

Following the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit God faithfully sent preachers with the Good News calling Israel nationally to repentance. After their rejection of it He sends the gospel out to all mankind. Now all persons on earth, Jews and Gentiles, are invited to trust in Jesus' death and resurrection for them and to confess Him as Lord. Many have, more haven't.

But what about Israel, God's chosen nation? Were they "blind sided" when God sent His only begotten Son to them as a baby in a manger and a meek and humble Man, when they expected rather a mighty shining conqueror on a great white horse with a huge host of angels? Were they deceived by God because the King came that way? And now even those "dogs of Gentiles" are being brought near to Him in something new? Something He calls His Assembly? A mix of Jews and Gentiles formed into a new entity, one body, replacing Israel as His people? Had God withheld anything from them that this should surprise them? No.

Paul points out the predictions given hundreds of years previously by their prophets in their scriptures. Clear predictions that they as a nation would indeed refuse to believe and that God would set them aside and turn to the Gentiles. How humiliating! It was so unbelievable that God would even think of such a thing that they, in their national pride, could not believe it. Paul cites at least eight scriptures, from among many, explaining what was happening and seeking to reach any who would even now listen.

(1) Isaiah predicted Israel's national unbelief. *Isaiah 53:1* is the preamble to one of the most graphic and complete prophecies of the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ in scripture. (2) David declared Israel indeed had opportunities to listen, *Psalm 19:4*. (3) Moses warned them fourteen centuries previous, *Deuteronomy 32:21*, that they would be upstaged by a despised body of people, by what they accounted as a foolish nation. Who? We know now it is the believers of the New Testament, drawn out individually from various nations and from among Jews scattered all over the earth. Moses predicted this occurrence would infuriate Israel in their national pride.

(4) But Isaiah 700 years before boldly warned that God would go to the Gentiles and they would hear, *Isaiah 65:1*. Gentiles, who had had no inclination to seek God and had not been drawn to ask after the God of Israel, would hear. Why had they not been drawn before? Because of Israel's national pride and consequent miserable failure to be an attractive witness to the nations of God's power and mercy.

(5) *Isaiah 65:2* is a poignant prophetic description of

Jehovah Himself, ignored and forsaken by His chosen people, stretching out pleading inviting hands toward a disobedient people, a people who dared even to speak against Him ("gainsaying"). They were certainly ripe for God's abandonment and judgement.

(Note there is an aspect of Christ's crucifixion which often goes unnoticed by Christians today. Christ on the cross endured God's righteous judgement, wrath and abandonment for His people Israel, opening the way for their future national repentance based upon their repentance and mourning over Him whom thy pierced, Zechariah 12:10-14.)

Clearly anyone upon reading this part of Paul's letter to the Romans should logically assume God has with good reason righteously abandoned His people. But has He really cast them away? "God forbid – Far be the thought!" How do we know? Paul cites his personal ancestry as proof. He was an Israelite of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin (not even of Judah). He repeats, God has not cast away His people! God has not shut anyone out from the His grace. God actually foreknew they would forsake Him. Paul masterfully cites from their own history to prove His point. (6) The prophet Elijah at one low point in his life thought he was the only faithful one left, *1 Kings 19:10,14*. God declares He has 7000 secretly faithful who had not bowed the knee to the idol image of Baal. He has a remnant today too.

Today the remnant is selected, chosen by grace. "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace," v.5. Paul repeats the obvious, for the obvious is not widely accepted among professing Christians today either. **"And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work,"** v.6. They make the same mistake Israel made. Their works won't be adequate either. How sad. How unnecessary. For here is the truth spelled out plainly. So the mass of professing Christendom seems to be headed down the same path as Israel took. And Israel as a whole is in spiritual darkness and blindness as forecast by its own scriptures. No less than Moses (7) *Deuteronomy 29:4; Isaiah (6:9; 29:10); Jeremiah (5:21); Ezekiel (12:2)*; as well as Jesus himself spoke to their deafness and blindness. He that hath an ear... Then David (8) in *Psalm 69:22*, which speaks prophetically of the Christ offering Himself on the cross, cursed Israel's table. Their religious sacrifices, rituals and relics would become a snare to them, having rejected and crucified their Christ.

"Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompense unto them: 10 Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see,

and bow down their back alway."

Strong words indeed, but well deserved. But it will not be a permanent condition as we shall see next. God's grace in restoring Israel to its former place is predicted in Scripture as well.

But not all Israelis are blind and deaf. There is still truly an election by grace. God in His sovereignty has chosen individuals of Israeli descent, and included them with Gentiles, in the Church of God. The apostles and early believers alive at Pentecost are examples, as is Paul himself. Israel itself has nationally defaulted on its obligations to keep the Law and has been set aside for a season (11:1). The Church was a new thing God had begun. But too soon, early in the second century of the Christian testimony, a strange idea crept into the teaching. It was claimed that the Church was simply a spiritual extension of the Israel of the Old Testament. That false premise has never been shaken off, to the great detriment of the Christian testimony ever since. Even today many Bibles even have notes by Old Testament passages applying them to the Church rather than to Israel. Christendom now attempts to integrate the Old Testament promises, commandments, order of worship and service into the Church. This misguided and unscriptural practice results in much confusion, disorder, dishonor to the Lord's name and loss of blessing. Systematic quenching of the Holy Spirit and the idea of the soul's acceptance by God based upon "Church membership" are but two flagrant destructive heresies. Israel is not the Church! The Church is not Israel! Scripture could not be more plain. The believer is strongly urged to see for himself.

2Timothy 2:15 Study (strive diligently) to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Have at it. Devote your life to your study of the Word. Pray that you, through the Spirit, will be enabled to rightly divide it. (Distinguish the Old from New Testament to begin with.) God will bless, bless you and others through you.

2Timothy 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

Remnants. God delights in blessing remnants. For centuries He has called out and sustained remnants faithful to Him, among an unfaithful majority of profession that has degenerated from something once established in truth and goodness by Him. Note these as you read scripture, Old and New Testaments, for history repeats itself. Whenever God bestows a blessing upon men it is their's for enjoyment and safekeeping. However because of

repeated failure of men to keep what He has committed to us down through the ages, Christ has been actively, progressively, purifying His Church, Ephesians 5:25-27. Nowadays God is still calling out a remnant faithful to Him. This, in a day of almost universal decline and departure from the basic truths of His Son, Christ's work, and His Assembly (Church). Instead we see anti-Christian tolerance of unrighteousness, immorality, self esteem and involvement in world affairs (even interference with God's appointed "powers that be," Romans 13:1-7). This is not the first time in the history of the assembly since Pentecost. a remnant has been called out. Will it be the last?

Predictably, a remnant is despised by those they differ from or leave, and becomes the target of persecution and of Satan's wiles. But too often the truth behind the initial godly exercise gradually fades unless held dear and passed on to succeeding generations. On the other hand there is danger that the principle of scripture that led to the separation may itself become a focus of the gathering, displacing the Lord as Center. If so, a gradual departure from scripture in another direction may ensue. A true godly remnant is not heretical, though likely to be accused as such. The bottom line is scripture. Historically we find remnants within remnants within remnants, all the result of Spirit led godly exercises of godly men and women, and subsequent decline due to unfaithfulness and lack of watchfulness. Peter refers to this needful purging,

1Peter 4:17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

Happily one final faithful remnant in Christendom will be called above, when the Lord Himself separates out the believers from all else on earth claiming His Name. That which is left behind of false Christian profession, prophetically named "Babylon the Great," will be destroyed in His good time and way, Revelation 14:8; 16:19; ch.17; 18; & 19.2.

That may be soon! **MAY THAT BE SOON!** Even so come Lord Jesus!

Note there are remnants referred to prophetically in the Lord's letters to the seven churches of Asia, Revelation 2 & 3. See if you can find them. Read a little on church history* and match them up. The Reformation, about 500 years ago, is a recognized example. Others have not always been so noticeable. Where are you walking and assembling today? Are **you** where the Lord wants you to be?

By Ron Canner, December 19, 2007

* An excellent Church history from a scriptural aspect is: *Short Papers on Church History*, by Andrew Miller. Available hard copy and also on-line at www.stempublishing.com, and perhaps other sites. R. C.