

Israel's Blindness

Romans 11:25

Paul wraps up what he has been teaching about Israel's fall and their removal from a special place of honor. He has been explaining dispensational changes that have resulted from Israel's fall. God is no longer using the nation of Israel to accomplish His plans, but has instead turned to the Gentiles. This was illustrated by the olive tree. The root of the tree represents everyone's connection to Abraham, that all can be saved by faith, whether Jew or Gentile. The branches of the tree initially represent the nation of Israel, including saved and unsaved individuals. God was using the nation of Israel to reveal Himself to the world through the prophets, Scripture and Jesus Christ (Romans 9:4—5). When the leaders of Israel refused to acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Messiah by rejecting the testimony of the Father through John the Baptist (John 1:6), then rejecting the Son, Jesus Christ, and finally rejecting the witness of the Holy Spirit through Stephen, God cut off unbelieving Israel and replaced that "branch" with the Gentile nations. God is now using Gentiles to accomplish His will. Just as the Little Flock of believers was formed out of unbelieving Israel with the Gospel of the Kingdom, the Body of Christ is being formed out of unbelieving Gentiles with the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19—20).

Looking to the future, Paul gives the Gentiles a general warning that they, too, stand in danger of being cut off from the olive tree. As unnatural, wild branches, Paul states that it will be easy to have the natural branches (Israel) grafted back onto the tree making them, once again, the nation through whom God works to reveal Himself and accomplish His purpose. This is exactly what will happen following the Rapture. The Church will be called home, the Gentiles will be broken off of the olive tree, and Israel's program will resume, starting up where it was paused in the Last Days of Israel's prophetic program (Acts 2:16—21). Until this happens, Israel, as a nation, will not be dealt with according to prophecy because they have been declared to be "not My people" during this Dispensation of Grace (Hosea 1:9). At the Second Coming, Israel will be called sons of the living God and will be gathered into the Promised Land to finally live in peace with Christ as their permanent King (Hosea 1:10—11).

Ignorant of the Mystery

Paul has now turned to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13) to teach them about Israel's program because it is important for us to distinguish these dispensational changes. Israel was once in a place of honor, but now they are not. Instead of being a guide to the blind, they have been made blind (Matthew 23:16—26). The leaders of Israel were blind, unable to see who Jesus Christ was, and they led the people away from Him instead of showing them that He was their Messiah.

Blindness

Notice that Paul says blindness happened in part to Israel. There was only a small remnant, the Little Flock, who did see the light and believed in Jesus Christ as Messiah. The vast majority within Israel did not believe, and now, the nation is said to have been blinded, but only in part. This, I believe, was a normal consequence of Israel being removed from their special spiritual position, and is pictured by being broken off of the olive tree. Scripture was given and the prophets originated through the nation of Israel. They were closer to God than any other nation because He had picked out that nation of Israel and placed them in a place of honor in order to accomplish His work and reveal Himself to the world (Isaiah 45:4). When they fell, they were removed from their place of honor, removed from the special relationship between them and God, and removed from the special blessings that were theirs because God was using them. This partial blinding does not disallow any individual Jew from becoming saved, but because they were removed from the closeness they once enjoyed with God when they were in their

place of honor, they now stand distant from these spiritual advantages. They are no longer enjoying the richness and fatness of the root of the olive tree (Romans 11:17).

This blindness of Israel can be better understood from Isaiah 29:9—12. Here, Israel refused to listen to God's warning to come back to Him. They refused to listen to the prophets and turned away from them. God responded by shutting their eyes and removing the warnings He was giving to them through the prophets. Notice that verse 9 states that they blinded themselves, and as a result, God blinded them by removing His word. God allowed them to go the way their hearts desired to go. He first sent prophets to tell them what He wanted them to do and then, when they refused to listen, God stopped warning them and allowed them to be captured by the Babylonians. They were blinded because God had removed His word from them. They wanted nothing to do with God, and God obliged them by withdrawing from them. (Isaiah shows a near warning to Israel about Babylon, but it also gives a future warning for Israel in the Tribulation.)

The declaration of a partial blindness should be a clue that God had changed His dealings with the nation of Israel. This is an important dispensational distinction which harmonizes with the knowledge that God is now going to both Jew and Gentile without distinction (Romans 10:12; Galatians 3:28). The Gentiles no longer needed to go through the nation of Israel for their salvation, but were allowed to come to God individually, as was shown with Cornelius in Acts 10. After the Rapture, God will revert to His previous dealings with Israel according to prophecy. Gentiles will once again look for God through the nation of Israel, even after the Millennial Kingdom has been inaugurated (Zechariah 8:23).

Fullness of the Gentiles

Another dispensational distinction that Paul mentions is the fullness of the Gentiles. He ties it to the partial blinding of Israel, although they are not synonymous. The partial blinding of Israel happened after their fall, and the fullness of the Gentiles will happen after the end of the Dispensation of Grace. Israel will remain partially blinded until the fullness of the Gentiles.

The fullness of the Gentiles is often mistakenly thought of as a point in time when every Gentile who is ordained to be saved has come into the Body of Christ by getting saved. This phrase is often confused with the term, "Times of the Gentiles" mentioned in Luke 21:24.

Fullness is often about completeness. It can refer to a ship which has been filled with a crew, or a container that is completely full. It is often used in connection to believers being filled with God's power, His richness or His Spirit. In Romans 15:29, Paul is hoping to come to them in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. He wants to come and make their understanding complete and share with them the whole richness of the gospel. In Romans 11:25, Paul speaks of the filling up of the Gentiles. The phrase, "The fullness of the Gentiles be come in," is a marker of a particular time relating to God's pre-ordained end of the Mystery program. The Gentiles have been given a certain amount of time before God catches the Church home and He begins to deal with Israel once again. God has already laid out His plan and the timing of future events. At the proper time, the fullness of the Gentiles will be complete, and Israel will be the new focus (1 Timothy 2:6; 6:15; Titus 1:3). This has nothing to do with filling up a certain quota of Gentiles, as many Calvinists teach. It has to do with God's plans that were determined before the foundation of the world. The same word is also used of Israel's program. When they have become full, they will be brought into the Kingdom at the Second Coming (Romans 11:12). When everything is wrapped up at the end of time, it is called the Dispensation of the Fullness of Times (Ephesians 1:10). This is when all the dispensations have been fulfilled and the Body of Christ is ruling in heaven and Israel is ruling on earth.

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