

Chapter 10

I'd been arguing that there have always been two ways of understanding Israel. One was as a physical entity, and the other was as a spiritual one. I'd also tried to show that the prophets looked forward to a day when the non-Jewish nations were welcomed into the people of God. My claim was that this day had now come. It had come because of the impact of King Jesus. He revealed that most of Israel was going about things in the wrong way. They gave their main attention to the outward aspects of the Instruction and neglected the inner ones. As a result, they could not embrace the Life that God was offering. At the same time some people from the non-Jewish nations, through their allegiance to King Jesus, did start to embrace that Life.

Verse 1-4 **How Israel went wrong**

In this section I was trying to explain how Israel, as a whole, had gone wrong. What it boiled down to was that they were trying to do something themselves that God had already done for them.

1. Now, I long for all the Jews to live as God intended and so experience God's salvation. I made this point at the start of chapter 9, and I repeat it here to make it clear just how much this issue means to me.
2. There's no question that many in physical Israel have a huge enthusiasm for God but sadly, they're barking up the wrong tree; they've missed the point; they've got the wrong end of the stick.
3. They've forgotten that God keeps his own promises. They thought they had to keep God's promises for him. The upshot of this was that when God acted to keep his promises, they didn't see what was happening. They therefore missed out and sought to keep them for him and as a result missed out when God kept them. They tried to make things about themselves rather than about God. When God acted to put the world back on track, most of Israel just couldn't get on board with what he was doing.
4. You see, King Jesus actually accomplishes the things the Instruction purported to achieve but really couldn't do; he enables people to live in the ways that God always intended, he gives them Life. He does this for those who trust in him. King Jesus is the real point of the Instruction. What he has accomplished means that those who follow him can be said to have righteousness. This means that, enabled by God's Spirit, they have begun to live in the way that God intended.

I think I've summed up where things went wrong for many of my fellow Jews. Of course, I'm dependent here on the understanding of things that I had once held. Basically, we were trying to do God's job for him. We behaved as though God's intervention to keep his promises depended on us rather than on God. In other words, we stopped trusting in God to do this and started believing that it depended on us. I shall say a little bit more about this in the comments on the verses that follow. This was because we got ourselves caught up with the outward aspects of the Instruction and forgot that its real point was what happened in our inner selves.

Verses 5-13 **The Instruction speaks in two contrasting ways**

Do you remember that I have outlined a kind of split in the Instruction itself – how part of it pulls one way and another part pulls the other? Well, I set out a key example of this in what follows. The idea is that most of the Jewish community is trying to do something that God has already done himself. The gospel is the announcement that God has indeed already done these things – he is keeping his ancient promises. The Instruction has been affected by Sin and, as a result, it is conflicted – it speaks with two voices. In the next few verses, I try to show that it can be read in two different ways. One is about human action to bring about God’s promises and the other is about God’s own action to deliver them.

5. The first example comes from Moses. This is an example of the Instruction suggesting that human action is needed to get God to act. He says that doing the things in the Instruction will bring Life. This says nothing about the inner life or the need to be transformed. It’s almost as if it leaves God out of the picture. Please understand, I am not for a moment saying that this is the way Moses saw things, but it is the way many of my fellow Jews understand him and, as a result, they treat the Instruction in the wrong way.

6. The next example shows the right approach. It’s as though the trust-based approach to living as God intended is the one speaking in the text. It says that God is not depending on you to climb up into heaven to bring about his promises – to bring down his promised King. This is simply not in your power to do.

7. What’s more, God isn’t depending on you to climb down into the place of the dead as though you could bring his promises up from there – perhaps by finding the promised King down there and bringing him up with you. Again, this is not something that’s in your power. Only God can do it.

8. Instead, we rely on the promise that the word of God’s promises is already with us, we speak it, and it lives within us. We depend on God for this – it is something he has done for us and not something we try to achieve for him. This word about God’s promises is, in truth, the gospel proclaimed by the followers of Jesus.

9. Salvation, that is Life as God intended, belongs to those who trust in King Jesus. This means acknowledging that he is Lord, that is raised to rule at the right hand of God – along the lines of Psalms 8 and 110, as I discussed earlier – and trusting in your inner self that he is alive.

10. It works like this. Those who trust in their inmost being in King Jesus are those who will be vindicated. It’s that law court image once again. This is another way of saying that these are the ones who live as God intended, which is to say are embraced by God’s salvation. How can you tell who they are? They are the ones who openly confess King Jesus.

11. We have already seen that scripture promises that those who trust in him are the ones who will not be shamed, that is who will be vindicated at the judgement, and will inherit the promises of God.

12. And obviously, this must apply to every category of humanity, both Jew and non-Jew. God, as I have argued previously, is the God of the whole world and treats everyone on the same basis. Those who call on him know he is generous to them.

13. Let me quote another text to make sure the point gets home. This is the fulfilment of the ancient prophetic promise. It is those who call on God, whoever they are, Jew or non-Jew, male or female, old or young, because they trust God to keep God's promises, who will share in salvation.

The point is that it is not for us to keep God's promises for him. Our role is to trust that God is getting on with it. Those who do, and live out that trust, are those who share in the promised salvation and live Life as God intended. Most of Israel, on the other hand, has gone wrong because they insist on trying to do God's job for him.

Verses 14-17 The importance of preaching the gospel

So, it should be clear by now that it is important to proclaim this message that we call the gospel. People must trust in this and can only do that if they've heard about it and they can only hear if someone tells them, and people can only tell them if others send them out to do just that. It's a wonderful thing and Isaiah makes just this point about it. But not everyone has grasped Isaiah's meaning even if they know his words very well. Again, this is just as we would expect from the prophets. In any event, people learn to trust by hearing the teaching about King Jesus.

14. I think these words are fairly understandable. You need the proclamation of the gospel which lets people know that God has acted to fulfil his ancient promises. Only then can people hear, and only if they hear can they trust, and only if they trust can they act on that trust. That's why it's so vital that the churches send out preachers. In the background to this argument is my concern that the believers in Rome should, once I had visited, send out me and the team on our proposed mission to Spain.

15. And, of course, this gospel cannot get announced unless God, acting through his people in the churches, sends out messengers. I paraphrase a text from Isaiah and the gist of it is that when it comes to those who announce the gospel, even their feet are lovely! In this section of his book Isaiah was telling the people that God was acting to keep his promises and he was going to be restored as ruler in Jerusalem and show the whole earth his salvation. Small wonder that the one who brings such a message should be welcomed. Needless to say, I believed then – and know for certain now – that those sent out as preachers by the churches are those who bring the message of which the prophet speaks.

16. At this point my thoughts begin to stray back to the main argument which concerns the unbelief of most of the Jewish community. It is clear that not everyone has responded to this gospel. Isaiah predicted that this would be the case. Just a few verses after the words I just quoted, in the run up to a song about King Jesus, the servant who would suffer for the sake of others, he states that few believe the message.

17. So, attempting to sum up the argument I have made, trust comes through the message that people hear, and what they hear comes through the proclamation about King Jesus.

The great news, prophesied by Isaiah, that God would keep his promises, has been fulfilled through God's action in sending his Son. This is a message that is to be proclaimed so that, hearing it, people can give their allegiance to King Jesus.

Verses 18–21 Part of Israel has heard but has not believed

Now, lots of people have heard because heralds and evangelists and preachers are going out into the whole world, just as God has promised. However, many of my fellow Jews have not grasped the message they bring. Again, it's as Moses suggests; the Jewish people are being provoked to jealousy. God says that through him nations who were not even looking for God have found him, but that Israel ignores him no matter how much he pleads with them.

18. Surely, the problem with Israel cannot be that they simply have not heard. Far from it. Indeed, the voice of those who proclaim the gospel is reaching not just Israel, but into the whole world.

19. At this point I explicitly go back to the question I addressed before – the unbelief of the majority of the Jews. I have tried to show that this is exactly what was always predicted by the prophets. I now quote Moses to make the same point and this time to suggest that God has a motive for all this. Remember, as we saw, Israel had got the wrong end of the stick about the way God would fulfil his promises. God plans to 'rub their noses in it'. He will provoke anger in them. The idea is that they will see non-Jews experiencing the promises and enjoying Life, and that they will respond with jealousy.

20. Isaiah makes the same point even more strongly when he insists that God always promised he would allow non-Jews who had never even thought of searching for God to find him, and that he would show himself to non-Jews though they never asked for it.

21. In other words, God always promised he would reveal himself to the non-Jews. Meanwhile, he was disappointed with the response of Israel. He kept pleading with them but to no avail.

Let's sum up the argument to this point. A majority of physical Israel has rejected King Jesus, and this had upset me and led to reflect at some length. The first stage of understanding what is going on comes through a retelling of Israel's story. This demonstrates that there was always a difference between Israel by descent and spiritual Israel – the smaller group within it who inherited the promises. The mistake the Jews of my own day made was to believe that it is up to them to fulfil God's promises. They haven't trusted God to do it himself. In fact, anyone, whether Jew or non-Jew, who accepts that by sending King Jesus God is keeping his ancient promises, can share in God's salvation. The announcement of this message is therefore vitally important. Of course, the Jews have had every chance to hear. The fact that many of them have not responded while many non-Jews have, shows that God is seeking to provoke them to jealousy.

I will go on to argue that there are some Jews who do believe and that this conforms to the pattern you can observe at every point in the story of Israel. This pattern will tell us something about God's purposes.