

Israel's Final Salvation

Romans 11:26

by Ernest O'Neill

Alexander Pope was an English poet in the 18th century and he had a theory of life: he said that every life has a ruling passion in it. That is, every person has one great concern and preoccupation that rules their whole life. I would ask you to be honest -- are you preoccupied with the great change that God has wrought in your miserable, selfish personality in his son on the cross? Are you preoccupied with the fact that that miserable little self of yours, with all its frustrations, has been destroyed in Jesus and has been raised with him? Are you living in real peace that God has made all the changes that needed to be made in you in the cosmic miracle that he worked in his son on Calvary? Are you resting in the Holy Spirit as he makes those changes actual in your own life, day by day? In other words, are you preoccupied with Jesus and your friendship with him? If you are, that is liberty; that is living in the kingdom of God. This dear book (the Bible) says the kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but it is a matter of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Jesus said when the Holy Spirit comes into a person, he doesn't bear witness to himself but he bears witness to Jesus. So people who live in the Holy Spirit are preoccupied with Jesus, and that is peace and liberty.

Or are you preoccupied with healing or whether Saturday is the real Sabbath or not? Are you preoccupied with the end times, or with deeper spiritual teaching? Are you preoccupied with Campus Church or Christian business? Then you know that all joy departs, and you begin to control things again: you have a cause that you can live for. You have a little piece of esoteric knowledge from the tree of knowledge that you can use to beat over everybody else's head and increasingly your life loses that liberty and freedom that it had when you were preoccupied with the only One that is worthy of our preoccupation -- which is Jesus, in whom all things cohere. But you sink from that and you narrow back down to a self that has found a drum to beat. I think there is a real danger that many of us who have known Jesus are sinking into that kind of lesser preoccupation over this verse that we are studying today. So maybe we could look at it and then I'll explain what I mean.

It is Romans 11:26. "and so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.'" There was no problem at all with this verse in the early church. In fact, there was no misinterpretation at all until about four hundred years had passed. Then Augustine introduced the misinterpretation: he suggested, and in fairness to him he only suggested, that perhaps this verse meant that there would come a time when Elijah and Enoch would return from heaven and appear before the Jewish nation and by the miraculous signs and wonders that they would do, they would overwhelm the Jewish nation and the Jewish nation would be saved. Not simply in the sense that the millennialists believe -- the millennialists believe that there will come a time when the Jewish nation, as a nation, will cease to refuse to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and will acknowledge him as the Messiah. That's not what Augustine taught. Augustine taught that every individual Jew would at that moment in history be saved and miraculously converted. The Venerable Bede in the Middle Ages spread that throughout the then known world, until eventually it became the normal doctrine of the Catholic Church. The Reformers rejected it: Luther, Calvin and the scholars of the Reformation rejected it as spurious interpretation. They went back to the original interpretation of the early Christian Church, which was that there would come a time when Israel as a nation would acknowledge that Jesus was the Messiah, but not that every individual Jew would at that time, therefore, be converted.

You know fine well that such is the Biblical vagueness of our present Christian movement, and such is the doctrinal emptiness of the religious momentum that is moving across the nation, that many, many loved ones have gone back to Augustine's spurious interpretation. They are saying "Look at the signs! There are earthquakes and volcanic eruptions; there are wars and rumors of wars. The Jews have now returned to their homeland. Just around the corner is Jesus' return. Any day now we can expect Enoch and Elijah to return from heaven and appear in Jerusalem and confound the Jewish nation with many signs and wonders so that they are utterly overwhelmed by this confirmation of Scripture and they are all miraculously converted and saved." Now the details of that may vary, but the result is the same: loved ones who were paying daily attention to Jesus, are suddenly utterly unsettled in their Christian lives. Their eyes come off Jesus, the liberty goes out of their lives, and they concentrate their whole being on this business of salvation of the Jewish nation and they begin to devote all their energies to that. They lose their preoccupation with their Savior, they lose their preoccupation with bringing others to him and they concentrate on one thought—to be as close to Jerusalem or as near to the action as they possibly can be when these exciting signs and wonders take place and the Jewish nation is saved in some strange way.

Loved ones, I think there are many today who are preoccupied with that. But it is just a trick of Satan to get them to lose the stability of their own daily obedience to Jesus and to get preoccupied with a cause -- a drum they can beat -- something that will distract them from the love of their Savior and love of their neighbor and their friends and their relatives and their colleagues. Now you may say, "What is so wrong about this idea of the general conversion of a nation? What is so wrong about the belief that the Jewish nation is going to be so overwhelmed and confounded by the signs and wonders that they see before them that they all bow, as one man, down to Jesus?" Easy -- free will -- that's what's wrong about it; God has always emphasized to us that there was a condition that needed to be fulfilled if we were to receive the Spirit of his son into our hearts: he has always stressed to us that it is up to us, and if we don't want it, he can't force his son into our hearts. John 1:12 says that to as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become the children of God. They had to receive him first. Jesus said, "The Jews are always looking for signs but if you do the will of my Father, then you will know the doctrine I speak is true. But you have to be willing to do the will of my Father. It's your choice. You have the free will. You must decide to receive me and submit to me or not." John 3:16 says that God gave his only beloved son that whosoever -- that is anybody who wishes -- can believe on him and not perish but have eternal life.

Loved ones, the fact is that the general idea and spirit that pervades this heresy that a whole nation will be overwhelmed and confounded by the signs and wonders, that they will all be saved on the spot, contradicts the centuries and centuries of God's emphasis to us that the only way to enter into his kingdom is by personal submission of our wills to him and by a quiet, individual receiving of Jesus into our lives as our Lord and master and Savior. Right from Ezekiel on, God emphasized, "You will die for your own sin; you must repent for your own sin. Except you repent you will all likewise perish." From Ezekiel on, God has stressed to all of us that receiving his spirit, and entering into a relationship with him, was a very personal matter that depended on the free exercise of our wills in submitting to him. The whole idea of a general conversion of a nation contradicts that truth.

When you go into the context of this verse you find that that heresy is exposed more and more clearly. The real meaning of the verse is what the early Christian church said it was. In Romans 9 through 11, Paul is concerned with one great subject: the fact that the Jewish nation has rejected

Jesus. He says that only appears to be the case if you think that Jews alone form Israel. If you think that every Jew is part of Israel and nobody is part of Israel except the Jews, then you are forced to believe that somehow God's plan has gone astray. He says, "All who are born Jews do not live in the faith of Abraham, their father. They are not all therefore members of Israel, the real Israel of God. There is a remnant of Jews who are part of that Israel and they accept Jesus. The real Israel will finally be saved." If you would look through Romans 9 I can point to verses that give a continuous presentation of those thoughts that I've tried to summarize.

Paul states the problem in Romans 9:3: "For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race." He was himself a Jew. "They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed forever. Amen." He is saying, "I feel absolutely that I am ready to be accursed for them because they appear to have rejected Jesus for whom they were made." Then in verse 6: "But it is not as though the word of God had failed." The Word of God has only failed if every born Jew is a member of Israel. "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are the children of Abraham because they were his descendants;" He points out that only a small number of the Jewish nation are part of the true Israel of God, and it is to that remnant that the Old Testament prophets apply all the promises of God.

So in verse 27: "And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: 'Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved.'" Paul says that it runs right through the Old Testament that not all born Jews are actually members of Israel. Then in Romans 10:12 he points out that the remnant will receive Jesus and they will join the others outside the Jewish nation who are part of the real Israel; "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek." In other words, there are Greeks outside the Jewish nation who are part of the same Israel. "The same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him." What Paul is saying is, "There is an external nation of Jews that appear to be rejecting God's son, but it is only an external nation, a geographical or political nation." Verse 21: "But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'" Then he says in Romans 11:1 "I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!" He is saying there are some of us (Jews) who have received Jesus. God has rejected the external Jewish nation, but not the internal remnant that has received his son. "By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew." The people that he foreknew are the people he mentions in Romans 11:5. "So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace." And in verse 7: "What then? Israel failed to obtain what it sought. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened."

Then we get to the context of the verse that we are studying today. Paul shares this truth that the Jews who receive Jesus, that remnant of the geographical, political house of Israel, will join the others outside that political group who also receive Jesus, and they will form together the true Israel of God. Romans 11:13: "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them." The result of that is in verse 25: "Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: hardening has come upon part of Israel" -- part of the geographical, political Israel -- "until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved." All of Israel, the real Israel -- the Gentiles and the Jews who form Israel -- so all Israel, the real Israel will be saved.

Some loved ones say, "When you say "Israel" it must be the geographical Israel, because that is how he talks about it in the previous verse." But in Romans 9:6 Paul talks about Israel in two senses: "But it is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel "(the political, racial Israel) "belong to Israel" (the real Israel of God that is mentioned in Galatians 6:16). So the meaning of the verse is that all Israel will be saved, the real Israel, the spiritual Israel of God, the Israel that is formed by the hearts that receive Jesus' Spirit into them. Paul is here concluding his whole argument in Romans 9 through 11 where he is trying to deal with the problem where some people say, "God's plans for Israel have failed because Israel has rejected Jesus." He says, "No! Political, racial Israel is not the real Israel. Only some of them have rejected Jesus. Some of them (here I am, I am one of them) receive Jesus. What will happen is we will be grouped together with those Gentiles among you who also received Jesus and so all Israel will be saved -- the real Israel of God."

Loved ones, it ties in with what the balanced prophetic teachers tell us about the end times. The end times are presented partially by Jesus in Matthew 24, so maybe you would look at that, and then I'll try to summarize the mainline teaching on it. Matthew 24:3: "As he sat on the mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying 'Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?' And Jesus answered them, 'Take heed that no one leads you astray." It is interesting that Jesus always warns that. He knows how we human beings love the sensational and the exciting. Jesus knew that and he says, "Be careful that nobody leads you astray in these things." Verse 5: "For many will come in my names saying, 'I am the Christ," and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth pangs."

Loved ones, there have always been earthquakes and volcanic eruptions and wars and rumors of wars. These things have come right through from earliest days, but you must admit that the frequency and the universality that is explained there by Jesus is not yet upon us and even when that happens, it is but the beginning of the birth pangs. That is still far, far ahead of the time when Israel will finally return to its homeland in the way that God has planned it. There is a partial return at the moment, the same way there was a partial return in the Old Testament times, but that is not the time that is prophesied, as you study the Scriptures carefully. In fact, the Scriptures indicate, and most Prophetic scholars agree, upon the broad outlines of this. The Scriptures indicate that as we expand the nuclear club and more and more nations begin to face each other in a stalemate with fingers on the buttons, all able to send enough missiles over that will destroy all of us; and as huge populations are dying of starvation and the only thing they are able to do is destroy each other, we as a human race will choose dictatorship rather than anarchy and annihilation. We will turn to that great anti-Christ manifestation of Satan who will be some genius of a human being, who will show all the wisdom and understanding and the apparent concern of Jesus.

That is why he is called the anti-Christ; because he is in many ways like Christ, except that he is out for our destruction and not for our salvation. This great figure will show all the wisdom of Jesus in the way he will organize world trade and pacify and settle the whole international situation. He will initially befriend the Jewish nation, especially during the three-and-a-half years of the tribulation when he will wreak an incredible persecution upon those who believe in Jesus. Now some say the rapture will occur before that and some say it won't; but all are agreed that there will be that time. Then he will turn from that persecution and there will be a great world-wide revival and many people will be saved through the tribulation. Some believe that they will

be taken to Jesus at that very time and that there will be a first resurrection of the tribulation saints.

After those three-and-a-half years, this anti-Christ will turn against the nation of Israel and he will lead a persecution of that nation -- you can read it in Daniel and Revelation. He will head up the destruction and the aggressiveness that is leveled at the Israelites at that time. It is then that two of the Old Testament prophets or witnesses (perhaps it will be Elijah and Enoch, or Elijah and Moses) will return from heaven and will appear in Jerusalem and will confound the entire Jewish nation by this confirmation of Scripture. And the Jewish nation at that time as a whole will give up their official opposition to Jesus as the Messiah, and will acknowledge that he is the son of God. In the midst of that time, just as in the tribulation of the Gentiles, in this tribulation of the Jews which is known as "the time of Jacob's trouble"—these three-and-a-half years during which the anti-Christ will persecute the Jewish nation --144,000 Jews will receive Jesus personally into their hearts as their Savior and they will join the others of us who are in Jesus. Then Jesus himself will come at the battle of Armageddon, and then the millennium will be established.

Loved ones, I would just gently point out to you who are tempted to get onto this band-wagon about the saving of Israel: do you see that it is a long, long series of events before that time comes in Scripture, and you cannot break Scripture? I don't care how much converting you do, you cannot break Scripture. Scripture says first wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, far more than we have ever seen before and then there will be an anti-Christ figure. We will all know when that moment comes, because it is clearly outlined in Scripture with the events that will accompany it. Then will come a time of tribulation and possibly a rapture or a first resurrection and we will be aware of those events.

Then will come three-and-a-half years of persecution of the Jews, and at the end of that, Enoch and Elijah will come and the Jewish nation will officially accept Jesus and individual Jews will receive him into their own hearts the same way as we do -- because we wanted to; because we saw that he was our savior -- not simply because we saw a whole lot of wonders and signs. Heaven will be filled with people who love Jesus, not just people who have been confounded and overwhelmed by his power. I would just ask you to listen to the sane and stable words of God. "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of the God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore beloved, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace."

2 Peter 3:11-14.

I would encourage each one of us not to get our eyes off our dear Savior and not to get our eyes off the Great Commission. We have an obligation first to our Lord, and then to that person who sits next to us, and then to our dear relatives and colleagues at work. The Great Commission will not disappear from the face of the earth until Jesus comes, and that is our duty and obligation. I do pray that you will walk as this dear Word says, in peace maintaining your own lives holy and without blemish -- so that if we should be wrong, we will not be caught out, that Jesus will find us. He knows, "As now, so then." As you are today, so you will be at the moment of your death and so you will be when he comes. That's why he says, "Today is the day of salvation." Change now, today.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you for this dear word of yours. And we thank you for the dear scholars and teachers

who have given us clear understanding of what it means. Father we thank you that there is no contradiction in your word; that it is clear, and if we are patient, and if we will above all do your will in our own lives, we will understand even these difficult things. So Lord while praying for the loved ones in the Jewish nation, and while praying for the Zionists who are trying to establish some political entity and plead that it is the return of God's people to their homeland, Lord we pray for them. We pray for them even as they misunderstand. And we would pray our Father that you would give us the stability and the grace to walk in the assurances of your word and to walk in peace, and not to be unsettled, and not to be running after sensational events, but to see that you have a plan and you have a program and no man can hurry it and no man can slow it up.

So Lord, we thank you. Thank you for your kindness, Lord Jesus, in explaining to us as much as we need to know. Thank you Lord. Pray for each other this day that we may live as people who are going to die this evening. We know that's the only reality Lord, because we know it will be a day like today that we leave this earth. So we would pray for each one of us; that we would live this day as if it were the last day of our lives.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now, and evermore. Amen.