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We Are Israel: The Relationship of Israel and the Church (*Rom 11*)

Introduction – There is much confusion today about the relationship of Israel to the church and the relationship of ethnic Israel to God. But there was some confusion all the way back in Paul's day. His instruction to the church at Rome then should clarify the confusion we sometimes face today as well.

Israel Rejected, But Not In Total (Rom 11:1-10) – Israel, having rejected her Messiah, was cut off from the covenant by God, which presented a problem. God had made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob of an everlasting covenant (Gen 17:7). But God had not totally rejected ethnic Israel. Paul is an example of this and he is not an isolated case, as he shows us in the story of Elijah (1 Kings 19). There have been many times where the faithful were only a small remnant; but there always was a remnant. In this selection of a remnant, God's exhaustive sovereignty is exalted, because those who remain do so because and only because of grace, and those who are rejected are blinded by God.

Israel Rejected, But Not Finally (Rom 11:11-15) – But Paul goes even further, and it is glorious. Israel's rejection was God's sovereign means to bring salvation to the Gentiles (Paul is writing to a predominantly Gentile church in Rome). The salvation of the Gentiles will be God's sovereign means of provoking the Jews to jealousy. And Paul's final point is this: if God can bring something so glorious as the salvation of the Gentiles out of something so terrible as the rejection of Israel, how much more will His blessing be when His sovereign purpose finds fulfillment and Israel turns to Jesus. He says for the Gentiles, it will be as a resurrection from the dead.

Israel Cut Out, Gentiles Grafted In (Rom 11:16-24) – God has always only had one covenant people, and it remains the same today. The New Testament church is the true "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16). Using an illustration, Paul explains how this happened. There was a cutting off and there was a grafting in. Jews or Gentiles who forsake the Lord cannot lay claim to God's blessing and favor. He requires faith which leads to obedience, or as Calvin put it, a life of continual repentance (Heb 3:12-14). And with regard to the ethnic people of Israel as a whole, they were once cut out, but that is not to say that as a nation they cannot one day be grafted back in.

Covenant Admonition – Do not presume upon God's kindness, nor doubt His severity. It is possible for individuals, churches, or nations, who are in covenant with God at some point to be cut out of covenant with Him. This is done because of covenant presumption, rejection of the gospel and of Christ as Lord to the point of excommunication. The church excommunicates individuals as God directs. Churches are warned that God will remove their lampstand if they do not remain faithful as well.

When You Are Cut Out, You Are Cut Out – If Israel, as a people, have been cut out of the covenant, where then do we have biblical warrant to say today that ethnic (but unbelieving) Israel has a right to any land, or has any special covenant relationship with God?

Israel and the Gentiles Will Be Saved (Rom 11:25-32) – In Paul's day, a day of great persecution upon the Christians by the Jews, these Jews are "beloved enemies" (vv28-29). The judicial hardening of Israel will not last forever. Someday, the veil will be lifted (2 Cor 3:14-16) and the nation as a whole will be converted to true faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Paul eludes that this will not happen until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, that is, until the Gentiles as a whole have been converted to Christ. Jew and Gentile alike, shut up in unbelief, are released unto faith only through mercy (vv31-32). And this is the mystery of the gospel.

Gospel Hope – Clearly, God intends to save the world. The command is to disciple the nations (Matt 28:18-20), and God gives what He commands. The Gentiles will be discipled. Israel will also be saved, and this will only expand the glorious work of redemption throughout the world. The scriptures do not give us a gloom and doom picture of the future. The scriptures give us a clear optimistic view of the work of the redemption of the world when taken on the whole.

Not Universalism – This does not mean, as we can certainly see, that every individual Gentile or Jew will be converted. The conversion will be analogous to the rejection. While Israel as a whole was cut out, there remained a remnant. In the same way, when the Gentiles and Israel as a whole are converted, this will not require that every last individual will become a Christian. And this is an important warning to all who are in covenant with the Lord today as well.

The Preaching of the Gospel – The means by which this will occur is not a second cataclysmic event (such as a Second Coming of Christ) but rather the preaching of the gospel (Rom 10:14-17).

Converted Jews – Jews who are converted to Christ are not a distinct group of Christians. There is, properly understood, no such thing as "Jewish Christians" any more than there are "Irish Christians" or "African Christians." By Christ's finished work He has "*made both groups into one*" (Eph 2:14, Gal 3:28).

...And All to the Glory of God (Rom 11:33-36) – While we study this story, we must understand that we will never plumb the depths of it. God created all things from nothing. God not only allowed but willed the entrance of sin among men, and all the

consequences therein. God predestined the fall and rising of all nations, the apostasy of all peoples, and the faithful remnants throughout history. God separated mankind into various tongues (words/religions/gods) and then chose one to be His people so that all might one day be His people. He did this through sending His Son to become a man, the last Adam, who would redeem His people through His death on the cross (John 3:16-17). In doing all of this, God has wonderfully manifested His glory, which is supreme and of supreme importance to Him. His wrath over sin, His mercy towards men, His longsuffering and His final and complete future judgment will all be to the praise of His glorious grace. And because "*of Him and through Him and to Him are all things*" there couldn't be a better way.

Dave Hatcher, June 24th, 2007