

The Restoration Herald

Published Monthly by the Christian Restoration Association

From the column:

"A Ready Answer"

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Date: March 2006

Series: I Want to be Left Behind (XVII)

Title: The Role of Israel in the End Times (cont'd)

"Thus, all Israel will be saved" – I know somebody reading this is thinking of Romans 11:25-26 and that Paul taught some future special salvation system for Jewish folks in connection with Christ's 2nd Coming. First, let's get some background on "all Israel." Nowhere do we find any Biblical teaching that suggests that all Jewish people (according to the flesh) will be saved by any other means than faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah. In fact, the Old Testament material alone should caution against such a notion. The very first generation of Israelites to exit Egypt under God's deliverance failed to reach the promised land because of rebellion and unbelief – all above the age of 20 (except for Joshua, Caleb, and probably Aaron's son, Eleazar) died in the wilderness (Numbers 13-14). Although very numerous, both Isaiah and Jeremiah painted a consistent picture that only a "remnant" of national Israel would be saved.¹

In the days of King Ahab, Ben-Hadad's Syria threatened Israel with extermination and, while the prophet Elijah was afraid that he was the only one left who was faithful to the covenant, God told him that there were still 7,000 Israelites who had not "bowed the knee" to Baal (1Kings 19:18). So, when battle with the Syrians soon followed, Israel's army consisted of "all of the sons of Israel" – 7,000 men (1Kings 20:15), even though there must have been many more Israelite men around "according to the flesh"! The psalmist, Asaph, equated "Israel" with those who were "pure in heart" (Psalm 73:1), thinking in terms of spirituality rather than the flesh. Consistently, the phrase "all Israel" refers to the faithful covenant-keepers.

Jesus mentioned to a Roman centurion that many would gather from distant lands (Gentiles) to eat with Israel's patriarchs in the heavenly kingdom, but the "sons of the kingdom" (Jewish unbelievers) would be cast out (Matthew 8:10-12).

So, when we come to Paul's comments in *Romans*, we must see 11:25-26 in the context of other teachings and the literary context of the whole book of Romans. First, remember that Paul early declared that the one and only Gospel message is "**the** power of God for salvation, to everyone who believes – Jews first" (1:15-16). Be sure to note what rejecting the Gospel means for Jewish folks (Acts 13:46). Second, note Paul's initial comment about "all Israel" – physical descent from Abraham and Isaac alone does NOT make one a part of "all Israel," for the "Children of God" are determined by faith rather than flesh (9:6-8) and God has worked over the centuries for the benefit of those He would call to glory – a combined body of Jews and Gentiles (9:22-24; see Ephesians 2:11 - 3:11 here). He finishes Romans 9 by noting the OT prophetic "remnant" doctrine and that the exclusion of many Jews is rooted in their own misguided approach to things – trying to be saved by their own works of the Mosaic Law rather than faith in the promised Messiah (9:27 – 10:4). As he moves into chapter 11, he notes that Jewish folks have not been intentionally and completely excluded, for Paul himself is a Jew and the early church was Jewish – the predicted "remnant" that is chosen (11:1-7). Then, he summarized, for

Gentile believers, what is going on so that they do not become arrogant against Jewish unbelievers, describing how Jewish/Gentiles believers in Jesus partake of God's richness, while unbelieving Jews were "pruned away," but can be grafted back in by their faith (11:11-24). Now for the tricky part!

A portion of what we think of as "Israel" has been hardened by unbelief and will remain so until all of the elect Gentiles have come in and "thus, all Israel will be saved, by a redeemer who comes from Zion and removes sin" (11:25-27). To understand this passage, you must note several things. First of all, "thus" does NOT mean "afterwards" – for the Greek term is *houtos* and means "in the manner described," referring to the preceding verses that describe salvation by faith – faith in Christ is how all are saved (remember 1:15-16?). Second, we should already know who/what Paul is referring to as "all Israel" from Romans 2:28-29 and 9:6-8! Third, verses 26-27 are not predictions of the 2nd coming, but citation of OT predictions (Isaiah 59:20-21 & 27:9) that were looking ahead to Messiah's first coming, in which a new covenant, focused on the forgiveness of sins, would be (and now has been) provided (see: Hebrews 9:26-28). Fourth, as a reminder we are told that national/fleshly Israel does have a valid place in God's program as the descendants of the Patriarchs and the lineage/people group from which the promised Messiah was to emerge, even though they were opposing the first generation church (11:28-29). Finally, Paul clearly identified "when" God's mercy is extended to Israel – NOW, as he was writing (11:30-32). However, I can find no evidence here for the notion that God is going to do something special and different to save Jewish folks at the end of the Church Age.

Heavenly Jerusalem – Those who continue to focus on national Israel and a future restoration of the Jerusalem Temple also need to grapple with some things in this area as well. The Mosaic Law noted that, after the conquest of the land, God would select a worship site in Canaan and this would be where all Jewish men were to gather yearly for several major feasts (Deuteronomy 16). The site selected was a city that David captured from the Jebusites (2Samuel 5:1-10) and renamed *Jerusalem*.² However, Jesus clearly signaled the approaching end of this Jerusalem-centered worship system when talking with the Samaritan woman (John 4:20-24). The shifted emphasis away from earthly Jerusalem towards the heavenly city is further developed by Paul in his letter to the *Galatians* (4:21-31) and is a repeated point in the letter to the *Hebrews* (11:9-16; 12:18-24; 13:12-14). (to be continued)

¹ Only a "remnant" of national Israel would be saved - Isaiah 4; 10:20-23; 11:11-16; 28:5; 37:31,32; 46:3; Jeremiah 23:3; 31:7; 42:1,2; 50:20

² Earthly Jerusalem chosen to be the worship site – 1Kings 11:13,32,36; 2Kings 21:7; 23:27; 2Chronicles 6:6; 12:13; 33:7