

ISRAEL'S CONVERSION

Paul's prophecy in Romans is very relevant here. He told the Roman Christians that Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles comes to faith, and then, all Israel would be saved, as Isaiah had written, the Deliverer would come from Zion; he would remove ungodliness from Jacob (Rom 11:25-26). When will Israel be saved as a nation? When Jesus returns, the door to the Church will be shut, the full number of Gentiles will have come to faith, and Israel's hardening, which relates to their indifference and obstinacy will end.

It can be ascertained from Revelation 11 that Israel, as a nation, will be ready for salvation at the Messiah's return. After the two witnesses ascend to heaven and an earthquake flattens one-tenth of Jerusalem, the survivors give glory to God. God will pour out on them a spirit of grace and their hearts of stone will be softened, they will mourn for the one whom their ancestors pierced (Zech 12:10). The Israelis will be born again of God's Spirit and be grafted back into that olive tree which is a symbol of the Spirit-filled people of God. It does not symbolize the kingdom; that right was forfeited and transferred to the Church.

The classic OT prophecy of Israel's conversion was made by Jeremiah and confirmed by Ezekiel, Joel, and Zechariah.

Jer 31:33-34 "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God. and they will be my people. *No longer will they teach their neighbor or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know him, from the least of them to the greatest.* For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Ezek 36:24-28 “For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.”

Ezek 37:23-28 “They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God. My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your ancestors lived. They and their children and their children’s children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.

Ezek 39:28-29 “Then they will know that I am the Lord their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind. I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the people of Israel,” declares the Sovereign Lord.

Joel 2:28-32 “And afterward, I will pour out his Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the Earth, blood and fire and billows

of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for *on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls.*”

Zech 12:10 “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplications. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.” (Compare Matt 24:30, Rev 1:7).

Zech 13:1 “On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.”

These promises concerning the conversion of Israel have never been fulfilled. It will happen soon in these last days, now that Israel is once again living in their promised land, and the greater son of David will be there for them. Their salvation as a nation is a separate act of grace from that of the Church. Born-again members of the universal Church have the promise of becoming heirs of the Messianic kingdom, but when all Israel is saved, their promises are earthly. The land promised to Abraham and Jacob will be theirs, and God’s temple will once again be in Jerusalem. The nations will come to worship the Lord in Israel, and their leaders will bring their wealth to Jerusalem.

Israel’s future conversion will be a national phenomenon of which a prophet like Elijah will prepare the way. The last two verses of the OT predict the coming of Elijah before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes (Mal 4:5-6). This is not the prophet Elijah who didn’t die but was taken to heaven in a chariot, but a reformer, similar to Elijah, who called the people to repentance and worked powerful miracles among them. An angel of the Lord alluded to this passage in Malachi when he told Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, that his son would go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to prepare the people to be ready for the Lord (Luke 1:17).

Jesus said that John the Baptist was the Elijah who was to come (Matt 11:14), but he also said, “Elijah is indeed coming first and will restore all things” (Mark 9:12). John the Baptist’s ministry was not the complete fulfillment of this prophecy. God said he would send Elijah “before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.” This prophecy was only partly fulfilled by John the Baptist; its true fulfillment will be fulfilled immediately before the Messiah’s return.

Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel and Zechariah all prophesy that the Lord will pour out his Spirit on Israel in the last days, resulting in the conversion of the whole nation. But before receiving the Spirit, there needs to be repentance and a seeking of the Lord.

The Lord brought Israel back from her 70-year exile in Babylon, and many believe the promise that Israel will once again seek the Lord and find him, when they seek him with all their heart, just as Hosea prophesied:

“For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods. Afterward, the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and his blessings *in the last days*” (Hos 3:4-5).

The majority of Jews are still living in unbelief, they have not recognized that Jesus is “David” their king. Hosea promises that they will recognize him in the last days.

Israel as a nation will be converted, but they will not be part of the Church and so will not inherit the Messianic kingship, because their ancestors forfeited their right to the kingship when they rejected Jesus (Matt 22:1-10, Luke 14:15-24). Israel’s conversion will follow the resurrection of the righteous. Individual Jews who convert before the Messiah returns are part of the Church and will rule with the Messiah.

Ezekiel said that the Lord will gather Israel from the peoples and assemble them out of the countries where they were scattered and he will give them the land of Israel. He will give them one heart and he’ll put a new spirit within them. The only indication of time here is that it is after Israel has returned to their land.

When the Messiah returns on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, there are three important historical events to accomplish:

1. the glorification of the Church; the resurrection of the righteous dead and the rapture of the living saints
2. the defeat of the Antichrist and the world's armies that are laying siege to Jerusalem, giving victory to Israel
3. Israel's mass conversion as a nation

Israel will see the Lord's glorious return and mourn in repentance for the one their ancestors "pierced". They will be conscious of what the two witnesses preached to them in Jerusalem during the last three and a half years, and how they were vindicated and brought back to life. The whole nation will be marvelously saved as the Messiah pours out his Spirit upon them (Isa 44:3, Eze 36:27, 39:29, Joel 2:28-29, Zech 12:10),

Ezekiel speaks of the Messianic reign when he says that God will make his holiness and reputation known among his people Israel and won't let his holiness be profaned anymore. Even the nations will learn that the Lord (the Messiah) is holy in Israel (Ezek 39:7-8). Pay attention, the Lord says, it is coming and will certainly happen. This will be the day about which he has spoken! The day of the great earthquake, when the mountains are thrown down, and when the nations under Gog are defeated.

The Messiah will be king over Israel, and they will live according to God's rules. They, with their children and grandchildren, will live forever in the land that God gave Jacob, the land where their ancestors lived. The Lord will establish them, increase their population, and place his temple among them so that the nations will understand that he has set Israel apart from them.

Joel said the Lord would pour out his Spirit on all flesh. He was thinking primarily about Judah, the "all" meaning both men and women, slave and free, old and young. The following phrases "your sons and daughters", "your old men" and "your young men" show that he regarded the recipients of the Spirit to be a future generation of Israel. This was partially fulfilled at Pentecost, but as the Hebrew context suggests, the final fulfillment will be on the great and

terrifying day of the Lord: “I will display warnings in the heavens, and on the earth, blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be given over to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and *terrifying* day of the Lord” (Joel 2:30-31). Many commentaries suggest that the darkening of the sun and moon relate to the crucifixion, but the mention of “blood, fire and columns of smoke” and especially the phrase “Day of the Lord” indicate that Joel’s prophecy is to do with the end of the age, as indeed is his whole book. The preceding verses describe a restoration of Israel. God will no longer make them a reproach among the nations, and they will never again be ashamed.

Zechariah says the Messiah will pour out a spirit of grace and supplications on the house of David and the residents of Jerusalem, so that when they look on him whom their ancestors pierced, they will mourn for him. At that time, a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for those who live in Jerusalem and they will be cleansed them from sin and impurity. In the whole land two-thirds of the people will die; the other third will survive and be refined, tested as if through fire, and they will become God’s people.

Hosea *On that day* Israel will call God her husband and idolatry will finally cease to exist. God will betroth Israel to himself forever. They will know him, and their relationship will be based on righteousness, justice, love, mercy, and faithfulness (Hos 2:16-20).

The final seven years of this age will give Israel and Jerusalem great prominence. Israel is already counted among the top ten most powerful nations of the world. During the millennium, the Messiah will be king over the whole earth, and the resurrected Church will reign with him over the survivors of the Great Tribulation. Israel will be one of the nations of the earth but recognized as the Messiah’s people.

Over centuries past there have been opposing views about the Jewish Messianic expectation. Older commentators lived in an era that preceded the return of the Jews from all over the world to form the new state of Israel in 1948 and to take control of Jerusalem again in 1967 after nearly two thousand years of oppression. Before the return, it was difficult for these older commentators to believe it could happen, and so they interpreted these prophecies about Israel as

having been fulfilled in the Church. In addition, there has been historically a considerable anti-Jewish sentiment that badly biased Christian commentaries. Now, with the Jews restored to their land, and with the increasing prominence of Jerusalem on the world stage, the promises that they would be converted in the last days and that Jerusalem would become the center of the world under their Messiah, are no longer incredible. Liberals teach that the rule of Christ in the hearts of believers has replaced the old idea of a Messianic kingdom on Earth, but that teaching has no scriptural basis. No verse of Scripture says or implies that the Kingdom of God is simply the rule of Christ in our hearts.

The prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah, a glorified Jerusalem, and the conversion of Israel are clearly and amply confirmed in both the OT and the NT. Israel will one day turn to the Lord *en masse*, but not before Jesus returns and the resurrection of the Church takes place. They will enter the millennium as mortal survivors of the Great Tribulation, not as part of the resurrected Church. In their rejection of Jesus at his first coming, they forfeited their right to the kingdom, so when the Messiah rules the world with his resurrected saints, only a small percentage of them will be Jewish; Jewish Christians or Messianic Jews as they are often referred to. The nation of Israel, however, will be God's special people on Earth during the millennium. God's call is irrevocable. They will be converted after Jesus' return, and all those still living among the nations will return to Israel. God will be vindicated as the God of Israel and the Father of Jesus the Messiah. He will rule the Earth as God's regent; King of kings and Lord of lords.

When the Deliverer comes from Zion and banishes ungodliness from Jacob, then all Israel will be saved (Rom 11:26). It is not only the Jews living in Israel who are saved but every Jew on the planet. There are an estimated 15.7 million Jews in the world, including 7.2 million in Israel and 6.3 million in the US. After the Messiah returns to Zion and defeats the surrounding armies, he will pour out his Spirit on all the surviving inhabitants of Jerusalem and Israel and gather those who remain from among the nations.

There is a moment when the door to the Church is shut, the moment when the dead in Christ are resurrected and the living saints are raptured, all in the twinkling of an eye. After meeting the Lord in the air, this great multitude of resurrected believers, including born-again Messianic Jews, will follow Jesus to the Mount of Olives from where the Messiah will enter the temple in Jerusalem. And in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins” (Rom 11:25).

The rest of the Jews will be unbelievers at the time of Messiah’s arrival, because they are not believers in Jesus. However, when Jesus comes to Jerusalem with the clouds, God will pour out on them a spirit of grace and supplication. “They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child. ... On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity” (Zech 12:10-11, 13:1). “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the land will mourn because of him” (Rev 1:7).

The time of Israel’s conversion is important. If they were to be converted before the return of Jesus, then they would become part of the Church, as many Jews have done over the centuries. We live in the age of grace, from Pentecost to the Second Coming, wherein people of every tribe and language are invited to put their faith in Jesus Christ, to be born again and united to Christ. When Jesus arrives, the door will be shut (Mt 25:11–12, Lk 13:25-29). While Jesus is in the air, the believing dead will be resurrected. They will rise from among the dead and meet the Lord in the air, and from that point on they will be forever with the Lord. No Scriptures say believers will go to heaven at this time. The Lord’s activity for the following thousand years is to do with the Earth. Believers who are still alive at the Lord’s coming will be raptured, caught up into the clouds with the risen dead.

Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 24:29–31. After the troubles of those days, the sun and moon will be darkened, the powers of heaven will be shaken loose, the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then “all the tribes of the land” (NIV alternate translation), rather than “all the peoples of the Earth,” will mourn when they see him

coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect (the nation of Israel) from one end of heaven to the other (Mt 24:29–31).

Israel's conversion will occur after the Lord descends to earth on the Mount of Olives. From there to the temple (Ezek 43) and from Zion to fight Israel's enemies who are laying siege to Jerusalem at the battle of Armageddon. The Messiah will come from Zion and save Israel and destroy those armies (Rom 11:26). He will pour out on Israel a spirit of grace. *They will look to him* – the one whom they pierced (Jn 19:37). Having seen the one their ancestors crucified coming in great power and glory to save them, they will respond with great mourning. They will be born again of the Holy Spirit. John sees Jesus coming in the clouds, and he says that every eye will see him (Rev 1:7), even (or namely) those who pierced him, and all *the tribes of the land will mourn because of him*. This is exactly what Zechariah predicted. Each family of Israel will mourn separately, wailing in repentance, because they will now realize the crime of their nation in crucifying Jesus the Messiah. The tribes who mourn refer to the tribes of Israel because that is the import of Zechariah's prophecy. In Revelation, the response of unbelievers to these last-day events is only to curse God, not to mourn (Rev 16:9, 11, 21). They are certainly not beating their breasts in sorrow.

The book of Revelation is written to Christians, the seven churches of Asia, so, it does not say much about Israel during the Great Tribulation. Only the New Jerusalem is referred to specifically, not the earthly city, except in Revelation 11:2, 8, where it is referred to as “the Holy City” and then “the great city that is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.”

Israel's conversion occurs after the resurrection and rapture of the church, too late for them to be included among the saints who are resurrected at the Lord's return. Paul said that they would not be converted until *after* the full number of Gentiles comes to faith (Rom 11:25). They will be among the survivors of the Great Tribulation and will continue to live normal lives on earth. At least half the population of the world will be destroyed during this terrible time when powerful earthquakes cause the cities of the nations to collapse (Rev 16:18–

19). Together with Israel, the survivors of the nations will be the *subjects* of the messianic kingdom. The resurrected saints, on the other hand, will reign with Christ as his huge royal family. All Israel will be saved, so the Messiah will be reigning over his people Israel for the first time as a redeemed and obedient nation. The nations are unbelieving survivors from the destruction of the world and will be ruled over with a rod of iron. They will go to Jerusalem to worship the King year by year, under threat of punishment if they do not do so.

Israel's Conversion Prophesied in the NT

Israel's future conversion is prophesied by many OT prophets. The NT is not written for Israel, but to the Church, so we don't expect there to be so many prophecies there concerning Israel. However, there is enough to confirm that what was promised in the OT has not been annulled. Israel has not been replaced by the Church. Paul is very emphatic that the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. As far as election is concerned, the Jews are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. Thousands of Jews became Christians in the first century and there are many becoming Christians today, but these conversions do not fulfill the promises for national Israel. God still has a plan for Israel as a nation, in fact, the whole concept of the Messiah and a Messianic kingdom is Jewish. When Jesus rules the world on his return, he will do so from Jerusalem with the nation of Israel as his nation.

When Jesus spoke about the signs of the end of this age and the coming of the Son of Man in Matthew 24, he said that the sign of the Son of Man would appear in the sky. And then all the *tribes* of the *land* will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. He will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from one end of the heavens to the other. His coming on the clouds is an obvious reference to Daniel 7:13-14, from where the "Son of Man" expression arose. The Ancient of Days gave him authority, glory, and sovereign power (kingship), with the result that all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is everlasting and his kingdom will never be destroyed. The alternate NIV translation "all the tribes

of the land” is the better translation because it is an allusion to Zechariah 12:10-12 where the Lord pours out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication and they look on him whom they have pierced, and they mourn for him as one mourns for an only child. The land will mourn, each clan by itself. ‘Land’ and ‘Earth’ are the same words in both Hebrew and Greek. When Jesus returns, what tribes are going to mourn for the one their ancestors pierced, if it be not Israel? Three times in Revelation 16 we are told that the unbelievers will curse God in response to the plagues they were suffering. It is only Israel who will mourn for him because it is the time for their conversion.

In Matthew 24, Jesus is explaining to his Jewish disciples what will happen at the end of the age. He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call and they will gather his elect from one end of the heaven to the other. Remember that Jesus is talking to Jews, not Christians. What would Jews have understood by “one end of the heaven to the other,” “the elect,” and “the loud trumpet call”? One thing is for sure, they were not thinking about a rapture! These expressions are all connected with Israel and its future restoration.

The “Son of Man” is the name that Jesus used regularly to refer to himself in the third person. The faithful realized that he was referring to himself. Others were not sure. Deuteronomy 30:4 is an early prophecy about God restoring the fortunes of a repentant Israel. It says that even if they have been banished to *the most distant land under the heavens*, from there the Lord their God will gather them and bring them back to the land that belonged to their ancestors. Isaiah 27:12-13 says: “In that day the Lord will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, Israel, will be gathered up one by one. And on that day *a great trumpet will sound*. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain of Jerusalem.” Isaiah 65:22 (LXX) is Messianic: “My *chosen* (eklektoi) shall not toil in vain, neither shall they bear children to be cursed; for they are a seed blessed of God and their offspring with them.” Israel always saw themselves as the elect of God.

Connected with Mt 24:31 is Revelation 1:7: “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him,

and all peoples on earth will mourn because of him.” As in Mt 24:31, “all peoples on earth” is better translated as “all the tribes of the land.” These two verses are important evidence that the Messiah is returning for his people Israel as well as for the Church. Both verses allude to the prophecy in Zechariah 12 which concerns the battle of Armageddon, when *on that day*, all the rebellious nations gather against Jerusalem, and the subsequent conversion of Israel as a nation.

However, ‘the elect’ in Matthew 24:31 is clearly ambiguous, as are the twelve tribes of Israel who are sealed in Revelation 7. Who would Jesus and his disciples be thinking of as ‘elect’ at this time just before Jesus crucifixion? Israel is God’s elect nation and Jesus’ followers are also his chosen people, the elect. The days of the great distress are cut short for the sake of the elect and false prophets perform great sign and wonders to deceive, if possible, the elect (Matt 24:22, 24), more likely with Christians in mind than Jews. God is gathering Israel back to their promised land, but angels are not the agents of this gathering, but rather the nations (Isa 49:22-23). It is the Church who are gathered by angels and a trumpet call (Matt 13:30, 39, Mark 13:27, 1 Cor 15:52, 1 Thess 4:16-17, 2 Thess 2:1).

Romans 11

In Paul’s three-chapter discussion of Israel in Romans 9–11, he states that stubbornness will be upon Israel until the full number of converts from other nations comes to faith. He explains that not all who are descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob belong to Israel. Ishmael was a son of Abraham, but his descendants were not chosen. Esau was a son of Isaac, but his descendants were not chosen either. Even the bulk of the Israelites were disobedient and God had to judge them.

Then, Paul says in chapter 11 that one day all Israel will be saved, just as the prophets said they would. The Deliverer will come from Zion and remove ungodliness from Jacob (Rom 11:25–27). Salvation came to the Gentiles, to make Israel jealous. God’s chosen people are likened to an olive tree. He chose Israel as his people, but because of disobedience, some of the branches were broken off, and the Gentiles were grafted in. Then Paul says, that if the Jews do not continue in their unbelief, God has the power to graft them in again. A partial

hardening has come upon Israel until the full number of Gentiles has been saved. When the time comes for them to repent, all Israel will be saved. Paul said if their disobedience resulted in riches for the Gentiles, their full inclusion would result in many more blessings. All Israel means the full number of Israelites alive at that time. The Messiah will rule from Jerusalem over his redeemed nation Israel, and from there his reign of peace and righteousness will extend to all nations. Concerning the gospel, the Jews were enemies of the early Church, and throughout the centuries there has always been a certain amount of anti-Semitism, even in the Church and among its theologians. But concerning election, Israel is beloved for the sake of the patriarchs. God's gifts and calling are irrevocable. When the Messiah returns, they will receive mercy. They will repent. They will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and they will be saved.

Revelation 11

The book of Revelation does not say much about Israel. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in 70 A.D. and the Jews were scattered throughout the world. The general feeling probably was that the Jews as a nation of God's people were finished and if individuals sought salvation, they would have to become Christians. But what about all those OT prophecies about the Messiah and his reign over a restored Israel? The apostle John, in a vision (Rev 11), was given a measuring rod and asked to measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, but not to measure the court outside the temple, because it had been given over to the nations and they would trample the holy city for forty-two months (the final period before the Messiah returns). During that time, the Lord's two witnesses are preaching in the city "where their Lord was crucified." They are clothed in sackcloth because they are calling Israel to repentance. They have the power to consume their enemies with fire and to shut the sky so that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, akin to things that the prophet Elijah did, so many see these two witnesses as representing Moses and Elijah, the Elijah whom Malachi prophesied would come before the great and awesome day of the Lord. The witnesses are eventually killed by the 'beast,' the Antichrist who is the world ruler, the 'little horn' of Daniel 7:8, 21 who wages war on the

saints and conquers them. When God brings the witnesses back to life, there is a great earthquake. One-tenth of Jerusalem falls and seven thousand people are killed. The clue to the significance of these events is that the rest of the people were terrified and gave glory to God, an idiom for repentance. They are ready to receive the Spirit which will soon be poured out on them by the returning Messiah. Those who repent are “the inhabitants of the earth,” of whom we are told three times that their only response in these days was to curse God (Rev 16:9, 11, 21).