

## The Resurrection and Reconciliation of True Israel Acts 28:17-29

**Main Idea:** *God's "Big Plan" is to reconcile a "resurrected Israel" (Jews and Gentiles) to Himself through Christ.*

**Introduction:** Please open your bibles and turn to Acts 28...

### **Orienting the Text: Where we are in the story**

I want to spend a few minutes catching us up in the narrative and where we currently are. Paul returns to Jerusalem to bring an aid package to suffering Christians and is arrested on trumped up charges of starting a disturbance in the temple courts and bringing Gentiles into forbidden spaces. However, Paul turns the tables and, in accordance with the legal privileges afforded him by his Roman citizenship, Paul appeals to the highest court and governance of the land, by demanding an audience with Caesar himself. Shocked and unsure what to do, Festus grants this request (thus favoring Paul over the Jews). Last week, we saw how God preserves Paul through the storms of the sea as he makes his way to Rome. Last we saw they shipwrecked on the island of Malta, and that's where we pick up the story today... Let's pray as we turn to the text and begin...

### *Paul meets with Jewish leadership in Rome - Acts 28:17-20*

Assuming that word about his arrival will eventually get to them, Paul invites local Jewish leadership to meet with him and explain his situation. He reiterates that which we have already seen in Acts so far:

- He has done nothing against the customs of his people
- He has done nothing worthy of the death penalty (in accordance with both Jewish and Roman law)
- He appealed to Caesar in order to get a fair hearing
- He is in chains for the hope of Israel

Throughout his trial, Paul has repeatedly said that he is in chains or on trial for "the hope of Israel", and ties that hope to the resurrection of Jesus. To reiterate again what we have already seen, I think we can summarize the "hope of Israel" in these three summary points:

### **The Hope of Israel: Renewed *People* (national Israel) in a Renewed *Place* (promised land) under a Renewed *Potentate* (Davidic Messiah) enjoying the Renewed *Presence* (YHWH's Temple)**

- A Messiah to occupy the throne of David
- End of Gentile (Roman) oppression, God's enemies defeated, and Jewish sovereignty is established over the land
- The glorious return of Yahweh indwell a renewed temple
- From Zion/Jerusalem, divine blessings radiate throughout the earth and the nations come to worship the God of Israel

All of this would be something akin to a national resurrection of the dead bones in the land to a living being, a Spirit-filled corporate entity called the true people of God, the people of Israel secure in their land as prophesied by Ezekiel. We see similar images in the other prophets as well.

However, the message that Paul has for them is the good news that these things blessings have come to the people in the Lord Jesus Christ, whom God raised from the dead as a sign, and confirmation, that He is the Lord and through faith in Him, Israel's salvation has come, the gift of the Spirit has been given, and He will come again to finish what he started!

### *Paul shares the hope of Jesus - Acts 28:21-24*

So they decide on a day to hear more from Paul, and they show up in even greater numbers this time! However, Paul's teaching gets a mixed review. Based on what we see from other texts in Acts as well as Paul's own

06-16-24

Pastor Grant Clay

letters, my guess the biggest hang up for these Jewish leaders was Paul's insistence that with the resurrection of Jesus, the promised kingdom had been inaugurated and God's plan was being fulfilled! Because I'm sure they looked around and asked (and probably what many Jews ask today): "Where?"

"You are in chains for the hope of Israel – Roman chains! Clearly our oppressors are still oppressing us!" "You mean to tell us that any backwater Gentile town or city, where people gather in the Messiah's name (your Jesus, who was crucified by the way), that's where God's new temple is? Seriously?" "You mean to tell us that the Messiah's mother was a young teenage virgin named Mary, whom we have never heard of, and he grew up in – where was it you said? – Nazareth?" "You mean to tell us that this Jesus was rejected by our people, crucified by the Romans, and then rose from the dead to ascend to the Father's throne and is ruling right now, but clearly has let the Romans stay in power, our people occupied, and basically nothing changed at all" – "this is nonsense!" In a nutshell, the offense of Paul's message is this:

### **The "Offense" of the Paul's Message:**

*Israel's renewal is happening through a crucified and risen Messiah, who is apparently: keeping Rome in power, keeping the land to be occupied by foreigners, allowing a corrupt temple to continue, and sharing Israel's covenantal/spiritual privileges with (uncircumcised) Gentiles.* Small wonder that Paul called all of this "foolishness to Greeks, and a stumbling block to Jews" in 1 Corinthians.

*Paul announces God's prophetic plan - Acts 28:25-28*

And so, Paul warns them with the words of the prophet Isaiah, words that harken back to what we found earlier during the times of Jesus: Israel remains spiritually blind, rejecting their Messiah. *So, has God rejected His own people?*

Now, at first glance it seems like God has rejected His people – or perhaps Paul has. Some scholars argue that Luke ends his account on a depressing note of tragic irony: what began with such high hopes in the Gospel of Luke with the birth of Jesus, angels singing, shepherds wondering, and people prophesying, all comes to a crashing halt here with the failure of Paul's message and ministry when these Jewish leaders walk away from him, and Paul denounces them with this prophetic text. However, this is actually a gross misreading of Luke's account, and misrepresentation of what actually takes place here. I want to suggest that though the account ends on something of a downer for the Jewish leadership, by no means does Luke see this as the end of the matter.

Put another way, Luke does not intend for us to think that all hope for Israel's redemption is now somehow lost, or that all that matters now is the conversion of the Gentiles and that God has somehow forgotten His people – to the contrary, Luke reminds us that the story is not finished yet. What Luke wants for us as readers to see is the "Big Plan" of God, and marvel at the way in which He is sovereignly carrying it out.

### **"God's Big Plan": Reconciling Jews and Gentiles together within a "resurrected Israel" through Christ**

What does this mean? Three texts to show you: Lk. 2:29-32, Acts 26:16-18, 22-23, Eph. 2:11-22. This is a vision of one plan, for one people, under one Messiah!

### **How is God going to bring about His "Big Plan"?**

As we have seen in Acts so far, Paul always begins in the synagogue, taking the gospel to the Jewish people first; however, the Jewish leadership almost always rejects the message, which forces Paul to go outside to the Gentiles, who tend to be more receptive. So, this hardening of the hearts of the synagogue leaders primarily (who stir up hostile crowds) becomes the springboard by which Gentile outsiders hear the gospel. Yet, it's not as if the Word of God is somehow failing, for in every city, there is a sizable number of Jews who also become believers! I call this the Gospel boomerang effect: as the word of God goes out, it rebounds back to Israel, provoking them to jealousy and hence, salvation! Look with me at Paul's own words in Rom. 11...

*Salvation by jealousy? - Rom. 11:11-14*

06-16-24

Pastor Grant Clay

Paul says that Israel's current condition is not permanent, but they will experience salvation through witnessing Gentiles experiencing God's blessings, which makes them jealous.

*Resurrected Israel?* - Rom. 11:15

And their coming to salvation will be like a resurrection, Paul says – like life from the dead (this is a clear allusion back to Ezekiel 36-37 of the dead bones coming to life).

*Jesus the olive tree?* Paul then uses the imagery of an olive tree and broken branches being grafted back in, and wild branches coming in (both of which are impossible, scientifically speaking). Again, this imagery is akin to life from the dead to resurrection!

Rom. 11:16 - Have you ever wondered what the olive tree actually is in this analogy? Some say it's Israel – but that can't be because they are the branches that broke off. Some say it's Abraham – possible. But what is the image Paul has used all throughout Romans (and all of his letters) that we are brought into as a people? I want to suggest to you that the olive tree is the body of the Messiah, whom Israel was intended to be a part of and worship through, and whom we Gentiles are now being brought into.

Listen again to Paul in Romans: Rom. 11:23-25

So, God is bringing about Israel's restoration, by first raising Jesus from the dead, installing Him as the Messiah of the true Israel, and bringing both Jews and Gentiles into His own body, in union with Himself for salvation, and through this body – we call the church – the blessings which God promised Israel would be to the world are being multiplied out to the nations; and the present hardness we see over Israel, which on the surface appears to be their own damnation, is in actuality bringing about their salvation, as a growing remnant comes to realize who the true Messiah actually is.

So, the question is: when will this happen? When will there be a resurrected Israel, where Jew and Gentile are joined together as one?

*The Boomerang effect* - Rom. 11:26-27

I suggest with the preposition change, Paul indicates that the Redeemer has come, and the gospel is going out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (just like we see in the book of Acts). So the process is happening right now...again look at Paul's own words:

Rom. 11:28-32

This is why Paul never gave up on the prospect of reaching his fellow Jews, and why we shouldn't either.

*“The premise [of Luke's message] is not that Jesus came to Israel, and then Israel rejected Jesus, so they are replaced by Gentiles. That's not the story at all. The story is that a transformed Israel will transform the world. Though many or even most Jews are not at the point of Messianic faith, like a mustard seed, like a pugnacious weed, the kingdom of God is growing and sprouting in all sorts of places, in synagogues and agoras.”* –

Michael F. Bird, New Testament scholar

**Main Idea:** God's “Big Plan” is to reconcile a “resurrected Israel” (Jews and Gentiles) to Himself through Christ.

**Application: So how should Christians stand with Israel today?**

Two extremes to avoid:

*Replacement theology*

(the [predominantly Gentile] church replaces Israel in God's Big Plan), therefore Israel is irrelevant.

*Restoration theology*

(Israel's restoration will occur apart from the [predominantly Gentile] church)

If you are going to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, pray for what Paul would pray for:

*Pray for Renewal (Rom. 10:1-2), Reconciliation (Eph. 2:11-23), and Resurrection (Rom. 11:15) of Israel through Christ*

What do we need most in the Middle East? Can I share some encouraging statistics?

Palestinian church (sending church) – *according to 2013 study The Palestinian Church sends out roughly 3,400 missionaries per one million Christians.*

Persian Christians (growing population) – *some missiologists estimate over a million followers of Jesus in Iran (not counting other Persians around the world).*

Jews meeting their Messiah (in the land) - *There are almost 900,000 Jewish evangelicals in the United States alone. Here in Israel, we've gone from 23 Jewish followers of Jesus in 1948 to 30,000, according to an Israel College of the Bible study just a few years ago. That's tremendous.*

What is God setting the stage for? I think its resurrection – massive, resurrection!

### **The Resurrection and Reconciliation of True Israel Acts 28:17-29**

#### **Exposition of Acts 28:17-29**

*Paul meets with Jewish leadership in Rome - Acts 28:17-20*

*Paul shares the hope of Jesus - Acts 28:21-24*

*Paul announces God's prophetic plan - Acts 28:25-28*

**“God’s Big Plan”:** Reconciling Jews and Gentiles together within a “resurrected Israel” through Christ

**Main Idea:** *God’s “Big Plan” is to reconcile a “resurrected Israel” (Jews and Gentiles) to Himself through Christ.*

**Application:** How might Paul instruct Christians to pray for Israel today?

*Pray for Renewal (Rom. 10:1-2), Reconciliation (Eph. 2:11-23), and Resurrection (Rom. 11:15) of Israel through Christ*

**Questions for Small Groups:**

- 1) Why does Paul's message cause offense to his Jewish audience? What was "wrong" the Messiah Paul proclaimed?
- 2) What is the significance of Paul quoting Isaiah 6 to them?
- 3) What is God's "Big Plan" for Jews and Gentiles? (hint: read Luke 2:32; Acts 26:16-18; 22-23; Eph. 2:11-23). How do you think Jews would become "jealous" of Gentile salvation today? (hint: read Rom. 11:11-15; 25-31).
- 4) How would Paul instruct Christians to pray for Israel today?