

I. The "Signs of the Times" (Matt. 16:1)

These are events in the period of time between the first and second coming of Christ that serve as reminders or signposts that the end is coming and the day of the Lord is at hand.

Signs that confirm that the present course of history is coming towards Christ's return

Signs that remind us that Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father

Signs that Christ is ruling all things for the sake of His church

Cautions:

These signs do not refer exclusively to events immediately prior to Christ's return

These signs do not enable us to date the time of Christ's return

These signs are not all abnormal, catastrophic, or spectacular

General Characteristics of these signs:

They remind that history is moving towards an appointed goal—Christ's return

They stress the antithesis in history between God's kingdom and the powers of evil

They remind us that now is the Day of salvation

II. Three Kinds of Signs: (outline from "The Bible and the Future," Anthony Hoekema)

Signs of the present working and triumph of God's grace (covered in this lesson)

The preaching of the gospel to the nations

The salvation of "all Israel"

Signs of the conflict between Christ and Antichrist (covered next time)

Tribulation

The Great Tribulation

Apostasy

The Antichrist

Signs of God's Judgment anticipation the Great Judgment

Wars and rumors of wars

Famine and earthquakes

The battle of Armageddon

1. The Sign of the preaching of the gospel to the Nations

Old Testament background of the nations being included in God's purposes

Matt. 28:18-20

Matt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15-16; Lk. 24:46-49

Movement and advance of the gospel in the Book of Acts

The epistles and the apostles' view of their preaching

2. The Sign of the salvation of "all Israel" (Romans 9-11)

(see following notes)

The Issue Under Debate

A. Does the Bible teach that at some point in time there will be a massive conversion of Jews to faith in Christ? Is this what Paul is teaching here in Romans 11?

11:12 "their (Israel's) fullness"

11:15 "their (Israel's) acceptance"

11:26 "and so all Israel will be saved"

B. Common interpretations of this passage

1. "All Israel" refers to the sum total of the complete church, including both Gentile Christians and the remnant of believing Jews. (John Calvin)
(compare use of "Israel" in Rom. 9:6 and Gal. 6:16)

Weaknesses of this view:

- A violent transition from the literal meaning of "Israel" in 11:25
- The other ten uses of "Israel" in Rom. 9-11 clearly refer to national Israel in contrast to the Gentiles
- Paul calls this teaching a "mystery" and is using it to correct misunderstanding by Gentile Christians. If "all Israel" is simply referring to the salvation of all believers, why does Paul bring it to their attention as a "mystery"? No one would doubt that!

2. "All Israel" refers to the total number of individual Jews who through the centuries have been added to the church by faith in Christ. (William Hendriksen, Anthony Hoekema)

Weakness of this view: The clear parallel between their "rejection" and their "acceptance" requires the same subject to both (verse 15). This subject can only be ethnic Israel, since the remnant was never rejected.

3. "All Israel" refers to a great multitude of Jews who will be converted to faith in Christ during the interval between the (secret) rapture of the Church and the glorious return of Christ. (dispensational view)

Weakness of this view: A fundamental problem which has been discussed elsewhere in this course - this view is based on the secret rapture theory which divides the "one momentous event" of Christ's return.

4. "All Israel" refers to a great multitude of Jews who will be converted to faith in Christ sometime before Christ returns (in addition to all believing Jews throughout history). This "revival" among the Jews will result in revival among Gentiles as well. (postmillennial or "optimistic amillennial" view) (Puritans, Jonathan Edwards, John Murray, Iain Murray)
(This is the view defended in this lecture.)

II. The Context and Argument of Romans 11

A. Romans 9-11 deals with the problem of Israel's unbelief.

Paul teaches that the rejection of the gospel by his kinsmen after the flesh is not to be interpreted as an abrogation of the divine promises. Neither does it indicate an abdication of divine power.

B. Romans 11 addresses the specific question of whether God has rejected "his people"

1. Note the distinction in this section between:

- a. Corporate election - God's choosing and setting apart of Israel as a nation
- b. Election unto salvation - The remnant chosen by grace (applies to both Jewish and Gentile Christians)

2. Paul's answer to this question about national Israel:

- a. Their unbelief is not total (verses 2-10)
(These verses set the immediate context for our study on verses 11-32. Paul speaks here about God's judicial hardening. The question that naturally comes to mind is, "Is this the last word of God with respect to the Jews?" This leads into the next section in which Paul gives the clear answer, "No, this is not the final word!")
- b. Their unbelief is not final (verse 11-32)
(It is in this answer that the subject of the future conversion of the Jews is addressed)

III. The Worldwide Purpose of God for the Jews

(A "mystery" - not something complicated that you must try to figure out, but something that God has revealed.)

A. Israel's unbelief - used by God to bring the Gentiles into the kingdom (verses 11,12,15,19,30)

(A clear instance of God's sovereign power to bring good out of evil)

Before Christ - mostly Jews saved

After Christ - mostly Gentiles saved

(Note refrain in Acts - message rejected by Jews, so Paul goes to the Gentiles)

B. Israel's "fullness" (verses 12, 15, 25-27)

Summary: Scripture teaches a future conversion of the Jews, an end of their hardness, brought about by the salvation of the Gentiles which arouses Israel to envy. In turn, the effect of this mighty revival among the Jews will bring even greater revival and conversions among the Gentiles.

1. Terminology used to describe this future conversion (and resulting revival):

- their fullness . . . how much greater riches (v. 12)
- their acceptance . . . life from the dead (v. 15)
- grafted in (vv. 23-24)
- all Israel will be saved (v. 26)
- receive mercy (v. 31)

2. This future conversion does not mean "every single one"

(typical Scriptural usage of the word "all")

3. "The fullness of the Gentiles" (NIV "full number") (v. 25)
 - refers to blessings for the Gentiles that are parallel and similar to the expansion of blessings for Israel denoted by "their fullness" and "their acceptance" (vv. 12&15). The phrase does not exclude subsequent blessing resulting from Israel's fullness.

IV. Application of this Doctrine

A. Understanding something of the worldwide purposes of God should fill us with a greater sense of expectancy. (verse 23 - God is able!)

Note: The parallel advance of good and evil in the world.
We must beware of an unbelieving pessimism.

Example: William Carey writes these words after the conversion of Krishna Pal in 1800: "He was only one, but a continent was coming behind him. The divine grace which changed one Indian's heart, could obviously change a hundred thousand . . . We want (need) only men and money to fill this country with the knowledge of Christ. We are neither working at uncertainty nor afraid for the results. . . He must reign, until Satan has not an inch of territory."

B. Understanding something of the worldwide purposes of God should cause us to pray and work for the conversion of the Jews and all the "nations" of the world.

Note Paul's example: Rom. 10:1; 11:13-14

V. Possible Questions

A. What evidence is there in Romans 11 concerning the issue of the **timing** of these things?

1. The fact that Paul is laboring for the conversion of the Jews (vv. 13-14) indicates that he does not envision their conversion taking place only after a secret rapture.

2. The clear interrelation of God's blessing on Jews and Gentiles argues against the church having been "taken out of the way" at this time.

3. It is left uncertain how this revival relates to the timing of Christ's return. In other words, it does not allow us to set dates.

B. In what way if any are the Jews still God's chosen people?

1. Paul speaks of Israel's continuing "election" or "calling" in verses such as 11:28-29. He is here referring to their "corporate election". In this sense, they are the recipients of great "gifts" from God, as described in 9:3-6; 3:1-2. However, this is a different kind of election than individual election unto salvation. (See also 11:7)

2. This passage says nothing about Israel as a modern nation/state.

3. The church (composed of Jews and Gentiles) is the fulfillment of the Old Testament "people of God" (See Ephesians 2)