

ham (Rom. 4:16) that his example can still “command his children . . . after him” (Gen. 18:19; Rom. 4:23-25). He would implicitly have this to say to us:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your *reasonable* service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:1,2).

“Reasonable” in the above passage is related in Greek to ‘accounting’, being equivalent to ‘logical’ (Gk. *logikēn*). This is in the context of “mind” and “prove”. Hence, applied to Abraham when God proved him (Gen. 22:1; Heb. 11:17), his

works, or “service”, of faith and obedience in sacrificing his son were ‘logical’. His *reckoning* was logical. Logical service is effected, or exercised, through a mind being “transformed”, and thus “renewed”, in a mortal body, by Divine revelation.⁷

This shows that a true Christian saint, of the seed of Abraham, should combine undivided, or inseparably, the mind, will and body in serving Abraham’s God.

(To be concluded)

7. This is analogous to the quickening process within Sarah’s dead womb and Abraham’s aged body to produce a godly seed (Rom. 4:17,19,20).



Principles, Preaching and Problems

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God’s purpose with Israel

6. Israel not replaced by the Church (Part 2)

Stephen Green

CONTINUING AN investigation of the Supersessionist viewpoint (see [previous article](#) [Jan. 2002, p. 5] for an explanation of this term), we concentrate on the question of whether God has cast away Israel. In doing so we shall spend much of our time looking at Paul’s letter to the Romans, especially chapter 11.

“Hath God cast away His people?”

Paul asks the question which forms our cross-heading in the following passage: “But to *Israel* He saith, All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying *people* [quoting Isaiah 65:2]. I say then, Hath God cast away His *people*? God forbid. For I also am an *Israelite*, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away His *people* which He foreknew” (Rom. 10:21–11:2).

In understanding the ‘cast away’ passages in both Testaments we need to be sensitive to the context on each occasion and determine whether

the words ‘Israel’ and ‘people’ refer to the nation at the time or over a long period, to the majority of the people or to all, to a small remnant or the accumulated remnant to date. Similarly we need to be careful about the kind of ‘casting away’ that is being referred to. Is it a temporary punishment or permanent rejection? Is it a casting out of the land or a complete loss of God’s interest and favour? We should take into account the passages which say Israel will be cast away, and also those which say they will not.

“Israel” in the above passage must be the nation who had received the words quoted from Isaiah 65:2. The first “people” must include at least a majority of the nation over a lengthy period reaching to late in Isaiah’s ministry. The second “people” Paul takes as referring to the whole nation in his own days, because he goes on to include himself as well as the disobedient: “God forbid [By no means!, RSV, etc.]. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the

tribe of Benjamin" (v. 1). Paul exclaims at the idea of God rejecting the whole nation, because, as he continues, "God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew" (v. 2).

God's foreknowledge of Israel

Who are the people which God "foreknew", and which He has "not cast away"? In this context they are clearly national Israelites. They are also clearly those who proved to be of faith: "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (8:29). He had a purpose planned for them. He watched over this family in Egypt and created them as a nation on the way to the Promised Land. Although many lost faith along the way, in the main those who entered the land under Joshua were a refined and faithful generation. God says: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2).

Earlier in Romans 10 Paul quotes Old Testament references to the Gentile opportunity: "Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you. But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought Me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me" (vv. 19,20). An overenthusiastic interpretation of these passages, when compared with the criticism of Israel in 10:21, already quoted, could suggest a Gentile replacement of Israel—the view of the Supersessionist. But Paul counters this in 11:1,2. The Gentiles are "no people" (10:19) to God's mind, and, in seeking Him, each must individually enter through Jesus the family which He does recognise.

This understanding of the first two verses of Romans 11 fits with the verses that follow. Elijah thought he was the only one left who was faithful to God, and pleaded with Him against the nation. But God's answer was: "I have reserved to Myself seven thousand men" (v. 4). He was prepared to allow Israel to continue for the sake of 7,000 hidden among them. "Even so then at this present time" (v. 5), whether Paul's time or our own, we cannot say that God has cast away national Israel, because there is this "remnant according to the election of grace"—one here, one there—with, in the future, according to prophecy, many to come.

"What then?", Paul asks. "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded" (v.

7). And later he refers to their "fall" (v. 12) and to their "casting away" (v. 15). A large majority of the nation of Israel have become blinded, have fallen and have been cast away, but a remnant of the nation have not.

We conclude from these early verses of Romans 11 that we do not know how many God has reserved for Himself in our own day, whether one, 7,000, or a greater number. But what we do know is that we cannot deny that there was a remnant through history, and at the time of Messiah's return to Israel there will be a much larger remnant, as forecast by Old Testament prophecy. It is clear from this New Testament passage that *the nation* viewed through history has not been rejected or superseded, even though many of its members in each generation have. And if in Romans 11 Israel is spoken of as not cast away, only substantially rejected, what is the significance of other 'cast away' passages?

No permanent rejection of Israel

There are many passages which affirm the casting away of Israel, but none affirms a permanent casting away. Through Hosea God says that He will no longer have mercy on the ten tribes, and that they would no longer be His people (1:6,9), and yet that this situation would later be reversed (v. 10). Again, Hosea foretells that they would be cast away to wander among the nations (9:17), but chapter 14 foretells a return to their God. Ezekiel recognises that elements of Israel have already been cast far off (11:16), yet they are to be gathered back (v. 17).

Further, Jeremiah foretells that Judah would be cast out of the land to go into a captivity (16:13), but that from it they would later return (v. 15; 33:7-26). In the context of a return, 33:16 appears to speak of an occasion when Judah and Jerusalem are saved in a special sense. Jeremiah also says: "the Lord will not cast off for ever" (Lam. 3:31). Some of these promises of Israel's return were fulfilled in part by the returns under Zerubbabel and Ezra.

It is clear from these and many other examples that a Biblical reference to Israel being cast off does not imply they will be wiped off the face of the earth as a complete people, or that they would be cast off for ever. Although these sentences of God's judgement have had a terrible effect upon the nation down the centuries, God has not been prolonging them because He enjoys watching their agony, but to teach them how to respond to Him.

“The New Testament never describes itself as superseding Old Testament religion, nor Jesus as coming to annul the Old Testament, but rather to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). It is therefore legitimate to think of Israel remaining as a distinct nation in the purposes of God and still to be a blessing to the world. It is of national Israel that we read that, ‘if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?’ (Rom. 11:15). In this important chapter Paul still describes the people of national Israel, in spite of their sins, as ‘beloved’ (v. 28): ‘for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable’ (v. 29)”.

B. Maoz, *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*, edited P. W. L. Walker, p. 159).

The fact that on occasion some have returned to God spiritually, or to the land physically, demonstrates that God did not intend the ‘casting away’ to be permanent. If it was not to be permanent, then we can expect a time when all those will return whose families have remained scattered as exiles from their homeland (for well over 2,500 years in the case of the ten tribes) and have served other gods. This is confirmed by Jeremiah: “I will bring [Israel] again into their land that I gave unto their fathers. Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the LORD, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks” (16:15,16). As Yahweh says: “And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly” (Lev. 26:44). From Jeremiah 31:35-40 and 33:20-26, quoted earlier in this series,¹ we see it is unthinkable to Yahweh that the seed of Israel and of Judah should cease from being a nation before Him, or that the whole seed should be cast off.

The Israel olive tree

In Romans 11:16-24 Paul goes on to discuss the Israel olive tree. This tree is a “good olive tree” (v. 24), one selected and tended by God. It is the tree from which “some of” the natural branches have been “broken off” (v. 17), and therefore it starts out as natural Israel.

Later, these broken natural branches are available for grafting back into the tree, that is, “into their own olive tree”; and, considering the compatibility of such a graft, Paul notes, “how much more” suitable would this graft be than one from some other source (v. 24)! It is very clear that the olive tree corresponds to natural Israel.

Paul’s purpose in this section is to make clear to Gentiles that they have not supplanted Israel. They have been added to or inserted into the tree by grafting, but they remain in the tree on

the same conditions as the natural branches, that is, only if they choose to continue in God’s goodness (vv. 21,22). Verse 23 makes it clear that nothing apart from unbelief prevents God grafting Israelite branches in again. He has made no permanent decision to cut off Israel following their rejection of Christ.

“Boast not against the branches”

The Gentiles, to whom Paul is particularly writing in verses 13-31, are warned not to boast against the Israelite branches that have been broken off, because they have been grafted in their place. Their fruit is not in themselves, but comes from the growth available through nutrients in the sap (the “fatness” and “goodness”) provided by the root (vv. 17,22). This comes from God through the promises to Abraham. The olive tree as a whole seems to be the equivalent of “the commonwealth of Israel” (Eph. 2:12), and the original branches the Israelites, both good and bad, descended from Abraham. From the way the olive tree of Romans 11 is cultivated, it is clear that only branches true to type, that is, of faith, are permitted to remain each time the pruning season comes round. Therefore, in the long term the olive tree represents “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). Short term it represents Israel after the flesh.

The boast of the Gentile, that the branches were broken off that he might be grafted in (Rom. 11:19), well represents the spirit of Christianity today, so lacking in humility towards God’s choice of the Jews as the means of salvation (Jno. 4:22). Gentiles stand before God on the basis of faith as much as do the Jews, and by nature they have the same failings; both need to watch themselves, that they continue in the goodness of God.

For the purpose of this study our main conclusion from this part of Romans 11 must be that

1. See [Part 4](#) (Nov. 2001, p. 414) for more comment on these two passages.

God is able to graft natural Israel back into “their own olive tree”, but they must come to believe again, an eventuality clearly considered as at least a strong possibility in verses 23,24.

“And so all Israel shall be saved”

The next three verses of Romans 11 are important in determining what happens to the Israelite olive tree, and there have been differing interpretations, particularly between those that believe there will be a restoration of Israel and those who believe Israel has been superseded: “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins” (vv. 25-27).

First, we will work through important phrases in this passage, presenting an interpretation that we believe to be the most natural understanding of Paul’s words. Afterwards we will comment on alternative interpretations provided by others.

“this mystery” (v. 25). The Gentiles were liable to consider themselves superior, and so the mystery of which they seemed unaware must be linked to Paul’s previous discussion about the olive tree, for example in verse 20: “Be not highminded, but fear”. This mystery is enlarged upon in the words which follow in verse 25, and are connected by the word ‘that’.

“blindness in part is happened to Israel, until” (v. 25). This is the mystery/secret which should impress humility upon the Gentiles. The blindness/hardening of part of Israel is of limited duration, only lasting until a certain event is reached.

“the fulness of the Gentiles” (v. 25). Before we consider the meaning of this phrase as it occurs in this verse it will be helpful to consider the meaning of the word “fulness” in verse 12. Here the people (Israel) by their “fall” allowed opportunity for the “riches” of the gospel to pass to the Gentiles. But they are to experience a “fulness” (Mt. 17:11; Acts 3:19-21), which is the signal for an even greater blessing upon the world. In the parallel verse (v. 15) the blessing is connected with “life from the dead”, that is, resurrection.² In verse 12 the “fulness” is contrasted with the “di-

minishing” of Israel, and so is a reference to the time of their glorious restoration and honourable place among the nations, which under the rule of their King will lead to blessings of peace and righteousness for the other nations of the earth.

The phrase in verse 25 is often interpreted as ‘the complete number of the Gentiles’. However, nowhere else in the New Testament does the word translated “fulness” here (*plērōma*) refer to completeness of number of people, and rarely of the number of any concrete entities. The same is true of the related verb ‘to fill’ or ‘to fulfil’ (*plēroō*).³ On the other hand, these words are used for the completion of time; for example: “The time is fulfilled” (Mk. 1:15); “my time is not yet full come” (Jno. 7:8); “when the fulness of the time was come” (Gal. 4:4); and “the dispensation of the fulness of times” (Eph. 1:10).

Another of these passages is particularly important, as Paul is probably alluding to it here: “And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Lk. 21:24). “The fulness of the Gentiles be come in” is thus most likely intended to refer to the completion of the times of the Gentiles, after which we would expect Israel to be restored to God’s favour.⁴

“all Israel” (v. 26). Israel in the context (the previous verse and indeed the whole chapter) is national Israel. We are reading in this verse of the mortal nation alive at a particular time when the salvation of the whole nation is to be effected.

“shall be saved” (v. 26). Salvation here refers to God’s forgiveness of Israel’s sins and a covenant made with them, as the rest of verses 26,27 explains. It is similar to the meaning of

2. The order of events may seem odd—the receiving of Israel being followed by the resurrection of the Gentiles. But we have to remember that the process of rejecting Israel and the provision of opportunity for the Gentiles overlapped by nearly forty years, from Paul’s commission to preach the gospel to the uncircumcision (Acts 9:15; Gal. 2:7,8) to the destruction of Jerusalem. So there could be scope for similar overlap between the process of restoration and the resurrection.

3. This is also true of the adjective ‘full’ (*plērēs*).

4. This interpretation of “fulness” in Romans 11:25 also appears in M’Neile, *The Prophecies Relative to the Jewish Nation*, pp. 304-5, and Friberg’s *Lexicon on plērōma*.

the word 'salvation' applied to the Gentiles in verse 11. It requires the purging of rebels from Israel, as forecast by Ezekiel 20:34-40, and the forgiveness of sin under the new covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Comments on Supersessionist views

A common Supersessionist understanding of the "all Israel" of Romans 11:26,27 is that it refers to 'spiritual Israel', which began to be saved from Christ's first coming and is still being saved now. This 'Israel' is associated with the covenant instituted at his first coming, and not with a renewal of this covenant at his second coming, and therefore "all Israel" does not refer to national Israel being saved in the future.⁵ This interpretation is wrong because:

- 1 It denies the national Israel context which Paul builds in Romans 11 for the phrase "all Israel". Note the sustained contrast between "Israel" and "the Gentiles".
- 2 The phrase 'spiritual Israel' is not a Scriptural term. It is used by Supersessionists to imply a church with a Gentile core, to distinguish it from the Scriptural 'Israel'. The correct distinction is made by Paul: "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" (9:6, RSV), which defines Israel as a subset of the nation.
- 3 The Supersessionist interpretation usually assumes that the full total of 'spiritual Israel' is accumulated over the centuries until the last Gentile has been incorporated, at which point "all Israel" to be saved will have been saved. This makes the statement, "And so all Israel shall be saved", not a prophecy in its own right, but a conclusion derived from verse 25. It also contradicts the idea of a future Kingdom of God on earth with mortal subjects ruled by Christ, initiated at his second coming, because it forecasts the continuing blindness of Israel up to the salvation of the last Gentile (v. 25) in the interpretation.
- 4 The prophecies alluded to in verses 26,27 (Isa. 59:20,21; 27:9; Jer. 31:34) are squeezed into a fulfilment between the first coming and the second coming of Christ.
- 5 It denies a "fulness" for Israel (v. 12), and God's future mercy towards them (v. 31).

One of the exponents of the Supersessionist view has attempted to explain the Old Testament prophecies of blessings flowing to the nations from Zion in a non-literal sense. He sees these promised blessings as following the de-

struction of Jerusalem and the temple, and flowing from Christ as the fulfilment of "the Zion-tradition".⁶ This interpretation undermines and dissolves away most of the detail of such prophecies, for example, Isaiah chapters 33, 60 and 62. Even in those parts of Old Testament prophecy which describe the activities of Messiah—for example, Isaiah 2:3,4; 32:1; 61:2,3—the activity is brought forward to times now past, which means that the promises of righteousness and hope are lost in the frailties of an apostate church.

Comments on Restorationist views

Although the main purpose of this and the previous article is to show the weaknesses, no, total inadequacy, of Supersessionism, and how it undermines the doctrine of Christ's promised reign as King of Israel, it may be helpful to comment on some aspects of the Restorationist position on Romans 11:25-27. Under this heading we restrict ourselves to considering Christadelphian views. Historically these have varied slightly in detail, mainly in presentation and choice of Old Testament parallels.

A very early view is that "all Israel" refers to the twelve tribes reunited into one nation and kingdom upon their own land, as explained in Ezekiel 37:25-28; 36:33-38; 39:25-29.⁷ The glory of the Redeemer coming to Zion includes figuratively the 144,000 with the Lamb (Isa. 59:20; 60:2; Rev. 14:1,3); that is, the immortalised ones are considered separately from "all Israel", but do have a part in saving them.⁸

A later view is that "all Israel" contrasts with the "remnant" which have obeyed the gospel. In Messiah's day the whole nation will be saved, apart from those purged out (Ezek. 20:34-38). They shall all know the Lord (Jer. 31:34).⁹

A number of more recent expressions of view have followed similar lines. However, the view has been expressed that the "all" of "all Israel" refers to the inclusion of the Gentile believers, or 'spiritual Israel', along with national Israel. This idea clearly weakens the support provided by verse 26 for the doctrine of the future restoration

5. See, for example, J. L. Bray, *Israel in Bible Prophecy*, 1983 (reprinted 1995), pp. 58-9,72-4.

6. T. Wright, *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*, edited P. W. L. Walker, second edition, 1994, p. 67.

7. *Elpis Israel*, p. 266.

8. *Eureka*, Ch. 16, part 1.

9. J. Carter, *Letter to the Romans*, p. 125.

of national Israel, and is inconsistent with the context in verse 28.

Important points for a valid interpretation

To help achieve a valid understanding of verses 25-27, the following matters need to be taken into account:

- 1 If a cumulative view of “the fulness of the Gentiles” and of “all Israel” is entertained, then the natural end point is the end of Christ’s thousand-year reign when no more Gentiles or Israelites can be saved, not his second coming. Christ’s reign is a time when Israel as well as the nations will learn righteousness (Isa. 2:1-5; 59:21; 60:21). This contradicts the idea that Israel remains blind until the salvation of Gentiles is completed.
- 2 The parallel Old Testament passages with links to Romans 11:26,27, including the “all” of Jeremiah 31:34, “the whole house of Israel” of Ezekiel 39:25 and the purging of Israel of Ezekiel 20:34-40, should be taken fully into account.¹⁰
- 3 The salvation of mortal Israel, and the redemption of immortals, should be distinguished, and the relationship between these two parties clearly worked out.

Conclusions

Supersessionism undermines the fulfilment of the promise to David that God would raise up

Christ from the dead to sit on David’s throne, reigning as the King of Israel (Acts 2:30,31). In so doing it also undermines the kernel of the gospel, that is, “the gospel of the kingdom of God”, which is the rule of God and the fullness of His glory in the earth (Num. 14:21; 1 Cor. 15:24). Other aspects of the gospel, although essential, are the means to achieve this—to achieve the situation where all creation glorifies God for His power and love.¹¹

In the next article, we propose to consider the status of Israel in the land today.

[\(To be continued\)](#)

10. Note that the purging of Israel will be like what happened in the coming out of Egypt. Those who entered the land were a mainly refined and faithful generation. In a similar way those gathered out of the countries, who are to be purged and to have their “ungodliness turned away”, will become another faithful generation.
11. A reader of early articles in this series has been kind enough to point out an article by A. McCaul which Brother Thomas published in *The Herald* (“New Testament evidence of the restoration of the Jews to the land of Israel”, Oct. 1856, pp. 217-25). Other readers may find this a helpful article for further study. Although it duplicates some of my own arguments, it presents them in a most cogent manner, and also makes a number of additional points and covers further Scripture passages.



Encounter

Reprinted items from earlier issues, chosen by the Publishing Editor

The Law given through Moses*

9. Capital punishment

Islip Collyer

CRITICS have often suggested that the Mosaic Law was more severe than laws which have ruled in more recent years and in Gentile lands. It has been affirmed that capital punishment was inflicted more frequently and men were sometimes condemned to death for offences which in these days would not be subject to penalty of any kind. It is interesting to

observe how completely modern Gentiles will forget the claims of God, and yet, by some strange process of reasoning, will conclude that they are more religious for so doing. They recognise that it is reasonable and just that high treason to the

* First published September 1947.