

Argument of Distraction: Israel or the Church?

God has had a romance with this world and with the universe, and it started with Abraham's family. It expanded to the nation of Israel through whom the Gentiles were to be saved, and it finally rested upon the church that was established by Jesus Christ. This romance that God has had with the universe is the key to its success and the key to its existence. Without God's love and romance, the world is lost.

All of this controversy as to whether the church is God's elect or Israel is God's elect is only a ploy to get our attention away from God's master plan. There has been much criticism toward the nation of Israel; and many believe that they have been replaced by the church so that the church now receives the spiritual birthright promises of God.

However, Israel still remains God's people and timepiece of prophecy. We can see this throughout the Old Testament, as we see this nation on numerous occasions being brought back to life by God.

So what about the statements that say the New Testament supports the replacement of the nation of Israel by the church? Many of those who believe this point to Romans 9:11 as one of their proofs. Some say this text shows that the church is now the elect and that Israel is no longer central in God's master plan for the end times.

They also infer that the church has replaced Israel and now receives all the promises of God that were originally intended for Israel. Even this difference and division between Israel and the church is part of the warfare that the devil is eager to keep at a boiling point among Christians.

However, Romans 9:11 unmistakably refers to both the nation of

Israel and the church as being the elect. The term "election" referred to in these chapters as the nation of Israel is an important part of the foreshadowing of the church's election. Paul was writing to the Romans who were Gentiles; he very easily could have said that the church had replaced the nation of Israel. He could have told them that all of the promises of Israel now belong to the New Testament-believing Gentile church. But that's not what he did. Certainly there are promises made to the church, but not at the expense of God's election and call of Israel.

Paul starts each chapter of Romans 9:11 with supportive statements that indicate that Israel is still central in God's thoughts and that He has not cast them off. His is a special message of prayer and hope for that nation. This means that the promises still belong to them, and God still has a plan for them. Paul even emphasizes that the Jews' ruin and guilt under the law did not change the promises that God made to them:

"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, *my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises*; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen" (Rom. 9:1-5, emphasis added).

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:1-3).

"I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew" (Rom. 11:1-2).

If anything, Paul reaffirms that God has continued to bless Israel. As a nation and as a people, they can still be grafted back into the representative olive tree of redemption and salvation. Paul did not despise them, but rather he acknowledges that all of the promises of the Old Testament still belonged to them. He doesn't say that the Word of God did not reach the Gentiles; but he says that according to a sovereign God, the Gentiles were saved and were now part of the church because of what happened to Israel. This happened without Israel losing any of the original covenant promises that God made to them. Not only do we have the powerful unconditional promises made to Israel in Genesis, but it is repeated by the Psalmist:

"He remembers His covenant forever, the word which He commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac, and confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the allotment of your inheritance" (Ps. 105:8-11).

I believe that if Israel had obeyed God, God could have called the Gentiles through the nation of Israel. The Messiah could have come for them and from them, and there would have been no rejection of Jesus Christ by the Jews. The crucifixion could have still happened, fulfilling the Old Testament types and promises of the Messiah as our sacrifice, but perhaps implicating the Roman government only.

After all, Jesus came to the Jews first and attempted to give them the message from His Father in heaven. John 1:11 says, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (KJV). Unfortunately, most of them did reject Him. Finally, Paul went

on to say about the gospel in Romans 1:16 that "It is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (KJV).

There was a place for the Jews. They had their opportunity for messianic redemption to come through them, but they missed it. I believe that if they had received Jesus, there would not have been the need for the church, as we know it today. The church could have been a part of a massive connection to the Jewish people with the nation of Israel leading the way in a great undertaking of the gospel. As it is, many Jewish people have found Christ and are part of the church without the official backing of their nation. In the future time of the millennium, the Jewish people as a nation will help rule the Earth during the reign of Christ.

If only Israel had been obedient from the very start. If only they had followed Christ and believed in Him; they could have avoided all their troubles and persecution over the past 2,000 years. The promises that the church now enjoys that specifically apply to them could have been applied to Israel as well. But alas, on Paul's first missionary journey in the city of Antioch, Paul and Barnabas decided to turn to the Gentiles after their message was rejected by the Jews. Of course, this was good news to the Gentiles.

The Old Testament is filled with Scriptures that promise that God wanted to reach beyond the Jews to the Gentiles and that salvation would come to them as well, and God could have used the Jews to do that. Yet God continually reached out His hand to His covenant people, Israel. When the Messiah did come, it was because of the nation of Israel and the promise God made to them, which in turn blessed the church.

The covenant that God made with Abraham that many nations would be blessed through him was passed down through the Jews and to the church, and to nations around the world. The church has not replaced the nation of Israel, but what this great

promise did was to give God the victory in warfare over the devil as the church was included as part of the children of Abraham.

In Romans 11, Paul basically said that the failure of the Jews led to the opening of the door to the Gentiles. He said that their slumber and blinded eyes were for the riches of the Gentiles, and that there would be a time of fullness for Israel. He reminds the Gentiles in Rome that Israel was still the root of the tree and the Gentiles were just the branches. This does point to a plan by God to bring Israel back as part of His plan in the end times.

Indisputably, Israel remains in line to receive the unconditional covenant promises that God gave them in Genesis, just as God gave promises to the Arab world. For us to deny the promises to Israel and the possession of their land would be to deny the possession of land for the Arab world. This unconditional promise has been made to Israel, even though they have repeatedly disobeyed God and have not always walked in His ways but have walked in willful sin. They have been disobedient over the centuries of the Old Testament, and even at the time of Christ, they rejected Him and crucified Him. As far as the promises to the Arab people are concerned, they still have their land, despite the fact that they became involved with the religion of Islam, and they too have not accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

The promises from God to both these two great peoples of the sons of Isaac and the sons of Ishmael are still in effect today. God has not forgotten what He originally promised to them in the book of Genesis.

God will not go back on His Word.

*The preceding is excerpted from Pastor **David Siriano's** book, Intergalatic Warfare, and is used with permission. Siriano was an Assemblies of God minister for 45 years before retiring*

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