

NOTED THEOLOGIANS FROM POST-REFORMATION HISTORY WHO BELIEVED IN A FUTURE CONVERSION OF NATIONAL / ETHNIC ISRAEL
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A key question: Will unfulfilled OT prophecy be fulfilled in the same way OT prophecies were fulfilled in biblical times? When prophets spoke literally of details surrounding Christ's first coming, should we not expect that details about Christ's second coming will be fulfilled just as literally? Great theologians have not always been consistent here.

Floyd Hamilton, an amillennialist, writes: "Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the premillennialist pictures. That was the kind of Messianic kingdom that the Jews of the time of Christ were looking for, on the basis of a literal kingdom interpretation of the Old Testament promises" (The Basis of the Millennial Faith, 38, in Ryrie, 83).

Leading amillennialist scholar Vern S. Poythress made a significant comment when, in having dialogue with dispensationalists under the auspices of The Evangelical Theological Society, he commented: "Zechariah 14, if read in a straightforward manner, is particularly difficult for an amillennialist. In fact, if I were to defend premillennialism in a debate, I would probably choose Zechariah 14 as a main text." *Grace Theological Journal*, V. 10 #2, Fall 1989, p. 159.

Outside of dispensationalism or any particular millennial position or theological system, some of the greatest theologians of the past have studied OT and/or NT prophecies (notably Romans 9-11) and concluded God is not through with the Jews and has a distinct plan for them in the future as a restored people. While many would consider the church "spiritual Israel," that didn't require God to be done with ethnic Israel. Many believed God would someday restore the Jews to spiritual Israel in the land of Palestine.

Amillennialist Sam Waldron admits the following from Reformation period on (vor.org): 'Millennial expectations of both the premillennial and postmillennial variety gradually grew up in the general context of the Puritan movement centered in the British Isles. Iain Murray [Reformed historian, also not premillennial] in a fascinating chapter found in his *Puritan Hope* carefully traces the development of these expectations. The development begins, he asserts, with the teaching of the restoration or future conversion of the Jews by two progenitors of the Reformed movement in Britain. One of the first developments in thought on prophecy came as further attention was given to the Scriptures bearing on the future of the Jews. ... notably Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr, who taught at Cambridge and Oxford respectively in the reign of Edward VI, did understand the Bible to teach a future calling of the Jews. In this view they were followed by Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor at Geneva. As early as 1560, four years before Calvin's death, the English and Scots refugee Protestant leaders who produced the *Geneva Bible*, express this belief in their marginal notes on Romans chapter 11, verses 15 and 26. On the latter verse they comment, 'He sheweth that the time shall come that the whole nation of the jews, though not everyone particularly, shall be joined to the church of Christ.'

Iain Murray then traces how this belief became common among the Puritans. He concludes, "From the first quarter of the seventeenth century, belief in a future conversion of the Jews became commonplace among the English Puritans."

William Perkins [lived 1558-1602], one of the most influential and prodigious Puritan writers, argued based on Genesis 12: "The Lord saith, All the nations shall be blessed in Abraham: Hence I gather that the nation of the Jews shall be called, and converted to the participation of this blessing: when, and how, God knows: but that it shall be done before the end of the world we know." (cited by Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, 42.)

". . . the seventeenth century witnessed a dynamic interest in the Jews on the part of Continental and British Reformed theologians who hoped for a large-scale conversion of the Jews and, in some cases, for a restoration of the Jews to Palestine before or after their conversion. . . . Theologians as early as Voetius (1609-1676) fervently hoped for the conversion of the Jews. He believed that the Reformed community must deal responsibly with the Jews by giving itself to prayer, godliness, sound interpretation of the OT Scriptures, and sympathy towards the Jews." – W. Van Gemeren, "Israel as the Hermeneutical Crux in the Interpretation of Prophecy (II), *Westminster Theological Journal*, vol. 46, #2, Fall 1984, p. 257, 255.

Dutch Reformed theologians of the seventeenth century believed in a future salvation of the Jews or restoration of the Jewish nation:

". . . for virtually all Dutch theologians of the seventeenth century, 'the whole of Israel' indicated the fullness of the people of Israel 'according to the flesh': in other words, the fullness of the Jewish people. This meant that there was a basis for an expectation of a future conversion of the Jews—an expectation which was shared by a large majority of Dutch theologians." -- J. Van Den Berg, "Eschatological Expectations Concerning the Conversion of the Jews in the Netherlands During the Seventeenth Century," *Puritan Eschatology: 1600 To 1660*, ed. Peter Toon (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1970), 140.

In Barry Horner's new book *Future Israel*, he documents a number of other notable Reformed theologians in this vein:

J. C. Ryle (famed minister in England who lived 1816-1900)

1. I believe that the Jews shall ultimately be gathered again as a separate nation, restored to their own land, and converted to the faith of Christ,
2. after going through great tribulation (Jer. 30:10-11; 31:10; Rom. 11:25-26; Dan. 12:1; Zech. 13:8-9).

I believe that the literal sense of the Old Testament prophecies has been far too much neglected by the Churches, and is far too much neglected at the present day, and that under the mistaken system of spiritualizing and accom-modating Bible language, Christians have too often completely missed its meaning (Luke 24:25-26).

Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981, one of top preachers of 20th century)

[Note: His writings were definitely amillennial and non-dispensational, and earlier writings did not give much place to Israel in the land. However, in his later years before he died, he apparently saw more in Israel's survival and significance in the land as one of the more notable events of his lifetime]

When, interviewed by Carl Henry for *Christianity Today*, he said:

“To me 1967, the year that the Jews occupied all of Jerusalem, was very crucial.

Luke 21:43 is one of the most significant prophetic verses: ‘Jerusalem,’ it reads, ‘shall be trodden down of the Gentiles *until* the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled.’ It seems to me that that took place in 1967—something crucially important that had not occurred in 2,000 years. Luke 21:43 is one fixed point. But I am equally impressed by Romans 11 which speaks of a great spiritual return among the Jews before the end time. While this seems to be developing, even something even more spectacular may be indicated. We sometimes tend to foreshorten events, yet I have a feeling that we are in the period of the end. . . . I think we are witnessing the breakdown of politics. I think even the world is seeing that. Civilization is collapsing.”

-- Carl Henry, “Martyn Lloyd-Jones: From Buckingham to Westminster,”
Christianity Today, February 8, 1980, pp. 33-34.

Jonathan Edwards (lived 1703-1785, arguably greatest American theologian ever)

Nothing is more certainly foretold than this national conversion of the Jews is in the eleventh chapter of Romans. And there are also many passages of the Old Testament that cannot be interpreted in any other sense, that I cannot now stand to mention. Besides the prophecies of the calling of the Jews, we have a remarkable seal of the fulfillment of this great event in providence by a thing that is a kind of continual miracle, viz. the preserving them a distinct [nation] when in such a dispersed condition for above sixteen hundred years. The world affords nothing else like it—a remarkable hand of providence. When they shall be called, then shall that ancient people that were alone God’s people for so long a time be God’s people again, never to be rejected more, one fold with the Gentiles; and then also shall the remains of the ten tribes wherever they are, and though they have been rejected much longer than [the Jews], be brought in with their brethren, the Jews. The prophecies of Hosea especially seem to hold this forth, and that in the future glorious times of the church both Judah and Ephraim, or Judah and the ten tribes, shall be brought in together, and shall be united as one people as they formerly were under David and Solomon (Hos. 1:11), and so in the last chapter of Hosea, and other parts of his prophecy.

Though we don’t know the time in which this conversion of the nation of Israel will come to pass, yet this much we may determine by Scripture, that it will [be] before [the] glory of the Gentile part of the church shall be fully accomplished, because it is said that their coming in shall be life from the dead to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:12, 15) [Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world . . . how much more their fullness? . . . For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?].⁴

It is already obvious that for Edwards, the conversion of ethnic Israel is related to the nation’s promised return to the land of Israel. This man of acknowledged, profound spirituality, is wholly at rest with such a substantial triumph; to charge him with carnality would be absurd. Further, while Israel and the church comprise the people of God, yet there is national distinction within this unity, as Galatians 3:28 well illustrates. Hence, let us now consider Edwards’ more detailed description of the millennial economy, both with regard to geography and the diversity within unity that will incorporate Jews and Gentiles.

That the land of Israel has distinct eschatological importance is indicated by Edwards consideration of its strategic location.

[T]he land of Canaan is the most advantageously posited of any spot of ground on the face [of the earth], to be the place from whence the truth should shine forth, and true religion spread around into all parts of the world. There are three continents of the earth: the old continent, America and Terra Australis. This land is right in the center of the old and principle continent, between Europe, Asia and Africa, but most in Asia, because it is abundantly the largest. And [it is] lying at the end of the Mediterranean Sea, which opens the way from Canaan directly to America, and having the Red Sea and Persian Gulf touching its borders as much as the Mediterranean, according to Exodus 23:31 and other places, opening the way straight to Terra Australis, the third continent. . . .

That God did take care of the situation of his people Israel, upon their account, for the advantage of spreading the truth and diffusing the influences of religion, I think is evident from Deuteronomy 32:8-9, and from Acts 17:26-27 and from Habakkuk 3:6. . . .

And it is the more evident, that the Jews will return to their own land again, because they never have yet possessed one quarter of that land, which was so often promised them, from the Red Sea to the river Euphrates (Exod. 23:31; Gen. 15:18; Deut. 11:24; Josh. 1:4). Indeed, it was partly fulfilled in Solomon's time, when he governed all within those bounds for a short time; but so short, that it is not to be thought that this is all the fulfillment of the promise that is to be. And besides, that was not a fulfillment of the promise, because they did not possess it, though they made the nations of it tributary.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (lived 1834-1892, arguably most influential preacher ever)

I think we do not attach sufficient importance to the restoration of the Jews. We do not think enough of it. But certainly, if there is anything promised in the Bible it is this. I imagine that you cannot read the Bible without seeing clearly that there is to be an actual restoration of the children of Israel. "Thither they shall go up; they shall come with weeping unto Zion, and with supplications unto Jerusalem." May that happy day soon come! For when the Jews are restored, then the fullness of the Gentiles shall be gathered in; and as soon as they return, then Jesus will come upon Mount Zion to reign with his ancients gloriously, and the halcyon days of the Millennium shall then dawn; we shall then know every man to be a brother and a friend; Christ shall rule with universal sway.¹⁴

Speaking on Ezekiel 37:1-10 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in aid of funds for the *British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel amongst the Jews*, Spurgeon declared:

This vision has been used, from the time of Jerome onwards, as a description of the resurrection, and certainly it may be so accommodated with much effect. . . . But while this interpretation of the vision may be very proper as an accommodation, it must be quite evident to any thinking person that this is not the meaning of the passage. There is no allusion made by Ezekiel to the resurrection, and such topic would have been quite apart from the design of the prophet's speech. I believe he was no more thinking of the resurrection of the dead than of the building of St. Peter's at Rome, or the emigration of the Pilgrim Fathers The meaning of our text, as opened up by the context, is most evidently, if words mean anything, first, that there shall be a political restoration of the Jews to their own land and to their own nationality; and then, secondly, there is in the text, and in the context, a most plain declaration, that there shall be a spiritual restoration, a conversion in fact, of the tribes of Israel. . . . Israel is now blotted out from the map of nations; her sons are scattered far and wide; her daughters mourn beside all the rivers of the earth. Her sacred song is hushed; no king reigns in Jerusalem; she bringeth forth no governors among her tribes. But she is to be restored; she is to be restored "as from the dead." When her own sons have given up all hope of her, then is God to appear for her. She is to be re-organized; her scattered bones are to be brought together. There will be a native government again; there will again be the form of a body politic; a state shall be incorporated, and a king shall reign. Israel has now become alienated from her own land. Her sons, though they can never forget the sacred dust of Palestine, yet die at a hopeless distance from her consecrated shores. But it shall not be so forever, for her sons shall again rejoice in her: her land shall be called Beulah, for as a young man marrieth a virgin so shall her sons marry her. "I will place you in your own land," is God's promise to them.

They shall again walk upon her mountains, shall once more sit under her vines and rejoice under her fig-trees. And they are also to be re-united. There shall not be two, nor ten, nor twelve, but one—one Israel praising one God, serving one king, and that one king the Son of David, the descended Messiah. They are to have a national prosperity which shall make them famous; nay, so glorious shall they be that Egypt, and Tyre, and Greece, and Rome, shall all forget their glory in the greater splendor of the throne of David. . . .

If there be meaning in words this must be the meaning of this chapter. I wish never to learn the art of tearing God's meaning out of his own words. If there be anything clear and plain, the literal sense and meaning of this passage—a meaning not to be spirited or spiritualized away—must be evident that both the two and the ten tribes of Israel are to be restored to their own land, and that a king is to rule over them.¹⁵

... We cannot help looking for the restoration of the scattered Israelites to the land which God has given to them by a covenant of salt: we also look for the time when they shall believe in the Messiah whom they have rejected, and shall rejoice in Jesus of Nazareth, whom to-day they despise. There is great encouragement in prophecy to those who work among the seed of Israel; and it is greatly needed, for of all mission fields it has been commonly represented to be one of the most barren, and upon the work the utmost ridicule has been poured. God has, therefore, supplied our faith with encouragements larger than we have in almost any other direction of service. Let those who believe work on! Those who believe not may give it up. They shall not have the honor of having helped to gather together the ancient nation to which our Lord himself belonged; for be it never forgotten that Jesus was a Jew.

Michael Vlach has compiled a number of quotations from famous theologians who have affirmed some form of a future for the Jews or national Israel. We have also included statements from historians who have made comments about how theologians of a particular era or group viewed Israel's future. (Please note that we are not asserting that all these men believe the same thing about Israel):

John Calvin (lived 1509-1564):

" When the Gentiles shall come in, the Jews also shall return from their defection to the obedience of faith; and thus shall be completed the salvation, . . . which must be gathered from both; and yet in such a way that the Jews shall obtain the first place, being as it were the first born in God's family, as Jews are the first born, what the prophet declares must be fulfilled, especially in them; . . . it is to be ascribed to the preeminence of that nation, who God had preferred to all other nations....God distinctly claims for Himself a certain seed, so that His redemption may be effectual in His elect and peculiar nation....God was not unmindful of the covenant which He had made with their fathers, and by which he testified that according to his eternal purpose He loved that nation; and this he confirms by this remarkable declaration, - that the grace of divine calling cannot be made void."

-- "Epistle to the Romans," *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 19, 434-40.

[Note: Calvin tended to de-emphasize Israel more often and spiritualized many OT references to Israel. Calvin is well known for his biblical emphasis on sovereign election of individuals that is not revocable by man's failure or weakness and cannot be lost, and I contend that consistent Calvinism should apply the same to God's election of the nation Israel, in line with Romans 9-11.]

Charles Hodge (arguably greatest Reformed postmillennial scholar of 19th Century):

"The second great event, which, according to the common faith or the Church, is to precede the second advent of Christ, is the national conversion of the Jews. . . . That there is to be such a national conversion may be argued. . . from the original call and destination of that people. As the rejection of the Jews was not total, so neither is it final. First, God did not design to cast away his people entirely, but by their rejection, in the first place, to facilitate the progress of the gospel among the Gentiles. and ultimately to make the conversion of the Gentiles the means of converting the Jews. . . . Because if the rejection of the Jews has been a source of blessing, much more will their restoration be the means of good. . . .The restoration of the Jews to the privileges of God's people is included in the ancient predictions and promises made respecting them . . .The future restoration of the Jews is, in itself, a more probable event than the introduction of the Gentiles into the church of God." -- *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, James Clark & Co. 1960, 805; *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Presb. Board Pub., 1836, 270-285.

John Murray (one of greatest Reformed scholars of 20th century):

"If we keep in mind the theme of this chapter [Rom. 11] and the sustained emphasis on the restoration of Israel, there is no other alternative than to conclude that the proposition, 'all Israel shall be saved' is to be interpreted in terms of the fullness, the receiving, the ingrafting of Israel as a people, the restoration of Israel to gospel favour and blessing and the correlative turning of Israel from unbelief to faith and repentance. . . . In a word, it is the salvation of the mass of Israel that the apostle [Paul] affirms ... While it is true that in respect of the privileges accruing from Christ's accomplishments there is now no longer Jew or Gentile and the Gentiles "are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus throughout the gospel" (Eph. 3:6), yet it does not follow that Israel no longer fulfills any particular design in the realization of God; worldwide saving purpose ... Israel are both "enemies" and "beloved" at the same time, enemies as regards the gospel, beloved as regards the election. . . "Beloved" thus means that God has not suspended or rescinded his relation to Israel as his chosen people in terms of the covenants made with their fathers. -- John Murray (1898-1975) in *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, p. 99

BELOW COMMENTS ARE FROM MOSTLY NON-PREMILLENNIAL WRITERS WHO HAVE SOUGHT TO FAIRLY DEAL WITH THE TEXT OF ROMANS 11:26

R. C. Sproul (in his commentary on Romans):

"And so all Israel will be saved." The context indicates that Paul must be speaking of the Jewish people. He does not mean every Jew that ever lived, but the nation of Israel. Now why do I say that 'Israel' in this phrase refers to the Jews? All through his discussion Paul is talking about Israel in part: part of Israel has been blinded, part of Israel has been cut away, part of Israel has been stubborn, part of Israel has been excluded from the kingdom of God and its blessings. The Jews as a people are presently under judgment. But as there was a national judgment, so there will be a national restoration. Their rejection, even though it was a national rejection, did not include the rejection of every individual. So the restoration doesn't necessarily mean that every individual Jew will be saved, but the nation as a nation will be restored to God.

Kenneth Gentry is a leading Preterist scholar who affirms much the same.

"The future conversion of the Jews will conclude the fulfillment (Rom. 11:12–25)."

Reformation Study Bible:

He is showing how God will, in the future, bring such widespread salvation to the Jewish people that, in an obvious general sense, it can be said that "all Israel will be saved" (v. 26) ... some form of this last view seems most likely for the following reasons. First, hints of it seem to appear already in vv. 11, 12, 15, 16, 24. Second, v. 25 suggests that an end to the partial hardening of Israel is in view. Third, "Israel" in v. 26 is not naturally interpreted as signifying a different entity from the Israel in view in vv. 1–24 and vv. 28–31, where national Israel (not spiritual Israel) is in view. Fourth, "mystery" in v. 25 would seem inappropriate and exaggerated if Paul's teaching were simply that all elect Jews will be saved. Finally, this view accords well with the quotations in vv. 26, 27 from Is. 59:20, 21; 27:9; Jer. 31:33, 34, which appear to speak of a comprehensive banishment of that sin that has been the cause of Israel's alienation from God.

Geneva Study Bible (1599 Edition, notes on Romans 11:24-25):

He [Paul] speaks of the whole nation, not of any one part. . . . The blindness of the Jews is neither so universal that the Lord has no elect in that nation, neither will it be continual: for there will be a time in which they also (as the prophets have foretold) will effectually embrace that which they now so stubbornly for the most part reject and refuse.

Matthew Henry (lived 1662-1714, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Romans 11:26):

‘The Jews shall continue in blindness, till God hath performed his whole work among the Gentiles, and then their turn will come next to be remembered. This was the purpose and ordination of God, for wise and holy ends; things should not be ripe for the Jews’ conversion till the church was replenished with the Gentiles, that it might appear that God’s taking them again was not because he had need of them, but of his own free grace. (3.) The extent of it: *All Israel shall be saved*, v. 26. He will *have mercy upon all*, v. 32. Not every individual person, but the body of the people. Not that ever they should be restored to their covenant of peculiarity again, to have their priesthood, and temple, and ceremonies again (an end is put to all those things); but they should be brought to believe in Christ the true Messiah whom they crucified, and be incorporated in the Christian church, and become one sheep-fold with the Gentiles under Christ the great Shepherd. . . . Others think that it is yet to have its accomplishment towards the end of the world—that those Jews which yet wonderfully remain distinct from the rest of the nations by their names, customs, and religion, and are very numerous, especially in the Levant parts, shall, by the working of the Spirit with the word, be convinced of their sin, and brought generally to embrace the Christian faith, and to join in with the Christian churches, which will contribute much to their strength and beauty. Alas! who shall live when God doeth this?’

Matthew Poole (lived 1624-1679, one of most famous Puritan commentators):

‘by Israel here (as in the precedent verse) you must understand, the nation and people of the Jews. And by all Israel is not meant every individual Israelite, but many, or (it may be) the greatest part of them. So all is to be taken in Scripture: see John 6:45; 1 Tim 2:6, and elsewhere. Look, as when he speaks of the conversion of the Gentiles, and the coming in of their fulness, there are many (too many of them) still unconverted; so, notwithstanding the general calling of the Jews, a great many of them may remain uncalled. As it is written; the apostle had this by revelation, but he proves it also by Scripture. All are not agreed from whence these testimonies are taken; the former is found (with some little variation) in Isa 59:20: as for the latter, some think it is taken from Jer 31:33. Others think, that he joineth two places in Isaiah together, (as he did before, Rom 11:8,) and the last words are taken out of Isa 27:9. The Seventy have the very words used by the apostle. These prophecies and promises, though they were in part fulfilled when Christ came in the flesh, (see Acts 3:26,) yet there will be a more full and complete accomplishment thereof upon the Jewish nation and people towards the end of the world.’ -- *Commentary on the Bible*, Vol. 3, p. 519-520

John Gill (1697-1771, premillennial, one of staunchest Calvinists of his time)

‘Ver. 26. **And so all Israel shall be saved**,.... Meaning not the mystical spiritual Israel of God, consisting both of Jews and Gentiles, who shall appear to be saved in the Lord with an everlasting

salvation, when all God's elect among the latter are gathered in, which is the sense many give into; but the people of the Jews, the generality of them, the body of that nation, called "the fulness" of them, Ro 11:12, and relates to the latter day, when a nation of them shall be born again at once; when, their number being as the sand of the sea, they shall come up out of the lands where they are dispersed, and appoint them one head, Christ, and great shall be the day of Jezreel; when they as a body, even the far greater part of them that shall be in being, shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their King; shall acknowledge Jesus to be the true Messiah, and shall look to him, believe on him, and be saved by him from wrath to come. ... he refers to the last times, and to a very general conversion of them to the Messiah'

Robert Haldane (Lived 1764-1842, *An Exposition of Romans*, p. 549)

'He now declares that at that period all Israel shall be saved. The rejection of Israel has been general, but at no period universal. This rejection is to continue till the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in. Then the people of Israel, as a body, shall be brought to the faith of the Gospel. Such expressions as that "all Israel shall be saved," are no doubt, in certain situations, capable of limitation; but as no Scripture demands any limitation of this expression, and as the opposition here stated is between a *part* and *all*, there is no warrant to make any exception, and with God this, like all other things, is possible.'

Charles Hodge (lived 1797-1878, *Romans Commentary*, 11.26):

'From the context, **Israel** here must mean the Jewish people, and **all Israel** the whole nation. The Jews, as a people, are now rejected; as a people they are to be restored. As their rejection, although national, did not include the rejection of every individual, so their restoration, though also national, need not include the salvation of every individual Jew. **All Israel** does not mean here all the true people of God, as Augustine, Calvin, and others explain it; nor all the elect Jews — i.e., all that part of the nation which constitute "the remnant according to the election of grace" — but the whole nation, as a nation.'

John Newton (lived 1725-1807, author of hymn "Amazing Grace," and Puritan pastor):

'we have what may be called a standing miracle continually before our eyes; I mean the state of the Jews, who, though dispersed far and wide among many nations, are every where preserved a distinct and separate people. The history of the world affords no other instance of the like kind. The great monarchies, by which they were successively conquered and scattered, have successively perished. Only the names of them remain. But the people whom they despised, and endeavored to exterminate, subsist to this day; and, though sifted like corn over the earth, and apparently forsaken of God, are still preserved by his wonderful providence, unaffected by the changes and customs around them; still tenacious of the law of Moses, though the observance of it is rendered impracticable. Many days, many ages they have lived as the prophets foretold they should, without a temple, without sacrifice or priest. (Hos. 3:4-5) As yet, many Heathen nations are permitted to walk in their own ways. But at length "the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in, and all Israel shall be saved." (Rom. 11:25-26) The revolutions and commotions in kingdoms and nations, which astonish and perplex politicians, are all bringing forward this great event.' — *Works of John Newton*, Volume IV, Sermon XXXII.

NOTE: Modern Reformed scholar Derek Thomas has done much study and some writing on the Eschatology of the Westminster Divines which may be published soon

Below is from "The Puritans and the Promises" (online article by reformed baptist pastor Errol Hulse at Banner of Truth website):

The **Larger Westminster Catechism** Question 191 sums up the Puritan view.

What do we pray for in the second petition of the Lord's prayer?

Answer: We pray that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, and the fullness of the Gentiles brought in.

In the **Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God** we are directed to pray for:

The propagation of the gospel and the kingdom of Christ to all nations; for the conversion of the Jews, the fullness of the Gentiles, the fall of antichrist, and the hastening of the second coming of our Lord

... There will be a major conversion of the Jews as 'godlessness is turned away from Jacob' (Rom 11). This is part of a programme as we will see.

The best-known Puritan expositor of Romans was Elnathan Parr. Parr was educated at Eton, graduated at Cambridge in 1597 and exercised a powerful ministry at Palgrave in Suffolk. He died about 1632. Parr's commentary on Romans was published in 1620. His exposition on Romans chapters 9 to 11 and on 11 in particular is constraining.

He argues along these lines: God's rejection of the Jews is neither total nor final. The drift of the passage is to comfort believing Jews, admonish the Gentiles and safeguard them from arrogance. Paul has shown at the conclusion of chapter ten that the Lord has stretched out his hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people, whereas the Gentiles who did not seek him were found by him (Rom 10:20,21). This leads to the question, 'Has God cast away his people?'

Paul answers with a strong negative, God forbid! He points to his own example, I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin. Paul answers too by making an accurate distinction that the Jews are in a special way God's people, a people whom he foreknew. Furthermore Paul answers the objection by citing an example from the days of Elijah when in spite of apostasy the Lord reserved 7,000 who had not bowed to Baal. In Paul's day then there was a remnant chosen by grace.

Parr: 'When he comes to verse eleven Paul shows that the rejection of the Jews is not final but that the multitude (I say not every individual) shall be generally called before the end of the world, that Jews and Gentiles shall make one sheepfold and one flock under one shepherd, Jesus Christ.'

... On the crucial verse 26: And so all Israel shall be saved Parr refutes the idea that in this phrase Israel stands for all the elect. Parr writes: 'That all the elect shall be saved? Who ever doubted that? But of the calling of the Jews there is doubt. He calls their salvation a secret or mystery but there is nothing mysterious about all the elect being saved. He shows that there is an unbroken reference to Israel/Jacob, that is, ethnic Israel.' From verses 25-28 Parr concludes, 'Before the end of the world the Jews in regard to their multitude will be called.' In this he is followed by Matthew Poole and Matthew Henry.

William Greenhill in his commentary on Ezekiel 39:25-29 says, 'There is a day of mercy to come for the Jews, even all of them,' and he cites Romans 11:15-27 and Zechariah 10:6.

The way in which they will be brought to repentance and the depth of that repentance is described by **George Hutcheson** on Zechariah 12:10-14.

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem 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, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son each clan by itself... (Zech 12:10-14). Writes Hutcheson, 'Here is held forth the future conversion and repentance of Israel, the full accomplishment whereof was not that which we read of in primitive times in Acts, but is yet to be accomplished when all their families concur in this work.' He continues, 'The conversion of the Jews or Israel unto the Messiah is not to be of some few only, but national of the body of the people, and there will be real repentance among them for all the land shall mourn and all the families that remain, men and their wives.'

Matthew Henry expounds Isaiah 19:25 which tells of a highway like an M1 motorway from Egypt through Israel to Assyria, a dual carriageway from Cairo to Jerusalem to Baghdad. 'The Gentile nations shall not only unite with each other in the gospel-fold under Christ the great Shepherd, but they shall all be united with the Jews. When Egypt and Assyria become partners in serving God, Israel shall make a third with them (v. 24) they shall become a three-fold cord, not easily broken; the ceremonial law, which had long been the partition-wall between Jews and Gentiles shall be taken down, and then they shall become one sheep-fold, under one shepherd. Thus united, they shall be a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, v 24, 25. Israel shall be a blessing to them all because of them, as concerning the flesh Christ came; and they were the natural branches of the good olive, to whom did originally pertain its root and fatness, and the Gentiles were but grafted in among them, Rom 11:17.'

The likelihood of so great a miracle as the conversion of the Jews on a large scale seems incredible. Parr agrees: 'But it is now almost sixteen hundred years ago since they were cast off. Is it likely that after so long a time they should be called? Answer: Yes: for the Gentiles lay longer under their own infidelity, and yet at last received grace and were called.'

... [Reformed] Expositors who endorse Parr's interpretation are **Charles Hodge, Robert Haldane, John Brown of Edinburgh, H G C Moule, Frederic Godet, W G T Shedd, Prof John Murray, Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, C E B Cranfield, James Dunn and Thomas R Shreiner** in his recently published commentary on Romans. [also **James Montgomery Boice, and Premillennial scholars in Puritan tradition, such as Jeremiah Burroughs, Joseph Mede, Horatius Bonar, Thomas Goodwin, John Gill, etc.**]

What about the prospect of Romans 11 being fulfilled today? This is the era of the Gentiles. During the 20th century there has been an unprecedented multiplication of evangelical churches in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Apart from a few Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia where every form of Christianity is fiercely persecuted, evangelical churches exist in every nation in the world. Would this be a fullness of the Gentiles? What about the present locality of Jews? In spite of the holocaust, which was a Satanic effort to annihilate the Jews, they have survived and in the Diaspora are found universally, especially in major cities world-wide such as Johannesburg, Sydney, Buenos Aires and New York where they form about one third of the population.

Since 1948 Jews have returned from a world-wide Diaspora to Israel. In 1967 the prophecy of our Lord was fulfilled: Jerusalem shall be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled (Luke 21:24). Today there are Christian churches in Israel. This year when a Reformed pastor baptised twelve converts to be added to his church of about 300, it caused such concern that it was even debated in the Knesset (Parliament) of Israel and caught the attention of the mass media which gave opportunity for Jewish converts to testify on national TV as to how they came to faith in Jesus.

There is much more today to encourage prayer for the fulfilment of the promises of Romans 11 than there was in the 17th century. Yet we do well to heed the wonderful counsel of **Francis Turretin**: 'As to the quality and extent of that conversion, whether it will be national and universal of all or particular of some; whether simultaneous or successive; and how, by what means and in what time it will go forward, is safer to be unknown than to be rashly defined, the Holy Spirit stamping this mystery with his seal.'

[full article available at http://www.banneroftruth.org/pages/articles/article_detail.php?670]

JOHN OWEN (1616-1683)

When preaching before the House of Commons in 1649, John Owen spoke of "the bringing home of his ancient people to be one fold with the fullness of the Gentiles....in answer to millions of prayers put up at the throne of grace for this very glory, in all generations. Vol. 8 pg 266. Days of prayer and humiliation were kept in Scotland, one particular object being "that the promised conversion of His ancient people of the Jews may be hastened."

COTTON MATHER (1663-1728)

"I lifted up my Cries.... for the conversion of the Jewish nation, and for my own having the Happiness, at some time or other, to Baptize a Jew that should by my ministry be brought home unto the Lord." The Theology of Mission in the Puritan Tradition pg 247.

ROBERT MURRAY M'CHEYNE (1813-1843)

"To the Jew first. Converted Israel, he declared, will give life to the dead world...just as we have found, among the parched hills of Judah, that the evening dew, coming silently down, gave life to every plant, making the grass to spring and the flowers to put forth their sweetest fragrance, so shall converted Israel be when they come as dew upon a dead, dry world. The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men." Micah 5:7. Memoir and Remains of R. M. M'Cheyne - 1966 reprint pg 489. In 1840 M'Cheyne went to Ulster to plead for the interest of the Jews. This stirred up great interest. The following year the Irish General Assembly resolved to establish work among the Jews. They established missions in Syria and Germany , believing "missionary enterprise is one of the means to bring about the restoration of Israel in accordance with the Scriptures." * Minutes of the General Assembly. 1840-1850 .

RICHARD SIBBES (1577-1635)

"The Jews are not yet come in under Christ's banner; but God, that hath persuaded Japhet to come to the tents of Shem, will persuade Shem to come into the tents of Japhet, Gen. 9:27.. the fullness of the Gentiles is not yet come in Rom 11:25...but God will gather all the sheep His father hath given Him into one fold that there may be one sheepfold and one shepherd John 10:16.... the faithful Jews rejoiced to think of the calling of the Gentiles; and why should not we joy to think of the calling of the Jews..*The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes by A.B. Grosart Vol 1 pg 99. And when the fullness of the Gentiles is come in, then comes the conversion of the Jews. Why may we not expect it? they were the people of God. We see christ believed on in the world. We may therefore expect that they will also be called, there being many of them, and keeping their nation distinct from others. Richard Sibbes vol 5 pg 517

INCREASE MATHER (1639-1723)

In his work the Mystery of Israel's Salvation Explained and Applied says the following : "That there shall be a general conversion of the tribes of Israel, is a truth which in some measure hath been known and believed in all ages of the church of God, since the Apostles' days....only in these late days these things have obtained credit much more universally than herefore." "There is a veil of miserable blindness upon their hearts that they cannot, they will not, see the truth ; but, sayeth the Apostle, "this shall be taken away". And (sayeth he) "it shall turn". What is this? I answer; "it", there may note the body of the Jewish nation, or the words may be read, "they shall turn" (i.e. the blinded minds of the Jews shall turn) "unto the Lord".

THOMAS GOODWIN (1600-1680)

"There will come a time when the generality of mankind both Jew and Gentile, will come to Jesus Christ. He hath had but little takings of the world yet, but he will have before he hath done. " Sermon 34 Vol 1 pg 520. "There may be some prayers which you must be content never yourselves to see answered in this world, the accomplishment of them not falling out in your time; such as those you haply make for the calling of the Jews, the utter downfall of God's enemies and the flourishing of the Gospel...all which prayers are not yet lost, but will be answered."* Works of Goodwin, 3:365,366.

MATTHEW HENRY (1662-1714)

"Now two things he exhorts the Gentiles to, with reference to the rejected Jews: - to have a respect for the Jews, notwithstanding, and to desire their conversion. This is intimated in the prospect he gives them of the advantage that would accrue to the church by their conversion, Rom. 11:12, 15. It would be as life from the dead; and therefore, they must not insult or triumph over those poor Jews, but rather pity them, and desire their welfare, and long for the receiving of them in again.

Another thing that qualifies this doctrine of the Jews rejection is that though for the present they are cast off, yet the rejection is NOT final; but, when the fullness of time is come, they will be taken in again. They are not cast off for ever, but mercy is remembered in the midst of wrath.

The Jews are in a sense a holy nation (Ex. 14:6) being descended from holy parents. Now it cannot be imagined that such a holy nation should be totally and finally cast off. This proves that the seed of believers, as such, are within the pale of the visible church, and within the verge of the covenant, till they do, by their unbelief, throw themselves out; for, if the root be holy, so are the branches...though grace does not run in the blood, yet external privileges do (till they are forfeited), even to a thousand generations...The Jewish branches are reckoned holy, because the root was so. This is expressed more plainly (Rom. 11:28)

Though particular persons and generations wear off in belief, yet there having been a national church membership, though for the present suspended, we may expect that it will be revived...It is called a mystery (Rom 11:25), that which was not obvious, and which one would not expect upon the view of the present state of that people, who appeared generally so obstinate against Christ and Christianity that it was a riddle, to talk of their unanimous conversion. Alas! who shall live when God doeth this?"

*Matthew Henry's Commentary, V 6, MacDonald Publishing Company, pp 448-453.

THOMAS BOSTON (1676-1732)

" There is a day coming when there shall be a national conversion of the Jews or Israelites. The now blinded and rejected Jews shall at length be converted into the faith of Christ, and join themselves to the Christian Church," Have you any love to, or concern for the church, for the work of reformation, the reformation of our country, the reformation of our world? Any longing desire for the revival of that work now at a stand; for a flourishing state of the Church, that is now under a decay? Then pray for the conversion of the Jews." Sermon in 1716 "Encouragement to Pray for the Conversion of the Jews."

[above from http://israelsmessiah.com/religions/christianity/christians_for_jews.htm]

CONCLUSION

The previous 12 pp. of quotes (all from non-dispensational writers) should be more than sufficient to show that some future distinct plan and salvation for ethnic or national Israel was not (as I've heard some charge) "a view invented by 19th Century Dispensationalists"! Regrettably there is much ignorance among dear Reformed brethren today who may be surprised to find some "future Israel" views among so many of the great heroes of their faith tradition in the past. While I personally believe futuristic premillennialism does best justice to the *biblical* evidence, I hope that even my amillennial and postmillennial brethren will reconsider recovering their position's *historical* past views on Israel. This is one of the most important issues of eschatology, because God's Word and promises and biblical interpretation are at stake. Of course, no matter what theologians we can find on our side, the Reformation motto and ultimate authority can only be *sola scriptura* – Scripture alone must interpret Zechariah 12-14, Ezekiel 36-39, & Romans 9-11 and other passages consistently with *tota scriptura* (the totality of scripture). If what is written here causes some to re-study the scriptures more, then *solī deo gloria*. – Pastor Phil