

Israel, Palestine, and the Love of God – *Rom 11:11-36*

Introduction – As long as I can remember, there has been trouble in the Middle East. And as long as history records, it appears, there has been trouble in that region. And with the attack by Hamas in October, here we are again. The geo-politics of this longstanding battle is complex and beyond the scope of this sermon, except to say that time and again, attempts to simply place landmark stones or put up fences between neighbors has failed at every turn. Something much deeper is in the works. And as Christians, our loyalties are with King Jesus Christ in the eternal purposes of God. Our ultimate desire is the same as the apostle Paul's, and that is the salvation of the Gentiles and the Jews (Gal 2:2, Rom 10:1), and the end of enmity between them (Eph 2:14-16).

Recent events have once again spawned "last days" hysteria and an incorrect interpretation of God's plan for Israel. This happens over and over each time there is some new turn of events and players in the struggle over this land. Currently that struggle is between Hamas, a terrorist organization that controls the Gaza strip and is committed to the total genocide of all Jews, and Israel, a pseudo-secular government filled with much of the progressive muck and political corruption to be found in our country.

But this runs further back than a Muslim-Jew problem. While the word "Palestine" is a Hellenized version of "Philistine," there is little proof of a genetic connection between the Palestinians of our day with the ancient Philistines; the name now refers to a region and the people who have populated it in recent centuries. They are mostly Arabs and their ancestor is Ishmael. The current enmity in the middle east is the ongoing enmity between Abraham's two sons. Ishmael and Isaac need to follow their father and his faith to the rightful Messiah-King, the Lord Jesus Christ (John 8:56).

In contrast to the last days madness, there is a historic, protestant, and optimistic view of what God intends through the rejection and then return of Israel. The notes to the Geneva Bible, loved by the early Puritans on this passage state, "*He sheweth that the time shall come that the whole nation of the Jews, though not every one particularly, shall be joined to the church of Christ.*"

The Rejection and Return of Israel (Rom 11:11-36) – Paul, writing to the church at Rome, is explaining how the apostasy of most of the Jews was actually a blessing to the Gentiles and how much more of a blessing the fullness of Israel coming to Christ will be (vv11-15). In verse 12, the "*failure*" (diminution, loss) from being cut out of the covenant is contrasted to a future "*fulness*" (abundance) that will be theirs when they are brought back in. The church at Rome and among the Gentiles will see such an increase of blessing as they follow the Lord, magnifying the ministry of Paul (of which we are the fruit), that they will provoke the Jews to jealousy. Israel was supposed to be this great blessed people that turned others to Yahweh (Deut 4:6-7). But the Lord turned this around because of the apostasy of Israel. Their apostasy was the storyline of God to bring the gospel to the nations. This is what Paul now explains.

The Jews, as a nation, were about to experience a great disaster (AD 70) and through that the Gospel would go to the nations like never before. He then warns the Gentile church in Rome not to become haughty, for they are wild branches grafted into the olive tree – how much easier it would be for God to cut them out and how much easier would it be for Him to graft in the natural branches (vv16-24). But Paul means to prove more than logical possibilities; he begins to declare the prophetic certainties. Something very important is illustrated here; there is not a separate covenant with Israel. Gentiles were grafted into that covenant and Israel (except for the remnant, see vv1-10), were cut out. This means that we are to understand that the Church is the renewed Israel.

The partial blindness of Israel (except for the remnant) was predicted until the fullness of the Gentiles had been reached (v25). By explaining this "mystery" Paul expects the church in Rome not to become conceited (v25). Paul then turns to Isaiah 59:20-21, conflating those verses with Isaiah 27:9, to explain God's intentions to take away the sins of Israel (vv26-27). So, for the time being the Jews were enemies of the Gospel, but still beloved for their father's sake (v28, Deut 7:8, 10:15). These gifts are irrevocable, which is why the Jews will return to Christ (v26, 29). Paul is talking about a Jewish return to Christ that will be as public and as visible as their rejection of Him was. The Gentiles were once disobedient but were brought out of unbelief by the unbelief of the Jews (v30). In a twist of events, God will bring the Jews out of unbelief through the mercy that He showed to the Gentiles (v31). And so, the plan of God was to place the Jews in unbelief (for the time being) in order to bring mercy to the whole world – Jews included (v32). Understanding this even just a little is a mind-blowing experience and brings overwhelming praise to God for His sovereign goodness (vv33-36).

Gospel Hope - God has always only had one covenant people, and it remains the same today. The New Testament church is the true "*Israel of God*" (Gal 6:16). Using an illustration, Paul explains how this happened. There was a cutting off and there was a grafting in. Jews or Gentiles who forsake the Lord cannot lay claim to God's blessing and favor. But through all of this, God intends to save the world. The command is to disciple the nations (Matt 28:18-20), and God gives what He commands. The Gentiles will be disciplined. Israel will also be saved, and this will only expand the glorious work of redemption throughout the world. The scriptures do not give us a doom and gloom picture of the future. The scriptures give us a clear optimistic view of the work of the redemption of the world when taken overall (John 3:16-17).

This Present Enmity - How will the age-old enmity between Palestine and Israel, between Muslim and Jew, between the two sons of Abraham, between black and white and every other ethnic and national enmity be brought to an end? Christless means will only produce, at best, a cease-fire agreement or a peace treaty (that will soon be broken) and history proves this right. Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace and He is our peace. We must be reconciled to the Father before we can be reconciled with His kids. And that is what the Gospel has done in principle (Eph 2:14-18). When the Gospel is preached, Jesus is preaching, for He is that Word, that evangel, that gospel (Eph 2:17). And it is this means, the preaching of the Gospel, and not some second cataclysmic event (such as a rapture or another Great Tribulation), which will bring it forth as God blesses through His Holy Spirit.

Covenant Admonition - Heed the warning of Romans 11. You are not saved by your covenant status. You are not saved by your pedigree. You are not saved by your creedal recitations. You are not saved by saying you believe in justification by faith. You are saved by a living faith given to you by God Himself, a faith in His promises including that His Son, Jesus, died for your sins and was raised from the dead for your resurrection life in Him. If you are a covenant member, it is all by grace and the goodness of God. Do not presume nor despise His kindness, and do not doubt His severity.

Covenant Glory - Heed the glorious hope of Romans 11. Rejections and apostasies are not evidence of the impotence of the Gospel. When Jesus was rejected and crucified, it produced the great atoning work of salvation. When Israel rejected the witness of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, bringing the destruction of Jerusalem, it sent the power of the Gospel out to all nations. We ought to learn that rejections and apostasies are means by which God propels the Gospel out in His perfect plan.

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