

DELIVERANCE FROM ZION

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INTRODUCTION:

We now come to the place where Paul makes his dramatic statement about the future blessedness that awaits Israel. He has shown us that Israel according to the promises must receive the blessings (by definition), but here he is saying that Israel according to the flesh will be included in them. How so?

THE TEXT:

“And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? 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 . . .” (Rom. 11:23-32).

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

Paul begins with a conditional, on the human level. If Israel repents of its unbelief, then God is certainly able to graft them in again (v. 23). Just consider the nature of the case. If wild olive branches can be grafted in, then how much more can severed natural branches be grafted in (v. 24). But Paul then moves from the logical possibilities to the prophetic necessities. He does not want the Romans to be ignorant of this mystery (Paul’s common word for something prophesied in the Old Testament and made manifest in the New). The partial blindness of Israel (excluding the remnant) was predicted until the fullness of the Gentiles had been reached (v. 25). And knowing this would keep the Gentiles from getting conceited about it (v. 25). So then Paul cites one of the places that tells us about this (v. 26)—which was Isaiah 59:20-21; 27:9). God’s covenant with Israel was that He would take away their sins (v. 27). So, for the time being, the Jews were enemies of the Gentile Christians, because of the gospel. But as concerns election, they are still beloved for their fathers’ sake (v. 28). How long will this last? It is irrevocable—which is why the Jews will in fact return to Christ (v. 29). The Gentiles used to be in unbelief, and were brought out of it by the unbelief of the Jews (v. 30). In a reverse twist, God will bring the Jews out of unbelief through the mercy that was shown to the Gentiles (v. 31). Put this all together, and we see that concluding the Jews in unbelief (for now) was the first move in His plan to bring mercy to the whole world—Jews included (v. 32).

THE MYSTERY REVEALED:

Now Paul says that this is a prophetic mystery, now revealed, and revealed so that Gentiles would not become conceited. Salvation is from the Jews (John 4:22), and always will be. Let’s look at how it works. The prophet Isaiah laments the condition of man. Our iniquities have separated us from God (Is. 59:2). This detestable condition is applied by the apostle Paul to all men, to Gentiles and Jews alike (Rom. 3:15-17; Is. 59:7-8). Everything falters; everything fails. There is no soundness anywhere. All men are in need of a Savior. When God saw this, when He saw that there was no man, He sent a man—He sent a Deliverer (Is. 59:16). This great warrior will put on His panoply—the armor of Jesus (Is. 59:17). Remind you of anything? Of course—this is the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:11). Put on the whole armor of God therefore (Eph. 6:13-17), which is another way of saying that we are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. What does Jesus do in this armor, back in Isaiah? First, He judges the wicked (Is. 59:18). As a result, the Gentiles stream to Him. They shall “fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun” (Is. 59:19). The world will gather to Him, and He will save them. And then the Redeemer shall come to Zion—this is the place Paul quotes with reference to his brethren in the flesh, collating it with Is. 27:9. The covenant is that Israel’s sins will be forgiven, and this is

equated with the Spirit never departing from the mouths of all their descendants (Is. 59:21). And this ties Is. 27 into the mix as well. “Jacob shall take root” and “Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit” (Is. 27:6). Glory to God, and may He hasten that day.

GIFTS AND CALL IRREVOCABLE:

God has, in His wisdom and providence, tied the fortunes of the world to the fortunes of the Jews. The apostasy of the Jews opened wide the door of salvation for the Gentiles, and their eventual conversion will be a blessing for them (of course), along with the remainder of the Gentiles. This is a decision that God will never repent of—this is the mystery that He has revealed, and which we are to live out.

Now this means that it is not possible to be in sync with the purposes of God in this world without loving the Jewish people. Christians who fall prey to anti-Semitism are trying to disrupt the grace of God for the whole world. It is counterproductive; it is anti-gospel. At the same time, loving the Jews as God does, for the sake of their fathers, is not the same thing as approving of what the Jews do, or agreeing with Zionism, or agreeing with the present position of the current administration of the Israeli government. That is not the point. The point is that animus against the Jews is out, and to give way to it is rebel against God’s gospel strategy. One might say “what about the Palestinian Christians that Israel has killed?” Look, this teaching comes from Paul, who was willing to be damned for the sake of the Jews (Rom. 9:3), and he maintained this attitude while outlining their hypocrisies throughout this book, and while in full knowledge of the fact that they had spent a great deal of energy trying to kill him.

MERCY TO THE GENTILES:

Mercy to the Gentiles has been God’s game plan to bring mercy to the Jews, and mercy to the Jews is what He is going to use to bring about “life from the dead” for all (Rom. 11:15). And so what we are called to do is preach God’s mercy in Christ to all the nations—with a view toward cultural transformation, remember—and to live it out in such a way that the Jews want to get themselves some of that. Personal conversion, certainly, planting of churches, even more. But what we are doing is building Christendom, and doing so in a way that leaves the doors wide open for the Jews. One of the great failures of the first Christendom was at just this point, and it is something we have to address. We are called to provoke emulation (11:14); we are not called to be envious.



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