

(Eschatological Problems IX:) Israel's Restoration

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[Author's Note: In the previous article on *Israel's Blindness*, it was pointed out that there were three views of the meaning of the phrase, "all Israel," in Romans 11:26: (1) all believers; (2) Jews as a people; (3) Jews as a whole or as a nation. It was further shown that Romans 11:25 taught a future restoration for Israel after the fullness of the Gentiles is concluded and that this restoration had two phases: (a) immediate lifting of their blindness, (b) restoration as a nation at the second coming of Christ. The implications of Romans 11:26 were reserved for the present article.]

The confusion in the minds of expositors of Scripture concerning the meaning of Romans 11:26 is one of the obvious facts of Biblical interpretation. Not only various schools of thought disagree, but the passage is a problem to all. An important clue to its interpretation is found in its preceding context. The entire chapter of Romans eleven deals with the question, "Did God cast off his people?" (Rom 11:1). The answer given to this leading question is that "God did not cast off his people which he foreknew" (Rom 11:2). The argument proceeds to point out that there has always been a remnant of Israel who believed both under the law and under grace. The fact that this group were only a small portion of the nation of Israel is explained as the occasion for the present grace extended to Gentiles: "I say then, Did they stumble that they might fall? God forbid: but by their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy" (Rom 11:11). The argument then turns on the point that if the unbelief and "fall" of Israel as a nation was the occasion of blessing on the Gentiles, how much more will be the blessing on both Gentiles and Israel when Israel comes into its fullness of blessing: "Now if their fall is the riches of the world, and their loss the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" (Rom 11:12). These facts combine to serve as a warning to Gentiles not to be high-minded and serve as an encouragement to Israel that a future time

of blessing is in store. The contrast throughout the passage is not between the believer and unbeliever, but between Gentiles as such and Israel as a nation. In Romans 11:25, the issue is brought to a head with the revelation that Israel's present blindness and unbelief will be concluded at the same time that the present Gentile opportunity is ended. Then follows the event described as "all Israel" being delivered.

The issues involved in the passage under consideration can be resolved into a series of questions: (1) What is the meaning of "all Israel"? (2) What is the nature of the deliverance? (3) When will the deliverance occur? (4) What are the concomitant events? Any answer to these questions involves both premises based on interpretation of the entire Scriptures and exegesis of the passage itself. The history of its interpretation has revealed a tendency to determine the meaning of the passage largely on the basis of other Scriptures. Hence, most amillennialists have denied that the reference is to Israel in the flesh and have given a spiritual interpretation of the passage. Premillennialists have insisted upon a more literal exegesis. The issue is determined by the meaning of key words.

What Is the Meaning of "All Israel"?

It is apparent that the construction placed upon the word *Israel* practically determines the exegesis of the entire passage. The question is answered by at least three important

considerations: (1) What is the use of the word in the context? (2) What is the use of the word in the New Testament as a whole? (3) What is the relation of the question to doctrine in general?

A study of the context bears out the fact that the word *Israel* as used in this passage is in contrast to *Gentile*. This is clear in Romans 11:1, where Paul identifies himself as an Israelite because of his connection with the tribe of Benjamin—a racial and national relation rather than spiritual. The contrast is made further in Romans 11:11ff. The use of “ye,” i.e., the Gentiles, is opposed to “they,” i.e., the Jews. In other words, the entire chapter carefully preserves the distinction between two classes—Jews and Gentiles. Further, the Gentiles are in most cases those who have believed in Christ and members of the church. The contrast is not, therefore, between believing Israel and unbelieving Gentiles, but rather the two groups are treated racially. There is no ground whatever in this passage for the idea that Israel is a reference to all believers as such—the interpretation advanced by Origen, furthered by Calvin, and embraced by most amillennialists. This interpretation would nullify the very theme of the chapter.

The immediate context also brings out the contrast between Israel and Gentiles. In Romans 11:25, both terms occur in contrast. As far as the general context and the immediate context is concerned, there is no ground for spiritualizing the word *Israel*. Even A. T. Robertson, who is not a premillennialist, rather reluctantly admits that the context would indicate that the Jewish people are indicated. Charles Hodge, who is also not a premillennialist, states flatly, “Israel, here, from the context, must mean the Jewish people, and *all Israel*, the whole nation. The Jews, as a people, are now rejected; as a people, they are to be restored.” The amillennial view that Israel refers to all believers must be held in spite of the context. It is noteworthy that Dr. Oswald T. Allis, who more than any other recent amillennial writer has attempted formally to refute premillennialism, passes by Romans 11:26 with only a footnote reference in which he tries to sustain his thesis that Romans eleven says nothing of Israel’s restoration. In brief, his argument is that if Paul believed in Israel’s restoration he would have mentioned restoration *to the land*. In other words, because Paul does not include all the elements of Israel’s restoration, he cannot be speaking on the subject at all. If words are to be taken in their ordinary meaning, Paul is speaking of Israel’s

spiritual and national restoration throughout the chapter. The fact is that Romans 11:26 is an embarrassing passage to the amillennial school of interpretation and, as they have no satisfactory interpretation of it, they are prone to give none.

The predicament of the amillennialist in interpreting Romans 11:26 is further disclosed by examination of their theory that *Israel* as a term is constantly used in the New Testament as a synonym of the church composed of both Jews and Gentiles. Their prejudice is expressed well by Dr. Allis when he states that when the Brethren Movement “insisted that Israel must mean Israel, and that the kingdom promises in the Old Testament concern Israel and are to be fulfilled to Israel literally” that they were “carrying to an almost unprecedented extreme that literalism which is characteristic of Millenarianism.” Yet Allis himself admits that premillennialism “was extensively held in the Early Church,” and that it was superseded only when Augustine advanced the idea that the millennium was “to be interpreted spiritually as fulfilled in the Christian Church.” As a matter of fact even a casual study of the writings of the early Fathers reveals that millenarianism was not only “extensively held” but was in fact the outstanding characteristic of early Christian eschatology. Dr. Wilbur Smith in his review of Dr. Allis’ book quotes Schaff to this effect: “The most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age is the prominent chiliasm, or millenarianism, that is the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on earth with

the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment. It was indeed not the doctrine of the church embodied in any creed or form of devotion, but a widely current opinion of distinguished teachers, such as Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, and Lactantius.” Dr. Allis’ “unprecedented literalism” was, in the impartial hands of doctrinal historians, the prevailing

opinion of the church until the perversions of Augustine and Roman Catholicism began to have weight. After all, is it such “unprecedented literalism” to believe that the Bible means Israel when it uses the term? Is not the burden of proof on the amillennialist to prove that the word means other than its ordinary meaning?

It is not difficult to prove from Scripture that *Israel* is frequently used in the New Testament to mean what it meant in the Old Testament—the nation descending from Abraham through Jacob. Further, *there is not a single reference in the New Testament to Israel which cannot be taken in its plain meaning. Not a single instance requires the term to include Gentiles.* As this subject has been treated in a previous article, it will not be further discussed here. In a word, there is no justification based on usage in the New Testament to interpret the word *Israel* as ever including Gentiles.

The question remains concerning the relation of the passage to Biblical doctrine as a whole. This involves the issues which determine premillennialism and amillennialism as systems of doctrines—a subject which is too large to be treated here. This much is clear: the premillennial system of interpretation is in full harmony with the interpretation that *Israel* in this passage refers to Jews in the flesh rather than to all believers, Jews and Gentiles alike. The amillennial system demands that the passage be spiritualized or their whole system is in jeopardy. The nature of the argument is illuminating, however. The amillennialist usually argues that *Israel* must be spiritualized because to do otherwise involves what is to him the extreme literalism that Israel means Israel. In other words, he argues from the system of doctrine to its necessary interpretation of the passage. On the other hand, the premillennialist appeals to the immediate context—the contrast between Israel and Gentiles; the general context—the discussion of Gentile privilege because of Israel’s fall; and the usage in the New Testament as a whole.

From the standpoint of arriving at Biblical doctrine, the hermeneutics of the premillennial argument is obviously sound.

A difficulty for all systems of interpretation is the use of the word *all*. What is meant when it is stated that “all Israel shall be saved”? This has been referred to as a difficulty of the premillennial interpretation. Obviously, all Israel are not saved. Israel in view in the prophecy must first of all be limited to living Israel, that is, those living on earth at the time. It is not true that all Israelites of all generations are to be saved. Further, the Scriptures reveal that a large portion of Israel will be martyred during the time of trouble preceding the consummation of the period before the second coming of Christ (Zech 13:8, 9). There are other complications in the doctrine when the judgment on Israel is taken into consideration (Ezek 20:33–38). What is meant, then, by *all*?

Before attempting to answer the question, it should be noted that the same difficulty attends the amillennial view, or any other view which attempts to find an actual event in this passage. While Israel according to the amillennialist means “all believers,” it is also obvious that all believers are not saved at the end of the age by the coming of Christ. For the proper interpretation of the passage both principal millennial views must limit the fulfillment to those living at the time. The difficulty is not, then, a result of the premillennial viewpoint.

The most obvious answer to the question of the meaning of *all* is found in the context. The *all* is in antithesis to the *in part* of Romans 11:25 and the *remnant* of verse five. During the present age a remnant of Israel is saved through the Gospel. The hardening or blindness is “in part.” When Christ returns, the situation will be changed. Instead of a remnant, instead of a small part, Israel as a whole will be saved. It will be a national deliverance. A. T. Robertson while attempting to defend postmillennialism in his interpretation admits: “*All Israel (pas Israēl)*. What does Paul

mean? The immediate context (use of *pas* in contrast to *apo merous*, *plērōma* here in contrast with *plērōma* in verse 12) argues for the Jewish people ‘as a whole’.” He goes on to express his opinion that other Scripture (Rom 9:6; Gal 6:16) may justify the teaching that both Jew and Gentile or “spiritual Israel may be the idea.”

The opinion of Charles Hodge is worthy of weight as he is not arguing for premillennialism: “Israel, here, from the context, must mean the Jewish people, and *all Israel*, the whole nation. The Jews, as a people, are now rejected; as a people, they are to be restored. As their rejection, although national, did not include the rejection of every individual; so their restoration, although in like manner national, need not be assumed to include the salvation of every individual Jew. *πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ* is not therefore to be here understood to mean, all the true people of God, as Augustine, Calvin, and many others explain it; nor all the elect Jews, i.e., all that part of the nation which constitute ‘the remnant according to the election of grace’; but the whole nation, as a nation.” The viewpoint that “all Israel” means “Israel as a whole” is not “an almost unprecedented extreme” of “literalism which is characteristic of Millenarianism,” as Dr. Allis would have us believe, nor is it a peculiarity of a little sect of Plymouth Brethren. It is the interpretation of those who believe that Israel means Israel, whether premillennial or postmillennial, and it is the only interpretation which makes sense out of the eleventh chapter of Romans. Professor William Hendriksen, professor of New Testament Literature at Calvin Seminary and an avowed amillennialist, interestingly disagrees with Dr. Allis and holds that *all Israel* refers to the total number of elect Israel in all ages—i.e., holds to a literal interpretation of the passage. This is, to say the least, an improvement on Augustine, Calvin, and Allis, though it misses the point of the context. The deliverance predicted in Romans 11:26 is, clearly, a group deliverance rather than individual salvation. This is borne out in the explanation which follows in the chapter.

What Is the Nature of the Deliverance?

The salvation of “all Israel” is described as a fulfillment of prophecy. Isaiah 59:20–21 is quoted in part in Romans 11:26, 27. The full quotation in Isaiah is as follows: “And a Redeemer will come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith Jehovah. And as for me, this is my covenant with them, said Jehovah: my Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith Jehovah, from henceforth and forever.” Three things are mentioned specifically in the Romans quotation: (1) the Redeemer shall come *out of* Zion; (2) He shall turn ungodliness from Jacob; (3) this is a covenant to be fulfilled “when I shall take away their sins.”

All views of the millennium agree that the Deliverer is the Lord Jesus Christ. Question has been raised concerning the meaning of “out of Zion.” The Hebrew of Isaiah 59:20 is correctly rendered “to Zion.” The LXX has interpreted this to mean “for Zion”: *ἔκεν Σιών*. Paul in quoting the Hebrew uses neither the Hebrew nor the LXX when he quotes the passage as “from

Zion”: ἐκ Σιῶν. How is this difficulty to be solved and what is the meaning of *Zion*? It is clear that Paul is here not directly quoting but is gathering up various passages in one statement. It will be noticed that his reference to turning away ungodliness is not in the Isaiah passage either. The Scriptures speak of Christ as both coming to Zion and from Zion (cf. Ps 14:7; 20:2 ; 53:6 ; 110:2 ; 128:5 ; 134:3 ; 135:21 ; Isa 2:3; Joel 3:16; Amos 1:2). It is certainly to quibble with words to argue, as Dr. Allis does, that this change of wording favors the amillennial view that a heavenly city is intended. In the nature of

the case Christ must come “to Zion” before He comes “from Zion.” The deliverance promised Israel is not *per se* His second coming, but His rule on earth after His coming.

What is meant by *Zion*? This term has been used in reference to the city of Jerusalem or parts of it “at least since the time of David.” A study of its usage in the Old Testament reveals that its meaning is literal, that is, it is always associated with the earthly Zion. Its use in the New Testament is also literal. The only cases in question are the references in Hebrews 12:22 and Revelation 14:1, which readily yield to a literal interpretation if the premillennial viewpoint be adopted in interpreting the passages as a whole. In no case does Zion become merely a “heavenly city.” The many predictions in the Old Testament foretelling the coming of the Deliverer “out of Zion” (see references above) argue for a literal interpretation.

When the Deliverer comes, He will “turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” This is an event, not a process extending over ages of time. It is the subject of much Old Testament prophecy. It is part and parcel of the new covenant which Romans 11:27 mentions. A classic Old Testament passage bearing on the subject is Jeremiah 31:31–37. A new covenant is promised the house of Israel. In this new covenant, Jehovah promises: “I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sins will I remember no more” (Jer 31:33, 34). The passage then goes on to declare that Israel will endure *as a nation* under this new covenant as long as the ordinances of the sun, moon and stars endure. The passage concludes: “Thus saith Jehovah: If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, then will I also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith Jehovah” (Jer 31:37). In brief, the new covenant promised the house of Israel is precisely what Paul refers to in Romans 11:26–27. The elements are the same: Israel is promised blessing as a group or nation; “all” are to be blessed; “all” are to know the Lord; “all” are to be forgiven. Certainly this is not the picture of Israel in any period of its history until now. A literal fulfillment demands an interpretation of Romans 11:26, 27 which is in accord with the premillennial position. The fact that believers in this age enjoy a “new covenant” of grace and blessing does not hinder the future fulfillment of this promise to Israel, which is in no wise being fulfilled now.

The premillennial interpretation of Scripture adds a great deal to the bare outline provided in Romans 11:26, 27. According to this viewpoint, the deliverance will be more than spiritual. Israel will be in the great tribulation and threatened with extermination (Matt 24:15–22). The coming of Christ will deliver them from physical harm. This is in view of their coming spiritual blessing which will be their portion after being judged and brought into the land of promise. These events are the means to the end—the spiritual blessing on Israel throughout the millennium. To argue that all the details of the complicated series of events which will bring

Gentile power to its end and establish the kingdom of Christ on earth must be in this portion of Romans in order to establish the premillennial view of the future, is an example of the error of arguing from silence.

When Will the Prophesied Deliverance Occur?

The amillennial viewpoint of Romans 11:25, 26 among other things does manifest injustice to the chronology of the passage. Whether the view of traditional amillennialism be followed, or the recent view of Professor Hendriksen that “all Israel” refers to elect Israel in all ages, the interpretation contradicts the order of events indicated in Romans eleven .

The point of the entire chapter is that the present age is one of blessing to Gentiles and that this follows Israel’s fall. During this age some in Israel come to Christ and are saved, but the nation as a whole goes on in hardness or blindness and in unbelief. According to Romans 11:25, 26, the present situation is going to change when the fullness of the Gentiles, i.e., the present period of Gentile blessing, comes to its close. The terminus of Gentile blessing is the point in time when Israel’s blindness is lifted. When Israel’s blindness is lifted, the way is opened for the work of the Deliverer who will bring spiritual restoration as well as physical. The order of events is therefore: (1) Israel’s fall; (2) Gentile fullness of blessing; (3) Israel’s blindness lifted; (4) Israel’s Deliverer comes out of Zion; (5) Israel is turned away from ungodliness and her covenants are fulfilled. Now, manifestly, Israel fell as a nation. The reference is not to believing Israel or true Israel. Likewise, Israel is blind as a nation. Believing Israel is not blinded even in this age. So also “all Israel” refers not to believers in this age or in any previous age, but to the entire group which enter the millennium. To make “all Israel” “all believers” as Dr. Allis does, or “all Jewish believers,” as Professor Hendriksen does, is to blur the distinctions which are so carefully maintained in the entire passage. A study of the entire chapter including verses 28–32 reveals that the antithesis of “ye” and “they,” i.e., present believers as in contrast to “all Israel,” is carefully preserved throughout.

The deliverance of “all Israel” is not a process but an event. The time of the event is clearly when the Deliverer comes out of Zion, an event following the return of Christ in His second coming. The prophesied deliverance is, therefore, a future event and a single event. The great prophetic passages of the Old Testament upon which this prophecy is based do not have any harmony with the present undertaking of God. It is evident that it is not true today that everyone knows the Lord, that it is no longer necessary to teach our neighbors. This is not true for Gentiles and it is certainly not true for Israel. The future revelation of Christ to Israel will fulfill these predictions and bring the prophesied time of blessing for God’s ancient people.

What Are the Concomitant Events?

The predictions of Romans 11:25ff involve important doctrinal considerations beyond the revelation explicitly made. This explains why its interpretation has been characterized rather sharply by the school of interpretation represented. The premillennial interpretation has as its background important considerations. The restoration of Israel as a nation involves the Davidic Covenant. . It involves Israel’s continuance as a nation and possession of the land. It involves the separation of the purposes of God for the church, believers in this age, and for Israel. The themes of Scripture bearing on the time of great tribulation for Israel, the consummation of Gentile power, the second coming of Christ, the judgment of the Gentiles, the resurrection of Israel and her judgment, the judgment of Israel still in the flesh, and many other important doctrines are directly or indirectly related. It is not claimed that Romans eleven in itself settles all the

problems or that it alone establishes the main premises of premillennialism. What is claimed is that a literal interpretation of Romans eleven is in full harmony with prophecy which has been and is being fulfilled and that it fits perfectly the general scheme of the premillennial interpretation of Scripture. If the statements of this chapter be taken in their ordinary meaning without resource to allegorical or spiritual interpretation of the key words, the inevitable conclusion is that we have here in broad outline God's program: present blessing for Gentiles, future restoration and blessing for Israel as a nation. We say with Paul in the sense we believe he meant: "Did God cast off his people? God forbid