



RETHINKING BIBLE PROPHECY IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY

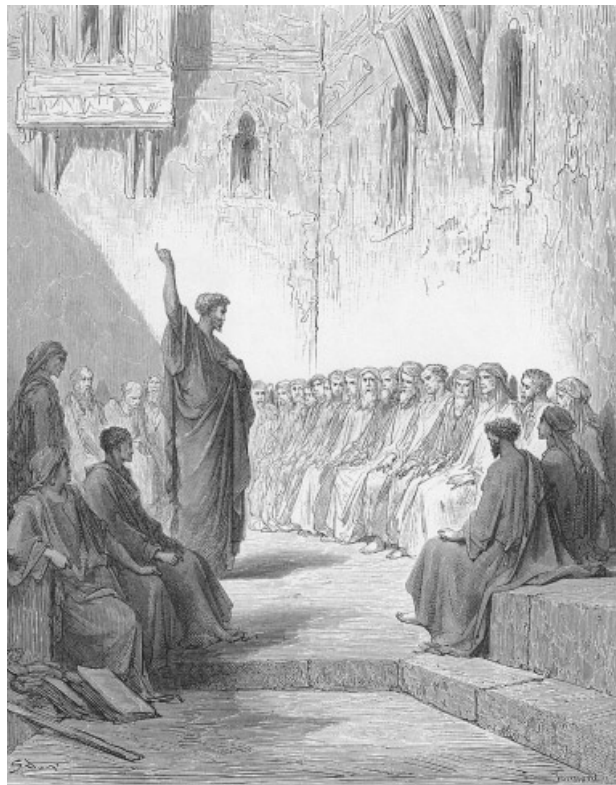
'Eschatology' is the study of last things. Christians should never fear having their eschatological 'system' scrutinised by the plain teaching of the Bible. If you subscribe to the currently popular "Left Behind" system of eschatology, prepare to be challenged by Scripture and history. Moreover, prepare to gain a greater respect for the integrity of the Bible.

THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL REEXAMINED

PART THREE BY JAMES B. JORDAN

A Glance at Romans

The Letter to the Romans is not a piece of systematic theology. It is full of systematic theology, but that theology is adduced to demonstrate a Biblico-theological point. We fall short of an understanding of Romans if all we see in it is a discussion of justification, sanctification, election, and holy living, with a "little parenthesis on the Jews" stuck in the middle. A full understanding of Romans needs to take into account that the redemptive-historical concern overarches everything else. Justification, sanctification, election, and holy living are implications of the Coming of the Kingdom, and they are laid out in Romans to make the point that the Coming of the Kingdom overcomes the Jew/Gentile distinction and creates One New Man in Christ.



ST. PAUL PREACHING TO THE THESSALONIANS
For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day
... we preached unto you the gospel of God. ... (1 Thessalonians 2: 9)

Paul starts in Romans 1 by saying that his ministry is to Gentiles, though the gospel is to the Jew first (1:13-16). The gospel is necessary because of the fall of man into idolatry (1:17-32). The gospel is the revelation of the righteousness of God at this time in history (1:16-17). Romans concerns the implications of that revelation, which includes the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the inner man, the coming of the Spirit, and climactically the resurrection of the political order of the world.

All men come under judgment, but in the Old Covenant Gentiles could be saved if they trusted God and followed His ways apart from the Law, while Jews were saved if they trusted God and followed His ways revealed in the Law. Moreover, the faithful Noahic Gentile believer had a

"Not giving heed to Jewish fables" - Titus 1:14

There are certain Prophetic passages in the Old Testament, which, apart from the light afforded by the New, might be taken as relating to "Israel after the flesh," and as foretelling the restoration, at some future day, of their national greatness. The erroneous doctrine of the teachers of Israel was based upon an unspiritual interpretation of their own Scriptures; for "they know not the voices of their prophets which were read every sabbath day."

from *The Hope of Israel: What Is It?* by Philip Mauro (1922)

true inward circumcision, while the faithless Jew had negated his own outward circumcision (chap. 2). In other words, as far as salvation was concerned, the Jew had no special place in the Old Covenant order.

So then, why did Jews exist? They were set aside to minister the oracles of God as priests to the nations (3:1-8). These oracles of God were the Law-Word of the Old Testament. Apart from a living faith-relationship to God, however, the Law-Word only killed men by condemning them. The living faith-relationship, which existed provisionally in the Old Covenant, has now arrived in its fullness because of the work of Jesus Christ. This faith-relationship establishes the Law-Word in a sphere of life instead of death (3:9-31).

In the Old Covenant, the faith-relationship was something Jew and Gentile had in common, as we see from the fact that Abraham had it as a Noahic believer before he was circumcised (chap. 4). The benefits of resurrection-life, seen in the opening of Sarah's dead womb, came to both Jew and Gentile through the faith-relationship.

One of the purposes of the Law, considered in redemptive-historical terms, was to put sinners to death. It showed men their need of resurrection, and thereby pointed to the need for the faith-relationship. The Law came in a context of death, not only the death that came from Adam's sin, but also the political death-context that resulted from the Jew-Gentile split. The Law could never overcome that political death, because it was part of it. Only when the Jew-Gentile split had been overcome through resurrection could the Law be re-established in a sphere of life. Those who are united to Christ through resurrection have a new positive relationship with the Law (chaps. 5-6).

Being raised from the dead, we are no longer subject to the total killing force of the Law, seen especially in the laws of uncleanness and sacrifice, but since we are still sinners, the partial killing force of the Law is still necessary for our personal mortification and sanctification (chap. 7). The Law helps show us our wickedness, purges us, and drives us to Christ in the quest for renewed experience of resurrection life. The work of the Holy Spirit continually serves to deliver us from the old world of the flesh into the new world of resurrection life (chap. 8).

I have only surveyed these chapters in a cursory manner, obviously, but I have done so to show that Paul is concerned from the beginning with the Jew-Gentile bipolarity, so that the idea that Romans 9-11 is a parenthesis is nonsense. Romans 9-11 carries forward the redemptive-historical themes of Romans 1-8. Romans 9-11 shows the outworking of the resurrection in its political dimension, the overcoming of the Babelic order by the reuniting of believing Jew and Gentile into one body. The climax of the whole first eleven chapters is the Amen at the end of chapter 11.

Then Paul applies his theme. In chapters 12-13 he applies the fact that we are now one body in Christ to righteous living in the Church and in the world. In chapters 14-15 he addresses the conflict that existed in the Interim Church between converted Jew and converted Gentile. The Jews tended to want Gentiles to come under the Law, a tendency that went to seed among the apostate Judaizers. The Gentiles, rejoicing at last to be in the Kingdom on an equal basis, tended to react against the Jewish believers and mistreat them. This was a problem unique to the Interim Church, though of course the Post-Holocaust Church faces similar problems and so these chapters are still very relevant to us today. Paul's argument to the Romans is this: The night is almost over, and the day is at hand, so bear with one another for the present, because in a few years this phase of redemptive history will be over (Rom. 13:11-12).

If we look back now at Romans 9-11, we can see that Paul is concerned with those Gentile believers who were reacting against the Jewish believers. He warns them not to despise the Olive Tree, and tells them that the history of Israel is not quite over yet. There is at present, he says, a Remnant in Israel, and before Jerusalem is destroyed, many Jews will be saved and there will be a great harvest. He says that this "fulfillment" of Israel will work a great benefit to the Gentile believers, for it will be a political resurrection that finally overcomes the Jew-Gentile bipolarity for all time (11:12).

Romans 9 & 10

Paul begins by speaking of the duties and privileges of Israel. Only in Romans 9-11 does Paul use the term "Israel," while everywhere else in Romans he uses the term "Jew." The word "Jew"

is associated with the Restoration Covenant, and was the peculiar term for the people at that time, for the New Covenant superseded the Restoration Covenant. In social and political terms, the bi-polarity in the New Testament Church was between Jew and Gentile. Paul goes back to the term "Israel" here because his stress is on the calling of these people to be priests to the nations, a calling made most explicit at the time of the Mosaic Covenant, which was when the term "Israel" replaced "Hebrew" as the name for these people. Paul is saying that the special relationship of Israel to the nations is not yet over. Jerusalem continues to be the center of the world until A.D. 70.

Paul then moves to a discussion of the Remnant. Not every Israelite was a true Israelite, for being a member of true Israel was never a matter of race but of calling and election (9:6-13). The Remnant is to the ungodly nation as Jacob to Esau, and as Israel to Egypt. The refusal of Israel to enter the New Covenant is analogous to Pharaoh's refusal to hear God. Just as God raised up Pharaoh, so He raised up Israel. God dealt with Pharaoh by showing Him mercy between each plague, with the result that Pharaoh got harder and harder against God. Similarly, Israel became harder and harder under the judgments God visited upon her throughout Old Covenant history. Each time God withdrew His judgments, Israel became worse than she had been before (9:14-18).

The Remnant had readily confessed that God was the Potter and they were the clay (Is. 64:8). They were ready to change under God's reshaping hands, and enter the New Covenant. Apostate Israel, however, resisted God and became a broken pot, henceforth good for nothing but unclean uses (9:19-22). God was mixing the soft Remnant clay with the Gentiles and making a new, more glorious pot (9:23-26). (Remember, man is made of earth, so clay is a *pregnant* analogy.)

During this Interim, however, the Remnant still existed and had a function. They had not yet become completely blended with the Gentiles into the Church. The Remnant within Israel protected her from wrath. God was willing to spare Sodom if only ten righteous people were found in it. Jerusalem is called Sodom (and Egypt) in Revelation 11:8, and Paul says that it is Remnant in

Sodom that preserves her (Rom. 9:27-29). When the Remnant flees, and the rest of it slain, then Sodom will have no more protection. The Man of Sin will no longer be restrained (2 Thess. 2).

In Romans 10 Paul argues that the Law should have led them to faith. Romans 10:4 says that Christ is the goal of the Law, so that anyone who kept the Law in faith would be led to Christ. Verse 5 says that anyone who kept the Law in faith would find life, and verses 6-11 expand that thought. (Verse 6 should begin with "and," not "but." The Greek word is a simple connective, *ho de*, not the adversative, *alla*.)

Anyone who really understood the Law, says Paul, would see that salvation is by faith, both for Jew and Greek (10:11-13). The peculiar task of the Jew (Israelite) was to be a preacher to the Gentiles (10:14-15). God sent prophets to Israel so that Israel would be faithful, and by becoming faithful, minister to the Gentiles. When Israel refused to fulfill her calling to be priests to the nations, God would take His message directly to the Gentiles in order to provoke Israel (10:16-21).

Taking the gospel to the Gentiles was designed to make Israel "jealous" (Dt. 32:21; Rom. 10:19). This term is neutral. In a positive sense, Israel's jealousy should lead them back to the Lord. In a negative sense, Israel's jealousy would cause them to become furiously angry at God, His prophets, and the Gentile converts. When Jesus brought this up in Luke 4, His home town tried to kill Him. The book of Acts shows that Paul's ministry among the Gentiles was treated the same way (cf. esp. Acts 21:28ff.).

At the beginning of both Romans 9 and 10, Paul expressed that his personal desire was to see Israel saved. His ministry among the Gentiles, while designed for their good in itself, was also designed to provoke Israel (cf. 11:13-14). During the Interim period, this provoking ministry was going on. It is not going on today. Modern Jews are not in the least provoked by the fact that non-Jews believe the Gospel. Modern Jews get angry with Jews convert, not when "Gentiles" do. In this respect, Modern Jews are just like any other non-Christian group. This is strong evidence that Romans 9-11 is concerned only with the early days of the Church.

Romans 11

Paul returns to the Remnant in 11:1-10.

He says that at the present time, there is still a Remnant of Israel. He is one such, he says. He points back to Elijah. The nation might have been destroyed in Elijah's day, except for the Remnant 7000.

The Remnant and its provoking work will have the effect of making the Jews "jealous." The fact that gospel has gone to the Gentiles, and they are inheriting the riches of the Old Testament promises, is not the last word. Paul reveals that the Remnant's work will bear fruit among the Israelites, so that Israel will experience a "fullness" (v. 12). When this "fullness" happens, it will be "life from the dead"—resurrection (v. 15). We shall return to this in a moment.

Having established that Israel has a future, Paul exhorts the Gentile believers not to lord it over Israel. Just as the Jews are not to dominate the Gentiles in the Church, so neither are the Gentiles to despise the Jews. God had grafted the Gentiles onto the patriarchal stock of the Olive Tree, but *soon* He will graft Israel back in, making One New Tree (11:16-24).

Verses 25-26 say that the partial hardening of apostate Israel will last until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, and then all Israel (not just the Remnant) will be saved.

So, the fullness of the Gentiles comes first, and then the fullness of Israel. What does this mean? In context, I believe that the fullness of the Gentiles has to mean the transfer of the riches to them, as mentioned in verse 12. This transfer of treasures went on during the Interim, and it is seen particularly in the completion of the canon of the New Testament, because the New Testament interprets and applies (transfers) the Old Testament to the New Covenant situation. The fullness does not refer only to words, however, but also to the completion of the formation of the New Covenant Church, which was a large part of Paul's own (Israel-provoking) mission. Just as Old Covenant Israel was to minister to the Gentiles by preaching and obeying God's law, so the New Covenant Gentile Church was to minister to Israel by preaching the New Testament and living righteously. Just as the Old Covenant Gentiles would admire Israel if she were faithful (Dt. 4:6-9), so it was necessary for the New Covenant Gentiles to be faithful in order to draw Israel into the Church. (This role reversal may be part of the reason why

Jerusalem is called Babel in the book of Revelation.)

Why did this fullness of the Gentiles have to happen first? Because only then would the fullness of provocation be possible. The presence of the New Covenant Church and its true interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures had the effect of gradually stripping away the veil that lay over Moses' words (2 Cor. 3), which was but the outworking of the rending of the Temple Veil that happened at Christ's death. When the Church was fully formed, and the Scriptures completed, then the veil was fully removed, and the provocation to jealousy reached its most intense development.

The purpose of the provocation was the salvation of Israel. True, for many, the provocation resulted in wrath, but for others it would result in repentance. Paul says that in the future (their future, not ours), this provoking work would bear fruit. Not just a Remnant but "all Israel" would turn to the Lord. At this point, Jew and Gentile would finally be One New Man in Christ, and this would be the political resurrection of the world that removed the bi-polarity of Babel and Israel.

The Book of Revelation

Paul does not describe how this would come about in detail, but we can see from the Book of Revelation what actually happened. A full discussion of this history would require us to delve into Josephus and other ancient writers. For now, I only want to show how Revelation delineates the Pauline prophecy.

Revelation concerns the judgment of the Old Creation, both Jewish and Gentile. Since Eden-Jerusalem is the center of the world, the book is centrally concerned with Jerusalem, but it also devotes attention to the Havalah-Roman Beast as well. The entire bifurcated Old Covenant order is going to be torn down.

I believe Revelation 7 shows the salvation of the Jewish Remnant and the initial Gentile Church. The 144,000 are the Remnant, and the great multitude from the nations is the "mixed multitude" that accompanied them out of the Egypt of rebellious Judaism (cf. Rev. 11:8). These are sealed against the initial outpourings of wrath against Jerusalem and the world.

I believe that Revelation 10:7 points to what Paul called the fullness of the

Gentiles, for it says that the mystery of God has been completed. At this point, it becomes necessary for John to preach again, this time to bring about the fullness of Israel. Right away we are shown the ministry of the two witnesses in Jerusalem, and their martyrdom. Here is jealousy and wrath poured out against those who provoke Israel, but the result of the witnesses' deaths is that many feared and gave glory to God (11:13; cp. Acts 5:11-14). This, I believe, is the "fullness of Israel." Immediately we are told that the world has become the kingdom of Christ (Rev. 11:15).

Revelation 12 & 13 back up to provide context for what follows, which is the harvest of this Fulfilled Church. On the basis of my studies in *the Abomination of Desolation*, it seems to me that the martyrdom of the two witnesses is the Desolating Sacrilege, or at least part of it. At this point, many of the Remnant fled Jerusalem and were saved (Rev. 12:14). The new converts, the Fullness, were stuck in Jerusalem. I believe they are seen in 14:1, standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion. As long as these believers remained in Jerusalem, the city could not be destroyed. Thus, they had to be harvested first. The harvest of these saints is simultaneously the filling up of the cup of Jerusalem's wrath, for the massacre of these saints eliminates Jerusalem's protection, and calls down the full wrath of God against her.

The angels reap the harvest of the Fullness (14:14-20). (Chilton and others err in seeing this as a picture of God's

wrath against the wicked.) We see the Fullness standing in heaven with God in Revelation 15. They were faithful to death. Their blood is the wine of God's wrath, which He will make their killers drink (14:10). The Fullness joins their Lord outside the city (14:20), privileged to join Him in martyrdom (Col. 1:24).

The blood of these martyrs is put into chalices and poured out on Jerusalem, to her destruction (15:7; 16:1-21). The city is seen drinking this blood, taking into herself the death she visited upon them (17:6).

It is my opinion that the martyrdom of the Fullness of Israel is what brings about the "life from the dead" that Paul spoke of in Romans 11. Thus, after the destruction of Jerusalem we are shown that Satan, who was on the earth during the Interim (12:9, 12), is cast into the abyss to deceive the nations no longer. The Church comes to life again, seated on thrones, and ruling with Christ for the millennium, which begins at that point (Rev. 20:1-6). This initial resurrection of the saints is a foretaste of the final resurrection at the end of history.

(A footnote: The current Reformed view is that the millennium is the entire Church Age, either in heaven or on earth, from A.D. 30 forward. But in that case, how can the millennium end before the final apostasy [20:7ff.]? If I am right that the millennium begins with the political resurrection of A.D. 70, that would explain why the millennium ends before the second coming of Christ, with the release of Satan. The millennium is

bracketed on both sides by short periods during which Satan is not bound in the abyss.)

Conclusion

In these short essays I have obviously not taken up every question surrounding this issue. I have sought to make a case for a preterist view of Romans 11. I think it is a very credible case, and I am pretty much convinced by it.

If Romans 11 was fulfilled in the first century, does it have any use for the Church today? I believe so. The issue Paul was addressing can be generalized to address a common issue today. The hardened Israelites were those who had inherited the tradition of the faith but were not living it. They are analogous to liberal and dead orthodox Christians today. Surely it is true that such people are greatly offended by faithful Christians. They are provoked to jealousy and wrath, and go out of their way to persecute those who show up their cardboard faith for what it is. Paul's admonition throughout all his letters, however, shows us how to deal with such people. We are to be all the more faithful and loving in our own circles, because the more visible our own "fullness" becomes, the better our witness becomes. Just as the fullness of the Gentiles eventually led to the fullness of Israel, so the fullness of faithful Churches today can and will lead to the fullness of unfaithful liberal and dead orthodox Christian communities.

The Election HATH Obtained It

from *The Hope of Israel: What Is It?* by Philip Mauro (1922)

The Spirit of God has caused it to be placed on record that—"Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it" (Rom. 11:7). Of what is the apostle speaking? What is it Israel was seeking for and had not obtained, but which the election had obtained and was in possession of, at the time the Epistle to the Romans was written?

The apostle deemed it not necessary to specify what he had in mind. We may infer it was something so well known that they to whom the Epistle was addressed would understand his meaning without a more explicit statement. And surely, what Israel was expecting was, and is, so well known by all who have any acquaintance with Bible prophecy and Jewish history, as to make a definite specification thereof unnecessary. Moreover, the context makes plain what it was that the election had obtained.

Let us observe that, whatever had been the object of Israel's quest, Israel had now (at the time the Epistle was written) lost it irretrievably; for the inspired utterance declares that, not only had Israel failed to obtain it, but another company, "the election," had obtained it. And furthermore, one of the chief purposes for which this passage (Romans 9-11) was written was, to make known that God, in bestowing the coveted blessing upon the believing remnant of Israel and in incorporating with that remnant the saved from among the Gentiles, was fulfilling the promises He had made by the mouth of His holy prophets to Israel; "for they are not all 'Israel' which are of Israel" (9:6). Clearly then, what is here referred to is not something which that generation of Israelites had missed and God had temporarily withdrawn, with the intention of bestowing it upon a future generation.

And further let us observe that Paul is not speaking here of something that lay in the then future purposes of God, but of a promised blessing whereof the set time had come, a blessing which had in fact already passed into the possession of those for whom it had been intended, the People of God "which He foreknew" (v. 1). For the word is, "The election HATH obtained it."