

Considering Natural Israel

Paul writes regarding his 'countrymen after the flesh' in his letter to the Romans, "What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened", Rom 11:7. We read that there was an 'elect' amongst the Jews, those who were saved at the very beginning of the Church: "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls," Acts 2:41 and in Acts 4:4, "But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand."

Isaiah had prophesied of what was to come: "Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.' And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am, send me.' And he said, 'Go, and say to this people - 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' **Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.**' Then I said, 'How long, O Lord?' And he said: '**Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste.**' Is.6:6-11.

So it is in Matthew's gospel we read of Jesus saying that this prophecy of Isaiah *was being* fulfilled: "**For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.**" Mat.13:15. Despite the covenant promises to Israel the time of their full restoration had not yet come and in the last few verses of the Acts of the Apostles we read again of this partial hardening of Israel. When the Jews could not receive the message Paul brought to Rome we read: "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet, 'Go to this people, and say, "**You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.**" **For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them. Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.**" Acts 28:25-28.

The Times Of The Gentiles

Still outstanding was what Jesus prophesied, that Jerusalem was yet to be surrounded by armies and was to become a desolation and that Israel would fall by the sword and led captive into all the nations, and Jerusalem would be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. (cf. Luke 21:24) It was God's plan that His salvation would come to the Gentiles and to this day Israel's full restoration still lies in the future. God's Covenant with Abram had yet to be fulfilled; "You shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram (meaning father) but your name shall be Abraham (father of a multitude) for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations." Gen.17:4&5.

Paul's desire was nevertheless to see his fellow countrymen saved, but he knew that only a remnant would respond because of the partial hardening that God had imposed. "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved." Rom 10:1.

This is Paul's hearts desire not a general command to the Church for nowhere else in scripture do we read that we should specifically pray for Israel, but for all men. We might feel the same about our own fellow countrymen but our concern should be for all men everywhere.

Paul is able to explain about natural Israel, "So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer

be grace. What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written, "**God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.**" Rom.11:5-8

So we can understand that it is God who has closed their eyes and ears but there was an elect from among Israel that received salvation. There is a warning, however, not to think that those who are not of Israel are any better than Israel for we were rebellious and no better until the Lord saved us and it is by his grace and mercy that we stand. Paul explains this: "Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: **a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.....**As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that He may have mercy on all." Rom.11:25 & 28-32.

God has purposed it so that all, both Jew and Gentile, are the same at this time so we are all equal, a level playing field, so that the Gospel will reach all.

Speaking of Israel Peter also writes, "For it stands in Scripture, behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone, chosen and precious, and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame. So the honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense. They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do." 1 Pet.2:6-8.

Israel's Future Restoration

So it is that Jesus prophesied regarding natural Israel's demise yet points to a future restoration "when the fulness of the Gentiles has come in." Then, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will banish ungodliness from Jacob; and this will be My covenant with them, when I take away their sins." Is.59:20&21 and Rom.11:26&27.

Understanding just when this restoration comes is found in scripture yet many misunderstood it. In recent times, when Israel captured the whole of Jerusalem again in the 'Six Day War', in 1967, many thought the times of the Gentiles must have been fulfilled but to this day the temple mount is in the hands of the Palestinians. Jerusalem, in effect is still being trampled by the Gentiles. And as we read prophecy of scripture we will see that even after Jesus has come for the Church, Jerusalem is still under siege and not delivered until Jesus comes to the Mount of Olives. (cf. Zech. 14:4)

Paul writes, "Thus all Israel will be saved," Rom.11:26, but to correctly understand this it is necessary to understand the mystery of the partial hardening of Israel. (cf. Rom.11:25) Unlike our modern usage of this word, a mystery is something that was once hidden but is now disclosed. "For they are not all Israel though they are descended in the flesh from Israel; neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but through 'Isaac your descendants will be named', that is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants," Rom.9:6-8. Whilst a promise remains for a remnant of natural Israel at this present time, in Christ the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile, circumcision and uncircumcision, has been removed and both have been made one.

The Commonwealth of Israel

Paul writes to the Gentile Church in Ephesus, "Therefore, remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh who are called 'Uncircumcision' by the so called 'Circumcision', which is performed in the flesh by human hands, remember that you were at one time separated from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise,

having no hope and without God in this world, but now in Christ you who were formerly far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace., and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by having put to death the enmity.” Eph.2:11-16.

So we can understand, “For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.” Rom.2:28&29. This means - “There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him.” Rom.10:12. We need to fully understand that in Christ, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Gal.3:28. “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.” Col.3:11.

Because natural Israel still exists understanding the difference between the natural and the spiritual is essential. Nevertheless, Paul wrote, “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the Law I became as one under the Law (though not being myself under the Law) that I might win those under the Law. To those outside the Law I became as one outside the Law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the Law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. 1Cor.9:20-22. In this age all, whether Jew or Gentile, can be saved and come into the true commonwealth of Israel in Christ.

The Gospel Goes To All Men

When Paul was saved the Lord spoke to Ananias of Paul saying, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry My Name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." Acts 9:15. We can see from this scripture Paul was sent to the Gentiles but also to Israel in God's plan. At the time of Jesus' birth it was prophesied over Jesus by Simeon, when Jesus was presented at the temple, that He was to be: “A light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel,” Luke 2:31&32. Matthew in his gospel declares that the prophecy spoken by Isaiah had been fulfilled, "Behold, My servant whom I have chosen, My beloved with whom My soul is well pleased. I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles..... and in His Name the Gentiles will hope." Matt.12:18 &21.

The Lord's ministry continues now through His body, who we are, and so we see Paul turning away from the Jew to go to the Gentiles. Paul writes to the church in Rome explaining that salvation came first to the Jew, just as tribulation and glory would come in that order. Speaking of the gospel Paul writes, “It is the power of salvation to every one who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” Rom.1:16, going on to say, “there will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, glory and honour and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek,” Rom.2:9&10.

This is not a rule for us to go to the Jew first before we can go to the Gentile but the order in which the good news of Christ was spread to all mankind. To the Church in its infancy Jesus prophesied, “When the Holy Spirit is come upon you, you will My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest parts of the earth,” Acts 1:8.

So it was on Paul's first missionary journey that he speaks in the synagogues in Cyprus and Pisidian Antioch and afterwards declared, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' And when the Gentiles heard this,

they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." Acts 13:46-48.

Sadly the very opponents to the gospel were the Jews: "But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers," Acts 14:2, and because of them Paul writes, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." Rom.2:24, and has to write to the Church in Rome, "Is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles," Rom.3:29, quoting once more from Isaiah, "The root of Jesse will come, even He who arises to rule the Gentiles; in Him will the Gentiles hope." Rom.15:12.

The gospel brought this prophesied division to both Jew and Gentile: "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles," 1 Cor.1:23, only the elect being saved from both Jew and Gentile. Paul again speaking of this 'mystery': "This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." Eph.3:6.

The gospel also brought the same tribulation and affliction. Speaking to the Church in Thessalonica Paul writes: "For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God's wrath has come upon them at last!" 1Thess.2:14-16.

And it was with great opposition that Paul proclaimed the gospel to the Gentiles, being "appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth." 1 Tim.2:7. "But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth." 2 Tim.4:17.

The Curse of the Law

Israel was brought out of Egypt and were given the Law through Moses. And as they were about to enter the Promised land blessings were set before Israel on Mount Gerizim and cursings were set before them on Mount Ebal depending on whether or not they to carry out all of God's commandments. One curse for disobedience was that "The Lord will scatter you among the peoples, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth," Deut.28:64. But with this curse a future promise had already been spoken, "Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you, and you return to the Lord your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." Deut.30:1-6.

We see in this prophecy the foreknowledge of God that Israel would be disobedient and not fulfill the commandments of the Law and so be scattered amongst the nations yet He would restore them to the land once more and THEN circumcise their heart.

The Law was to be a tutor to lead us to Christ for man by his own works is unable to obey the commandments of God. So it was that Moses prophesied, "I call heaven and earth to witness

against you today, that you will surely perish quickly from the land where you are going over the Jordan to possess it. You shall not live long on it, but will be utterly destroyed. The Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord drives you. There you will serve gods, the work of man's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the Lord your God and listen to His voice. For the Lord your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them," Deut.4:26-31.

When, in 1948, Israel became a nation once more, and since then many have returned to the land of Israel, many conclude this to be a fulfillment of these prophecies not realizing they have not yet searched for Him with all their heart and most Jews still remain scattered throughout the nations.

That there would be a partial return of Israel to the land before the whole house of Israel would be brought back by the Lord is prophesied by Ezekiel. Speaking of Israel's full restoration Ezekiel prophesies of a future time when God says He will "take you from the nations and from ALL the lands, and bring you into into your own land," Ez.36:24, Ezekiel prophesied that it would be THEN that they would have God's Spirit put in them; they would THEN come into the New Covenant. "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God." Ez.36:25-28.

For the full restoration to occur Ezekiel prophesies of the reunion of southern kingdom of Judah and northern kingdom of Israel at that time (cf.Ez.37:15-20). Only after this do they enter the promised New Covenant the Church has already entered. "THEN I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God." Ez.37:21-23.

God is not only foretelling of the full restoration of natural Israel but of them then coming into the New Covenant that the Church has already come into. This restoration occurs when Jesus will return to be their King: "My servant David (speaking of Jesus) will be King over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them. They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever." Ez.37:24-28.

The Great Supper Of God

But before this promised restoration Ezekiel prophesies of a war on the mountains of Israel. It is yet unfulfilled prophecy and foretells that "In the latter years you will come into the land that is restored from the sword, whose inhabitants have been gathered from **many nations** (not all) to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste; but its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them," Ez.38:8. We see that this war happens after a partial return has taken place, making today a possible time for this fulfillment.

The end of this war sees what is described as God's 'sacrifice on the mountains of Israel. Today we would call this area the 'West Bank'. This war sees God defending Israel "And My holy Name I shall make known in the midst of My people Israel; and I shall not let My holy Name be profaned any more, and the nations will know that I am the Lord, the Holy One of Israel," Ez.39:7. The slain will litter the ground. "Speak to every kind of bird and to every beast of the field, assemble and come, gather from every side to My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood. You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, as though they were rams, lambs, goats and bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan. So you will eat fat until you are glutted, and drink blood until you are drunk, from My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. You will be glutted at My table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all the men of war," declares the Lord God. Ez.39:17-20.

We read of this same event in the Book of Revelation. "Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, 'Come, assemble for **the great supper of God**, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.' And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh." Rev.19:17-21.

The Wrath Of God

To understand the timing of this battle we must realise that when Jesus returns for His Church - His elect - at the end of this age, natural Israel is still unsaved. Of Jesus' return it says, "Behold, He comes with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, **even those who pierced Him**: and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him." Rev.1:7. Zechariah prophesies of this same event, "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, **the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him** as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for Him as one grieves for a firstborn son." Zech.12:10.

So it is we see, when God pours His wrath upon the world after the Church has been caught up, immediately after the great tribulation, when Jesus comes in the clouds, that a remnant of Israel are sealed, 12000 from each tribe, that no harm will come to them. This first 144,000 mentioned in the book of the Revelation may not literally be of that number but certainly that perfect number, those chosen to not be harmed by the coming wrath of God.

We also see during this time of God's wrath that the Gentiles will tread the holy city underfoot for forty two months and two witnesses testify until the beast will kill them, "And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified." Rev.11:7&8. This is described as the 'Second Woe'. (cf.Rev.11:14) Jerusalem continues to be Satan's target even during this time and Jerusalem is still being trodden underfoot by the Gentiles!

Before the 'Third Woe' Satan gathers together "for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty," the "kings of the whole world" and "gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Armageddon." Rev.16:14-16.

We see that Armageddon is not the place of the war, but rather the gathering place before the battle. The 'Third Woe' is the seventh bowl of wrath of God's judgement and also the judgement when seventh angel sounds the seventh trumpet. Gathered to make war with Jesus as He returns to the earth with His saints, we see the detail of what Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Church,; "The

lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming," 2 Thess.2:8.

Israel's Full Restoration

So it is after the coming of Jesus and after this war that Ezekiel now prophesies, "Therefore thus says the Lord God, "NOW I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the **whole house of Israel**; and I will be jealous for My holy Name. They will forget their disgrace and all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me, when they live securely on their own land with no one to make them afraid. When I bring them back from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, then I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of the many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God because I made them go into exile among the nations, and then **gathered them again** to their own land; and **I will leave none of them there any longer**. I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I will have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," declares the Lord God." Ezek.39:25-29.

Thus it is, that we see natural Israel's restoration is not in this age but after the wrath of God. The restoration is when Jesus returns to the earth with His saints, the Church that is His body, saved in this age and previous ages from amongst both Jew and Gentile. These will have immortal bodies, ready to reign with Christ. Jesus then takes up His place in Jerusalem and Ezekiel prophesies of the new temple that will be in Jerusalem during the Millennial reign of Christ, the remnant of natural Israel occupying the land prophesied to Abraham for them from "the river of Egypt as far as the river Euphrates," Gen.15:18. The division of the land for the twelve tribes includes divisions for the priests and the Prince. (cf. Ez.48)

This time is the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy, "Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of ALL the countries where I have driven them and bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply. I will also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the Lord. "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; And He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; And this is His Name by which He will be called, the Lord our righteousness.'

Therefore behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when they will no longer say, 'As the Lord lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, 'As the Lord lives, who brought up and led back the descendants of the household of Israel from the north land and from ALL the countries where I had driven them.' Then they will live on their own soil." Jer.23:3-8.

Passover will no longer be the Feast remembered by Israel but the Feast of Tabernacles will be celebrated in Jerusalem. "In that day the Lord will be King over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His Name the only one," Zech.14:9. "Those who are left of all the nations" after God's wrath has been poured out in the great and awesome 'Day of the Lord' will go up "year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths," Zech.14:16. The name of the city from that day will be "The Lord is there" - Jehovah Shammah. Ez.48:35.

Conclusion

More can be understood of the Church's reign with Christ, His Church which is His body, ruling and reigning with Him in the Millennium. Only then will natural Israel have entered the promised Covenant with Abraham that applies to them. Let us rightly divide scripture in this regard and not place natural Israel above the Church.

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