to the Gentiles was designed to make Israel “jealous” (Deuteronomy 32:21; Romans 10:19). This term is neutral. In a positive sense, Israel’s jealousy should lead them back to the Lord. In a negative sense, Israel’s jealousy would cause them to become furiously angry at God, His prophets, and the Gentile converts. When Jesus brought this up in Luke 4, His hometown tried to kill Him. The book of Acts shows that Paul’s ministry among the Gentiles was treated the same way (cf. esp. Acts 21:28ff.).

At the beginning of both Romans 9 and 10, Paul expressed that his personal desire was to see Israel saved. His ministry among the Gentiles, while designed for their good in itself, was also designed to provoke Israel (cf. 11:13-14). During the Interim period, this provoking ministry was going on. It is not going on today. Modern Jews are not in the least provoked by the fact that non-Jews believe the Gospel. Modern Jews get angry with Jews convert, not when “Gentiles” do. In this respect, Modern Jews are just like any other non-Christian group. This is strong evidence that Romans 9-11 is concerned only with the early days of the Church.

Romans 11

Paul returns to the Remnant in 11:1-10. He says that at the present time, there is still a Remnant of Israel. He is one such, he says. He points back to Elijah. The nation might have been destroyed in Elijah’s day, except for the Remnant 7000.

The Remnant and its provoking work will have the effect of making the Jews “jealous.” The fact that gospel has gone to the Gentiles, and they are inheriting the riches of the Old Testament promises, is not the last word. Paul reveals that the Remnant’s work will bear fruit among the Israelites, so that Israel will experience a “fullness” (v. 12). When this “fullness” happens, it will be “life from the dead” – resurrection (v. 15). We shall return to this in a moment.

Having established that Israel has a future, Paul exhorts the Gentile believers not to lord it over Israel. Just as the Jews are not to dominate the Gentiles in the Church, so neither are the Gentiles to despise the Jews. God had grafted the Gentiles onto the patriarchal stock of the Olive Tree, but soon He will graft Israel back in, making One New Tree (Romans 11:16-24).

Verses 25-26 say that the partial hardening of apostate Israel will last until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, and then all Israel (not just the Remnant) will be saved.

So, the fullness of the Gentiles comes first, and then the fullness of Israel. What does this mean? In context, I believe that the fullness of the Gentiles must mean the transfer of the riches to them, as mentioned in verse 12. This transfer of treasures went on during the Interim, and it is seen particularly in the completion of the canon of the New Testament, because the New Testament interprets and applies (transfers) the Old Testament to the New Covenant situation. The fullness does not refer only to words, however, but also to the completion of the

formation of the New Covenant Church, which was a large part of Paul's own (Israel-provoking) mission. Just as Old Covenant Israel was to minister to the Gentiles by preaching and obeying God's law, so the New Covenant Gentile Church was to minister to Israel by preaching the New Testament and living righteously. Just as the Old Covenant Gentiles would admire Israel if she were faithful (Deuteronomy 4:6-9), so it was necessary for the New Covenant Gentiles to be faithful in order to draw Israel into the Church. (This role reversal may be part of the reason why Jerusalem is called Babel in the book of Revelation.)

Why did this fullness of the Gentiles have to happen first? Because only then would the fullness of provocation be possible. The presence of the New Covenant Church and its true interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures had the effect of gradually stripping away the veil that lay over Moses' words (2 Corinthians 3), which was but the outworking of the rending of the Temple Veil that happened at Christ's death. When the Church was fully formed, and the Scriptures completed, then the veil was fully removed, and the provocation to jealousy reached its most intense development.

The purpose of the provocation was the salvation of Israel. True, for many, the provocation resulted in wrath, but for others it would result in repentance. Paul says that in the future (their future, not ours), this provoking work would bear fruit. Not just a Remnant but "all Israel" would turn to the Lord. At this point, Jew and Gentile would finally be One New Man in Christ, and this would be the political resurrection of the world that removed the bi-polarity of Babel and Israel.

The Book of Revelation

Paul does not describe how this would come about in detail, but we can see from the Book of Revelation what actually happened. A full discussion of this history would require us to delve into Josephus and other ancient writers. For now, I only want to show how Revelation delineates the Pauline prophecy.

Revelation concerns the judgment of the Old Creation, both Jewish and Gentile. Since Eden-Jerusalem is the center of the world, the book is centrally concerned with Jerusalem, but it also devotes attention to the Havilah-Roman Beast as well. The entire bifurcated Old Covenant order is going to be torn down.

I believe Revelation 7 shows the salvation of the Jewish Remnant and the initial Gentile Church. The 144,000 are the Remnant, and the great multitude from the nations is the "mixed multitude" that accompanied them out of the Egypt of rebellious Judaism (cf. Revelation 11:8). These are sealed against the initial outpourings of wrath against Jerusalem and the world.

I believe that Revelation 10:7 points to what Paul called the fullness of the Gentiles, for it says that the mystery of God has been completed. At this point, it becomes necessary for John to preach again, this time to bring about the fullness of Israel. Right away we are shown the ministry of the two witnesses in Jerusalem, and their martyrdom. Here is jealousy and wrath poured out against those who provoke Israel, but the result of the witnesses' deaths is that many feared and gave glory to God (Romans 11:13; cp. Acts 5:11-14). This, I believe, is the "fullness of Israel." Immediately we are told that the world has become the kingdom of Christ (Revelation 11:15).

Revelation 12 and 13 back up to provide context for what follows, which is the harvest of this Fulfilled Church. On the basis of my studies in the Abomination of Desolation, it seems to me that the martyrdom of the two witnesses is the Desolating Sacrilege, or at least part of it. At this point, many of the Remnant fled Jerusalem and were saved (Revelation 12:14).

The new converts, the Fullness, were stuck in Jerusalem. I believe they are seen in Revelation 14:1, standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion. As long as these believers remained in Jerusalem, the city could not be destroyed. Thus, they had to be harvested first. The harvest of these saints is simultaneously the filling up of the cup of Jerusalem's wrath, for the massacre of these saints eliminates Jerusalem's protection, and calls down the full wrath of God against her.

The angels reap the harvest of the Fullness (Revelation 14:14-20). (Chilton and others err in seeing this as a picture of God's wrath against the wicked.) We see the Fullness standing in heaven with God in Revelation 15. They were faithful to death. Their blood is the wine of God's wrath, which He will make their killers drink (Revelation 14:10). The Fullness joins their Lord outside the city (14:20), privileged to join Him in martyrdom (Colossians 1:24).

The blood of these martyrs is put into chalices and poured out on Jerusalem, to her destruction (Revelation 15:7; Revelation 16:1-21). The city is seen drinking this blood, taking into herself the death she visited upon them (Revelation 17:6).

It is my opinion that the martyrdom of the Fullness of Israel is what brings about the "life from the dead" that Paul spoke of in Romans 11. Thus, after the destruction of Jerusalem we are shown that Satan, who was on the earth during the Interim (Revelation 12:9, 12), is cast into the abyss to deceive the nations no longer. The Church comes to life again, seated on thrones, and ruling with Christ for the millennium, which begins at that point (Revelation 20:1-6). This initial resurrection of the saints is a foretaste of the final resurrection to come at the end of history.

(A footnote: The current Reformed view is that the millennium is the entire Church Age, either in heaven or on earth, from A.D. 30 forward. But in that case, how can the millennium end before the final apostasy [Revelation 20:7ff.]? If I am right that the millennium begins with the political resurrection of A.D. 70, that would explain why the millennium ends before the second coming of Christ, with the release of Satan. The millennium is bracketed on both sides by short periods during which Satan is not bound in the abyss.)

Conclusion

In these short essays I have obviously not taken up every question surrounding this issue. I have sought to make a case for a preterist view of Romans 11. I think it is a very credible case, and I am pretty much convinced by it. Filling in the details will have to wait for another occasion.

If Romans 11 was fulfilled in the first century, does it have any use for the Church today? I believe so. The issue Paul was addressing can be generalized to address a common issue today. The hardened Israelites were those who had inherited the tradition of the faith but were not living it. They are analogous to liberal and dead orthodox Christians today. Surely it is true that such people are greatly offended by faithful Christians. They are provoked to jealousy and wrath, and go out of their way to persecute those who show up their cardboard faith for what it is. Paul's admonition throughout all his letters, however, shows us how to deal with such people. We are to be all the more faithful and loving in our own circles, because the more visible our own "fullness" becomes, the better our witness becomes. Just as the fullness of the Gentiles eventually led to the fullness of Israel, so the fullness of faithful Churches today can and will lead to the fullness of unfaithful liberal and dead orthodox Christian communities.

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