

Israel's Future as a Nation

by John F. Walvoord

The sermon discusses the future of Israel as a nation, exploring the premillennial and amillennial views, and emphasizing the significance of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31.

Scripture: Genesis 12:9, Jeremiah 31:35, Romans 11:26, Galatians 6:15, Ephesians 2:12

Topics: "Israel's Future", "Eschatology"

Description

John F. Walvoord delves into the prophecy relating to Israel's future as a nation, exploring the various viewpoints on whether Israel exists today and has a future. He discusses the denial of Israel's existence, the belief in Israel's continuity as a race but not as a nation, and the premillennial teaching that Israel has a future as a nation in the millennial kingdom. Through a detailed analysis of biblical promises, historical evidence, and New Testament passages, Walvoord affirms that Israel's future as a nation is intricately tied to God's everlasting covenant and the fulfillment of prophecies, emphasizing the distinction between Israel, Gentiles, and the church.

Transcript

One of the central questions in prophecy relating to Israel is whether Israel has any future as a nation. The question is by no means easily answered because there is a confusing number of answers to the question. These can be itemized as follows: (1) The point of view that denies that Israel exists today and therefore has no future as a nation, as illustrated in the book *The Seed of Abraham* by Albertus Pieters. In Pieters' opinion, Israel is nonexistent as either a race or a nation in the ordinary sense of the term. (2) The idea that Israel continues as a race but not as a nation. This concept is illustrated in conservative postmillennialism of the last generation in works like *Systematic Theology* by Charles Hodge and is held by some contemporary amillennarians such as William Hendriksen in his book *And So All Israel Shall Be Saved*. (3) The teaching of most premillennarians that Israel has not only continuity as a race, but a future as a nation in the millennial kingdom. This is the normal premillennial approach.

Variations in the statement of these three major points of view abound. The opinion of Albertus Pieters has already been discussed and the evident facts pointing to the continuance of Israel as a race have been stated. The formation of a political state in the Middle East in 1948 bearing the name Israel as well as the continuance of Judaism as a religion seems a sufficient answer to the first point of view. The principal question which remains is whether Israel continues merely as a race without a future or whether it has promises which can be fulfilled only by its continuance as a nation and its revival as a people in the

political government of the millennial kingdom.

The Continuance Of The Physical Seed Of Abraham

Though it is allowed by all conservative expositors of Scripture that Abraham had a physical seed, and in particular that Jacob was the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, an examination of this evidence serves to provide a basis for the theological implications which are based upon this fact. To be sure, modern liberals have asserted that the accounts of Abraham and his posterity are only traditional myths, but as this is done only by sweeping denial of the authority of Scripture, it does not require refutation in a discussion with orthodox scholars who accept the inspiration of the Bible. If the record of Scripture is valid, there can be little question concerning the fact that Isaac was born as a son to Abraham and Sarah when they both were past age, by miraculous intervention of God. Nor is there much question concerning the fact that Isaac had the twin boys Esau and Jacob. Much of the content of the book of Genesis deals with the story of Jacob, the birth of the twelve patriarchs, and the beginning of Israel's history as such. Even unbelievers in Scriptural revelation will acknowledge that the modern Jew is a descendant of Jacob and recognize the historical sequence which has brought Israel to the present hour.

It should also be evident from Scripture and history that Israel is more than just a race. From the time they left Egypt they assumed the proportions of a great nation and, though for a time they lived with little political unity during the period of the judges, there is abundant evidence to sustain the rise of the nation under Saul, David, and Solomon. Their moral deterioration, the Assyrian and Baby-Ionian captivities, and the regathering and restoration of Israel recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and supported by Zechariah and Malachi provide a setting for the New Testament. When Christ was born, Israel was a nation even though it was under the heel of Roman oppression.

With the destruction of Jerusalem, however, and the scattering of the children of Israel, their national characteristics were blurred for many centuries. It is of tremendous significance, however, that the ties which bound together the race of Israel were of such character that in our modern day the nation Israel has once again returned to its ancient land, established itself as a political state, and is recognized as such by most of the civilized world. In any ordinary meaning of the term, Israel has continued as a nation and is in existence today in that capacity.

The Promises To Israel As A Nation

Much of the evidence which supports the concept of Israel as a nation is bound up in the promises which are given to her which will be discussed later. Sufficient for the present purpose, however, is to point out that the original Abrahamic covenant expressly promised that God would make a great nation out of Abraham's seed (Genesis 12:9.). To this nation is given the promise of possession of the land, which implies national characteristics.

Relative to the express question concerning the perpetuity of Israel as a nation, the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 17:7, 8 is of special importance. Here the covenant with Abraham is declared to be an everlasting covenant, and the land is promised to Israel as an everlasting possession. It would be of course impossible for the covenant to be everlasting and the possession of the land to be everlasting unless the nation also continued forever. The Hebrew expression for "everlasting" is *olam*, meaning "in perpetuity." While it might not quite be the equivalent of the infinite term "everlasting," it would certainly mean continuance as long as this present earth should last. It is the strongest expression for eternity of which the Hebrew language is capable. Inasmuch as these promises are reiterated to Isaac and to Jacob

and are constantly referred to throughout the Old Testament, the nature of these promises confirms the continuance of Israel as a nation.

The matter of Israel's regathering, judgment, and restoration still to be fulfilled will be the subject of later discussion, and only can be anticipated here. It follows, however, that if the Scriptures teach Israel is to be regathered, brought back to their ancient land, and actually possess the area promised by God to Abraham in Genesis 15:18-21, these predictions in their very character would demand Israel's continuance as a nation. Inasmuch as these promises do not rest on a few isolated texts, but on hundreds of prophecies in the Old Testament which directly or indirectly anticipate a future day of glory for Israel, it is hardly too much to say that there are few doctrines that are better attested in the Bible than that of the future of Israel, provided that these prophecies are interpreted in their normal and literal sense.

The Express Promises Of Israel's Perpetuity As A Nation

In addition to the strong predictions of Genesis 17, the most pointed pronouncements are made elsewhere in the Old Testament concerning Israel's continuance as a nation. One of these, which should be decisive in itself, is that expressed by Jeremiah at a time of Israel's apostasy and captivity. In this context of Israel's disintegration Jeremiah predicts a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jeremiah 31:31) which will replace God's covenant with them in the Mosaic law (Jeremiah 31:32). After defining the millennial situation in which this covenant will be fulfilled for the nation Israel, Jeremiah adds this word of assurance: "Thus saith Jehovah, who giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, who stirreth up the sea, so that the waves thereof roar; Jehovah of hosts is his name: If these ordinances depart from before me, saith Jehovah, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith Jehovah: If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, then will I also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith Jehovah" (Jeremiah 31:35-37).

In view of the fact that some amillenarians contend that the Abrahamic promise concerning Israel is conditioned on their obedience and therefore is set aside upon disobedience, it is most significant that this strongest prophecy in the Old Testament for the continuance of Israel is given in a setting when Israel is manifestly in apostasy and about to be carried off into captivity. It would be difficult to provide a setting anywhere which would make it clearer that this is God's sovereign purpose entirely apart from Israel's worthiness and the fulfillment is determined solely by God's power and will. As long as the sun and moon endure and as long as the heavens have not been measured, Israel will continue as a nation. The divine purpose to continue the nation Israel is supported by the continuance of these elements of natural creation as long as the present earth exists. It is not simply that they will continue as a seed, but as Jeremiah expresses it, Israel shall not cease "from being a nation before me for ever."

The promise of Israel's perpetuity in the new covenant in Jeremiah 31 is supported by the provisions which are itemized: (1) It is designated a covenant with "the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah." The covenant is therefore limited to the descendants of Jacob. (2) It is a covenant designed to replace the Mosaic covenant also made only with Israel. As such it will be written "in their hearts" rather than on tables of stone. (3) The fulfillment of the covenant may be expected after "the time of Jacob's trouble" mentioned in Jeremiah 30:7. Jeremiah predicted in 31:28: "And it shall come to pass that, like as I have watched over them to pluck up and to break down and to overthrow and to destroy and to afflict, so will I watch over them to build and to plant, saith Jehovah." The time of fulfillment is further identified as the time of Israel's regathering, indicated in Jeremiah 30:10 and Jeremiah 31:8 and following. (4) The time of its fulfillment is

described as a period when there will be universal knowledge of the Lord. Jeremiah speaks of this in these words: "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah, for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah" (Jeremiah 31:34).

Isaiah referred to this same time in Isaiah 11:9 when he predicted: "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea." This was an especially strong prediction in view of the fact that both Isaiah and Jeremiah lived in a day when ignorance of the Lord prevailed and apostasy characterized Israel. The new covenant therefore is related to the future day of Israel's glorious kingdom on the earth. (5) The period of its fulfillment will be one of great spiritual blessing. God will be publicly identified with Israel, and Israel will be God's people. Their sins will be forgiven, and they will be the beneficiaries of God's wonderful grace. It should be obvious to any student of premillennial interpretation that all of these prophecies fit naturally and easily into the context of the millennial hope.

The new covenant is frequently mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 61:8, 9, in a similar context speaking of Israel's tribulation followed by regathering and blessing, it is affirmed that the covenant will be everlasting. Jeremiah himself reaffirms the covenant in 32:37-40 and mentions its everlasting character and fulfillment in the time of Israel's regathering.

The Prophet Ezekiel repeats all the familiar elements found in earlier statements of the covenant, namely that Israel is to be regathered, to be reunited in one kingdom, to be ruled by one king, is to be forgiven and cleansed from idolatry, and will dwell forever in the land of their covenant of peace (Ezekiel 37:21-28). God is going to be present with them, and Israel will be known all over the world as a nation blessed of God.

Because these prophecies interpreted in their normal and natural way would unmistakably affirm the premillennial interpretation of prophecy, amillenarians deny these conclusions and usually hold that the new covenant as given to Israel is being fulfilled by the church today. Though this is quite foreign to the Old Testament presentation, they claim that the New Testament authorizes this transfer of promises from the nation to the church and that particulars such as the coming time of tribulation, regathering of Israel, their re-establishment in the land, their being ruled by one king, and being united as one nation must be interpreted spiritually as being fulfilled in the gathering out of the church from all nations into the one body of Christ. Before turning to other New Testament evidence confirming the continuance of Israel as a nation, attention must be directed to this amillennial interpretation of the new covenant.

There are five references in the best texts of the New Testament in which the term new covenant (*kaine diatheke*) is found (Luke 22:20; I Corinthians 11:25; II Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 8:8; 9:15). In addition there are several other references which are properly within the sphere of this study as referring to the new covenant without the precise words being used (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Romans 11:27; Hebrews 8:10, 13; 10:16; 12:24). It is, of course, hardly possible to treat the subject adequately without a more prolonged discussion than can be undertaken here. A more complete presentation is afforded in *The Millennial Kingdom*, chapter 18, by the writer, and in Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost's *Things to Come*, chapter 8.

In regard to Israel's continuance as it relates to the new covenant, it is significant that only one passage specifically identifies the new covenant with that spoken of by Jeremiah. This is found in Hebrews 8. It is not too much to say that amillenarians who are careful scholars consider this passage one of the most important in their argument identifying the church with Israel.

The argument of Hebrews at this point is that Jesus Christ as our High Priest has a more excellent ministry and is the Mediator of a better covenant providing better promises than that of the Aaronic priesthood built on the Mosaic covenant. This is stated in Hebrews 8:6: "But now hath he obtained a ministry the more excellent, by so much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which hath been enacted upon better promises." The writer of Hebrews then proceeds to prove this by quoting the new covenant of Jeremiah as demonstrating that the Mosaic covenant was faulty and needed to be replaced. He states in verse 7: "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then would no place have been sought for a second." He continues by quoting Jeremiah's new covenant with the words: "For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah." Verses 9 through 12 are a quotation from the provisions of the new covenant given in Jeremiah 31. The writer of Hebrews then concludes in verse 13: "In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. But that which is becoming old and waxeth aged is nigh unto vanishing away."

The interpretation of this quotation as it relates to the new covenant is complicated by the fact that conservative scholars have no less than five differing points of view, one of which is the amillennial interpretation. Briefly stated, these five positions are these: (1) The postmillennial interpretation that the promise of future blessing for the Jews will be fulfilled in the people of Israel in the latter days of the period of the church on earth when the Jews are converted and accept Christ as Saviour. This was typical of the conservative postmillennialism of the nineteenth century. (2) That the new covenant in both the Old and New Testaments concerns Israel and Israel alone and has no relationship specifically to Gentiles or the church. This was the viewpoint of Darby and is one of several premillennial approaches. (3) That the new covenant has a twofold application to the church in the present age and to Israel in the future millennial age. This view was popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible. (4) That there are in fact two new covenants, one for Israel to be fulfilled in the future, one for the church to be fulfilled in the present age, both founded upon the grace of God and the sacrifice of Christ. This view was supported by Lewis Sperry Chafer in his Systematic Theology and by Charles Ryrie in his book, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*. (5) The amillennial position that the church is true Israel and that the prophecies given to Jeremiah and other prophets are being fulfilled in the church age in a spiritualized way.

The postmillennial point of view has been largely discarded with a defunct postmillennialism and does not figure prominently in current eschatological discussions. Interpreters usually choose either between the amillennial point of view or one of the three premillennial interpretations. Darby's teaching that the new covenant both in the New and Old Testaments concerns Israel alone is not usually accepted by premillenarians, though it has many attractive arguments. The principal difficulty is that the Lord's Supper seems to relate a new covenant to the church which makes it difficult to confine the term to Israel's future. Usually the choice is between Scofield's position or that of Chafer in premillennial circles. For the purpose of our present discussion relative to the perpetuity of the nation Israel, it will suffice to show that the amillennial point of view is not that which is taught in Hebrews, though there are problems that remain in the premillennial understanding of this passage.

Oswald Allis defines the amillennial interpretation in these words: "For the gospel age in which we are living is that day foretold by the prophets when the law of God shall be written in the hearts of men (Jeremiah 31:33) and when the Spirit of God abiding in their hearts will enable them to keep it (Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26f)" (*Prophecy and the Church*, p. 42). He argues that the quotation before us in Hebrews 8 is a clear and unmistakable statement to this effect. Allis writes: "The passage speaks of the new covenant.

It declares that this new covenant has already been introduced and that by virtue of the fact that it is called 'new' it has made the one which it is replacing 'old,' and that the old is about to vanish away. It would be hard to find a clearer reference to the gospel age in the Old Testament than in these verses in Jeremiah" (ibid., p. 154). An examination of the passage in Hebrews, however, does not support what Allis claims. Though the writer quotes the entire new covenant as given by Jeremiah, in his exegesis he uses only one word, namely, the word new. His argument in brief is based on the fact that Jeremiah predicted a new covenant in the Old Testament. This prediction proved that the Mosaic covenant was not intended to be an everlasting covenant and would in fact be done away. He does not say that Jeremiah's covenant is in effect now. While the New Testament in other passages alludes to the covenant of Jeremiah as in the quotation in Hebrews 10:16 and states that Jesus is the Mediator of a new covenant in Hebrews 12:24, nowhere in the New Testament is the church specifically put under the detailed provisions of the covenant of Jeremiah. The normal premillennial interpretation therefore considers these references (1) as an application of the general truth of the grace of God illustrated in the new covenant with Israel but also of the church, or (2) as two new covenants, one for Israel and one for the church. The problem yields to the patient exegesis of all passages relating to this subject in the New Testament, but even the New Testament, as in Romans 11:27, refers the detailed fulfillment of the covenant of Jeremiah to the second coming of Christ and the deliverance of Israel, a passage which amillenarians characteristically avoid as the plague. The amillennial point of view is the most extreme of the five possible viewpoints and is not supported by a careful study of the new covenant in the New Testament.

A study of further particulars in the New Testament related to the question of Israel's continuity serves to confirm that the word Israel is used in the New Testament in the same sense as in the Old and that promises to Israel continue to be inviolate, including their future restoration.

Amillenarians, while denying any future to Israel as a nation, are, however, divided as to whether Israel continues as a race. Allis follows the traditional amillennial approach in making Israel and the church one and the same as far as New Testament teaching is concerned. More recently amillenarians of both conservative and liberal backgrounds have tended to regard Israel as something distinct from the church. William Hendriksen, for instance, a well-known amillenarian, takes the position that Israel means Israel in the New Testament, not the church. In a similar way Charles Hodge, the postmillenarian of the last generation, held that the term Israel is never used in the New Testament except for those who were physical descendants of Jacob. It would seem in view of the fact that some amillenarians and postmillenarians concede that Israel means Israel in the New Testament it would be unnecessary to debate this point. However, in view of the evidence that many amillenarians consider it, as Allis does, "an almost unprecedented extreme" to insist that Israel actually means Israel (Prophecy and the Church, p. 218), it is necessary to dispose of this point first.

New Testament Evidence

A study of the New Testament demonstrates beyond question that there is a continued contrast between Israel and Gentiles as such throughout the New Testament. Israel as a nation is addressed again and again after the beginning of the New Testament church in such passages as Acts 3:12; 4:8, 10; 5:21,31,35; 21:28, etc. A most significant illustration is Paul's prayer for Israel that they might be saved found in Romans 10:1 which is a clear reference to the use of the term Israel as a nation outside the church. The term Jews, derived from the tribe of Judah, is also used in I Corinthians 10:32. The argument of Paul in Romans 9 is certainly built on the idea of Israel as a separate nation. He surveys their peculiar promises and privileges in Romans 9:4, 5 and expresses the wish that he himself might be cursed if by

this means his brethren, i.e., Israel, could be saved (Romans 9:3, 4).

Not only is Israel regarded as a separate nation, but Gentiles as such are expressly excluded. In Ephesians 2:12: "Ye [Gentiles] were at that time separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." In the discussion which follows it is important to note that Paul does not indicate that Gentiles come into these promises given to Israel, but rather pictures both Jew and Gentile as being joined in an entirely new entity, namely, the body of Christ. The fact, therefore, that in the New Testament Israel and Gentiles are contrasted to each other is strong evidence that the term Israel continues to mean what it meant in the Old Testament, namely, the descendants of Jacob.

Perhaps more to the point in this discussion is the New Testament contrast between natural Israel and the church. As has been previously pointed out, there is a tendency on the part of some amillenarians to regard the church as the New Testament Israel. The New Testament in continuing the contrast between Israel and the church first of all notes that natural Israel--that is, unsaved Israelites--are not in the church. There is then no teaching that the nation of Israel as such becomes the church as such. Instead the nation Israel is promised a future, and, though this future is largely fulfilled by spiritual Israel, the existence of these promises as distinct from God's program for the church maintains the difference between the two terms.

A central passage in the New Testament on this point is found in Romans 11 where Paul raises the question that is before us: "I say then, Did God cast off his people?" (Romans 11:1). In his argument which follows he, first of all, answers this question in an absolute negative by asserting that there always has been a remnant of Israel and that there will be a remnant in the future. He notes the fact that the great majority in the nation Israel are spiritually blinded and that their hardness of heart has occasioned God's turning to the Gentiles in the present age. He anticipates, however, that this is a temporary situation which will be followed by a future blessing of the nation Israel. He states in Romans 11:15: "For if the casting away of them is the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" He acknowledges that Israel at the present time is broken off from the olive tree or the place of divine blessing, but he predicts a future ingrafting of Israel into "their own olive tree" (Romans 11:24). This is to take place where Israel's blindness is lifted (Romans 11:25), which will be followed by the fulfillment of Israel's covenants and their restoration as a nation as indicated in Romans 11:26-32. This extended passage then expressly denies the contention that Israel has no future or continuance as a nation. The hope that is set before is not the hope given to the church which already is in the place of blessing in this present age and has no title to the promises given to Israel of possession of the land and other portions of their predicted future.

Not only is the nation Israel contrasted to the church, but spiritual Israel is contrasted to Gentile Christians who are in the body of Christ. This perhaps is the crux of the entire question, namely, are Gentile Christians ever designated Israelites? The argument of Romans 9:11 where this problem is expressly discussed makes clear that spiritual Israel and Gentile Christians continue to be contrasted. Spiritual Israelites never become Gentiles, and Gentile Christians never become Israelites. The statement of Romans 9:6, "For they are not all Israel, that are of Israel," does not deny this, but rather indicates that all who are physical descendants of Abraham do not necessarily inherit the spiritual promises. The contrast is between Israel according to the flesh and Israel which is spiritual, rather than a reference to Gentile believers. As has been previously pointed out, Gentile believers are the spiritual seed of Abraham who received the promise of blessing to all nations which was to come through Abraham. This does not mean,

however, that they received the promises that came through Jacob to the nation of Israel.

Probably the most important text used by those who attempt to prove that Israel and the church are one is that found in Galatians 6:15, 16, which reads as follows: "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God." It has been argued that the expression "Israel of God" is used here of the church as a whole.

It may be observed first that if this passage does use the term "Israel of God" for the church, it is the only passage in the entire New Testament where there is any evidence in the text for such a conclusion. Seen in the setting of its context, it is by no means the clear assertion that the church is the Israel of God as is sometimes claimed by its proponents. Paul is stating in these closing verses of the epistle to the Galatians the pre-eminence of the cross of Christ before which neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availed. The important fact is that those who trust in Christ who died for them become a new creature quite apart from any rite of circumcision or its lack. Upon those who have thus apprehended the grace of God and have been delivered from the law and its religious regulations, Paul breathes a benediction of peace and mercy. Then he adds, "And upon the Israel of God." The most natural explanation of this is that Paul is stating that anyone, whether Jew or Gentile, who walks by this rule is worthy of his benediction, but especially is this so for the Israel of God, i.e., Israelites who are the godly remnant of this age, that is, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. The use of the Greek kai is best translated by the word and and only rarely is used in the sense of even as would be required if the term Israel of God is entirely equivalent to the expression "as many as walk by this rule." The passage does not state that the Israel of God and the church, i.e., the new creation, are coextensive. At the most, such identification is possible, but not probable. Paul's statement is simply a recognition of his particular interest in Israelites who have come to know Christ and expresses the hope that they would enter into the freedom of grace of which he is such an able exponent in the epistle to the Galatians.

One of the familiar arguments against the continuance of Israel as a nation is the idea that when Israel rejected Christ they failed to meet the necessary conditions for the fulfillment of their promises and are in fact disinherited as far as national promises are concerned. According to this point of view, an Israelite today has only the possibility of entering spiritually into the promises given to the church, not the promises given to Israel as a nation.

This question is largely answered by the materials already presented. The fact of continued recognition of Israel as a nation and the presentation of their future hope in Romans 11 would seem to be a sufficient answer. Two additional passages, however, may be considered.

In Matthew 21:43 Christ said in connection with the parable of the householder: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." A casual examination of this text would seem to indicate the taking away of the kingdom of God from Israel. Even amillenarians, however, have seldom claimed this text, as a careful examination of it indicates quite another conclusion. First, those to whom He was addressing this verse were by no means the total of Israel. He could hardly say to the religious leaders of His day or to those within the hearing of His voice that their unbelief was sufficient to take away Israel's future hope from the nation as a whole. Second, the question can be raised--To what nation is the kingdom of God going to be given? Certainly no other people or race are any more qualified to receive the kingdom of God than the nation of Israel. Third, what did He mean by the kingdom of God?

This declaration of Christ is understood when it is interpreted as a statement that the scribes and Pharisees who rejected Christ, illustrated in the rejection of the son of the householder in the preceding parable, would never enter into the blessings of the kingdom of God. The term nation here should be understood as a people, i.e., anyone who would bring forth the fruits of faith. Some have interpreted the word nation here as referring to Israel, but to another generation of Israel, namely, the godly remnant of the future. Still others refer it to the church. It is probably better to leave it undefined as referring to any people who meet the conditions. In any case, the passage is not a proper basis for Israel's disinheritance. The Kingdom, as the sphere of divine blessing, is for all true believers.

A second major text in the New Testament has already been mentioned, namely, the question raised by Paul in Romans 11:1: "Did God cast off his people?" To this Paul gives a categorical negative in the words, "God forbid." He not only expressly denies that God has cast off Israel, but he argues that this has never been God's method with His people when they have sinned. While the unbelieving in Israel bore their judgment, as is true even in the present age, there was a continuing program for the godly remnant in Israel as illustrated in the present age as well as in the Old Testament. The argument of Romans 11, which has already been reviewed, comes to a climax in the expression "All Israel shall be saved" (Romans 11:26). This certainly does not mean all the church shall be saved, nor is it simply a reference to all the elect in Israel. It is rather, as many scholars have pointed out, the concept of Israel's national deliverance at the time of the second coming of Christ at which time they are saved from their persecutors and delivered from physical destruction. The contrast is between the individual salvation of Israel in the present age through faith in Christ and the collective deliverance of Israel at the end of the age.

Summary

In this discussion three points of view concerning Israel's continuance as a nation have been considered: (1) The view that denies that Israel exists today, and therefore has no future. (2) The concept that Israel continues as a race, but not as a nation. (3) The premillennial interpretation that Israel has not only continuity as a race, but a future as a nation in the premillennial kingdom. It was shown that Israel's continuance as a nation depended first of all upon the nature of her promises as contained, for instance, in Genesis 17 where the Abrahamic covenant is declared to be everlasting and the land is promised to Israel as an everlasting possession. This was confirmed by the new covenant revealed by Jeremiah in which Israel was promised that it would continue as long as the moon endured. The New Testament interpretation of the new covenant was shown not to shake or alter this clear revelation in the Old Testament. New Testament evidence was cited to prove that Israel as a nation continues throughout the period of New Testament revelation. Israel continues to be addressed as a nation and is distinguished both from Gentiles and the church. Both the nation Israel is contrasted to the church as a whole and spiritual Israel is contrasted to Gentile Christians in the body of Christ. Miscellaneous texts and arguments such as Galatians 6:15, 16, Matthew 21:43, and Romans 11, when properly interpreted, would seem to confirm the conclusion that Israel is promised continuance as a nation throughout human history. The faithfulness of God to Israel is a convincing proof that God keeps His word whether to Israel or to the church, and in this we can rest our faith.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net