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## Israel During the Church Age

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William Graham Scroggie has stated, "No one who neglects the Jews can understand the plan of God in history, either that part of it which is realized, or that which is to be."<sup>1</sup> William Blackstone agrees by stating, "If we want to know our place in chronology, our position in the march of events, look at Israel."<sup>2</sup> However, a survey of the material written about Israel reveals many volumes written on her past and still more written on her future but only a handful of material deals with her position in the present age. Furthermore, most of the books and articles that deal with Israel in the church age are either lacking serious Scripture support or are written with an allegorical hermeneutical prejudice and do not agree with the plain teaching of Scripture. Some are limited in scope, being briefly and scantily done, or deal with only one aspect of Israel's present position.

The present state of neglect can be attributed to a number of factors. Probably the greatest factor is, as Scroggie has stated, that:

The prevailing view, where any view is at all held, is that the Elect Nation has served its purpose in having given us the Bible and Christ; and that when it failed to fully realize the Covenant promises, it has, through unbelief, forever missed its opportunity, and must sooner or later perish, as other ancient peoples have perished. In this view the Covenant promises of the Old Testament are being fulfilled in a spiritual sense to the Church.<sup>3</sup>

A second factor might be the great number of questions and problems associated with Israel's condition in the present age. Not only are there difficulties regarding her present position in this age, but also regarding her still unfulfilled covenants and privileges promised and prophesied in the Old Testament.

A third factor that may have brought about this neglect is priority. Most fundamental writers have placed this topic on a low level of importance, preferring rather to expound the great teachings of the New Testament concerning the church.

It is the purpose of this article to investigate Israel's position in the church age. Israel has been called the "people of the second chance"<sup>4</sup> and the "people of the unfinished task"<sup>5</sup> and indeed they are. Therefore, it is important to discern their place in God's program for the church age.

### **Israel's Rejection in the Church Age**

Throughout Old Testament history the nation of Israel enjoyed a position of favor in God's program. This fact is evidenced in many ways in Scripture. Moses records that God chose the nation of Israel as the object of His grace for His own purposes in Deuteronomy 7:6-8. Numerous Old Testament authors record God's acts of kindness, blessing, mercy, and grace upon the chosen nation throughout her history. Interwoven in the Scripture record of Israel's history are God's promises of a glorious future—a kingdom, a land, and the Messiah. When Israel was obedient to God, she experienced blessings and usefulness commensurate with her position of favor in God's program.

However, Old Testament history also records the fact that the nation of Israel rebelled against God, fell into sin, and strayed from God's purposes. Israel repeatedly fell into sin and uselessness to God. Only after judgment and cleansing could Israel be refitted and restored to a usable condition in God's eternal plan. Israel was always God's chosen nation, but often because of sin she was unworthy and unusable for the purposes God had for her.

The problem with which this section deals is, in what condition is the nation of Israel in the church age? Is Israel in a place of favor and thus enjoying service and usefulness to God? Or has she fallen from God's place of favor and usefulness? Is she experiencing the blessings of favor or the judgments of sin?

#### **The Fact of Israel's Rejection**

During the church age Israel has been rejected by God. She does not enjoy a position of favor but has been set aside by God as unusable. A brief survey of three New Testament passages will confirm this fact.

**Acts 13:44-48.** In these verses Luke records the Jewish rejection of Paul's declaration of Jesus as the promised Messiah (vv 44-45). Paul, in response declares that God had now directed them, Paul and Barnabas, to turn from the Jews to the Gentiles (vv 46-48). The implication is that the nation of Israel is set aside as the

primary recipient of the message of salvation and in its place the Gentiles will receive this favor. Paul had been chosen by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Eph 3:6-8) and the content of his ministry and writings bear out this fact that Israel has been set aside and that the Gentiles occupy the prime position in God's program.

**Romans 11:16-25.** The apostle Paul in this passage employs the figure of an olive tree in illustrating the fact of Israel's rejection. Although many commentators have disagreed over the meaning of this figure, it is apparent, as Ryrie states, that "the olive tree is the place of privilege. Israel was the first definite group to be called to this place, but because of unbelief she was set aside or broken off."<sup>6</sup> Paul, in using the figure of the olive tree as the place of God's favor, symbolizes the nation of Israel by the natural branches which were broken off (vv 17, 19, 20) and the Gentiles as a wild olive tree (v 17) which is grafted into the tree in the place of some of the natural branches. In verse twenty-five, Paul moves from the figure of the olive tree to the fact of Israel's rejection in plainly stating that "hardness has come in part to Israel."

A second evidence of Israel's rejection in this passage is found in the phrase "hardening has happened to Israel." Hardening (*porosis*) refers to a calloused or dulled mental or spiritual state, which in this instance is directly connected to Israel's rejection. The use of the perfect tense of *ginomai* (has happened) indicates that this hardening occurred at a point prior to Paul's writing yet its effect continues (during the church age). Israel's rejection is a fact occurring before Paul wrote and continues during the church age.

**The New Testament Church.** A third reference in the New Testament that would indicate that God has set aside the nation of Israel is the institution of the church.

A survey of the terms "church," "temple," and "synagogue" outside of the historical and prophetic books of the New Testament indicates the following facts. The word *ekklesia* occurs a total of sixty-eight times in the Greek New Testament in the epistles. Each occurrence is translated "church" in the KJV and refers to an institution being used by God in the present age.

On the other hand, the word "temple" is used to translate two words *hieron* and *naos* which "differ in that the former designates the whole compass of the sacred enclosure . . . the latter designates the second edifice,"<sup>7</sup> thus both refer to the center of worship for the nation of Israel. The term *hieron* occurs only once

in the New Testament, in I Corinthians 9:13, where Paul uses the temple service as an illustration of the New Testament church regarding support of Christian workers. The term *naos* occurs only eight times, six of which refer to the Christian as a temple of God. One refers to the local church as a "holy temple" (Eph 2:21) and one refers to the future action of the "man of lawlessness" in the tribulation temple (II Thess 2:4).

Further, the term *sunagoge*, being translated "synagogue," as the normal place of worship for Israel other than the temple, occurs only once in the New Testament in James 2:2 where it is translated "assembly" and refers to the church. Thus it is seen that with the increase of New Testament revelation the church receives greater emphasis while the temple and synagogue receive lesser. The church as the center of worship for Christians replaces the temple and synagogue which were the centers of Jewish worship. Israel, being rejected, no longer occupies the attention of revelation in the church age while the church becomes the focal point of revelation.

The fact of Israel's rejection is plainly recorded in the New Testament. Israel has been set aside and in the church age does not occupy a position of favor with God.

### **The Cause of Israel's Rejection**

Israel as a nation has been rejected by God, set aside from the place of favor in the church age. This fact is undeniable. But the question arises—Why has Israel been rejected in the church age? What are the reasons for this rejection?

In general, Israel's rejection in the church age was caused by sin just as had happened repeatedly in the Old Testament dispensations. Rejection, setting aside, and the inability to be used always result when sin is present in people whom God would use. However, the New Testament reveals more clearly the causes of Israel's rejection. The sins that caused Israel's national rejection were as follows:

**Self-righteousness.** Paul lists this cause twice in Romans 10 and 11. In Romans 10:2-3, Paul plainly reveals self-righteousness as the cause of Israel's present condition. In verse 1, Paul bemoans Israel's unsaved condition—they are outside God's program for the church age. In verses 2 and 3, he reveals why they are in this condition. The reason is that they are continually attempting "to establish their own righteousness." By works Israel sought after righteousness and "did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God" which is by faith.

Again in Romans 11:6-8, Israel's attempt to gain righteousness by works is contrasted with God's gracious offer of righteousness by faith. The righteousness that Israel did attain was self-righteousness and not God's righteousness.

**Unbelief.** Self-righteousness in turn led to unbelief. Since Israel endeavored to attain a righteousness without obeying God, Israel progressed to unbelief of God. William Hendriksen, in commenting on Romans 10 has said, "The rejection of Israel is not arbitrary. It was Israel's own fault. The way of salvation had been made perfectly plain to the Jews. Their sin was that of willful and stubborn unbelief."<sup>8</sup>

**Rejection of the Messiah.** Just as self-righteousness led to unbelief, unbelief culminated in the rejection of the Messiah. If one cause were to be singled out as the single ultimate reason for Israel's rejection, this would be the one. Israel's whole Old Testament experience was directed to this end of the Messiah's coming. When He came she rejected Him and in turn God rejected her.

Ryrie traces the rejection of Christ by Israel in the Gospel of Matthew, which appropriately presents Christ as the Messiah King, to show the completeness of the rejection by the nation. He points out that Christ was rejected by individuals, by cities, by geographic regions, by social classes, by the religious leaders, and finally by the nation at the crucifixion.<sup>9</sup>

Israel has failed and fallen into sin. Because of self-righteousness, unbelief, and the rejection of the Messiah, Israel as a nation has been rejected and set aside by God in the church age.

### **The Extent of Israel's Rejection**

The fact of Israel's rejection is undeniable. The cause of her rejection is ultimately her disbelief in the Messiah. But not every Jew rejected the Messiah. The Gospels bear witness to the fact that many Jews believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Were these individual Jews rejected because of the rejection of the majority of the nation? Also, what about the promises God made

*Israel has been rejected because of self-righteousness, unbelief, and rejection of her Messiah.*

to Israel through the Old Testament prophets concerning her future—were they set aside when the nation was rejected? In order to answer these questions, the extent of Israel's rejection must be discovered. In this section, three factors that indicate the extent of Israel's rejection in the church age will be examined.

**It is Partial.** In Romans 11:1-5, Paul states emphatically that God has not totally rejected His people. According to Hoyt, Paul lists four reasons in verses 1-4 showing why Israel's rejection is only partial in the church age. These reasons are:

First, *reason* . . . anyone whose mind and heart have been charged and surcharged with the information of the Old Testament and God's dealings with His people must answer as Paul did . . .

Second, *personal experience* teaches Paul otherwise (v 1b). Paul, too, is an Israelite. If anyone deserved to be cast away, he did. But in wonderful mercy God dealt with him. He can see through his own experience the experience of a larger group, a whole nation of Israelites. He will not cast them away.

Third, the *doctrine* of God teaches otherwise (v 2a) . . . foreknowledge carries with it God's provision, preservation, and protection for His people. So He cannot at the same time foreknow and cast away.

Fourth, the *history* of Elijah is final proof (vv 2b-4). He lived at a time when it seemed to him that all the people had forsaken God . . . there were yet 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. God's grace is still 7,000 times greater than any of us think. So He has not cast off His people.<sup>10</sup>

To this a fifth reason from verse 5 might be added, that is that in the church age there is still a remnant faithful and obedient to God. "The remnant now, as in other ages, proves that the apostasy of Israel is never a complete one. From the times of greatest apostasy God has always had a remnant."<sup>11</sup>

Again in Romans 11:7 Paul reveals that the rejection is only partial since it is only "the rest" who are hardened. Paul uses the term *hoi loipsis* which has the basic meaning of "the remaining portion" and is always used to express the idea of a portion of something, being translated in the KJV by the words "other," "rest," "remnant," and "residue."<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, in Romans 11:25 Paul states plainly that the nation of Israel has experienced only a "partial hardening"—rejection. The term that Paul uses for "partial" is *apo merous* which has the meaning of a part as opposed to the whole as a share or portion.<sup>13</sup> In fact, Lange states that "most commentators now adopt the extensive rather than the intensive signification."<sup>14</sup> That this rejection is partial numerically is indicated by the

preceding context dealing with Israel's present remnant of grace in verse 5; with the contrast of the some obtaining and the rest being hardened in verse 7; and with the fact that only "some" and not all of the natural branches (Israel) were broken off from the olive tree in verse 17.

**It is Temporary.** The rejection of the nation of Israel in the church age is not only partial in number but it is also temporal. It will not continue indefinitely. This rejection of Israel is not a final, irreconcilable act—Israel still has a future. This fact is once again revealed in Romans 11.

In Romans 11:23-24, the possibility and probability of Israel's restoration to God's favor is presented by Paul. In verses 16b-24, Paul uses the figure of an olive tree and the process of grafting to illustrate the fall of Israel, that is, the natural branches, from God's position of favor, that is, the tree. In verse 23, the condition for restoration is given—if they do not continue in unbelief. This indicates, as Ferrin observed, that "Israel is temporarily deprived of that which she sought after but is ever capable of being aroused to emulation to obtain the grace which she sees in saved Gentiles."<sup>15</sup>

In Romans 11:25, Paul reveals the terminating point of Israel's rejection when he states "until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in." The conjunction *achris*, when used with the relative pronoun, normally refers to a time sequence.<sup>16</sup> In this case *achris* serves as the terminating point of Israel's rejection. This terminal point is further described as being when *to pleroma ton ethnon eiselthe*. This phrase raises a number of questions. Some commentators equate this phrase with "the close of the Gentile dispensation"; others with "the times of the Gentiles"; still others with "the Gentile world as a whole."<sup>17</sup> However, in light of the contrast just completed in context (vv 16b-24) between the wild olive branches or the Gentiles, who being in the position of God's favor must be the church, and the natural branches or the unbelieving nation of Israel, it seems most likely that this phrase refers to the church. "The fulness of the Gentiles" refers to the end of the church age, that is, after the church has been made complete and fulfilled its time and purpose in God's program, then it will be removed to heaven and God will deal once more with the nation of Israel. Haldane calls this phrase "the clearest attestation that the blindness of the Jews will yet cease, not only as individuals, but as to the body."<sup>18</sup>

In Romans 11:26 Paul reveals the certainty of Israel's national restoration to favor. He writes, "All Israel will be saved." The phrase *pas Israel* can only refer to the nation of Israel; while the



future verb (*sothesetai*) points to the certainty that Israel's rejection will terminate in salvation.

Paul records in Romans 11:16b-26 not only the possibility and probability of Israel's restoration, but also the certainty of it. In fact, Israel's restoration is so certain that Paul records the very event that will terminate her rejection.

**It is Not Compounded.** Israel's blindness or rejection does not extend beyond that of other unbelieving nations. Some would make Israel doubly blind, concluding that she is under the blindness of Romans 11:25 and II Corinthians 4:4, while unbelieving Gentiles are only under the blindness of I Corinthians 4:4.<sup>19</sup> Their point seems to be based on the difference in wording between the two passages—Romans 11:25 speaking of a "hardening" and II Corinthians 4:4 speaking of a "blinding."

However, a comparison of these two passages will show that Israel's rejection and subsequent hardening is not compounded beyond that of unbelieving Gentiles. First, the subject of both passages is the unbelieving. In II Corinthians 4:4 this fact is clearly stated—the subject is all the unbelieving. In Romans 11:25 this fact is indicated in context. In Romans 11:7, those who did not obtain God's righteousness, the unbelieving, were hardening. The only difference that is evident is that II Corinthians 4:4 deals with all unbelieving Jews and Gentiles while Romans 11:25 deals only with unbelieving Jews as a nation.

Second, the realm affected in both passages is the spiritual. In II Corinthians 4:4, the blindness is "that they might not see the light of the gospel." In Romans 11:25, the hardening is also in the spiritual realm as indicated by verse 7.

Third, both conditions are terminated by the same action. In II Corinthians 4:4, the blindness is removed only by Christ, as indicated in verses 5 and 6. In Romans 11:25, the hardening is "until the fulness of the Gentiles" at which time "all Israel will be saved" because of Christ's work (v 26).

Fourth, a comparison of the two actions of blinding and of hardening reveals that they are little different from one another. In II Corinthians 4:4, a form of the verb *tuphloo* is translated "blindness." This verb means "to blind" or "to deprive of sight." It is used three times in the New Testament and is always used in the figurative sense in reference to unbelievers in regard to salvation or spiritual matters.<sup>20</sup>

In Romans 11:25, the noun form of the verb *poroo* is translated "hardening." This verb literally means "to harden" or "to dull" and is used figuratively to refer to making insensitive or obstinate.

*God's rejection of Israel is partial,  
temporary, and uncompounded.*

The noun in turn is used literally to speak of something that is hardened such as a callous, or figuratively of something dulled, usually in reference to obtuseness or dullness of mental discernment. The noun form occurs three times in the New Testament and is always used in the figurative sense in regard to lack of mental discernment of spiritual matters in reference to unbelievers. The verb form occurs five times in the New Testament and is always used in the figurative sense in regard to spiritual matters. Of these five occurrences, three are in reference to unbelieving Israel, and two are in reference to the twelve disciples.<sup>21</sup>

Fifth, a further study reveals that both terms are used together only once in the New Testament. This occurrence is in John 12:40 where Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:10. Both of these passages are applied to unbelieving Israel. Thus both actions are true of Israel and are connected in each instance by a coordinating conjunction denoting two concurrent actions and not a progression.

The only conclusion that can be reached is that unbelieving Israel is just as rejected by God and just as much out of God's favor as are unbelieving Gentiles. Their rejection is not compounded.

The Jewish nation has fallen, but not permanently. The Jewish nation is "cast off," but neither totally or finally.<sup>22</sup> Israel's rejection is only partial, temporary, and is not compounded above that of unbelieving Gentile nations.

### **The Results of Israel's Rejection**

The fact of Israel's rejection has been clearly shown. The cause of her being set aside during the church age was culminated in her rejection of the Messiah. However, the extent of her rejection was neither total nor final, but was partial, temporary, and to the same degree of that of unbelieving Gentiles. The fact, the cause, and the extent of Israel's rejection have been dealt with. The next question to be dealt with is: What were the results of Israel's rejection? From Scripture, three results of Israel's rejection are evident.

**Judgment for Sin.** The first result of Israel's national rejection is judgment. This fact at first is confusing because Israel's rejection itself is the result of God's judgment for unbelief. As Riggs stated, "This hardening is judicial in nature. In verse 7

(chapter 11) the implication is that it results from Israel not obtaining righteousness. The cause, according to Romans 9:30-10:4, was their unbelief."<sup>23</sup> The judgment in view at this point is God's judgment which falls on all unbelievers, that is, spiritual death, which in this life is evidenced in the blinding of the intellect, the corruption of the affections, and the enslavement of the will,<sup>24</sup> and in the future life is evidenced by eternal separation from God. In respect to Israel, this judgment also takes the form of a postponing of the promises and blessings which had been prophesied for her and of a uselessness in God's plan for the present age.

**Blindness to Scripture Truth.** The second result of Israel's national rejection is her inability to discern Scripture truth. Feinberg views this as the primary result of Israel's rejection when he writes:

First, the nation exhibits a deplorable lack of spiritual perception of the Scriptures. It is not that they do not have reverence for the Holy Scriptures . . . but because they fail to see that the glorious center . . . is the Lord Jesus Christ, the spiritual message of the Word is closed to them.<sup>25</sup>

This fact is clearly revealed in II Corinthians 3:12-18 by Paul. In this context Paul is showing the superiority of his apostolic ministry to that of the Judaizers. In the passage being considered this takes the form of showing that righteousness cannot come by conformity to the old covenant. In verses 14-15, the reason for this is given—their hearts are veiled to the meaning of the Old Testament.

Paul compares Israel's inability to discern scriptural truth in the church age with that of Moses' day. The reference in verse 13 is to Exodus 34:29-35. Paul is showing that the Jewish unbelief in his own day is exactly like that unbelief which was manifested at Sinai.<sup>26</sup> Their rejection because of unbelief in each instance resulted in a covering of their heart, that is, they were intellectually blinded in regard to their spiritual discernment of the Scriptures.

**Salvation of the Gentiles.** A third result of Israel's rejection in the church age has been the salvation of the Gentiles. This result is revealed by Paul in Romans 11:11-15. Paul, in context, is dealing with Israel's national rejection. In verse 11a, Paul confirms the fact that their rejection is not final. In verse 11b, Paul reveals another result of her rejection: "by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles." It is repeated in verses 12 and 15 though in slightly different words. This is not to say that there was no

Gentile salvation before Israel's rejection, for the Old Testament records many Gentile conversions. However, the point is that when God set Israel aside and directed the Gospel to the Gentiles great numbers have come to Christ in the church age.

Two additional facts should be noted. First, the blessings of the Gentile salvation, though great during Israel's rejection, will be even greater when Israel is restored, "how much more their fulness" (Rom 11:12). Second, a reason for or result of the Gentile's salvation is to provoke Israel to jealousy (Rom 11:11) and a return to God (Rom 11:15).

### **Summary**

In what condition is the nation of Israel in the church age? Is she in a position of favor, enjoying service to and usability by God? Or has she fallen from God's place of favor and usefulness?

The answers to these questions are clear in Scripture. The fact is that the nation has fallen from God's place of favor and has been set aside from a position of usefulness in the church age. This rejection came because of Israel's self-righteousness and unbelief which ultimately led to her rejection of the Messiah. However, the rejection of Israel is not complete or final, but it is partial, affecting the greater portion of the nation; it is also temporary, it will come to an end after the church age has run its course; and it is not compounded, it is no greater than that of any other unbelieving nation.

The results of this rejection are threefold. The first result is God's judgment which comes on all sin, but in regard to Israel this also takes the form of withheld blessings and promises and of a state of uselessness to God in the church age. The second result is Israel's inability to discern scriptural truth. And finally, Israel's rejection led to the salvation of the Gentiles.

As a nation Israel has been set aside, hardened, and is of no use to God. She is under God's judgment and chastening in this present age. The question arises, however, how does Israel's national rejection affect individual Jews? Throughout Israel's history there have always been believing Jews who have been faithful to God. In order to arrive at an answer to this question Israel's identification in the church age must be determined.

### **Israel's Identification in the Church Age**

Old Testament history records the fact that within the nation of Israel there were two groups of Israelites. One group faithfully and obediently followed God's leading, believed His promises, and enjoyed a close spiritual relationship to God. The other group did

## *The Jewish nation is not cast off totally or finally.*

not believe or obey God and His chosen leaders and at best were only externally religious. This group experienced only a national relationship with God, being Israelites by physical descent.

Several events in Israel's history reveal this fact. One event that demonstrated this distinction occurred at the report of the twelve spies in Numbers 13-14 when faithful and obedient Jews stood with Moses. Another time when this distinction was evident was during the apostasy that characterized the divided monarchy when faithful and obedient Jews journeyed to the temple to worship as recorded in II Chronicles 30.

This theme was also evident in the message of the prophets. In Jeremiah 24, following the taking into captivity of King Jeconiah and the craftsmen of Judah, God likened spiritual Israel to good figs (vv 4-7) and disobedient Israel to rotted figs (vv 8-10). In Malachi 3, during a time of nationwide apostasy in Israel, God responds to the testimony of faithful Jews (v 16) with a promise for the future (vv 17-18). The promise involves a distinguishing between righteous Jews who serve God and wicked Jews who do not serve God. Also included in the promise is assurance by God that the righteous Jew will be God's own possession and will be spared by Him from coming judgment. The implication is that throughout Old Testament history the nation of Israel was composed of a faithful portion and an unfaithful portion.

The question that arises is: Can the aforementioned identifications be made in Israel in the church age? In the church age is Israel dealt with only as a nation of which a small portion is faithful? Or is Israel dealt with as two distinct units, one being faithful and one being unfaithful? And if such an identification can be made, what distinguishes these two groups from one another?

It is the purpose of this section to deal with Israel's identification in the church age, namely, to show the composition of the nation of Israel in the church age and any distinctions which might characterize the groups composing national Israel.

### **Spiritual and Physical Israel Distinguished**

As was true in Old Testament history, Israel in the church age is composed of two portions. The first, faithful and obedient, bears a spiritual relationship to God; while the second, unfaithful and disobedient, bears only a natural relationship to God. This fact is plainly revealed by two clear passages.

**Romans 2:28-29.** This passage falls within the context of Paul's revealing the condemned state of the Jew (2:17-3:8). The Jew claimed exemption from condemnation on three grounds, the last of which was birth—he was a son of Abraham. In verses 28-29, Paul shows the Jew that his birth cannot save him.

Paul uses four sets of contrasting terms to make his point. On the one hand, there is the Jew who is one outwardly, circumcised in the flesh, by the letter, and of men; while, on the other hand, there is the Jew who is one inwardly, circumcised in the heart, by the spirit, and of God. Paul is identifying two distinct groups within the nation of Israel. "Some people think this statement teaches that every Christian is a Jew but what it really teaches is that every Jew is not a Jew."<sup>27</sup> The first group of Jews is the natural

### *Not every Jew is a Jew.*

Jew who bears only a physical relationship with God as the four terms used by Paul indicate. The second group of Jews is the faithful and obedient group or the spiritual Jew who bears a spiritual relationship to God as the other four terms indicate.

Denny states, "What constitutes the Jew in the true sense of the term and gives the name of Jew its proper content and dignity, is not anything outward and visible, but something inward and spiritual."<sup>28</sup> This distinction is enlarged by Ferrin who states that both groups are Israelites; however, the first "are merely the natural posterity of Abraham, and those other Israelites who are not only Abraham's natural posterity, but also Abraham's spiritual children by faith."<sup>29</sup>

**Romans 9:6-13.** The theme of Chapter 9 is the absolute sovereignty of God. In verses 6-13, Paul answers the problem of the trustworthiness of the Word of God in light of Israel's rejection. The answer is that "they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel."

This remnant within the nation were and are the true spiritual Israel of God, . . . the rest are blinded, i e, Abraham's seed after the flesh who walked not in the steps of his faith.<sup>30</sup>

Paul uses the phrase "who are descended from Israel" to refer to natural Israel, the physical seed of Abraham. The phrase "they are not all Israel" refers to a group within natural Israel, that group being spiritual or believing Israel.

Israel as a nation had failed; God's Word had not failed. Israel was elected as a nation to privilege and favor, but in the present, due to unbelief, she is not enjoying the benefits of her privileges.

*One Israel is faithful and obedient; a second, unfaithful and disobedient.*

On the other hand, individual Israelites enjoying personal salvation are distinctly set apart from the nation as a whole. For this reason, Paul refers to them as being of Israel yet not of Israel. In Romans 9:6, the contrast is between national and individuals experiencing blessing<sup>31</sup> and, as Walvoord points out, not a matter of who is excluded and who is included in the blessing.<sup>32</sup>

Two distinct groups can be identified within the nation of Israel in the church age. The first group is composed of the natural descendants of Abraham and may be called natural or physical Israel. The second group, which is a division of the first, is spiritual Israel, which is composed of the faithful and obedient Jewish believers.

**Spiritual Israel**

Paul declares in Romans 11:5 that there is "at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice." This remnant is the group identified as spiritual Israel. As Hasel points out:

The term "remnant" is always understood and used in a very limited and narrowly defined sense, namely as a "holy remnant" or "pious remnant" . . . . It is Israel *kata pneuma* in contrast to Israel *kata sarka*.<sup>33</sup>

A survey of Scripture reveals that Israel's spiritual remnant in the church age possesses the following characteristics:

**It is Small.** The Greek word translated "remnant" in Romans 11:5 is *leimma*. This term occurs only in this verse in the New Testament. It basically refers to "what is left over" or "what remains."<sup>34</sup> The New Testament concept of the remnant is the product of Old Testament teaching. In the Old Testament four words<sup>35</sup> are used to convey the idea of a remnant or part. Old Testament writers used these terms consistently to refer to the small number of faithful Jews who existed either during times of apostasy or following imminent or future judgments (II Kings 19:4; Ezra 9:8; Haggai 1:12, 14; Amos 5:15; Micah 2:12).<sup>36</sup> To Paul, the remnant was not Israel but a part of Israel, a new seed which points forward to all Israel.<sup>37</sup>

Other indications that the remnant is only a part of the nation are found in Romans 11:7 where Paul reveals that some obtained righteousness; in Romans 11:17 where in the figure of the olive tree some branches were broken off, the implication being that some were left on the tree; and in Romans 11:25 where it is indicated that Israel's hardening is partial numerically.

**It Exists by God's Grace.** In Romans 11:1-6, Paul bases the existence of the remnant in the church age on grace "in the same way" (v 5) it existed in Elijah's time (vv 2-4). The one thing that is clear is that the remnant exists because of God's mercy. In the end there is neither merit nor reward for the remnant—only grace.<sup>38</sup>

**It is Not an End in Itself.** McClain, in commenting on Romans 9:6-8, states, "Through this believing remnant the continuity of the chosen nation is being preserved and assured . . . such a method has been used of God from the very beginning in dealing with Israel."<sup>39</sup>

Riggs, in his thesis on Romans 9-11, makes this statement on Romans 11:5:

It is through the election of these individuals that God is conducting this program for the nation . . . God being sovereign in His dealings is saving a remnant of the nation in the present and will deal with the nation as an entity in the future.<sup>40</sup>

Even though God's grace rests on the remnant in the church age, God's future for Israel is with the nation as a whole (Rom 11:26).

Israel's spiritual remnant, though small in the church age, is the object of God's grace. The remnant, though the object of God's grace in the church age, is not the final object of that grace—Israel's future is with the nation.

### **Natural Israel**

In Romans 11:28-29, Paul states that Israel's natural existence is sure—"the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." As Haldane states, "What He has given them He will not withdraw, and His special people never can be altered."<sup>41</sup> A survey of Scripture reveals the following characteristics of natural Israel in the church age.

**It is Unbelieving.** In Romans 11:20, 23, the natural branches, national Israel, are characterized by unbelief. Also in Romans 11:7 national Israel, because of unbelief, was hardened, while the spiritual remnant obtained God's righteousness.

**It is Rejected by God.** This characteristic has been considered earlier. National Israel has been removed from God's position of favor (Rom 11:16-25). National Israel in the church age is rejected by God.



**It has a Future.** National Israel, though rejected, is not set aside completely or permanently. Although hardened for a time, she still has a future (Rom 11:25-26). "The nation of Israel is a special nation, elected by God to a position before Him eternally . . . . At the present time God has set this nation aside as a nation, but He will take up His dealings with them again."<sup>42</sup>

**Summary**

Just as in Old Testament times, so in the church age God is dealing with two groups within the nation of Israel. The first group is national Israel. National Israel is composed of the physical, natural descendents of Abraham who have only a national and not a spiritual relationship with God. In the church age, national Israel has been set aside because of unbelief. Yet she has a future in God's program.

The second group is spiritual Israel, the remnant according to grace. Spiritual Israel is composed of faithful and obedient descendents of Abraham who have a spiritual relationship to God. In the church age, spiritual Israel is small in size compared to the nation from which she was taken; her existence is based solely on God's grace; and she is not an end in herself because God's future for Israel rests in the nation.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> W Graham Scroggie, *Prophecy and History* (London: Marshal, Morgan and Scott, nd) p 39

<sup>2</sup> William E Blackstone, *Jesus is Coming* (Chicago: Fleming H Revel Co, 1908) p 234

<sup>3</sup> Scroggie, 38, 39

<sup>4</sup> Thomas M Seller, "The People of the Second Chance" *The Alliance Witness* Vol 109 No 4, Feb 13, 1974, p 3

<sup>5</sup> Ralph M Gade, "Is God Through With the Jew?" *Grace Journal*, Vol II, No 2, Spring 1970, p 33

<sup>6</sup> Charles C Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (New York: Loizeaux Bros, 1953) p 66

<sup>7</sup> Joseph H Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Co, 1889) p 299

<sup>8</sup> William Hendriksen, *Israel and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968) p 36

<sup>9</sup> Charles C Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959) pp 54-55

<sup>10</sup> Herman A Hoyt, *The Gospel...God's Way in Saving Men* (Winona Lake: Brethren Missionary Herald Co, n d) pp 45-46

<sup>11</sup> Charles L Feinberg, *Israel in the Spotlight* (New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1964) p 72

<sup>12</sup> William F Arndt and F W Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: Univ of Chicago Press, 1957) p 381

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 506, 507

<sup>14</sup> Lange, loc cit

<sup>15</sup> Howard Ferrin, "All Israel Shall Be Saved" *Bibliotheca Sacra* Vol 112, No 447, July 1955, p 239

<sup>16</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, 128

<sup>17</sup> Feinberg, "The Mystery of Israel's Blindness" 69-71

<sup>18</sup> Haldane, Vol IV, p 541

<sup>19</sup> Feinberg, "The Mystery of Israel's Blindness" 57-58

- <sup>20</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, 838
- <sup>21</sup> George V Wigram, *The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1860) p 675
- <sup>22</sup> John Wilkinson, *Israel My Glory* (London: Midway Mission to the Jews, Bible and Tract Depot, 1890) p 27
- <sup>23</sup> Riggs, 180
- <sup>24</sup> Augustus H Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1907) p 591
- <sup>25</sup> Feinberg, "The Mystery of Israel's Blindness" 53
- <sup>26</sup> Lenski, Vol VI, p 940
- <sup>27</sup> Alva J McClain, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Winona Lake: Brethren Missionary Herald Co, n d) p 86
- <sup>28</sup> James Denny, *St Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Vol II of *The Expositors Greek New Testament* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publ Co, n d) pp 601-02
- <sup>29</sup> Howard Ferrin, "Is the Church Ever Called Israel?" *The Sure Word of Prophecy* (New York: Fleming H Revell Co, 1943) pp 149-50
- <sup>30</sup> George B Fletcher, "Is There a Difference?" *The Researcher*, Vol II, No 2, Summer, 1972, p 12
- <sup>31</sup> Riggs, "The Argument of Romans Nine to Eleven" 48
- <sup>32</sup> John F Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham Publ Co, 1959) p 169
- <sup>33</sup> Gerhard F Hasel, *The Remnant* (Berrien Springs, Mich: Andrews Univ Press, 1974) p 2
- <sup>34</sup> Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publ Co, 1967) IV, 194
- <sup>35</sup> The Hebrew *yathar*, to be left over, remain, survive; leave a remnant; *palat*, to cause to escape, be delivered; *sarad*, to run away, escape, survive; *shaar*, to remain, to be left over.
- <sup>38</sup> Kittel, TDNT, 195-6
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 212
- <sup>38</sup> Riggs, "The Argument of Romans Nine to Eleven" pp 174-5, citing A A Solomon, "The New Testament Doctrine of Election" *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol XI, Dec 1958, 412
- <sup>39</sup> Alva J McClain, *The Jewish Problem and Its Divine Solution* (Winona Lake: B M H Books, 1944) p 10
- <sup>40</sup> Riggs, 173
- <sup>41</sup> Haldane, Vol IV, p 545
- <sup>42</sup> John W Cawood, "A Definitive Study of Dispensational Interpretation" (Unpubl ThD thesis, Dallas Theol Seminary, May 1959) p 40

*Israel's present rejection will terminate  
in salvation; all Israel will be saved.*