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And in This Way, all Israel will be Saved

Romans 11:11-32

Last week I shared with you my opinion that the single most influential event in the last 75 years, as far as its impact on the Christian church is concerned, was the formal establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948. There are many today who would share my opinion, but they do so for different reasons. Some believe that Israel's emergence as an independent nation is important because it is the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, and may very well be a sign of the soon return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Their principal reason for believing this, in many cases, is because of what they believe Paul is saying in Romans 11. They are persuaded that in this chapter the apostle affirms that in the future, in some way related to the Second Coming of Jesus, God intends to save the nation of Israel as a whole. Is that God's intention? Does Paul teach this in Romans 11? That is the question we face today in an admittedly complex and quite dense passage of Scripture.

The Full Inclusion of Israel (vv. 11-16)

Paul labors to make four major points in these verses.

First, yes, Israel has “stumbled,” i.e., the nation as a whole has rejected Christ and thus failed to attain to the righteousness that is available only in him (cf. 9:31-33). But no, this does not mean Israel has “fallen” into irretrievable spiritual ruin, as if it means salvation is now out of the question for all Jewish people. Contrary to what some of the Gentile believers in Rome may have thought, God has not given up on the Jews. In point of fact, as bad as Israel's rejection of Messiah is, God has used it (and will use it) to set in motion a process that will eventually lead once again to Israel's blessing.

This is confirmed in v. 16. Paul appeals to something found in Numbers 15:17-21 where Israel was commanded to offer to the Lord a loaf from the first batch of dough. In this way the entire batch was consecrated or made holy. This suggests that God's on-going work of salvation among Jewish people, such as in the case of Paul, is a pledge or guarantee that God will continue to save a remnant throughout history.

Second, because of Israel's rejection of the gospel, the blessings of salvation have come to the Gentiles. Two examples will suffice to explain how this happened. Paul and Barnabas arrived in Antioch of Pisidia

and immediately began preaching in the Jewish synagogue. The Jewish leaders reviled them (Acts 13:45) and rejected their message. We then read:

“And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, ‘It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you [Jews]. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us saying, ‘I have made you a light for Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth’” (Acts 13:46-47).

Much the same thing happened when Paul arrived in Corinth:

“When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles’” (Acts 18:5-6; cf. Matt. 21:33-43).

Third, the salvation of the Gentiles in turn makes the Jews jealous. They see the Gentiles getting saved; they witness their joy, peace, and the blessings of salvation and by God’s grace realize what they are missing. As a result, they yearn to experience it also. The Holy Spirit uses this envy to save the Jews:

“So I ask, did they [the Jews] stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous” (Rom. 11:11).

Fourth, Paul concludes that if the Gentiles were blessed when Israel rejected the gospel, how much more shall Gentiles be blessed when Israel accepts it. We see Paul explain this in vv. 12-15. Let’s read it again.

Many have concluded from vv. 12-15 that Paul is describing what will happen at the time of the Second Coming of Jesus at the end of the age. The “full inclusion” (v. 12) of Israel and her “acceptance” (v. 15), so they say, are references to a mass, national salvation of Jews in the future. This may be correct. But I’m not entirely convinced. Here is why.

Note well in vv. 13-14 that Paul has in view the salvation of individual Jewish men and women *in the present era*, the era in which Paul lived and ministered extending through the era in which we live, leading up to the Second Coming of Christ. By means of his ministry in the first century (cf. Rom. 11:5) Jewish people are being saved. Thus Paul envisions his own ministry of gospel proclamation as contributing to the “full inclusion” (v. 12) and “acceptance” (v. 15) of Israel. But how could this be true if the “full inclusion / acceptance” of Israel refers to a national, in mass salvation of the Jews at the end of the age?

It may well then be that when Paul refers to the “full inclusion” and “acceptance” of Israel he is describing the sum total of all Israel’s remnants throughout history. Think back to Romans 11:1-10. The remnant of true believers in the days of Elijah, as well as Paul who identifies himself as a member of the

“remnant, chosen by grace” (v. 5), together with all Jewish people who come to faith in Jesus through the course of history, constitute the “full inclusion” and “acceptance” of Israel.

Could it be that both of these views are true? Yes, I suppose it could. In other words, it may be that Paul envisions the salvation and acceptance of Israel as taking place both gradually over time, through history, as individual Jewish men and women respond in faith to Jesus, and in one final mass ingathering of Jews to faith when Christ returns at the end of history.

The Olive Tree (vv. 17-24)

In order to make his point concerning the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles, Paul employs an illustration, a figure taken from the world of agriculture, or better still, horticulture. He does it by describing God’s elect people of all ethnicities as an olive tree. There is only one olive tree, not two. The olive tree symbolizes the people of God, both believing Jews and Gentiles. In that one olive tree there are “natural” branches, a reference to ethnic Jews, and “unnatural” branches or what Paul calls “a wild olive shoot,” a reference to ethnic Gentiles.

When Israel as a whole rejected the Lord Jesus as Messiah, God broke off the natural branches. He rejected those who rejected his Son. God then took Gentiles who did believe in Jesus and grafted them into the olive tree. ***Now, both ethnic Jews who believe in Jesus and ethnic Gentiles who believe in Jesus are together one people in the one olive tree, together sharing “in the nourishing root of the olive tree” (v. 17).*** Much the same thing is said by Paul in Ephesians 2:11-13, 17-19 –

(11) Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— (12) remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (13) But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. . . (17) And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. (18) For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. (19) So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:11-13, 17-19).

When Paul says that Gentiles were “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise” he means that they had no part in the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, promises later reaffirmed to David. But through faith in the blood of Christ, we pagan Gentiles who were “far off” from the promises given to Israel have now been “brought near.” Indeed, believing Gentiles have equal access to the Father through the Spirit and are “fellow citizens” with believing Jews in the commonwealth of Israel.

This is precisely what Paul is saying in Romans 11. Contrary to what is known as “replacement theology,” no believing Gentile has replaced any believing Jew. Rather, believing Gentiles have now been included or grafted in to the one olive tree. ***There in that tree, a symbol of God’s elect people, we now see both***

natural branches, Jewish believers, and unnatural branches, Gentile believers, together sharing equally in the blessings of the covenant and its promises.

But notice how Paul warns Gentile believers not to be arrogant. Just because many Jewish people were broken off because of their unbelief is no reason for believing Gentiles to boast. Believing Gentiles are graciously nourished and supported by the root of the olive tree, a reference either to the covenants God made with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David, or to the patriarchs themselves. In other words, you believing Gentiles are supported and draw spiritual nourishment from the root of the olive tree, that is, from the covenant promises made to the patriarchs of the Old Testament.

Israel as an ethnic body largely rejected the Messiah. So Israel was cut off. God then turned to save the Gentiles. Of course, not all ethnic Jews were cut off. Many of the “natural” branches, like Paul himself, are still a part of the olive tree. They are the “remnant” that Paul has been describing. Thus, if Gentiles turn their back on the Messiah they will likewise be cut off. Not all of them, of course, for there will always be a believing remnant.

The good news is that God is prepared to graft Jews back into the olive tree if they believe. This is Paul’s point in vv. 23-24. The question of when this can happen is the point of dispute. Does it happen throughout the course of church history, over the past 2,000 years, each time individual Jews come to faith in Jesus as Messiah, or does it only or primarily happen at the end of history in conjunction with the Second Coming of Jesus?

There isn’t anything in the text up to this point that decisively answers this question. Nothing that Paul has said requires that he has in mind a one-time, end-of-the-age salvation of the Jewish people as a whole. But nothing he has said necessarily precludes that possibility. As I said before, perhaps both ideas are present.

The Problem Posed by vv. 21-22

What does Paul mean when he says this?

“Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off” (v. 22).

Does this imply that genuine believers can lose their salvation? No. Three views are possible.

It may be that Paul is echoing a theme found elsewhere in his letters and throughout the NT, namely, that *ultimate salvation is dependent on perseverance in faith* (cf. Rom. 8:13; Col. 1:23; Heb. 3:6,14; 1 Peter 1:5; 1 John 2:19), a faith which God graciously preserves and sustains within us.

Others have suggested that Paul's discussion here is about Gentiles as a class, considered collectively, and Israel as a class, considered collectively. In other words, just as "Israel" was cut off because of unbelief, so also "Gentiles" may be if they do not believe. On this view, those who were "cut off" were not born-again believers but were Jews who, by virtue of their ethnicity, were members of the covenant community of Israel. Their "unbelief" was their rejection of Jesus as Messiah. Thus they were members of the one "olive tree" but did not experience saving faith. The "breaking off" of such branches was the corporate rejection of Israel. Could it be, then, that the threatened breaking off of Gentile branches should likewise be viewed as a corporate judgment?

Doug Moo has another, far more probable, explanation:

"While the olive tree represents the true, spiritual people of God, those who are said to belong to this tree are not only those who, through their faith, are actually part of the tree but also those who only appear to belong to that tree. This is evident from the fact that Paul speaks of unbelieving Jews as having been 'cut off' from the tree (v. 17). In reality, these Jews had never been part of the tree at all; yet to preserve the metaphor he is using, Paul presents them as if they had been. In the same way, then, those Gentiles within the church at Rome – and elsewhere – who appear to be part of God's people, yet do not continue in faith, may never have been part of that tree at all" (707).

In a sermon on Romans 11,¹ John Piper agrees: Paul "means that, on the one hand, *there are real, genuine, spiritual, inward attachments to the tree* —the covenant of grace and salvation; and, on the other hand, *there are unreal, counterfeit, unspiritual, outward attachments to the covenant.*" Failure or refusal to "continue in his [God's] kindness" (Rom. 11:22b) shows "that their attachment is merely external and unspiritual and non-transforming, and they will be cut off."

The future tense "will" be cut off likely points to the day of final judgment, much in the way Jesus referred to this in Matthew 7:22-23 – "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" In that declaration, "depart from me," says Piper, "we hear the terrible squeezing of the omnipotent clippers lopping a fruitless, unspiritual, hypocritical church-going Christian from all attachment to the family of God." So, "listen carefully and lay this to heart: Just as in the Old Testament you could be a circumcised, sacrifice-offering, outwardly law-abiding, physical child of Abraham and not a spiritual child of Abraham (John 8:39-44; Romans 9:8), so in the New Testament church . . . you can be a baptized, communion-taking, worship-attending, tithe-giving, doctrine-affirming church member and not be a child of God."

Thus, the first and third views may be combined. Those who have truly believed *will* continue in God's kindness (Heb. 3:6, 14). Those who do not continue in God's kindness show thereby that they were only superficially, but not savingly, part of the tree (on this, see especially 1 John 2:19). Failure to persevere does not mean that one who was truly saved becomes truly lost. Rather, perseverance is itself the proof that one was truly saved. If one does not persevere, one has always been lost and never saved.

"And in this way all Israel will be saved" (vv. 25-27)

¹ John Piper, "You Stand Fast Through Faith, So Do Not Become Proud, But Fear," February 8, 2004.

What does Paul mean when he says that “a partial hardening” has come upon Israel? I think he’s talking about the *extent* of hardening. He is not saying that those hardened are only partially hardened, as if to suggest that their hardening is not as intensive or as deep as it could have been. Nor is he saying that Israel’s hardening is temporary, as if he meant to assert that only for a while is Israel hardened. His point is simply that not all Israelites in this present age are hardened to the gospel. Some, the remnant, are saved. There always have been, are now, and always will be saved Jews who believe in Jesus. He is simply repeating what he said earlier in Romans 11:7,

“Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened” (Rom. 11:7).

This partial hardening will continue until “the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (v. 25). The “fullness” of the Gentiles is Paul’s way of describing all God’s elect people who are ethnic Gentiles. The “fullness” is the sum total of those Gentiles down through the ages whom God sovereignly elected to inherit eternal life. So, the hardening that has come upon Israel will continue all through this present age until such time as all God’s elect people from among the Gentiles are saved.

“And in this way,” says Paul, “all Israel will be saved” (v. 26a). There are several different interpretations of what “all Israel” means. Some believe it refers to *all ethnic descendants of Abraham of every age*; in other words, every Jewish man and woman who has ever lived. Others contend it means *all ethnic descendants of Abraham living in the future when Christ returns*. Many contend that it refers to *the mass or majority of the ethnic descendants of Abraham living in the future when Christ returns*. A few believe Paul has in mind both elect Jews and elect Gentiles who together comprise *the Church of Jesus Christ, the true “Israel of God”*.

Contrary to each of these views, I believe he is talking about *the total number of elect ethnic Jews, the sum total of all Israel’s remnants throughout the present, inter-advent age*. “All Israel” therefore parallels and has the same reference as “the fullness of the Gentiles.”

But what about Paul’s use of the future tense “will” be saved in v. 26? Does that mean he is referring to a future salvation of the Jews? Well, yes, but it is future from Paul’s vantage point in the first century. It is not future from our vantage point in the twenty-first century. If someone in the first century, like Paul, is writing about the salvation of others that has yet to occur, how else could he have described it if not with the future tense?

“And in this way” all Israel will be saved. He does not say, “And then,” but “and thus” or “and in this way.” Paul is not telling us *when* Israel will be saved, but *how*. It is in this manner, according to this principle. In what manner or principle? He told us in vv. 12-15.

In other words, Paul is not simply asserting *that* all elect Israel will be saved but is describing the mysterious *manner* in which it will occur. That is, *it is not so much the fact as it is the fashion in which they will be saved*. It is by means of nothing less than the incredible scenario of

Jewish unbelief → Gentile salvation → Jewish jealousy and salvation → Gentile blessing

This is the way in which all elect Israel will eventually and progressively come to saving faith. It is in this manner or in that way that God is going to save the elect Jews down through history. And when the day comes when all God's elect from among the Gentiles are saved, all God's elect from among the Jews will also have been saved.

Paul then confirms this in vv. 26-27 by appealing to the OT. He first mentions Isaiah 59:20-21 and then Jeremiah 31:33-34. Many read this and simply assume that Paul is referring to Christ's Second Coming at the close of history. But I believe he is describing what Christ did at his First Coming. The coming of the deliverer who removes sin and iniquity was future from the perspective of the OT prophets who wrote the words, not future from those of us who read this prophecy in the twenty-first century. The New Covenant was established when Christ died at Calvary and rose again from the dead. The forgiveness of sins for both Jew and Gentile is available because of what Jesus did at his first coming. By means of that, then, all elect Gentiles ("the fullness of the Gentiles") and all elect Jews ("all Israel") will be saved.

The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable (vv. 28-32)

Finally, what contribution do vv. 28-32 make to our discussion? Most agree that the enmity of the Jews ("they are *enemies* of God") is not subjective, that is to say, ***it is not their enmity against God but God's enmity against them because of their unbelief.*** We know this to be the case from the contrast drawn between being, on the one hand, "enemies" of God and, on the other hand, being "beloved." To be an enemy of God is to be the object of his wrath; to be beloved is to be the object of his love and grace.

But who are "they" in v. 28 of whom these things are said? Surely they are "all Israel" (v. 26), those whom God intends to save by taking away their ungodliness and forgiving their sins (vv. 26-27). Consequently, the "enemies" of God and the "beloved" of God are the same people, the elect of ethnic Israel. Their rejection of the Messiah, as a result of which the gospel comes to the Gentiles, incurs divine wrath and enmity. Hence, while they remain in unbelief they are God's enemies. But when they are in turn saved, being provoked to jealousy and faith by Gentile blessing, they enter a new relationship with God, that of being beloved because of election (cf. Rom. 5:6-11).

It is because all Israel is elect that in God's redemptive purpose they are transformed from a status of enmity to one of love. In saying they are beloved "for the sake of their forefathers" Paul does not mean their election is a result or reward for any supposed merit or innate goodness in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (cf. Rom. 9:6-13). Rather, Paul is referring to the divine promise given to Abraham of an elect remnant from among his physical seed, in fulfillment of which "all (elect) Israel" is being saved. Therefore, they are beloved because God promised a saved remnant to the fathers in the Abrahamic covenant, and to his word God is ever faithful. The "gifts" and "calling" of God, therefore, are not non-saving theocratic privileges given to all ethnic Jews regardless of their relation to Messiah. They refer to the products of God's special, saving, electing grace such as faith, hope, love, and peace, that is to say, those spiritual blessings which accompany the salvation of those whom God has called to himself.

The “for” with which v. 30 begins indicates that what follows confirms and illustrates the assertion of vv. 28-29. Why is this significant? Simply because in vv. 30-31 Paul explicitly declares that the salvation of elect Israel, their experience of being beloved of God in fulfillment of the divine and irrevocable promise given to the fathers, is being realized **now**!

Note well in vv. 30-31 the three-fold “**now**” which emphasizes that the salvation to which Paul has just referred is being realized in the gospel era, the *now* of gospel proclamation. The irrevocable gifts and calling of God (v. 29) which account for the ultimate realization of “all Israel’s” salvation as God’s beloved are being experienced *now* in the present church age. This salvation, this removal of ungodliness from Jacob, this forgiveness of sins, this restoration of all Israel is not said to be restricted to the end of the age, in some way associated with the second advent of Christ, but is *presently* being realized as a result of Christ’s *first* advent.

As for v. 32, Paul is saying that all of mankind, both Jew and Gentile, are imprisoned in their sin unless God in mercy should choose to release them. God has justly consigned us all to condemnation in order that his mercy might be magnified when he saves and delivers us through Christ Jesus.

Conclusion

There are two points I want to make by way of conclusion. The first concerns the identity of God’s elect people. There are not two “peoples” of God, Israel and the Church. There is one people, one olive tree, in which there are both believing Jews and believing Gentiles who equally share in the covenant promises. Here is how Doug Moo explains it:

“The turn of the ages at the coming of Christ brought an important development in the people of God: the object of one’s faith became clearer and more specific and the ethnic makeup of that people changed radically, as God extended his grace in vastly increased measure to the Gentiles. But Paul’s metaphor warns us not to view this transition as a transition from one people of God to another. ***Gentiles who come to Christ become part of that community of salvation founded on God’s promises to the patriarchs. And ‘messianic Jews,’ following in the footsteps of their believing ancestors, belong to this same community . . .*** Paul suggests that the church, defined as the entire body of believers in Jesus Christ, is simply the name for the people of God in this era of salvation history – as ‘Israel’ was the name of that people in the previous age” (710).

In summary,

“the coming of Christ did not for him [i.e., Paul] involve ethnic subtraction, as if Jews were now eliminated [or replaced], but addition, with Gentiles now being added to believing Jews. Paul’s boundary for the people of God is a religious one – faith in Jesus Christ – not an ethnic one” (710).

The second concluding observation concerns the question I asked at the outset: Should we view the establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948 a fulfillment of biblical prophecy, or perhaps a precursor to it?

If it is, you couldn't prove it from Romans 11. Is God going to save Jewish people at the end of history in some form of mass ingathering or spiritual revival? Perhaps, but we must never let that possibility blind us to the very clear truth that Paul has established in this chapter, namely, that God is working in a marvelous and mysterious way to save Jewish people throughout the course of this present era of church history. And when Jewish people are at any time saved, be it in the past, now, or in the future, they become members of the one body of Christ, the Church. They do not inherit any covenant promise separate or distinct from believing Gentiles. We are all together one elect people, one olive tree, equally sharing in and enjoying the same covenant promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Do Jews Have a Divine Right in the Promised Land?

John Piper

(slightly edited)

(1) The Land was part of the inheritance God promised to Abraham and his descendants forever.

Genesis 15:18, "On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.'" Then in Genesis 17:7-8, God says to Abraham, "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. 8 And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God." Then God confirmed the promise to Jacob (Genesis 28:13) and to Joseph (Genesis 48:3).

(2) The promises made to Abraham, including the promise of the Land, will be inherited as an everlasting gift only by true, spiritual Israel, not disobedient, unbelieving Israel.

This was the point of Romans 9. When Paul grieved over the lostness of so many Jews who were rejecting Jesus and were perishing, he said in verses 6-7, "It is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, 7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring." In other words, the promises cannot be demanded by anyone just because he is Jewish. Jewish ethnicity has a place in God's plan, but it is not enough to secure anything. It does not in itself qualify a person to be an heir of the promise to Abraham and his offspring. Romans 9:8 says it clearly: "It is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring." Being born Jewish does not make one an heir of the promise—neither the promise of the Land nor any other promise.

This was plain in the Old Testament, and it was plain in the teachings of Jesus. For example, in the terrible list of curses that God promised to bring on the people if they broke his covenant and forsook him was this: "And as the Lord took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the Lord will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it" (Deut. 28:63). Throughout the history of Israel, covenant breaking and disobedience and idolatry disqualified Israel from the present divine right to the Land. (See Daniel 9:4-7; Ps. 78:54-61).

Be careful not to infer from this that Gentile nations (like Arabs) have the right to molest Israel. God's judgments on Israel do not sanction human sin against Israel. Israel still has *human* rights among nations even when she forfeits her present *divine* right to the Land. Remember that nations which gloated over her divine discipline were punished by God (Isa. 10:5-13; Joel 3:2). ***So the promise to Abraham that his descendants will inherit the Land does not mean that all Jews inherit that promise. It will come finally to the true Israel, the Israel that keeps covenant and obeys her God.***

(3) Jesus Christ has come into the world as the Jewish Messiah, and his own people rejected him and broke covenant with their God.

Even though Jesus was the Messiah and did many mighty works and taught with great authority and fulfilled Old Testament promises, nevertheless the people of Israel as a whole rejected him. This was the most serious covenant-breaking disobedience that Israel had ever committed in all her history.

This is why Jesus told the parable of the tenants who killed the Landlord's son when he came for his harvest, and ended that parable with these words to Israel in Matthew 21:43, "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits." And it's why he said in Matthew 8:11-12, after seeing the faith of a Gentile centurion and the unbelief of Israel, "Many [Gentiles] will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Israel has broken covenant with her God and is living today in disobedience and unbelief in his Son and her Messiah. That is why Paul says in Rom 11:28, "As regards the gospel [the good news of the Messiah] they are enemies of God."

(4) Therefore, the secular state of Israel today may not claim a present divine right to the Land, but they and we should seek a peaceful settlement not based on present divine rights, but on international principles of justice, mercy, and practical feasibility.

This follows from all we have said so far, and the implication it has for those of us who believe the Bible and trust Christ as our Savior and as the Lord of history, is that we should not give blanket approval to Jewish or to Palestinian actions. We should approve or denounce according to Biblical standards of justice and mercy among peoples. We should encourage our representatives to seek a just settlement that takes the historical and social claims of both peoples into account. Neither should be allowed to sway the judgments of justice by a present divine claim to the land. If you believe this, it would be helpful for your representatives to know it.

We are not whitewashing terrorism and we are not whitewashing Jewish force. Nor is there any attempt on my part to assess measures of blame or moral equivalence. That's not my aim. My aim is to put the debate on a balanced footing in this sense: neither side should preempt the claims of international justice by the claim of present divine rights. Working out what that justice will look like is still a huge and daunting task. I have not solved that problem. But I think we will make better progress if we do not yield to the claim of either side to be ethnically or nationally sanctioned by God in their present conflict.

(5) By faith in Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah, Gentiles become heirs of the promise of Abraham, including the promise of the Land.

In the words of Romans 11:17, “You [Gentile], although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree”—that is, they become part of the redeemed covenant people who share the faith of Abraham. The reason, as Paul put in Romans 4:13, is that “the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.” So all who are united to Christ, Abraham's offspring, by faith are part of the covenant made with him and his offspring.

Here's the most sweeping statement of this truth — Ephesians 2:12“Remember that you [Gentiles] were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. . . . So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”

Therefore, Jewish believers in Jesus and Gentile believers will inherit the Land. And the easiest way to see this is to see that we will inherit the world which includes the Land. Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians will not quibble over the real estate of the Promised Land because the entire new heavens and the new earth will be ours. 1 Corinthians 3:21-23, “All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the *world* or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.” All followers of Christ, and only followers of Christ, will inherit the earth, including the Land.

(6) Finally, this inheritance of Christ's people will happen at the second coming of Christ to establish his kingdom, not before; and till then, we Christians must not take up arms to claim our inheritance; but rather lay down our lives to share our inheritance with as many as we can.

You recall that all-important word that Jesus spoke to Pilate in John 18:36: “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” Christians do not take up the sword to advance the kingdom of Christ. We wait for a king from heaven who will deliver us by his mighty power. And in that great day Jew and Gentile who have treasured Christ will receive what was promised. There will be a great reversal: the last will be first, and the meek—in fellowship with the Lamb of God—will inherit the Land.