

Pentecost's Five Important Factors Concerning Israel's Blindness
By
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This blindness differs from the “spiritual” blindness that affected the nation of Israel in the Old Testament (e.g. time of the Judges, and the divided kingdom). God would not have us ignorant concerning this “new” blindness that came upon Israel because of their rejection of the Messiah.

For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this *is* my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. Romans 11:25-27

In the Scripture, a mystery (μυστηριον, *musterion*) is something not previously revealed (e.g. Rom. 16:25, 1 Cor. 15:51). It is ‘words’¹ not spoken or recorded through revelation from God.

“Dr. H. A. Ironside defines the word *mystery* as follows: “As used in the New Testament, the mysteries are those truths which in Old Testament days were kept in silence, but which are now the common property of all believers. They are not special truths for a special class, but every Christian is privileged to enter into the knowledge of these mysteries.... They are simple truths of tremendous importance, some of which, at least, have been ignored by the vast majority of theologians ancient and modern.” Yet, we read that Paul would not have us to be ignorant concerning these things!”²

Hosea describes Israel's blindness as a result of their rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He says,

“For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and *without* teraphim: Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.”
Hosea 3:4-5

¹ Strong's 3466, *Mystery* is “a derivative of *muo*, meaning ‘to shut the mouth’ or in other words to not speak ‘words.’”

²Herbert Kann, “The History of Israel's Blindness: The Mystery of It,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 94:376, (Dallas Theological Seminary, January, 1937) 442-443.

What are some other reasons that God was so disgusted with Israel that he would “blind” them? Consider at least five reasons Israel exists. (1) “Israel was raised up to be a witness to the unity of the triune God in the midst of universal idolatry, pantheism, and polytheism...(2) Israel was separated from the nations that she might illustrate to them the blessedness of serving and obeying the one true God...(3) [The] purpose of God in choosing this people was that they might be the medium through which the Word of God might be transmitted and preserved among men...(4) The final purpose God had in calling out and separating this people was in order that through them might come the Messiah, the Redeemer of mankind, not only of the Jew but of the whole world, and to them was given the promise of the Messiah’s coming, and He was to be one of their nation. Thus we see in brief the purpose for which God chose these people from among all the people of the earth.”³ With these thoughts in mind, Pentecost’s five factors exude genuineness.

Factor 1

Israel’s Blindness is a New Mystery

This particular blindness is a mystery. A mystery, in the Scriptural use of the word, as has previously been seen, refers to some divine program that could not and would not have been known unless it had been revealed to men by God. The fact that this blindness is a mystery shows that it is a kind of blindness hitherto unrevealed. Therefore it must be distinguished from both spiritual blindness, which was the experience of Israel as children of Adam and therefore under the curse of sin, and from willful blindness, which was Israel’s experience in sinning against revealed light. This is a new form of blindness, not hitherto experienced by men. It was the divine visitation of Israel by God because of the national sin of rejecting the Messiah (Matt. 27:25).

Dr. Pentecost makes several concurring points. It is (1) a mystery, (2) a ‘new’ mystery, (3) a mystery previously unrevealed, (4) not a previous ‘spiritual’ blindness, (5) a ‘new’ experience by Israel, and (6) a divine visitation. They were guilty of the

³ Ibid. 444-445 (Kann).

accusation found in Romans, which says, “But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Romans 10:21)

because the Lord Jesus Christ’s appeal was rejected.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen *doth gather* her brood under *her* wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until *the time* come when ye shall say, Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Luke 13:34-35

Factor 2

The Nature of the Blindness is Revealed

The nature of this blindness is revealed. The word *pōrōsis* (blindness) literally means “the covering with a callus” and comes from the verb which means “to cover with a thick skin, to harden by covering with a callus.” It suggests that the thick impenetrable covering has come because of repeated rejection of the revelation that was given, which now has become the settled condition. [HDW, *pōrōsis* is Greek, Strong’s 4457]

An example of the accusations and warning that God made to Israel as he looked through the corridors of time before he judicially blinded them in this age was:

And it shall come to pass at that time, *that* I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil...the great day of the Lord is near, it is near, it hasteth greatly... That day *is* a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, Zephaniah 1:12,14-15 [HDW, my emphasis]

Israel will remain “settled on their lees,” spiritually and divinely blinded, because they depend upon their own abilities (which is iniquity) rather than the guidance and leadership of their Great “Shepherd” (Isa. 53:6; Mat. 7:21-23; Heb. 13:20).

When the people of Israel arrived at the door to the age of grace, ‘all’ (see below) Israel had become calloused because of hard hearts, deaf ears, and eyes that could not see. They could not “see” Jehovah Himself, their Saviour and Shepherd, standing before them, who wrought miracles enough “I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” (Jn. 21:25). Their fathers had killed the prophets and they had built the sepulchers (Lk. 11:47). Obviously, God did not choose

the nation because it was ‘good,’ but because His grace is demonstrated through their rebellion. Their ‘impenetrable’ blindness will remain until it is divinely removed for ‘all’ Israel⁴ in the Great Tribulation, “a day of wrath,” when they shall finally say, “blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Mat. 23:39; Lk. 13:35).

“All Israel” (Rom. 11:26) does not mean every person in the nation, dead or alive, shall be saved. The universalists have it wrong. Pentecost explains in an article written in 1960 that the remnant in Israel, which will be saved in the tribulation, are “those who are in faith.”

Paul declares clearly in Romans 11:25 that the blindness of Israel is a temporary blindness. Because that nation is now blinded God cannot have a remnant within the nation with whom the covenants will be fulfilled. In Romans 11:26–27 it is stated: “And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.” Paul has previously declared (Rom 9:6) that God is not numbering all the physical seed of Abraham as descendants, but that the promises are to those who are in faith. Thus we understand the “all Israel” in Romans 11:26 to refer to this believing remnant, the believing Jews at the second advent of Christ.⁵

Therefore the callus will be removed from those who believe. Salvation always comes down to the individual, although it seems that most, if not “all” will believe during the “Day of the Lord.” The judgments will be of such a nature in the second half of the tribulation that “except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened” Mat. 24:22).

Factor 3

The ‘Blindness’ of Israel Does Not Preclude Individual Salvation

Paul says that this blindness is “in part” (Rom. 11:25). This reveals the fact that the blindness is not universal so that no Jew can believe today. The possibility of an individual’s salvation exists, although the nation has been judicially blinded.

⁴ J. Dwight Pentecost, “The Godly Remnant in the Tribulation,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 117:466 (Dallas Theological Seminary, January-March, 1960) 128.

⁵Ibid. 128. (Pentecost, “The Godly Remnant in the Tribulation”).

Although God presents a program for ‘entities’ such as nations, the church, cities, and kingdoms, in the various dispensations, the question of salvation among the people in the entities always rests upon personal faith. For example, “all Israel” seems to mean only those saved by their faith and taken into the millennium because some will be taken and some “left” (Mat. 24:40-41). The church in the age of grace is composed of individual believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. Dr. Chafer explains:

“The Scriptures bear testimony to the fact that Israel as a nation is to be saved from her sin and delivered from her enemies by the Messiah when He shall return to the earth. It is true that, in this age, the present offers of divine grace are extended to individual Jews as they are to individual Gentiles (Rom 10:12), and that, without reference to Jehovah’s unchangeable covenants with Israel, which covenants are in abeyance (Matt 23:38, 39; Luke 21:24; Acts 15:15–18; Rom 11:25–27), the individual Jew is now divinely reckoned to be as much in need of salvation as is the individual Gentile (Rom 3:9). These facts, related as they are to the present age-purpose-the calling out of the Church from both Jews and Gentiles alike (Eph 3:6)-, have no bearing upon the divine purpose for the coming Kingdom age when, according to covenant promise, Israel will be saved and dwell safely in her own land (Deut 30:3–6; Jer 25:5, 6; 33:15–17). In the progress of the argument which the Apostle Paul presents in the letter to the Romans and, after having set forth the present fact and plan of individual salvation for Jew and Gentile in chapters 1 to 8, he proceeds to answer in chapters 9 to 11.”⁶

Dr. Walvoord reports A. C. Gaebelein said similar things.

“The nation to whom the Lord promises the Kingdom is not the Church. The Church is called the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, the Habitation of God by the Spirit, the Lamb’s Wife, but never a nation. The nation is Israel still, but that believing remnant of the nation, living when the Lord comes.”⁷ [HDW, my emphasis]

God’s focus is on the individuals within the various entities throughout the ages! The entities are the vehicles which help mere humans understand God’s program. This is similar to a church bus taking the members of a local church to a rally. We would say the bus from such and such has arrived representing the entity. We would not list the individuals on the bus, but the unsaved, if any, would be taken off (Mat 24:40-41). It

⁶Lewis Sperry Chafer, “The Doctrine of Sin,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 93:371 (Dallas Theological Seminary, July, 1936) 275.

⁷John F. Walvoord, “Eschatological Problem V, Is the Church the Israel of God?” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 101:404 (Dallas Theological Seminary, Jan., 1944) 415. Walvoord quoting A. C. Gaebelein, *The Gospel of Matthew* (New York: Our Hope, 1910), Vol. II, p. 138.

becomes a group representing an entity (e.g. “all Israel”) made up of individuals that God wants in the millennium. Thus, God says the believing ‘group’ of the nation will be saved and taken into the millennium.

Factor 4

There is a Specific Time When Israel’s Blindness will be Removed

It is to be noted that there is a definite time when *the blindness will be removed* from the nation. Paul says that “blindness in part is happened to Israel, *until...*” Robertson calls this clause a “temporal clause” which means “until which time.” This anticipates the removal of the blindness at some appointed time.

One could characterize the question raised by the word “until” as ‘until what and when’? The ‘until when?’ part of the question will be answered in the next section. The ‘until what?’ part of the question carries a meaning that signals there is a span of *time* “up to” a certain event. It has been answered by the various rapture positions such as the pre-wrath or posttribulational rapturists differently. In other words, the Scripture indicates that there is “*a set time*” for the blindness of Israel to be removed by God.

The original language exegetes have some interesting points. Walvoord places before us the sense of “until.”

The central teaching of the passage revolves on the preposition *until*. The condition of Israel's blindness is revealed to continue up to a certain point at which it is terminated. That this expression is crucial to the interpretation is borne out by the attempts to alter its force. Calvin, for instance, changes it to “that,” making the blindness of Israel a factor in bringing about the fullness of the Gentiles. This is a clear violation of the meaning of the expression. As Charles Hodge states, “The words...cannot, so consistently with usage, be translated, *as long as*, or *so that*, followed as they are here by the aorist subjunctive; see Rev. xv.8 , xvii.17 ; compare Heb. iii.13 .” A. T. Robertson follows the same translation, labeling the clause a “temporal clause” meaning “until which time.” Its basic meaning is “up to.” In the language of Thayer it indicates “the terminus ad quem.” If we are willing to accept the plain meaning of the Greek text, we must recognize that this passage teaches two distinct situations: one, in which Israel is blinded in part; two, in which this blindness is removed. This is what the passage states and any tampering with it is confession of prejudice.⁸

Factor 5

What is the *Time of the Removal* of the Blindness?

Finally, the *time of the removal* of this blindness is stated in the phrase, “until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.” It thus becomes necessary to identify the term “fulness of the Gentiles.”

⁸John F. Walvoord, “Eschatological Problem VIII, Israel’s Blindness,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 102:407 (Dallas Theological Seminary, Jan., 1945) 285-286

The exegete must determine from Scripture the meaning of the terms “*the fulness of the Gentiles*” (Rom. 11:25) and “*the time of the Gentiles*” (Luke 21:24). Walvoord presents the numerous speculations by theologians concerning the phrase “the fulness of the Gentiles.”

The exegesis of Romans 11:25 has indicated a predicted time when Israel's blindness will be ended. This time is described as the point in the prophetic program when “the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.” This expression which occurs only here in the New Testament has given rise to many interpretations. Dr. Charles Feinberg summarizes the various viewpoints as follows: “Sanday and Headlam maintain that το πληρωμα refers to the Gentile world as a whole. Griffith Thomas refers the time to the close of the Gentile dispensation. Faber, Stifler, Brookes, and Chalmers are all of the opinion that the time referred to is identical with ‘the times of the Gentiles.’ Godet, after denoting the fulness of the Gentiles as the totality of the Gentile nations, designates the time as ‘the times of the Gentiles.’ Bosworth contends that reference is made to the large majority of the Gentile population of the world, while Govett thinks the phrase refers to the elect of this dispensation out of all nations. Moule holds that ευσελθη (‘be come in’) refers to a time when the ingathering of the Gentile children of God will be⁹

Finally, the premillennial position is present by Walvoord.

Within the bounds of the premillennial interpretation of Scripture, a problem remains regarding the termination of the period of Gentile blessing. In Luke 21:24, Christ referred to the “times of the Gentiles” as continuing as long as Jerusalem is “trodden down of the Gentiles.” The reference in Luke is to the political domination of Jerusalem by Gentiles which began with the fall of Jerusalem at the time of the captivity and has continued to the present day. While the terminology is not significant in itself, from the context of the two passages involved, it seems clear that the expression “times of the Gentiles” has reference to political domination of Gentiles, while the expression “fulness of the Gentiles” has reference to Gentile blessing and opportunity in this present age. If this analysis is correct, the times of the Gentiles and the fulness of the Gentiles are two entirely different ideas. The times of the Gentiles began long before Christ and will continue until Christ returns to establish His kingdom. The fulness of the Gentiles began at Pentecost and will continue only as long as the present age of grace. From the standpoint of eschatology, the important point is that the fulness of the Gentiles will come to its close before the times of the Gentiles are run out. Accepting the usual interpretation that the church, the body of Christ, will be caught up with Christ to glory before the time of tribulation predicted for Daniel's seventieth week, it seems clear that the fulness of the Gentiles will come abruptly to its close when the church is caught up to heaven. If so, we have here the terminus of the fulness of the Gentiles and the terminus of Israel's blindness.¹⁰

⁹John F. Walvoord, “Eschatological Problem VIII, Israel's Blindness” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 102:407 (Dallas Theological Seminary, Jan., 1945) 286.

¹⁰Ibid. 287-288 (Walvoord EP VIII).

Finally, a significant point needs to be made concerning the status of the people at the conclusion of “*the fulness of the Gentiles.*” Some have speculated that there would be a sudden conversion of all the citizens of Israel at the conclusion of the church age. Nothing could be further from the truth. A careful reading of the text reveals that the Jew is returned to the status of Gentile during the Church Age derived from the phrase “in part.” Some Jews will believe and some will not in every age or transition phase from one dispensation to another. Again, if it is not by faith in any age, then it is not ‘real.’ In this age and the ages to follow, God demands us to **πιστεω**; that is to have faith, which means to trust and believe in His Son’s Words, His Son’s Person, and His Son’s work in His offices of Prophet, Priest, King, and Saviour. True faith in these factors is the determining factor of salvation for the Jew and Gentile alike.

Amen!

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