



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 11:25-27

“Israel Saved by the Deliverer From Zion”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The general theme of this series of messages is the Apostle Paul and the Purpose of the Ages. Or to put it in popular terms, What is God Doing Now? This, the fifth in our series of seven messages, is entitled Israel Saved by the Deliverer From Zion. Have your Bibles before you. Turn to Romans chapter 11 verse 25 through verse 27, and also Isaiah chapter 59 verse 20 and 21. And I am sure you will prophet considerably more from the message if you have the text before you.

Now, Israel Saved by the Deliverer from Zion. We have turned the corner toward home and the conclusion of our study of Paul and the purpose of the ages. I realize that the depth and technicality of the theme is not easy for the average student of Scripture and I hope that it has not been too much for you.

The story that Alexander McClaren often told comes to mind. He enjoyed telling about the old virgule of Saint Mary's Church, a well-known university church where the famous Bampton lectures are given. As the virgule was taking a party of sightseers through the church he commented, "I've heard every sermon and every lecture given in this here church for the past forty years and thank God I am Christian still." I hope you too have managed to hold on to your faith as we've investigated the story of Israel and the nations in this somewhat complex chapter. The importance of the subject however

demands a careful treatment. As we noted in an earlier study, Professor Berkouwer excused a separate chapter on Israel in his book, *The Return of Christ*, for two reasons. First, he referred to the renewed attention to Israel arising from the, what he called, the tragic outbursts of anti-Semitism in our age. And then he pointed to the rise of the Jewish state in Palestine. This second fact, particularly calls for an intensive treatment of the biblical chapters dealing with matters related to the state of Israel.

The theodicy of Paul in Romans 9 through 11, is certainly one of the crucial sections in the word of God that touch Israel and the purpose of God. In the theodicy his vindication of God's ways with the nations according to the principles of justice, Paul has made these points. First of all, in chapter 9 verse 1 through verse 29, he made the point that God is sovereign in his grace, and he elects whom he will. And secondly in chapter 10, since that is not the whole truth, he then explains that Israel's own disobedience lead to her downfall. Human responsibility necessarily follows divine sovereignty inseparably. And Paul makes a third point, because the two points just made are not the final word on Israel. Her fall, while real, is not total nor is it final, and that's the substance of Paul's message in chapter 11, the chapter that we are looking at. The figure of the olive tree in the preceding context is designed primarily to be a warning to the Gentile believers not to presume on the Lord's mercy to them in the present age, but it taught the fall of Israel, the blessing of the Gentiles, and the probability of the reception of Israel again into the redemptive purpose and plan of God in grace.

Notice particularly the 15th verse of Romans chapter 11, where Paul writes,

“For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead. (And then verses 23 and 24.) And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief shall be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For is thou weren't cut out of the olive tree, which is wild by nature, and weren't grafted contrary to

nature, and to a good olive tree, how much more shall these which be the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree.”

What he had shown as possible, since faith is the only thing hindering Israel's return to covenantal blessings from the human standpoint, as probably since it is easier to believe that the natural branches shall be grafted into the olive tree, than the unnatural, he now prophecies in his thrilling words, and so all Israel shall be saved.

We turn to them now. And first we look at the hardening of Israel in Romans 11, verse 25, and the admonition, which begins the verse the 25, comes first. One must remember in going through the section that the apostle has the nations in the foreground and individuals in the background. He is reasoning over the relation that God has established in his eternal plan, between the nation Israel and the Gentiles. The for, with which verse 25 begins, “For I would not brethren that you should be ignorant of this mystery.” Introduces the fundamental ground for the hope of Israel's regrafting into the olive tree. It is found in Scripture. The apostle does not want his Gentile readers to succumb to ignorance and pride overlook that fact. Israel's hardening is subject, he says, to two limitations, which sum up the chapter. First, it is in part, the phrase being used extensively, not intensively. All men including Israel are equally depraved, but the depravity of some in Israel has been overcome by God's effectual grace in them. He refers of course to the remnant of Jewish believers in this age. That which he referred to in verse 5, and alludes to in verse 17. And second he says the hardening is temporary, being until the fullness of the Gentile salvation takes place. The apostle calls these things a mystery. That is a divine secret, something that may be known only by divine revelation. And here the mystery encompasses the divine program of the future in its several steps. Paul's concern over his readers' possible ignorance of these matters reminds me of one of Josh Billings, sayings. “The trouble with most folks” he said, “isn't

so much their ignorance as knowing so many things that ain't so.” Well, there are many who know Israel has no ethnic future but it just ain't so, Scripture affirms.

Look now, at Paul's description of the hardening in verse 25, where he says, “Lest ye be wise in your own conceits that blindness in part is happened to Israel.” He describes the hardening now. He says that, “Hardening in heart has happened to Israel.” Paul uses a word, translated blindness in the Authorized Version that denotes a dullness, an insensibility or a hardening. In fact, the Greek word was used for a callus. The Authorized Version's rendering of blindness is not correct, but Paul's word includes the sense of spiritual blindness just the same. The hardening has been judicially inflicted on a part of Israel, the mass but not all. And it is the result of the rejection of the Messiah the Lord Jesus Christ. The nation as a whole centering their attention on the prophecies of Messiah's glory and the victory he would accomplish for them failed to give proper attention to the prophecies of Messiah's sufferings, the ground of atonement, and the forgiveness of sins.

Passages such as Isaiah 53, and Psalm 22 were a mystery to them due of failure to recognize their sinful state in need of redemption from guilt. In fact, that's always true when we don't understand our sin and realize it, then we have no real desire for forgiveness of sin, and thus do not understand all of the significance of redemption from sin. Like the little boy waiting in a London hospital for a visit from King George V. and failing to recognize him when he came because he didn't wear his crown as the King of England. At the end of the day after expecting him, he had asked his nurses, where was the king that he had been looking forward to seeing so much. And one of the nurses said, “Well didn't you notice that kindly gentlemen that came in with some other people and he went over and held your hand for a moment?” And the little boy said, “Was that the king?” And she said, “Yes.” And he said, “But he didn't have his crown on.”

Well, the Lord Jesus, when he came did not have his crown on. He came in his suit of suffering. His crown was not golden but of thorns. The day is coming however

when he shall come again in his royal apparel, then the whole world will recognize and acknowledge him as ruler of the kings of the earth.

Paul speaks in the latter part of verse 25 of the culmination of Israel's hardening. Several important points are made by Paul in the last clause of the verse. He says until the fullness of the Gentiles come in.” This “until” suggests an end to the hardness of heart and that which is implied is stated in the next verse, and second note carefully the term “the fullness of the Gentiles.” The word fullness usually means the full number, the whole body, Sandy Hedlman one of the better commentaries of the Book of Romans, have the full completed number. The term must be distinguished from another familiar eschatological term, the times of the Gentiles, mentioned by the Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 21, 24. That term covers the period of time from 605 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Daniel chapter 2 verse 1 through verse 45 has a full treatment of the times of the Gentiles, but here the term the fullness of the Gentiles is a soteriological term, referring to the time of Gentile salvation during the present age. Paul's word “come in” better rendered “shall have come in” refer to entrance by regeneration and faith and to the community of the Lord's people signified by the olive tree. The Gentiles enter into the possession of the blessing of the unconditional covenantal program of the Old Testament Scriptures.

And now, secondly the apostle speaks of the salvation of Israel, in the opening words of verse 26, “And so all Israel shall be saved.” Let's notice the number of them first. Before us now is that important statement, “And so all Israel shall be saved.” The enemies of Israel cry out still today, like the enemies of Old Testament times. Come and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance. Just recently the Syrian president, Mr. Assad boasted that when the Syrians finished with Israel the Golan Heights would be in the middle of Syria. He fails to reckon with God in his word. They say, “Thus saith the Lord who giveth the sun for a night by

day and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, who divided the sea when it's waves roar. The Lord of Hosts is his name.”

And notice these words now, that Jeremiah writes now, in chapter 31 in verse 36, “If those ordinances depart from before me (that is the sun and the moon.) sayeth the Lord, then the seed of Israel shall cease from being a nation before me forever.” But what is meant by the expression “all Israel”? A study of such passages is 1 Kings chapter 12 in verse 1 and 2 and 2 Chronicles chapter 12 verse 1 through verse 5 and Daniel chapter 9 verse 11, will show that Paul did not mean every single individual Israelite, but he meant Israel as a national whole. The nation as a whole, that is it's leaders and the majority of the people will turn to the Lord in the latter days. This meaning is confirmed by the fact that in Rabbinic literature all Israel has this force. Often cited is the statement from the mission attracted Sanhedrin ten one. All Israel has a portion in the age to come and in the context there in that tractate there follows a lengthy passage listing the kinds of Israelites who do not have a portion in the age to come. Sadducees, Heretics, magicians etcetera, but what is meant by the term Israel? It would seem to be very plain, but it's surprising to see how many have translated it and interpreted it in different ways.

John Calvin referred the term Israel to all the people of God, drawn from both the Gentiles, and ethnic Israel, although he gave to Israel the first place in the whole Israel of God. Another modern commentator comments that all Israel here does not include Gentiles is virtually certain. Unusual confidence for a modern commentator who generally liked to be doubtful about most things. The evidence however is overwhelmingly against Calvin. Israel elsewhere always refers to ethnic Israel. The term occurs ten times previously in Romans 9 through 11, and always in that sense. Notice the reference to the fathers, in verse 28 of this chapter, which confirms that sense too. Further it surely is questionable hermeneutically to give the term a sense different from that which it has in the immediately preceding verse. Try reading verses 25 and 26

given Calvin’s sense to the word Israel in verse 26, and the impossibility of that view plainly emerges. Calvin therefore was not always right.

The manner of Israel’s salvation is referred to by that expression “and so”. “And so all Israel shall be saved.” So we must give attention to this warmly discussed to words. The phrase may be understood in several different ways. It’s been given the temporal force of and then. The rarity of the usage however argues against its sense here. The phrase may be taken inferentially and rendered by “and thus” or “therefore,” but that sense is also rare in the New Testament, and third it may be taken correlatively with the following as”. In “as it is written.” The rendering would then be, “And so all Israel shall be saved,” just as it stands written. Well that makes pretty good sense, and it may be correct, but sense the most common sense of the adverb rendered here by so as a comparative adverb, I think its best to take it in that sense. The full significance of this will appear when we discuss the alternative interpretations of the statement shortly. That brings us toe interpretation of the declaration as a whole.

Among the views contending for acceptance of the following three, first, we may dispense, I think with a view that Paul is referring to the salvation of spiritual Israel composed of elect Jews and Gentiles together. Aside from the usage of terms referred to previously the antithesis in the overall and immediate context between Israel and the Gentiles forbids this interpretation. Another view that has gained a body of support among amillennial students namely that all Israel here refers to elect Jews down through the ages, who are converted to Christ, demand some consideration simply by reason of the name supporting it. The view was held by Melancthon , I believe, and it has found contemporary support among such amillennial theologians as Herman Ridderbos, G.C. Berkouwer and others.

Building upon the comparative phrase, “and so” and yet admitting that all Israel can only refer to ethnic Israelites, they’ve sought to show that the phrase can only refer to all Israelites saved through the ages. A kind of soteriological trickle down theory, one

might facetiously say. The salvation of all Israel is simply the salvation of all the remnants of the past. Forgetting that Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and that outside of Romans 9 through 11, Paul only uses the term “Israel” about six times. Ridderbos demands that Paul speak of Israel’s conversion in other places. He forgets what Paul has said in Romans 3:1-4 about their present advantage. What he said, in chapter 9 verse 3 through verse 5, those great privileges that still belong to Israel, and how he insisted that the purpose of Christ’s coming as a minister of the circumcision in behalf of the truth of God was to confirm the promises made to the fathers in chapter 15 in verse 8.

Notable is Ridderbos’ failure to handle verses 11 through 15 the parable of the olive tree with its future reference verses 23 through 24, and the time reference of the biblical citations of Paul in verses 26 and 27. Still other objections may be raised to this view, but I have only space and time for a few.

First the passage stresses the reversal of fortune experienced by Israel. Look at verse 7, verse 11 and 12. Verse 15 particularly, where the apostle writes, “For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead.” As one can see that text speaks of a reversal of the fortunes of Israel. But in Ridderbos’ view there is no place for that. Further the truth that the elect shall be saved is so obvious that one would have to ask, Why would the question God has not rejected his people has he? Ever have arisen in the first place, and third the much more argument of verse 12 and the statements of verses 11, 14 and 15 taken together with the future sense of the passage support the ethnic future of Israel.

The view of Professor Ridderbos, and others has no real casting away and no real receiving. No imposition of judicial hardening and no lifting of it. Finally the view cannot explain why Paul is so concerned with Israel, when they are no different from anyone else. What then is Paul saying? Simply that Israel’s hardening is temporary, and at the same time the occasion of the opening of the door of the worldwide salvation of the Gentiles. This very exercise of mercy toward the Gentiles however shall result in the

salvation of ethnic Israel as a whole ultimately. For Gentiles salvation shall provoke them to jealousy. That's the meaning of “and so”. It is in this manner that the mystery unfolds.

Now, finally the Scriptural attestation in the latter part of verse 26 and verse 27. Adolf Harnack, the famous German historian, in speaking of Paul's conviction of the salvation of Israel has yet to come, said, “The Jew in himself was still too strong.” A Lutheran of all people, and yet the revered reformer made many exaggerated and foolish statements in his career, once said, “A Jew, or Jewish heart is so wood stone iron devil hardened that it can in no way be turned.” And that coming from the man who got his insight into divine grace from a Jew, the Apostle Paul.

No it was not Paul's patriotism that led him to prophecy Jewish restoration. It was the Bible, and so in the final verses of the section in a free blending of Old Testament passages he supports his view by the word of God. The passages are interesting for they are grounded in the truth of the three unconditional covenants of Israel, the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the new. In verse 26b, the words about the deliverer from Zion refer to the Davidic covenant and its conquering king, and then in the first part of verse 27, in words that ultimately are to be traced to Genesis chapter 17 in verse 4, there are phrases that are traceable to the Abrahamic covenant made with Abraham by the Lord God, and finally in verse 27b, in the statement about the forgiveness of sins, when I shall take away their sins, either Isaiah 27:9 or Jeremiah 31:33-34 are in mind, but the fact that the forgiveness of sins, is in view makes it clear that the new covenant is in Paul's mind also.

Thus remarkable as it may seem, all the unconditional covenants pertaining to divine redemption, which find their fruition in the Second Advent, are linked by Paul with the statement, “And so all Israel shall be saved.” That would seem to clearly indicate that the time reference of the statement is future. Therefore empirical evidence in the presence of a remnant by the election of grace in the church of Jesus Christ, a remnant of Jewish believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Divine logic as seen in the example of the olive tree, and now the prophetic word unite in affirming the restoration of believing ethnic

Israel as a whole to saving covenantal blessing. We therefore, believing Gentiles, pray to that end. And with the psalmist we say, “let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, loving kindness is the meaning of the Hebrew word, *“Haseth* And with him is plenteous redemption. Psalm 130 in verse 7.

One final point may be made. Is it not significant that the restoration of Israel is traced to the favor of God as found in the ministry of the Messiah? In other words there can be no restoration of Israel apart from the coming and cross of the Savior, for only there is found the forgiveness of sins, which underlies all of God’s promises and blessings. If one were to visit Virden, Germany, he would no doubt notice an image of a lamb carved high upon the old church there. If one asked about it he would be told about the worker who many years ago while working on the structure fell to an expected sudden death on the stones scattered on the ground below. He miraculously arose unhurt, because there had been a lamb among the stone heaps, nibbling on some tufts of grass there, and he had fallen on the lamb, which was crushed, to death. The man in gratitude carved the memorial to the lamb to celebrate both his deliverance and its ultimate suggestion of the deliverance we have by the Lamb of God.

We too have been delivered by, from certain judgment, by the deliverer out of Zion, who offered the saving atoning sacrifice at Golgotha in the land of Israel. We exalt him, and we sing his praised in the words of the living creatures and elders in the book of the apocalypse. Thou art worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals for Thou wast slain and hast redeemed to God by Thy blood some out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them unto our God a kingdom of priests and they shall reign upon the earth.

Now, listening friend, if you are listening to the broadcast today, and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we invite you to come to him who offered the atoning sacrifice for sinners, acknowledge your sin. Lean upon the sacrifice that he has

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accomplished and receive the free gift of eternal life, for by grace are we saved through faith, that not of ourselves, it's the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast.

The sixth of the messages to be given next week is entitled “Calling Immutable and Calling Mercy Inexhaustible.” I hope you'll be listening then.