

Will All Israel Be Saved?

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“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.’ ” (Romans 11:25,26, emphasis mine)

Many Christians use Romans 11:25,26 to reach and support a conclusion that has nothing to do with Paul’s intent. I would like to illustrate three reasons for this aberration:

1. Improper use of Scripture to support a paradigm
2. Superficial treatment of subject material
3. Lifting words out of context and/or imposing a theological construct

1. Improper Use of Scripture to Support a Paradigm

Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament, was written about 450 years before Jesus was born. Consider Malachi’s final words: **“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.”** (Malachi 4:5,6)

The Bible indicates that Elijah was taken to Heaven in a fiery chariot around 850 B.C. (2 Kings 2:11) During the time of Christ, Malachi’s prediction fueled the idea that Elijah would appear before Messiah could appear. We see this anticipation when John 1 records the story of John the Baptist:

“Now this was John’s testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, ‘I am not the Christ.’ They asked him, ‘Then who are you? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ . . . [Then] ‘Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?’ John [the Baptist] replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, ‘I am the voice of one calling in the desert, “Make straight the way for the Lord.” ’ ” (John 1:19-23, insertion mine)

John’s parents were well known because his father, Zechariah, was a priest. The facts about John’s miraculous birth were also well known. (Luke 1) The inquiry into John’s identity is important because one of the strongest arguments the Jews used against Jesus was the

prophecy of Malachi. The Jews concluded that Messiah could not appear until Elijah arrived.

Because Malachi's "Elijah prophecy" was often used against Jesus, **"The disciples asked him [Jesus], 'Why then do the teachers of the law say [keep saying] that Elijah must come first?' Jesus replied, 'To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist."** (Matthew 17:11-13, insertions mine)

Jesus could say that John was Elijah because spiritually speaking, John the Baptist was a parallel of Elijah. The Holy Spirit enabled Elijah to be a mighty prophet and the same Holy Spirit enabled John the Baptist to be a mighty prophet. In fact, Jesus said no prophet was greater than John the Baptist. (Matthew 11:11) Both men were heralds of God's efforts to establish His kingdom on Earth. Because the Jews misunderstood Malachi's prediction, they rejected Jesus. Their failure also illustrates how an improper use of Scripture can be devastating.

2. Superficial Treatment of Subject Material

Many wonderful Bible themes are given superficial treatment today. "Sound bites" are simplistic and worse, they can produce a concept that is totally wrong. For example, consider the role and importance of the Ten Commandments. Are the Ten Commandments a religious relic or a declaration of God's will that lives in perpetuity? Of course, this question cannot be addressed in this short article, but I wish to use this debate among Christians to illustrate a point.

If the Ten Commandments were abolished at the cross, then there is no law against idolatry, the worship of images, taking God's name in vain, lying, adultery, murder, or stealing. Many Protestants will respond that there are laws against these behaviors after the cross because nine of the Ten Commandments are mentioned in the New Testament. So, many Protestants want to believe that just the fourth commandment was abolished at the cross. They simply do not want to observe God's seventh-day Sabbath; instead, they would rather protect an ancient tradition of Sunday observance. In spite of what many Protestant believers say, all of the Ten Commandments are mentioned in the New Testament, including the fourth. (Compare Genesis 2:1-3 with Hebrews 4:4,9,10.)

To prove their claim that the Ten Commandments were abolished at the cross, Protestants will sometimes resort to a superficial treatment of Bible texts. For example, Romans 10:4 says, **"Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."** (Romans 10:4)

What does Paul mean when he says that **"Christ is the end of the law. . ."**? The key question is: Is a sinner declared righteous in God's sight after the cross because there is no law, or is a sinner declared righteous in God's sight after God covers him with the righteousness of Christ? Paul did not contradict himself in the book of Romans. Paul understood the Ten Commandments were obligatory after the cross and this is why he wrote, **"Do we, then, nullify**

the law [the Ten Commandments] **by this faith** [in Christ]? **Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.**" (Romans 3:31, insertions mine)

When Paul wrote "**Christ is the end** [Greek: teleos] **of the law. . .**", he meant that Jesus met the goal of the law. The law could not find any imperfection in Him. Christ's perfect life is so important because He had to live a perfect life, overcoming every temptation before He could even go to the cross. The Father required Jesus to live a perfect life so that Jesus could transfer the "righteousness of Christ" to His believers. Then, after Jesus had established the righteousness needed for our salvation, the Father sent Jesus to the cross so that our death sentence could be transferred to Him. There is nothing within this process that required the Sabbath commandment to be abolished.

Romans 10:4 perfectly aligns with Romans 1:17: "**For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed** [a righteousness which a sinner cannot achieve or create], **a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'**" [insertion mine] Jesus created this righteousness by overcoming every temptation. Sinners receive this righteousness through salvific faith (faith that results in salvation) through obeying the demands of the Holy Spirit without regard for the consequences! No sinner can enter Heaven and enjoy the wedding banquet unless he first receives and wears the righteousness of Christ! (Matthew 22:11-13)

I have used Romans 10:4 to illustrate how a Bible text can be distorted and used in a superficial way to support a tradition. Remember, Hebrews 10:31 says that if anyone willingly and knowingly distorts the Word of God, God will deal harshly with that person.

3. Lifting Words Out of Context and/or Imposing a Theological Construct

A sentiment widely held by Christians today is that after a pre-tribulation rapture occurs, the Jews will become believers in Jesus. They will repent of their rebellion and recognize Jesus as the Son of God and "all Israel" will be saved at the Second Coming.

Because this sentiment is a theological construct (i.e., a construct is made up of many supporting pieces), it is like a house of cards. Because of space limitations, we will consider one doctrine that ruins this construct, although several doctrines could be discussed. This doctrine concerns the heirs of Abraham. Let us discover how the Bible describes the heirs of Abraham.

The Bible teaches that all believers in Christ are Abraham's seed. (Galatians 3:29) Jesus said that only those who live by faith, as did Abraham, are Abraham's seed. (John 8:39) Paul reaffirms that it is not the natural children who are heirs of Abraham. (Romans 9:8) The book of James teaches that early believers in Christ considered themselves to be part of the twelve tribes of Israel. (James 1:1; 2:1) And last, but not least, ". . . **Jesus declared** [to Nicodemus], '**I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.**'" (John 3:3, insertion mine)

Before the cross, Jesus made an important declaration that John recorded in John 3. If we work backwards to the days of Abraham, the following declaration makes perfect sense just as it reads: “. . . **For not all who are descended from Israel [Jacob] are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’ In other words, *it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring.***” (Romans 9:6-8, insertion and italics mine)

Who are the children of the promise who will inherit Earth made new? One could say, “the children of the promise are the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” but he would be incorrect. Abraham had two sons and only one son, Isaac, participated in the promise. Isaac had two sons and only one son, Jacob, participated in the promise! Then, Jacob (Israel) had many sons with four women and Paul said of them, “not all who are descended from Jacob are Israel.” So, “Who are the children of the promise?” Speaking for the Father, Jesus defined the heirs of Abraham when He said to Nicodemus: “. . . **no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.**” (John 3:3)

Given what Jesus said in John 3 and John 8, as well as what Paul wrote in Romans 9, it is necessary to take a closer look at Romans 11 to determine what Paul meant when he wrote, “. . . **all Israel shall be saved, just as it is written.**” Paul had something very different in mind than what millions of Protestants have in mind today when they read Paul’s words.

Notice the whole phrase, “**And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written . . .**” Paul is not postulating a new idea in Romans 11 when he says that all Israel will be saved. Paul has already said in Romans 9 that not everyone descended from the loins of Jacob are part of Israel and it is not the natural children who are Abraham’s offspring. To prove these two points, Paul quotes from Isaiah: “ ‘**The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,**’ declares the Lord. ‘**As for me, this is my covenant with them,**’ says the Lord. ‘**My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever,**’ says the Lord.” (Isaiah 59:20,21, italics mine)

This is the problem. Since Adam and Eve sinned, salvation has always had a simple qualification: God’s people are people who obey His Word, believe His promises, and repent of their sins. All people who meet this qualification are the heirs of Abraham. Thus, all Israel will be saved and Isaiah confirms this!

Paul wrote the book of Romans and sent it to both Jew and Gentile believers in Rome for several reasons. One important reason was to clarify the true constituency of Israel. If we compare Paul’s words in Ephesians 2 with Romans 9-11, there is perfect harmony. After the Levitical code was abolished (Colossians 2), Gentiles no longer were required to “become Jews.” They can be grafted directly into the family of Abraham through faith in Christ! Long ago, Isaiah and Hosea predicted this wonderful development! (Isaiah 19, 56; Hosea 1) There is no longer a distinction between Jew and Gentile because of Christ! All that matters to God is going forward in obedience, faith, and repentance.

Romans 11 has been grossly distorted and if Paul was alive today, he might write Romans 11:26 this way: "Soon, all of God's children – those within every religious system on Earth – will be saved because God promised Abraham long ago that he would be the father of many nations."

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