

Prophecies of Israel's Future: *The Hermeneutics of Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism*

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Introduction

As a student at a Christian University in Ukraine I took a New Testament course on the Book of Revelation by Professor William Klein of Denver Seminary. Passing over the majority of the book, one student asked him, «But...where is the Rapture?» Professor Klein stopped and replied, “Rapture? Until chapter 19 there is no Rapture.» For the first time I began to think seriously about the biblical teaching on the Rapture, Tribulation, and other eschatological positions. I began to recognize that the stamp of the dispensational worldview on my “hermeneutical” principles influenced my reading of the Bible. Once, when I talked with one brother about some eschatological issues, he responded: «But that is for Israel...» All these conversations provoked me to think about why such interpretations—which are widely held throughout the former Soviet Union—have a place in our churches.

Behind my personal experiences there are other reasons to think seriously about the future of Israel and the hermeneutical principles that are applied to the interpretation of Old and New Testament passages about the future. Merkle gives two reasons for studying this question: “The final destiny of ethnic Israel is both a sensitive and important topic. It is sensitive, because it involves real people and real outcomes. It is important, because it involves God’s promises and God’s integrity.”¹ The main analytical questions that I will examine in this article are: What



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¹ Ben L Merkle, “Romans 11 and the Future of Ethnic Israel,” *JETS*, 43.4 (2000): 709.

kind of future is expected for national Israel? How should one interpret OT prophecies and apocalyptic literature about the future of national Israel? Then these analytical questions will be addressed to the dispensational school of interpretation, the Reformed school of interpretation, and then to Paul's interpretation (especially to Ro 9-11). Finally, on the basis of New Testament teaching (Ro 9-11) two contrasting schools of interpretation will be evaluated.

Dispensationalism: Old Testament prophecy and the future of Israel

The first questions about the future of Israel to be addressed to the dispensational school of interpretation are as follows: What is dispensationalism as a school of interpretation and as a point of view? What kind of future do dispensationalists envision for national Israel? How do dispensationalists interpret Old Testament prophecies

about the future of national Israel?

First, dispensationalism is regarded as a worldview, a theological system, a philosophy of history, and a school of interpretation. The word «dispensation» comes from the Latin translation (*dispensatio*) of the Greek word (*οἰκονομία*), which means “management of a household, direction, office.”² Ryrie suggests that a dispensation is a «distinguishable economy in the outworking of God's purpose.»³ At the heart of dispensationalism lies the understanding that the history of God's plan of redemption may be divided into seven separate ages (dispensations) in which God deals with people in a particular way.⁴ So, dispensationalism could also be considered a specific “worldview” of God's plan for people in different economies (ages), viewing God's plan through the lens of a particular perspective.⁵ Thus, dispensationalism is the worldview (or point of view), that surveys and interprets the whole Bible in the context of different dispensations.⁶

² W. Bauer “οἰκονομία,” 5:559-60. Cf. Charles G. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 24-25.

³ Charles G. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 29.

⁴ Some other advocates of the dispensational school suggested a different number of dispensations in God's plan, but Scofield's widely held view presents the classical number of seven dispensations.

⁵ Each age (*οἰκονομία*) is characterised by God's dealing with his people in a specific way. Each age provides a context for the interpretation of events that take place during the dispensation. Thus, God has one plan for Israel in one dispensation but he has another plan for the church in a different dispensation. A literal interpretation of OT prophecy claims a literal fulfilment in the *future* and a dispensational worldview claims their fulfilment in a new *dispensation* because God now deals with the church, not with

Israel. Therefore, these things will happen in the future, not in the church age, but rather in a future age of the new dispensation for the nation of Israel, where God's plan for the nation of Israel will come to an end.

⁶ Keathley writes that, “Each dispensation is characterised by new revelation from God, testing to go along with that revelation, human failure, and divine judgement in light of that failure” [Hampton Keathley, “The Relationship of the Church to Israel,” n.p. Cited 24 December 2003. Online: <http://www.bible.org/docs/theology/dispens/ct.htm>.] Scofield, who through his Reference Bible did much to popularize and spread the dispensationalist position, wrote that each age is “a period of time during which man is tested in respect to his obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God» [Cyrus I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), 5]. Scofield wrote his commentary in 1909 and it

Second, dispensationalism may also be considered a school of interpretation. If the first word, *oivkonomi*, suggests that dispensationalism is a worldview of God's plan in history, the second word, *ovrqotome,w*, suggests dispensationalism to be a school of interpretation. This theory is built on the understanding that the interpreter must ensure that he has "correctly handled the word of truth" (2Ti 2:15),⁷ i.e. correctly interpreted the Bible according to the dispensational worldview. The two concepts (*οἰκονομία* and *ὀρθοτομέω*) indissolubly exist together, forming dispensationalism as a worldview and as a hermeneutical school in an integrated system.⁸

Finally, the dispensational worldview results in a distinct dispensation for the church and a distinct dispensation for Israel. Thus, the dispensational approach previews a future for national Israel in contrast to the church's

dispensation, which begins after the church age (after the rapture of the church before the Great Tribulation). When the church is raptured, God will continue to deal with Israel through the Tribulation and Millennium epochs. The inference, then, is that OT prophecies are literally interpreted and have to be fulfilled in the future dispensation for Israel.⁹ Thus, rightly dividing truth into different periods and administrations (into seven dispensations) the interpreter has to make distinctions between two groups of God's people: Israel (earth) and church (heaven); two gospels (kingdom and grace); two kingdoms (on earth and in heaven); the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of grace; the two advents of Christ (for the church and with the church); the day of the Lord and the day of the Christ, etc.¹⁰ Thus, OT prophecies are interpreted literally as concerning the future dispensation of Israel age.¹¹

was translated and widely distributed beginning in 1987 in the former Soviet Union. He summarized and extended what J. N. Darby began, and Lewis S. Chafer and Charles C. Ryrie further authorized and systematized it. But Scofield taught, preached and extended dispensationalism among churches, lay people, and ministers in his *Scofield Reference Bible*.

⁷ According to dispensational understanding, the word "handled" (*ὀρθοτομέω*) has the meaning "to cut directly" the scriptures into correct pieces of God's program for ages.

⁸ Rightly dividing truth into different periods and administrations (into seven dispensations), the interpreter has to make distinctions between Jew, Gentile, and the church of God; the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of grace; the two advents; the day of the Lord and the day of the Christ, etc.

⁹ For example, Israel will come back to the land, towns and temple will be rebuilt, Israel will go through the Tribulation (Da 9:24-27), come to the Millennium, and have a future distinct from the church, etc.

¹⁰ The nature of each dispensation is characterized by "(1) a *deposit* of divine revelation concerning God's will, embodying what God requires of man as to his conduct; (2) man's *stewardship* of this divine revelation, in which he is responsible to obey it; and (3) a *time-period*, often called an [age,] during which this divine revelation is dominant in the testing of man's obedience to God" [Scofield, *The New Scofield Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3].

¹¹ Dispensationalists demand that literal interpretation is the basis of the dispensational hermeneutic. A literal approach to interpretation is "grammatical-historical," "normal," and "plain" (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 96). In the context of a literal approach, "symbols, figures of speech and types are all interpreted plainly in this method and they are in no way contrary to literal interpretation" (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 86-87). Ryrie argues that dispensationalism is a result of literal interpretation: "literal interpretation results... in recognising distinctions in the Scriptures...in the New Testament the word Israel does not mean the church and

Dispensationalism is a point of view of the redemptive history of the Bible in that it is built on two key words (οἰκονομία and ὀρθοτομέω), and in that it is a system that has become a foundation for hermeneutic principles and interpretation.¹² Sharp distinctions are not the product of a literal approach, but rather the result of a worldview.¹³ Worldview becomes the main hermeneutical principle for the interpretation of the future of Israel. Thus, dispensationalism (as a school of interpretation and as a worldview) interprets OT prophecies and apocalyptic literature about Israel literally, finding their fulfilment in a national Israel in a future dispensation.

Covenantalism: OT prophecy and the future of Israel

What is the Reformed interpretation, both as a school of interpretation and as a point of view? How do Reformed theologians interpret OT prophecies

and apocalyptic literature? Do Reformed theologians find any future for Israel? The theological tradition of Reformed theology itself will not be examined, but rather its hermeneutic approach.¹⁴ Covenantal theology is a worldview shared by many Reformed theologians that looks at God's plan of redemptive history from the viewpoint of God's covenants with humankind. I will use the terms covenantalism¹⁵ and dispensationalism to distinguish two points of view of the Bible and especially two hermeneutical approaches to OT prophecy and apocalyptic interpretation about Israel.

The covenantal worldview regards God's plan through his covenants as the main context for interpretation. There are three covenants: the covenant of works,¹⁶ the covenant of grace, and the redemptive covenant.¹⁷ The covenant of grace is progressively expressed by eight individual covenants: Edenic, Adamic, Noa-

vice versa. Dispensationalism, then, recognises the different peoples of God simply because of the distinction maintained by the text as literally interpreted" (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 96). He concludes that there is a logical connection between literal interpretation and the principle of distinguishing: "normal interpretation leads to the clear distinction between words, concepts, peoples, and economies" (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 86-87). Ryrie asserts that, «Dispensationalism is a result of consistent application of the basic hermeneutical principle of literal, normal, or plain interpretation. No other system of theology can claim this.»

¹² Many scholars and commentators do not share such an interpretation of οἰκονομία and ὀρθοτομέω. For example, Matthew Henry [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 2362] suggests another perspective on the meaning of ὀρθοτομέω: "It is *rightly to divide the word of truth*. Not to invent a new gospel, but rightly to divide the gospel that is committed to their trust.

To speak terror to those to whom terror belongs, comfort to whom comfort; to give every one *his portion in due season*." Walter G. Bauer in *A Greek-English Lexicon* (5:580) interprets the word as "teach the word aright, expound it soundly, shape rightly, and preach fearlessly."

¹³ It is impossible to make a significant distinction between the church and Israel based only on the different usage of these words. It is not reasonable to construct distinct interpretations on the meanings of words or concepts in the OT and NT apart from exegetical research of the passage.

¹⁴ Reformed theology is very often associated with Calvinism, covenant theology, Federal theology, amillennialism and even liberalism.

¹⁵ Covenantalism relates to all "reformed theology" that follows the covenantal method of interpretation of OT prophecy and apocalypses.

¹⁶ The covenant of works includes agreement of contracting parties (God and man), promise (life) and condition (obedience).

¹⁷ God established the covenant of works before

hic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Palestinian, Davidic and the New Covenant.¹⁸ Each contains three main parts: words of promise, blood, and the seal of the covenant.¹⁹ The covenant of grace consisted of the main promise (I will be your God) and the main response of humankind (faith, love and obedience).²⁰ Stephen Spencer notes that as in the dispensational approach, worldview also plays a significant role in the interpretation of the Bible in the covenantal approach: "It can designate a theology in which the concept of covenant plays a significant, even central, role, so that it is basic to the understanding of Scripture and the plan of redemption."²¹ In this way covenantal worldview regulates the hermeneutic, just as in the dispensational approach.

As a result, covenantalists look at OT prophecies about the future of Israel as prophecies that were fulfilled

by the NT church. Both Israel and the church are the people of God: Israel is the church and the church is the new Israel (1Co 10:17; 12:12; Eph 2:14-15; Gal 3:28.39; 1Pe 2:9-10 and Ex 19:5-6; Gal 6:16; Ro 9:8). A promised kingdom has already come with Jesus and this is the church, the same as the people of God (Col 1:13; Rev 1:5-6); the new temple is the church (Eph 2:19-22; 1Co 3:16-17; 2Co 6:15 and Eze 37:27; Jn 2:19-21 and Mk 14:58); the New Jerusalem is the church (Heb 12:22-23; 11:10; Php 3:20; Rev 21:2) and a new covenant is made with the church (Jer 31:31-37; Eze 36:15-28). Thus, OT prophecies were spiritually fulfilled in the NT church (or in the new Israel of God).²²

In this way, the Bible does not separate Israel and the church, but rather explains them as the people of God (Eph 2; Ro 9; 1Pe 2:6; and Ex 19:5-6). Keathley states this position

the fall whereby Adam had to obey God and received eternal life. After the fall, God established the *covenant of grace* that included all people who needed the grace of God for salvation from sin. The covenant of grace became possible only on the basis of the *redemptive covenant* between God the Father and God the Son.

¹⁸ Covenantalists suggest one more divine covenant: the everlasting covenant of God the Father with the Son, which is separate from the other eight progressive covenants.

¹⁹ Kevin J. Conner and Ken Malmin, *Interpreting the Scriptures: A Textbook on how to Interpret the Bible*. (Portland, Ore.: Center Press, 1976), 130-31.

²⁰ Kevin Conner adds that, "The source of the covenants is the grace of God and the purpose of the covenants is to make man in the image of God and to bring man to full fellowship with Him" (Conner, *Interpreting*, 130-31).

²¹ Stephen R. Spencer, "Reformed Theology, Covenant Theology and dispensationalism" (Ph.D. art., Dallas Theological Seminary, n.d.), 5.

²² Covenantalists suggest several reasons why they could not interpret OT prophecy literally.

First, the nation of Israel broke the covenant by their disobedience to God and thus the promises will be fulfilled only in those people of God who keep the covenant conditions. Christ said that the promised kingdom came into the world and was given to the people who would bear fruit (Mt 21:43). Thus, literal promises and their fulfilment are not for the future of national Israel because they broke the covenant; instead, spiritual fulfilment must be found in the church (New Israel). The church replaced the nation of Israel in God's plan and there is no literal future for the ethnic nation that could be found in OT prophecy; all of them are fulfilled and must be interpreted in relation to the church. Second, the apocalyptic literature of the prophets demands to be interpreted symbolically as "time" is not clear due to the frequent use of symbolic language. If apocalyptic prophecy is not treated symbolically then covenantalism finds it impossible to appropriately connect some prophecy if interpreted literally. In addition, they cannot agree upon a system of literal pictures of the future because they appear to contradict each other.

clearly when he writes, “Israel, the church of the new covenant, is regarded as the fulfilment of the Lord’s promises to the people of God of the old covenant.”²³ Therefore, the church inherits the promises of the covenant and OT prophecy in the New Testament. Thus, an ethnic Israel will not have a future, because the predicted future of OT prophecies is fulfilled in the NT church. The point is not Israel and the church, but the corporate people of God in God’s plan. Therefore, there is no future for national Israel because the OT prophecies are fulfilled spiritually in the church (the new Israel of God).²⁴

Paul: OT prophecy and the future of Israel in Ro 9-11

Next, I would like to address the question of the interpretation of OT prophecy for the future of Israel in the NT, namely: How does the NT look at the future of national Israel and interpret OT prophecy concerning it? Since Ro 9-11 is the central passage in NT discussion about the future of Israel, to be more concrete I will relate the analytical question to Ro 11:26: What kind of future for national Israel does Paul envision, and how does

Paul use OT prophecies to interpret or determine this future? (Does he interpret OT prophecies literally [as dispensationalists] or does he interpret them figuratively [as covenantalists] or does he interpret them in a different way?) I will examine three ideas of the key thought of Paul in Ro 11:26: “And so *all Israel* will be saved, as it is *written*”: 1) The future of national Israel; 2) Future salvation; 3) Usage of OT prophecies.

“*All Israel.*” The focal point of Paul’s discussion in Ro 9-11 is national Israel and in Ro 11:26 Paul asserts, that “all Israel” will be saved in accordance with God’s plan. The meaning of “all Israel” is debated among scholars and has at least four possible interpretations: 1) every physical Jew; 2) every [elect] Jewish believer; 3) every elect person [Jewish and Gentile]; 4) the nation as a whole [not necessary every Jew].²⁵ Most commentators agree that “all Israel” has a corporate, diachronic meaning in a wide sense and Israel means ethnic Israel. Craig A. Blaising explains “... the term Israel in its primary sense, which designates the descendants of Jacob as an ethnic, cultural, and national entity.”²⁶ In this context, Paul discusses the question of national Israel and the

²³ Keathley, “The Relationship,” n.p.

²⁴ For instance, cf. two commentaries on Isa 60:1-3: Edward, J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. 3, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981), 21-23.37 and *Scotfield Reference Bible*, Isa 40:1-2.

²⁵ Cf. J. A. Emerthon, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark limited, 1979), 576; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 720. Some others suggestions include in “all Israel” the remnant (the physical national people of the last days of history) of the future time who

will come to the faith in massive numbers. Dunn argues that if “‘all Israel’ has diachronic corporate meaning, the phrase cannot mean the physical remnant of last time” (James G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998] 527).

²⁶ Craig A. Blaising. “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question” *JETS*, 44/3 (2001): 435-51. Moo (*The Epistle*, n. 48, 721) notes, that Paul uses “Israel” ten times in Ro 9-11 and in all cases he means ethnic Israel (9:6.27.31; 10:19.21; 11:2.7.25). Dunn argues that “all Israel” does mean “historic people of that

word (Israel) means ethnic Israel. Overall, in Ro 9-11, the word Israel always refers to ethnic Israel (probably Ro 9:7 is an exception). Present rejection of Israel is not a fulfillment of OT prophecies for Israel (even Paul argues that God fulfilled His promises in Ro 9:6), and the fulfillment of these prophecies will occur in the future in the fullness (11:12), acceptance (11:15) and salvation (11:26) of Israel. Romans 11:26 talks about a future salvation of the nation that will take place in a future corporate redemption (restoration) in accordance with God's plan that was well known in the OT and explained by Paul in the NT.²⁷

Salvation of Israel. One of the focal points of OT prophecy (of the pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic prophets) for the future of Israel is the whole restoration of the nation that occurs soon after exile. In Paul's perspective, this future of Israel will take place in eschatological salvation. The Jewish OT idea of the restoration includes theocratic rule and David's

throne (temple, Jerusalem, Zion); return from exile to the national land; the restoration of physical creation (cf. Ro 8:18-25); and the restoration of humankind's relationship with God (new restored life in the new covenant).²⁸ In accordance with his main idea of salvation in the Letter to the Romans, Paul talks about the future restoration of Israel in terms of eschatological salvation (Ro 11:15, 26).

One group of scholars²⁹ interprets the salvation of Israel in Ro 11:15, 26 as coming to faith in the end times (11:26), that is, repentance and coming to the Christian faith.³⁰ The early church fathers understood Paul in terms of a massive conversion of Jews to faith in Christ³¹ while the Reformers interpreted Israel in terms of the "elect," both Jews and Gentiles, and the future salvation of Israel as the whole community of the people of God. Thus, the salvation of Israel in Ro 11:26 is understood as salvation through faith (the forgiveness of sins) of Jews in the end times.³² Israel is the ethnic Israel that will come to faith at

name" (*The Theology*, 527) because the "phrase occurs 148 times in the OT and always designates historic, ethnic Israel" (Fitzmyer in accordance with Dunn, *The Theology*, n. 135, 527.)

²⁷ Paul (Ro 9-11) sees God's plan for Israel and interprets the present situation of Israel's lapse of faith as a temporary (not eternal), partial (not whole) space in history (not the end). At the end of time, "Israel shall be restored to the root of God" (Jerry Falwell, Edward E. Hinson and Michael Kroll Woodrow, eds. *KJV Bible Commentary on CD-ROM*. Version 2.1g. 1997).

²⁸ In Ez 37:12 resurrection is considered as a returning to the national land, returning from the exile. Cf. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*.

²⁹ Scholars (such as Ladd, Henry, and Stott) believe that the restoration of Israel will take place in history as an act of belief in Christ, and other groups interpret salvation in Ro 11 as the

restoration that will take place in the Messianic age after the second coming of Christ in resurrection.

³⁰ Cf. Ladd, Henry, Stott, Luther.

³¹ Augustine, Chrysostom, Theodoret.

³² Ladd wrote: "... the salvation of Israel could occur by a great evangelistic movement that would bring Israel into the church, ... It is impossible that Israel should be saved in any way but by faith in Jesus as Israel's Messiah. ... converted Israel may become for the first time in history a truly Christian nation." Ladd, *Theology*, 608, cf. 583-84. Stott wrote: "one day 'all Israel' will experience (11:26) salvation from sin through faith in Christ. It is not a national salvation, for nothing is said about either a political entity or a return to the land" John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 304. Emerthon, Cran-

the end of time.³³ The resurrection (11:15) is interpreted in the same sense as salvation (salvation of the Gentiles through faith.)³⁴

Another group of scholars³⁵ interprets salvation in the eschatological sense of resurrection from death. Thinking about the manner and time of Israel's salvation, Moo suggests that: "The specific point in the future when this will occur is indicated by Paul's probable connection between Israel's 'acceptance' and the eschatological resurrection of the dead (v. 15)"³⁶ and Dunn argues, that "life from death" is an "eschatological sal-

vation"³⁷ or resurrection from the dead: "the final resurrection at the end of the age/history."³⁸ Thus, the expression "all Israel" in 11:26 has a corporate meaning that is supported by the idea of "fullness" in vv. 12.25.³⁹ Israel's salvation means "full communion with its God"⁴⁰ in their resurrection (redemption) in a new Messianic age.⁴¹

OT prophecy. Paul's assertion that "all Israel will be saved" is supported by OT quotations from Isa 59:20, 21 (v. 26) and Isa 27:9 (v. 27).⁴² OT Rabbinic interpretation had applied these passages to the Messiah.⁴³ The quota-

field C. (eds.) *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Limited, 1979), 577.

³³ Stott suggests that Israel is the nation as a whole, but Matthew Henry wrote, "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" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991], 2224). Cf. Merkle, who submits "... that Romans 11 does not teach a future mass conversion of ethnic Israel but that there will always be a remnant of believing Jews until the end of time" (Ben L. Merkle, "Romans 11 and the Future of Ethnic Israel," *JETS*, 43/4 [2000]: 709-722). On restoration before the parousia, cf. Michael J. Vlach, "Famous Theologians Who Affirm a Future for Israel" cited 7 February, 2004. Online: http://www.theologicalstudies.org/israel_future.html; George Ladd, «Historic Premillennialism,» in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1977), 28.

³⁴ Cf. Ladd, *Theology*, 608.

³⁵ Dunn, Jary, Campbell, Moo, Merkle.

³⁶ Moo, *The Epistle*, 724. He argues that salvation is a future event because Israel is now "rejected," and Paul contrasts this to "their fullness," "their acceptance," and the grafting in of branches (Ibid., 723-34).

³⁷ Dunn, *Romans*. 658. Dunn and Schreiner argue that the phrase "e'k (tw/n) nekrw/n" (v.

15) means a resurrection. Cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, n.13, 599.

³⁸ Dunn, *Romans*, 658.

³⁹ Cf. Moo, *The Epistle*, 723.

⁴⁰ Dunn, *Romans*, 691.

⁴¹ Moo and other scholars criticize the theological position (two-covenant theology) that suggested that Israel will be saved in a specific manner (Old Covenant – obedience to Torah) distinctive from the Christian salvation approach through faith (New Covenant – salvific faith). Cf. Moo, *The Epistle*, 725; Schreiner, *Romans*, 616; Craig A Blaising, "The Future of Israel as a Theological Question," *JETS*, 44/3 (2001): 435-451.

⁴² Cf. two readings: a) (LXX) Isa 59:20, 21 and b) Ro 11:26.

a) ἤξει ἕνεκεν Σιῶν ὁ ρυόμενος καὶ ἀποστρέψει ἀσεβείας ἀπὸ Ἰακωβ καὶ αὐτῆ αὐτοῖς ἡ παρ' ἐμοῦ διαθήκη
b) Ἡξει ἐκ Σιῶν ὁ ρυόμενος, ἀποστρέψει ἀσεβείας ἀπὸ Ἰακώβ· καὶ αὐτῆ αὐτοῖς ἡ παρ' ἐμοῦ διαθήκη

Emerthon suggests, that evk instead e'neken could be result of influence of Ps 14:7, 53:6, 110:2, where Redeemer comes from Zion (Moo mentioned, that Jesus - Redeemer ἐκ Σιῶν could mean that he "originates from the Jewish people (cf. 9:5); ...or to show that Christ will save Israel by coming from the "heavenly" Zion at his parousia." [Moo, the Epistle, 726] Sf. Emerthon, *The International*, 578. Dunn points on the universal character of the covenant and in this context suggests "the deliverer comes "from (heavenly?) Zion," but not "for the sake of (earthly) Zion." [Dunn, *Romans*, 693.]

⁴³ Cf. Emerthon, *International*, 578.

tions are applied by Paul to the Parousia of Christ.⁴⁴ Paul supports, by means of this passage (vv.26.27), a future salvation of Israel: the covenant will be realized in the coming of the Redeemer and the forgiveness of sins.⁴⁵ Most commentators conclude that Paul implies that the future restoration of Israel will happen at the time of the second coming of Christ.⁴⁶ Paul interprets OT prophesies in relation to the future restoration (“will be saved” v. 26) of Israel that will take place in the eschatological future that connects Israel with belief in Christ, the new covenant (forgiveness), and the Parousia of Christ.

National Israel will be saved, not in terms of every Jew, but in terms of the corporate entity. The future salvation of Israel is an eschatological event, but for ethnic Israel there is hope of salvation through faith. The main question of Ro 9-11 is the discarding of the nation of Israel. However, God did not discard the nation; the nation discarded Him. God is faithful to the end. He was faithful in the past (Israel), present (remnant) and future (restored Israel). Romans

11:25 points to the faithfulness of God: he will fulfill his promises to Israel. It is very possible that a large portion of the nation of Israel will come to the Christian faith before the second coming of Christ, but Ro 11:26 cannot directly support this (Ro 9-11 points to the possibility for Israel to be saved through faith, but this idea does not come from 11:26.)⁴⁷ Paul talks about the salvation of Israel in a corporate meaning. Romans 11 sees Israel as a whole (olive tree) in God’s plan, and salvation here relates to all Israel in the eschatological sense.

Conclusion

Dispensationalists envision a future for national Israel and covenantalists do not. Although Paul points to the future of Israel, he points to eschatological salvation (redemption in resurrection, as reflected in 11:26) and to salvation through faith in Christ (“if they do not persist in unbelief” 11:23). However, dispensationalists envision the future restoration of Israel in terms of regathering them to their land and reconstructing their

⁴⁴ Cf. ο“ ρυόμενος in Ro 11:26 and Ἰησοῦν τὸν ρυόμενον in 1Th 1:10.

⁴⁵ Probably the three OT passages (Isa 59:20; 27:9 and Jer 31:33) reflect three ideas: the Parousia of Christ, the forgiveness of sins, and the new covenant. Cf. Emerthon, *Interpretation*, 579; Schreiner, *Romans*, 619.

⁴⁶ Isa 59 talks about the coming of Yahweh to redeem his people in the context of the destruction of the enemy. The eschatological conception of Paul is the second coming of Christ that conforms to the OT idea of salvation and restoration (For instance, 1Th 4:13-5:11; Ro 8:18-24).

⁴⁷ Paul uses the idea of salvation in Romans both in an eschatological sense (at the future time of the resurrection) and in a present time sense (through conversion by faith). If “Israel”

in Ro 11:26 refers to the ethnic nation at the end of time (where salvation means conversion), then the idea of national salvation of all Israel (salvation as the time of the resurrection) in the end times does not confirm the idea of the holistic salvation of Israel in 11:26. Both Jews and Gentiles come to salvation through faith, but 11:26 could not support a massive repentance of the whole nation at the end of time (although it is possible that many Jews will come to faith).

⁴⁸ Walvoord considers the restoration of Israel in a dispensational perspective: “At the rapture of the church, Gentiles again take second place in God’s program and the Jew resumes his place... The unfulfilled program of the seventieth week of Daniel is completed during the final period

religious, political and national identity⁴⁸ before the second coming of Christ. The weakness of this approach is that the detailed interpretation of the future of national Israel is built upon the dispensational worldview of ages, applying literal interpretation to the different dispensations for Israel. But, the dispensational system of interpretation is not a result of exegesis, or even of literal interpretation. Even when Paul and dispensationalists envision the future for Israel, the future itself is very different. The weakness of the covenantal system of interpretation is in doing away with the margins between Israel and the church.⁴⁹ It is true that the NT interprets the fulfillment of many OT prophecies and OT concepts in the church, but Paul in set terms predicts the future for Israel. On the other hand, such concepts as temple, resurrection, salvation, and Israel

continue to keep their double meanings in NT teaching.⁵⁰ Thus, these two opposite positions on the future of national Israel are the results of worldview and not of solid exegesis and synthesis. Both systems are not even the fruit of the exegetical approach to the interpretation of the Bible.

The interpretation of OT prophecies in relation to the future of national Israel or to the church are based on worldviews and applied to hermeneutics. The dispensational school interprets OT prophecy literally to ethnic Israel in its future dispensation (in the tribulation and in a specific role in the millennium). Covenantalists interpret OT prophecy and concepts figuratively to the church, and do not see any kind of future for the ethnic Israel.⁵¹ Although Paul (and other NT authors) interpret OT prophecies as applying to the church (Hos 2:23; 1:6, 11 and Rom 9:24-25,

before the second coming of Christ. During this period among unbelieving Jews, the Mosaic laws and sacrifices are reinstated. As far as Israel as a whole is concerned, there is no evidence of a large turning to Christ. During this period, however, a remnant turn to Christ" (John F. Walvoord, "Eschatological Problems VIII: Israel's Blindness," *BSac* 102.407 [1945]: 289-90). However, OT prophecies predict future restoration not only in a political or religious sense, but also in terms of spiritual redemption. So, such interpretations of future restoration miss the spirit of OT prophecy and lose the main sense as a restoration.

⁴⁹ Even if covenantalism believes that God has finished his program with Israel, Paul considers that "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until..." (Ro 11:25.) Paul also allows that national Israel has hope of salvation by remaining through faith.

⁵⁰ Cf. concept of *temple*: 1Co 3:16f; 6:19; 2Co 6:16; Eph 2:21, where Paul uses *ναός* ("the place of God's dwelling," [P. W. Comfort, "temple," *DPL*, 924] applying it spiritually to the church

and literally to the temple in 2Th 2:4; concept of *Israel*: Ro 9:6.27.31; 10:19.21; 11:2.7.25; 1Co 10:18; 2Co 3:7.13; Eph 2:12; Php 3:5; and Ro 2:28-29; 4:11.16.18; 9:7.8; Gal 3:29; 6:16; concept of *resurrection*: future aspect: 1Co 6:14; 15:35.52; 2Co 1:9; 4:14; 15:52; Ro 8:11 and present reality: Ro 6:4; Col 2:12; present and future aspects of *salvation*: Ro 11:11 -13:11; Php 1:28-2:12; 1Th 5:9; 2Ti 2:10; Heb 1:14; 2:3; etc.

⁵¹ Covenantalists critique dispensationalists for their literal approach to prophecy and spiritual approach to history. Scofield interprets many clearly historical events, peoples, and things spiritually, while on other occasions clearly historical narratives become prototypes or illustrations of God-given truth, yet at the same time prophecies are interpreted exclusively literally (cf. commentary on Ge 1:16; 3:21; 6:14; 24:1; 37:2; 41:45; 43:34; Ex 2:2; 15:25; 25:1.30; 26:15.) A dispensational worldview is appreciable even in the interpretation of historical books about the future restoration and conversion of Israel in the distant future. Cf. *Scofield Reference Bible*, Ge 43:34, Lev 23:24.

Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:17, Gal 4:26; Heb 12:22, Rev 21:2, etc.) he also clearly supports the future salvation of Israel (Rom 11:26) by Isa 59:20, 21 and (11:27) by Isa 27.9.⁵²

Two systems of interpretation (dispensationalism and covenantalism) were examined above in the light of Paul's view of the future of Israel and his usage of OT prophecy. Based on the above, I conclude that these two schools of interpretation are based on their own worldviews that regulate their hermeneutics. The way that Paul uses OT prophecy did not conform to the dispensational school

of interpretation and only partly conformed to the covenantal school. Israel has a hope in the earth's future (through conversion to Christ and in future eschatological restoration) and OT prophecies from Isaiah are interpreted by Paul in this perspective. On the other hand, the NT does not predict full national restoration in accordance with the OT model of the nation of Israel. Furthermore, the NT does not teach about a distinctive dispensation for Israel in God's plan. Therefore, the future hope of Israel is the same as the hope of church (salvation through faith).

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⁵² It is very important that Paul (and other NT authors) did not interpret OT prophecy in terms of specific details of the future salvation of Israel, such as a national, religious (temple, Jerusalem, sacrifice) ethnic restoration. The concept of future restoration in Ro 11 does not include the idea of OT religious practice, but only allows salvation of the remnant through faith in Jesus.

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