

Our Debt to Israel

In His conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, Jesus told her: "You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). By "you" Jesus was referring to the Samaritans; by "we" He was referring to the Jews. Thus He identified Himself with the Jews; He spoke as one of them. In the last book of the Bible—Revelation 5:5—Jesus is called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." "Judah" is the name from which the word "Jew" is taken. It is important for us all to understand that there is a way in which Jesus is specially identified with the Jews; and that this identification did not cease with His earthly life, but is still continued by Scripture after His death, burial and resurrection—on into eternity.

It is equally important for us all to acknowledge the truth of what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman—"salvation is of the Jews." This is an indisputable, historical fact. Without the Jews we would have no patriarchs, no prophets, no apostles, no Bible—and no Savior! Deprived of all these, how much salvation would we have left to us? None!

All other nations of the earth owe all that is most precious in their spiritual inheritance to the Jews. This is true of all of us—whether we be Arabs, Africans, Asians or Europeans—Russians, Americans or Chinese. We all owe a spiritual debt to the Jews that cannot be calculated.

The Bible makes it clear that God requires the Christians of all other nations to acknowledge their debt to the Jews and to do what they can to repay it. In Romans chapter 11 Paul is writing primarily to Christians of Gentile origin. In verse 13 he says, "For I speak to you Gentiles. . . ." He reminds the Gentiles of their debt to the

Jews and warns them against adopting an arrogant or unthankful attitude toward Israel. An analysis of this chapter will show that Paul uses the name “Israel” to refer to those who are Jews by natural descent and to distinguish them from Christians of Gentile descent. In other words, he does not use “Israel” as a synonym of the Church.

In Romans 11:30–31 Paul sums up what he has been saying about the debt and the responsibility of the Gentile Christians toward Israel. (For the sake of clarity I have inserted the appropriate words—either “Israel” or “the Gentiles”—in brackets beside the pronouns):

For as you [Gentiles] were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their [Israel’s] disobedience, even so these [Israel] also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you [Gentiles’] they [Israel] also may obtain mercy.

In other words, because of the mercy of God that has come to us as Gentile Christians through Israel, God requires us in our turn to show mercy to Israel. How shall we fulfill this obligation? The following are four practical ways that we may do so.

First, we can cultivate and express an attitude of sincere love for Jewish people. Most standard forms of “witnessing” or “preaching” practiced by Christians do not reach the heart of the Jewish people at all. In fact, they frequently anger them and alienate them. But it is amazing how the apparently hard exterior of a Jew will melt when confronted by warm unfeigned love. In nineteen centuries of dispersion among the other nations there is one thing that the Jews have seldom encountered—and that is love! For the Lord’s own sake, let us stop trying to make “converts” out of the Jewish people and let us begin to repay the debt of love we have owed them for so many centuries.

Secondly, in Romans 11:11 Paul says that “through their [Israel’s] fall, to provoke them [Israel] to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.” This is