

# WE AFFIRM A BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE END-TIMES, PART 2

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Last time, we began looking at eschatology, the topic of the end-times. Instead of jumping into Revelation, through, we looked to the Old Testament and noticed that it builds expectation for the future. We reviewed the various covenants and God's promises to Israel for an everlasting land and future blessing. We also noted an important rule of Bible study—a consistent hermeneutic—and said that we should read the Bible as God delivered it to us. A literal interpretation should lead us to expect a future for Israel.

However, there are dear saints who'd disagree with us here, believing God wants us to now allegorize these promises and apply them to the church age. To build their case, they may point to passages like Deuteronomy 8:18-20, where God says that, if they refuse the Word of the Lord, they'll perish just like the nations that He causes to perish before them. Moreover, God already fulfilled His land promises; in Joshua 21:43-45, we read, "So the Lord gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. And the Lord gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the Lord gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass." So, if God already fulfilled all His promises and Israel then chose to sin, then God is under no obligation to hold to the original agreement.

However, while there's a sense of fairness here, does God say He rescinds or changes the terms of these covenants? No. In fact, remember that the covenant agreements with Abraham, Phineas, and David were all *unconditional*, although the Mosaic or Sinai Covenant added a degree of conditionality to the timing of these promises. If we look beyond Joshua to God's covenant promises to David that included land, then there's no reason to think these verses somehow negate the Lord's Word. They may have had temporary fulfillment, but because these are "everlasting" covenants, God brought them back to their land even after the Babylonian Captivity.

Turn to Ezekiel 36:22 and consider again the promises of the New Covenant. In the description here, God says, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord... when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight." We see that God keeps His covenantal word *despite* their sinfulness (which is a tremendous blessing to consider in our own lives).

Notice what He says next—"For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you **into your own land**" (v. 24). In v. 28, God says, "You will live **in the land** that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God." Look down to vv. 33-35; "On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by. They will say, 'This desolate land has

become like the garden of Eden; and the waste, desolate and ruined cities are fortified *and* inhabited.’ ” Is this all just spiritual, or do cities and places and land here refer to geography? As Ezekiel 37 goes on to describe the restoration of national Israel, the evidence seems to point in one direction.

These Old Testament promises are perpetual. It shouldn't surprise us, then, to find this expectation continue in the New Testament. That's where we turn today.

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## WE AFFIRM THE CONSISTENT TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE (PART 2)

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Let's consider Matthew 19 for a moment. You may remember that we talked about the rich young ruler while we were going through Mark, how he went away sorrowful because money was ultimately what he worshiped. Seeing that Jesus sends him away with nothing, in v. 27, Peter asks what there is for them. Jesus replies, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Jesus anticipated a time of reigning called the *regeneration*, and He expected them to rule with Him. He's not describing spiritual salvation, because *others* “will inherit eternal life” (v. 29). Remember passages like Isaiah 55:3 – “I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to the faithful mercies shown to David.” I'm not sure what this may mean if these are only spiritual thrones, but if “regeneration” refers to a renewal on the earth, then there's no reason to believe this refers to anything other than physical thrones for Jesus and the twelve.

Let's briefly consider the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24. If you have studied anything about Bible prophecy, you may have expected to turn here at some point, because this is one of the pivotal chapters on the subject. Even so, I only want to note how it starts. In v. 2, Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple, which was *literally* fulfilled (not spiritually) in the year 70. In v. 3, the disciples ask when this will be, and what the signs are for Jesus's coming and the end of the age (a Granville-Sharp Greek construction links these two as one). What Jesus goes on to describe parallels what John describes in the Book of Revelation. Notice that Jesus never contradicts or corrects their understanding of a future kingdom to come; instead, in v. 31, He says the elect will be gathered together in one place after He returns (presumably, on a piece of land).

Keep that in mind and turn now to Acts 1. In v. 3, Jesus spends 40 days teaching them on the kingdom of God. What did He teach during this period – perhaps that the kingdom of God is only a spiritual reality and that the land promises to Israel are now null and void? Look down to v. 6 for a possible answer; Peter asks, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” Forty days of kingdom teaching, and Peter asks this! Maybe he just doesn't get it, but Jesus doesn't reply, “You numb scull! What have I been saying this past month?” Instead, Jesus says, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority” (v. 7). So, either Jesus rolls His eyes as He says this, *or* He's acknowledging a valid question, just one that He won't answer.

Acts 1 is pre-Pentecost, though, before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so let's turn to Acts 3:17. Peter heals the lame beggar, and then preaches this sermon to Jewish people – “I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled” (vv. 17-18). Peter appeals to prophecy to demonstrate that their sins require

them to “repent and return” (v. 19). Not stopping there, because the prophets had more to say, he continues, “...in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus [again!], the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time” (vv. 19-21). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter sees a coming period of refreshing and restoration for his Jewish audience, a time when the Messiah would return to the Jewish people – when “all things about which God spoke” will come true!

If the promises of Scripture to national Israel loom as large as we’re suggesting, then we must expect the New Testament to explain how they fit alongside the church, which we see in Romans 9-11. It should be no news to anyone who’s studied the Bible that a major emphasis of Romans (if not *the* emphasis) is the gospel. Paul has this promise in mind as he begins his theological treatise on the good news of God, presenting both the universal condemnation of man (1-3) and the message of good news from Scripture (4-8). He opens Romans by highlighting it, but when he mentions it, he also is quick to identify God’s Son, “who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh” (vv. 2-3). That means that the Davidic covenant partly informs Paul’s understanding of the gospel – which is why, after eight chapters of gospel explanation, Paul turns to the sad state of the Jews, his “kinsmen according to the flesh” (9:3). He ponders their plight for three chapters – their past election by God (9), their current rejection by God (10), and their hope for restoration in God (11).

We can’t tackle all that, so let’s zero in on chapter eleven. The first verse reads, “God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be!” Paul chooses the strongest negation possible here, something the King James translators chose to render, “God forbid!” What’s the plain sense of this verse?

If it’s not clear, Paul continues: “God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew.” In Deuteronomy 7:7-8, we read of Israel, “The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers.” God sovereignly chose the Jewish people, and He did so regardless of their current character or future actions. So, the conclusion must be that the all-knowing God isn’t rejecting them now! Otherwise, what would it imply for *our* salvation if God rejected His chosen people when they sin?

It is true that the Jews overall rejected the first-century presentation of the kingdom (Luke 19:41-44). Even when the nation rejects God and His Word (v. 3), He retains a remnant – 7,000 who have not bowed their knee to Ba’al (v. 4). In the same way, a remnant of Israel is “at the present time” being saved (v. 5). This goes back to what Paul said in 9:6, “But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel.” Today, we would expect salvation for only a remnant in Israel – those who repent and believe in Jesus the Messiah. I don’t believe there’s any disagreement among Christians here.

In fact, their problem is worse than that. Paul reveals that the current rejection of Christ results from God sovereignly choosing some for salvation and judicially hardening others (v. 7). Paul then quotes the prophets who predicted it (vv. 8-9). In other words, national Israel’s condition seems terminal, with only a few being saved.

However, that would be an incorrect assessment. In v. 11, Paul begins, “I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be!” This expression brings us back to the thought of v.1 – “I say then, God has not

rejected His people, has He? May it never be!" This isn't referring to the church, because look at how v. 11 continues: "But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous." The church includes Gentiles, so those transgressing here must be unbelieving Israel, "His people." They're still *His*.

Paul says that they are not completely without hope (and neither are any unbelievers you know). He hopes to stir jealousy in the hearts of those who reject Christ. This isn't a sinful motivation, because Paul says in v. 14 that he hopes this jealousy will provoke "my fellow countrymen and save some of them." So, salvation of the rest of Israel is the goal.

Notice what he says next: "For if their [the Jews'] rejection is the reconciliation of the world [brining in the Gentiles], what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (v. 15). Now, we can interpret their acceptance in an Ephesians 2 sense – unbelievers are dead in their trespasses until they have new life in Christ. Paul the Hebrew of Hebrews here might *also* have another image in mind – Ezekiel prophesying life to the dry bones. In Ezekiel 37:12-14, we read, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord [they didn't before], when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. I will put My Spirit within you [new covenant promise] and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken and done it." In other words, life from the dead is not just an image of spiritual salvation in Scripture, but also of displaced Israel coming home. Let's consider this thought again in a moment.

In the next section, Paul describes branches being broken off (11:17-24). Gentiles, we who are wild branches are grafted into the vine (v. 17). Paul warns the Gentiles not to become conceited toward the Jewish branches that have been lopped off, because God might decide to engage in more pruning (vv. 18-22). Incidentally, if you are wondering if Jesus is the vine here, note that Paul says "remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you;" Christians never wonder if they support Christ, but Gentiles might wonder if they support or even have replaced Israel. Even so, Paul continues to describe that this is a *temporary* rejection of Israel – "if they do not continue in their unbelief, [they] will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again" (v. 23). In context here, the vine is the remnant of God's people, and unbelieving Israel has hope of being grafted back into its own vine.

If it's not clear that God intends this to be a *temporary* rejection of national Israel, notice what comes next: "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery – so that you will not be wise in your own estimation – that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, and so all Israel will be saved" (vv. 25-26). Paul said back in 9:6 that that "they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel," but Paul also speaks of a coming day when *all* Israel will be saved. When the last Gentile believes, God will open the eyes of all the Jews and begin work to save all Israel.

In case the expression "all Israel" isn't clear in this verse, Paul goes on in vv. 26-27 to say this is what the prophets predicted, citing the very covenant promises we've been discussing. Moreover, notice that v. 28 describes them as enemies from a standpoint of the gospel today, but from God's perspective, "they are beloved for the sake of the fathers." Paul then says that "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (v. 29). This statement might apply to the church, but it cannot describe it. Paul can only refer to national Israel here.

Notice how he then compares Israel to the believer – “For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all” (vv. 30–32). Paul obviously isn’t contradicting the gospel by saying that everyone in the world is going to be saved. Rather, he’s continuing his thought while also revisiting his claims in chapters 1–3; all, both Jews and Gentiles, are condemned, and in the mercy of God, all will be saved. And this thought turns a melancholy Paul from mourning for His countrymen in chapter nine to the wonderful doxology of the remaining verses here.

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## CONCLUSION

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Therefore, like other passages, Romans 11 seems to communicate a future salvation for the ethnic Israel. Our beloved brothers and sisters may allegorize “Israel” to mean the elect church of God, but that would mean that v. 28 is saying that some of the universal church are enemies of the gospel, that only part of the church is being saved now and God will only save the rest of it later. It moves the meaning of *Israel* in chapter nine from “my kinsmen according to the flesh” (v. 3) and how Paul uses the term *Israel* throughout these three chapters. The allegorization does not fit the text or the theology of Scripture and demonstrates an inconsistent hermeneutic.

There’s also a larger theological issue at play. Let’s say for a moment that God changed or removed His promises to national Israel for a physical kingdom because they sinned. Does this not imply that we can lose our promised salvation by our sinful works? However, God always says to Israel that He will keep His promises in spite of their sin, and the Lord eternally guards the salvation of those who call upon Him because He promised to do so.

The plain and simple reading Scripture seems to reveal a consistent message. Matthew opens with a reference to both the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants. We’ve seen numerous other passages, and Hebrews 1 gives us a triple reference to the Davidic Covenant (which we didn’t have a chance to examine). The very last chapter of Scripture contains a reference to the Davidic covenant (Rv 22:16). The New Testament begins, continues, and ends with repeated reminders of God’s previous promises, and God says that His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will continue as long as the natural order of day and night (Jer 33:23–26).

While we haven’t explained all the other ins-and-outs of prophecy, such as the timing of the rapture, the tribulation, and the Second Coming of Christ, the foundational nature of national Israel’s future must be established before anything else; we must understand the expectations of Scripture before making sense of the Book of Revelation. While a restoration of the kingdom to Israel didn’t occur as soon as the Jews expected, that doesn’t mean that they were altogether wrong, and we who hold to Scripture should also expect to see an eschatological kingdom in the land of Israel.