

Israel In Prophecy
(Is God Finished With Ethnic Israel?)
Session 4

Introduction: God promised Abraham offspring. Abraham believed God and God credited it to him as righteousness. God's promise of offspring came true initially through the existence of the Hebrew race (the ancient Israelites), who were said to be as numerous as the sands of the sea. However, the New Testament reveals the Hebrew race was merely a shadow of the true substance fulfillment that came later: Jesus the Christ, Abraham's ultimate offspring. The New Testament further states that anyone of any ancestry who has the faith of Abraham is the true promised offspring of Abraham.

Inquiring Minds Want to Know: Once ultimate substance New Testament fulfillments come, they make the initial Old Testament shadow fulfillments seem almost irrelevant, like using a flashlight outside in the blazing summer sun. In fact, we already saw that the New Testament made the entire Sinai covenant old or obsolete. Now today we'll consider:

What about the ethnic descendants of Abraham? How do they figure into the realities of the New Testament?

What is the fate of Abraham's ethnic offspring?

Is God finished with ethnic Israel? (*Rhetorical*).

Turn over to Romans 9.

When we think of Israel today, we think of a geo-political country over in the Middle East. That is not how Paul used the word Israel. No geo-political nation called Israel existed when Paul wrote Romans. A country called Israel had not existed since it was destroyed by Assyria some 700 years before Paul wrote. Modern geo-political Israel has only been in existence 65 years. Within the book of Romans, Paul used the word Israel in two different ways, both with reference to the Hebrew ethnic group:

1. Simple Ethnic Israel: People whose ethnic ancestry goes back to Abraham via Jacob (alias Israel), no matter if they have the faith of Abraham or not. Ethnic Israel is an ethnic group, not a geo-political country. We see this usage in **Romans 9:1-5** ("They are Israelites", 9:4).

Example: Both Judas and Jesus were members of simple ethnic Israel.

Simple Ethnic Israel Example: Draw a dot on the left side of the board representing Abraham. Then draw flowing to the right out of this dot in an ever widening horizontal wedge representing the descendants of Abraham from his son Isaac. This is simple ethnic Israel.

2. Saved Ethnic Israel: People whose ethnic ancestry goes back to Abraham via Jacob (alias Israel) but who also have the faith of Abraham (Jews for Jesus!). This is a subset of simple ethnic Israel.

Example: Judas was not in this group; Jesus most certainly was in this group.

We see this usage in **Romans 9:6-13** (*read*). Within ethnic Israel there are those who also have the faith of Abraham (Jacob's alias was Israel).

Saved Ethnic Israel Example: Add to the above drawing another wedge also flowing out of Abraham but within and much smaller than the first wedge. This represents the descendants of Abraham who also had the faith of Abraham: saved ethnic Israel. Paul describes these as the elect, the remnant, as "some".

Look at **Romans 9:27** (*read*). Ethnic Israel is a huge group of people (numbering like the sand of the sea), but most of whom are disobedient and contrary. Spiritual ethnic Israel is a tiny "remnant".

Simple Ethnic Israel Example: Adding to the above drawing, draw a second wedge, also flowing out of Abraham, encompassing and much wider than the first wedge. This is simple ethnic Israel.

The New Testament reveals that Abraham's metaphysical children are the ultimate substance fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that he would have offspring. Since ethnic Israel for the most part rejected Jesus (9:27), one might conclude God had rejected all ethnic Israel in an act of righteous judgment.

****** What proofs did Paul offer that God has not totally rejected ethnic Israel (Ro 11:1-6)?**

- 1) Paul offered himself as proof that God has not totally rejected ethnic Israel. Paul was a Jew, yet Paul was a believer (11:1).
- 2) Paul next offered the example of Elijah, who learned that God still had a remnant of believers, chosen by grace (11:2-6).

What word did Paul use in 11:5 to describe how many from ethnic Israel would have Abraham's faith? The word he used was remnant.

Truth: Here is a truth to bank on: "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew" (11:2a). God is still doing a work among Abraham's ethnic offspring to bring a remnant to faith. Those whom God foreknew are the elect, the remnant, saved ethnic Israel, not simple ethnic Israel.

Note: Geo-political Israel and ethnic Israel are not the same thing.

What time indicator did Paul give in 11:5 concerning when this remnant would be saved?

Paul said at “the present time” there was a remnant. That reality was already true when Paul wrote this, and arguable it is still true today. It is not some pie in the sky, by and by promise. It is a present reality.

God’s “People”: God has not rejected His people ethnic Israel in the sense that he still has an elect remnant among them. All throughout the past two thousand years of church history, there has been in every generation a steady trickle of Jews who believe in Jesus and join the church.

****** According to 11:7-8, why does the bulk of ethnic Israel reject Jesus?** The majority of ethnic Israel rejects Jesus because they are not among God’s elect. God hardened them, just as He did Pharaoh.

Speculation: Some people believe that in the future the remnant will one day become a majority. We’ll have to see if Paul goes on to predict that.

****** Ethnic Israel stumbled, but did not actually fall. In this context, what would it actually fall (11:11-12)?** To fall in this context would mean the Jewish race would be totally rejected by God and perhaps even go extinct as a race (as happened to the Canaanites or Hittites or Philistines or the Mohicans). In light of wholesale Israelite rejection of Jesus it would be easy to make the mistake of concluding that God had forever divorced Himself from the Israelite race. As it now is, the elect among simple ethnic Israel are still God’s people.

It was not God’s plan for Israel to stumble “in order that” they might fall (11:11a). That was not God’s purpose. According to 11:11b, how will God bring elect Israel to salvation? Israel’s stumbling/trespass resulted in salvation coming to the Gentiles (riches for the whole world). God’s plan is to use Gentile salvation to provoke the elect within ethnic Israel to jealousy and cause the elect among them to accept Jesus as Messiah. The remnant will be Jealous Jews for Jesus!

Context:

ESV **Romans 9:6** . . . not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel . . .

Historically, here’s how Jewish trespass resulted in Gentile riches (11:11-12):

ESV **Acts 13:46** . . . Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you [the Jews]. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.”

What did Paul mean by full inclusion (11:12)? See also 11:25. The Greek simply says “fullness.” It means a full number (Hendriksen, p. 378). Whatever it means here, it means the same thing in 11:25 (fullness of Gentiles).

- 1) Some take full inclusion to mean a large scale conversion of Jews to Jesus just prior to the Second Coming and take “full” to refer to most of the race. They contrast remnant with full inclusion. However, the fullness of the Gentiles (11:25) is not taken to mean most Gentiles will be saved, so the fullness of Israel should be not taken to mean most Jews would ever be saved.
- 2) Others take it to refer to the previously mentioned salvation of the remnant, “full” referring to the full number of the remnant as, generation by generation, a larger and larger percentage of the remnant comes to faith (the full inclusion of the remnant).

Example: Go back to the earlier drawing of saved Israel within simple Israel. Fill in the first one quarter of the wedge. This fill represents the percentage of the total remnant that was saved in the first century. Then fill in half the wedge. This represents the percentage saved up through the Reformation. They fill in three-quarters to represent the percentage saved up through the 21st century. Full inclusion or literally fullness would be the full percentage of the remnant that gets saved.

******According to 11:13-16, how many jealous Jews did Paul expect to see saved (11:14)?**

Paul expected that “some” of them would be saved (11:14). This fits with what Paul wrote in 11:5 about a remnant being chosen by grace at this present time.

How does 11:14 help interpret what Paul meant by full inclusion (literally, fullness, 11:12)?

Both paragraphs mention Gentile conversion leading to Israelite jealousy and the subsequent conversion of the elect within ethnic Israel. The 2nd paragraph adds Paul’s goal that “some” be saved (far different from literally all of them getting saved).

Timing: Some interpreters feel Israel’s jealousy and conversion will not happen until just before the Second Coming and that a huge percentage of Israelites will accept Christ. However, it seems clear from 11:13-14 that this inclusion was *already* happening in Paul’s day and presumably has kept on happening right along since then for the past two thousand years (Hendriksen, p. 392). Fullness in this case arguably refers to the full number of the remnant.

What is the answer to the question of 11:15? Since the vast majority of Jews are dead spiritually, having rejected Jesus, any remnant Jewish acceptance of Jesus will constitute life from the dead.

11:16 contains two illustrations (firstfruit/root). Both make the same point. What is the point of these two illustrations as relates to ethnic Israel (11:16)? Suppose for example the firstfruit/root refers to Abraham; then the rest of the dough/branches would refer to the Hebrew race as a whole. All Israel is in some sense holy because of Abraham. Because of His promises to Abraham, God will always elect at least a remnant from ethnic Israel (unlike the Canaanites or Philistines). As made clear earlier by Paul, this does not mean every Jew will be saved. Only “some” will be saved, the “remnant”.

******9. Does 11:17-24 express a possibility or a prophecy? Why?** The key seems to be the word “if” in 11:23. It is a statement of theological fact. However, it falls short of an all out prophecy that ethnic Israel as a whole will be grafted back in again. It is possible, but not predicted here.

What Paul did emphatically state is this:

ESV **Romans 9:27** . . . Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved . . .

What is the point of this paragraph (11:17-24)? The point is to make the application that the Gentiles must not be arrogant toward unbelieving Israel. The purpose was not to make a prediction.

******What mystery did Paul want Gentile believers to understand (11:25-27)?** The mystery has at least two parts: **1)** Israel does not believe because they have been partially hardened and **2)** God is working to bring in the fullness of the Gentiles.

In what sense is Israel’s hardening only partial (11:25)? See 11:7, 13-14. It is partial as opposed to total; there will always be God’s elect within ethnic Israel who come to faith in Jesus.

ESV **Romans 11:7** Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened . . .

ESV **Romans 11:13-14** . . . Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.

Ethnic Israel has experienced a partial hardening (11:25). What is the difference between partial and temporary? Partial refers to a quantity. Temporary refers to time. Paul did not say that a temporary hardening had happened to Israel. He said a partial hardening had happened. There may never be a time when they are not partially hardened.

4. Does the word “until” in 11:25 indicate how long the hardening will go on or does it indicate the purpose of the hardening? Why? The answer to this is found in the difference between when and why. In English the word until typically denotes when something will happen. For example, I might say I stayed inside “until” it stopped raining (denoting a time frame). Notice that my staying inside did not cause the rain to stop. The Greek for “until” in such usages (as a time frame) is often *heos hutoi*. However, the meaning of “until” in Romans 11:25 is different. The Greek behind “until” is *achri hou*. When used along with an aorist subjunctive verb (which is the case here for “has come in”), it grammatically can denote a goal or objective (Rienecker, p. 427). Thus Paul is not telling us how long Israel will be hardened; he is telling us why Israel was hardened: so that the fullness of the Gentiles can come in.

Other examples of *achri hou* used with an aorist subjunctive verb:

ESV **Luke 21:24** . . . Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

[The point is not that a time is coming when Jerusalem won't be trampled underfoot. Rather, the point is to express the purpose of the trampling: so that the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled].

ESV **1 Corinthians 11:27** . . . as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

[The point here is not how long we are to proclaim the Lord's death, but rather why we proclaim it: with the goal of His return].

ESV **1 Corinthians 15:25** . . . [Jesus] must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

[The point is not to inform us when Jesus will cease to reign. The point is that the purpose of his reign is to put the last enemy into subjection].

In 11:25, what is the fullness of the Gentiles (used of Israel in 11:12)? This is a reference to the full number of elect Gentiles who will come to faith. It does not mean a majority of Gentiles will come to faith, and neither does it mean this about Israel back in 11:12.

Fullness (11:25) and full inclusion (11:12) and are from the same word (*plérōma*). How can 11:25 (fullness of Gentiles) help us understand 11:12 (fullness of Israel)? If the fullness of the Gentiles is the full number of Gentiles who will be saved, it also makes sense that Paul's use of the word fullness with reference to Israel's salvation (11:12) refers to the full number of Israelites who will be saved.

Paul wrote, "in this way" Israel will be saved (11:26); in what way? What way is this way?

See 11:25, 11:7. It seems to refer back to 11:25 and the partial hardening of Israel. It is not a total hardening. The elect remnant will be saved through jealousy and the rest will be hardened. It was true in Paul's day, it has been true throughout church history, it is true today and it will be true in the future. Thus, "in this way" (i.e. due to God's grace in election and jealousy), the elect within ethnic Israel will be saved.

7. What did Paul mean by "all" Israel (11:26)? *See 9:6.* It is the full number of elect Jews gathered out of ethnic Israel over the course of the centuries. Just as not literally all Gentiles will be saved, but rather a full number of Gentiles, so too not literally all Israel will be saved, but rather a full number (all the elect). All the elect within ethnic Israel will finally be saved.

Mass Conversion? Many interpret 11:25-27 to mean that the partial hardening of Israel is also a temporary hardening and that it will be removed toward the end of the church age after the fullness of the Gentiles is accomplished, resulting in a wholesale conversion of Jews due to the events surrounding the Second Coming. However, it seems strange that Paul would introduce a major eschatological event with just five words, with no further explanation and without alluding to it elsewhere in any of his other writings.

In his commentary on Romans, Martin Luther expressed the opinion this passage taught the final conversion of all Jews. However, Luther later accepted opinion of Origen, Theophylact, Jerome and others who identified “all Israel” with the full number of elect Jews, corresponding to the expression “the fullness of the Gentiles”. That is, the full number of the elect among the Gentiles is being brought in through the preaching of the Gospel and so also is the full number of the elect from among ethnic Israel (Luther, p. 162).

Teacher’s Note: Some feel the word Israel here refers to the elect from among both Jews and Gentiles, joined together in a new spiritual Israel. However, Paul has only used the word Israel to refer to ethnic Israel and it would be strange for him to change semantic horses mid-stream without explanation.

In 11:26-27, Paul quoted from Isaiah 59 and Jeremiah 31. When were these prophecies fulfilled? When did the Deliverer come, make a covenant and take away Israel’s sins? This Old Testament prophecy is now fulfilled history. Hebrews 8 confirms the fulfillment of Jeremiah 31. It is a prediction of the first coming of Jesus, when He made the New Covenant (which accomplished the forgiveness of sins). Thus Paul quoted Isaiah and Jeremiah as the basis for all believing ethnic Israel being saved (the making of the New Covenant), not to make a prophecy about a wholesale conversion at the Second Coming.

******What confidence did Paul express regarding Israel in 11:28-32?** See 9:6. Since God’s gifts and calling are irrevocable, God still has love toward the elect within ethnic Israel, showing them mercy.

ESV Romans 9:6 . . . it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel . . .

According to 11:28, why they enemies of God? It is for the “sake” of the Gentiles!

Based on the context, how are unbelieving Jews enemies of God “for our sake” (11:28)? See 11:11-12 and 11:30. Their opposition to God is *for our sake* in the sense that the apostles began preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles after the Jews rejected it with the result that the Gentiles became God’s people by faith.

ESV Romans 11:11 . . . through their [Israel’s] trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles . . .

Based on 11:28, despite the fact they are enemies of the God, why is there still an elect remnant within enemy Israel? It is because of their forefathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc.) who were called by God and given many gifts. The gifts and calling are primarily those of the Abrahamic Covenant wherein God promised Abraham offspring.

ESV Genesis 17:7 . . . I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

ESV Romans 9:6 . . . it is not as though the word of God has failed.

ESV **Romans 5:10** . . . while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son

[At one time all Gentiles were enemies of God too; but God had mercy of some of us and made us His own. This will also happen to elect Jews who at this moment are God's enemies].

Timing: What word in 11:30-31 repeatedly indicates when disobedient Israel will receive God's mercy? Timing is everything. According to the text, the time is "now" (not far off in the future). The word "now" occurs three times. The elect with ethnic Israel already was getting God's saving mercy when Paul wrote and they are still getting it now.

Universalists believe everybody will go to heaven and quote Romans 11:32 in support of their belief. What does "all" mean in 11:32? Paul's reference is to all men without distinction (Jew or Gentile), not all men without exception. We must let Scripture interpret Scripture. We must interpret the word all concerning Israel in the same way (11:26).

So What?

17. What truth about Israel does Romans 11 hold for us? Even though Israel rejected their own Messiah, God has not totally rejected Israel. God could have caused them to become like the Canaanites or Philistines or even Cooper's Mohicans. There was then, has been throughout history, is now and will be in the future an elect remnant within ethnic Israel that God will save and bring into the church in each generation. Some of the physical offspring will yet become meta-physical offspring!

Bad theology leads to bad applications, misguided actions, false expectations and an incorrect lifestyle:

Romans 11 does not predict a mass conversion of Jews at some point in the future.

Romans 11 does not predict the restoration of geo-political Israel to the Promised Land.

To get an idea of what incorrect theology on Israel can lead to watch "Dr." Jack Van Impe use the newspaper to interpret Bible prophecy concerning Israel.

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.

- You can hear this lesson being taught at www.SermonAudio.Com/NTRF.

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