

THE JEWISH PEOPLE AND SALVATION

Michael A. Rydelnik

IN 1996 I RECEIVED A PHONE CALL from my cousin in Israel, telling me that my father had just died. A Holocaust survivor and an Orthodox Jew, my father had cut all ties with me when I became a follower of Yeshua (Jesus). He moved to Israel and refused any contact with me. Despite my repeated efforts to reach my father through the years, he would never respond. When he died, his only surviving sibling, my aunt, instructed the entire family not to let me know of his passing. Gratefully one of my Israeli cousins refused this last painful demand and called me.

That was the first time I questioned the particularist¹ soteriology I had been taught at Bible college and seminary. I had been taught and believed that apart from conscious faith in Yeshua, all people, including my father, would be lost for eternity. But if someone could have earned his way into heaven on the basis of suffering, certainly my father could have. He lost his first wife, five sons, and an adopted daughter to the gas chambers at Auschwitz. He himself had suffered miserably in the Lodz ghetto and then in several concentration camps. After the war he remarried and his new wife died while giving birth to my half brother. Then he married my mother, with whom he had a daughter (my sister Esther), who died in a drowning accident in Berlin when she was two years old. After this tragedy my parents moved to America and tried to rebuild their lives. More than twenty years later my mother, my two

Michael A. Rydelnik is Professor of Jewish Studies, Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, Illinois.

¹ Particularism affirms that “salvation depends on explicit personal faith in Jesus Christ” (R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, “A Particularist View: An Evidentialist Approach,” in *Four Views of Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 214. Although sometimes called exclusivism, particularism is a more appropriate term because of the unwarranted negative suggestions of undue dogmatism and elitism that are often associated with the term “exclusivism.”

sisters, and I confessed faith in Yeshua, causing my father to disown us and move to Israel.

When my dad, who had suffered so much in life, died, a small voice in my head began to question how God could exclude him from eternal life. In the midst of my doubts I had two firm convictions: that Yeshua is truly the promised Messiah, and that the Bible is the inspired Word of God.

So I turned to the Bible to reexamine my previously held convictions. This is still where I turn when I am pained by the loss of my father and the continuing unbelief of the vast majority of my people. Must Jewish people consciously believe in Yeshua to have eternal life or are there exceptions to this seemingly biblical requirement? In this article I share what I believe the Scriptures say about the Jewish people and salvation.

The Bible addresses this topic in clear terms. The Scriptures affirm four principles regarding Jewish people and salvation.

THE LOST CONDITION OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

The Bible asserts that *Jewish people, in fact all people, are lost without faith in Yeshua as their Redeemer*. The Scriptures state that all are dead in “trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1) and thus are separated from God. Isaiah proclaimed to Israel, “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you” (Isa. 59:2). However, some passages require a closer look.

JOHN 3:18

The apostle John² considered any individual, including all Jewish people, as having been “judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Nash believes that this verse so plainly maintains the lostness of humanity without conscious faith in Yeshua that when he cites it, he fails to comment on its meaning. He simply states that this text speaks for itself.³

² Although it is possible that Yeshua spoke these words, it is more likely that His words ended in John 3:15, with verses 16–21 presenting John’s theological reflections (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993], 203; and Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 228). Assuredly verses 16–21 reflect the teachings John had received from Yeshua during His earthly ministry.

³ Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 148.

Verse 16 affirms God's love for the whole world and His provision of the Son of God to save it. Verse 18 plainly states that those who believe will be saved. However, the verse also affirms that judgment results from failing to believe in Yeshua.

It is unlikely that John considered this fact to be true of only those who have been evangelized with a loving and clear presentation of Yeshua, since this distinction is not found anywhere in this text. Apparently John wrote of those who fail to believe in Yeshua, regardless of whether they have ever heard of Him.

Failure to believe "in the name of the only begotten Son of God" brings judgment, that is, judgment stems not merely from a lack of faith in God but from the failure to believe explicitly and consciously in Yeshua. To believe "in the name" of a person means to understand his true identity. When the psalmist stated that "those who love Your name may exult in You" (Ps. 5:11), obviously he spoke of those who consciously know the identity of the God of Israel. To make the phrase believing "in the name of the Son of God" exclude conscious faith in Yeshua would violate John's usage as well (John 1:12; 20:31).

JOHN 3:36

"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." A person who believes in the Son is assured a place in the age to come. The opposite is also true. A person who does not believe will fail to see life in the age to come. John used the words "does not obey" in contrast to the verb "believe." Failure to believe is in essence disobeying the commandment of Messiah to believe in Him. "Those who believe do in fact obey the Son, and those who do not believe do not in fact obey Him."⁴

Of significance is the fact that "the wrath of God" abides on any person who does not believe and obey the Son. This does not refer to an anger distinguished by an "irrational or emotional outburst." Instead it is used to describe the effects of a holy God's just response to unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18).⁵ Failing to believe in the Son results in God's wrath abiding on Jews and Gentiles alike, without distinction. Apart from faith in Yeshua, all people stand in their sins and justly deserve God's wrath.

⁴ Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 248.

⁵ G. Stahlin, "ὀργή," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged edition, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 722–27.

JOHN 8:24

In a clearly Jewish context Yeshua told the Jewish leaders, “You will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” According to Yeshua the only way to avoid dying in an unforgiven state is to have faith in Him. In the conditional clause Yeshua made clear that He is the proper object of that faith when He said “unless you believe that I am He [ἐγώ εἰμι].” This is an explicit self-declaration of His deity. Some have suggested that the words ἐγώ εἰμι refer not to deity but to an implicit object, such as, “unless you believe I am who I claim to be” or “unless you believe that I am not of this world but from above.” However, Carson correctly rejects those possibilities by pointing out that these translations are unlikely with the absolute usage present in this verse. The alternative possibility, that Yeshua was declaring His own deity, is far more likely.⁶

The phrase ἐγώ εἰμι is probably taken from the Septuagint’s translation of אֲנִי הָאֵלֹהִים, a phrase used for God’s self-disclosure in Isaiah (cf. Isa. 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 46:4; 48:12). For example in Isaiah 43:10 the Lord said, “So that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He [אֲנִי הָאֵלֹהִים].”⁷

Speaking to a Jewish audience, Yeshua declared that they needed to recognize that He in fact is God or they would still be in their sins. The context clarifies that He was claiming deity. For later in the chapter John recorded that Yeshua said, “Before Abraham was born, I am [ἐγώ εἰμι]” (John 8:58). His hearers fully understood the import of these words because “they picked up stones to throw at Him” (v. 59). This all relates to the question at hand in that Yeshua told a group of highly committed Jewish people that they were lost and remained in their sins so long as they did not consciously believe that Yeshua is God in the flesh.

ROMANS 2:17–23

In Romans 1:18–3:20 Paul made the case that all people, Jewish or Gentile, are lost in sin and in need of redemption. He demonstrated that pagans are lost (1:18–32), as are moralists (2:1–16), and then that Jewish people too are lost in sin (2:17–3:8). In this last section Paul’s point was that Jewish people who celebrate God’s gift of the Torah and teach others to obey it still failed to keep it themselves. Thus he asked, “You who preach that one shall not steal, do you

⁶ As opposed to referring to Exodus 3:14 in order to assert, “I AM has sent me” (see Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 342–43).

⁷ Ibid.

steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?" (2:21–23).

Of course not all Jews literally steal, rob temples, or commit adultery, though some may do so.⁸ However, if the stricter interpretation of the Law is true, as set forth by Yeshua in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:17–48), namely, that obedience is measured by the intentions of the heart, certainly not one Jewish person is innocent.

Since Paul's rhetorical questions must be answered affirmatively, Jewish people are just as lost and accountable to God for sin as are the Gentiles. Moo captures the import of these words when he writes, "In arguing in this manner, Paul is implicitly contesting the traditional Jewish understanding of the covenant. Whereas Jews tended to rely on their election and works of the law, Paul insists that it is faith—only and always—that is the basis for a righteous standing with God."⁹

ROMANS 3:9–20

Having made his case that Gentiles, moralists, and Jews are all guilty before God, Paul concluded by stating "that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin" (Rom. 3:9). He followed this with a catena of verses from the Old Testament that show that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, are lost and separated from God. Paul then stated categorically that those who fail to keep the Law will be judged, and that "all the world [has] become accountable to God" (v. 19). The universal condemnation of humanity for sin summarizes the point of this section. All people, including Jewish people, are lost and separated from God because of sin. But there is hope because that forgiveness is available through faith in Yeshua.

THE NEED FOR CONSCIOUS FAITH IN YESHUA

The New Testament consistently affirms that *Jewish people and Gentiles must have conscious faith in Yeshua to experience God's forgiveness and receive the promise of life in the world to come*. The following are some of the many passages that affirm this fact.

⁸ C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1957), 56–57.

⁹ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 158.

JOHN 3:16, 18

Verse 16 clearly asserts the need for explicit and conscious faith in Yeshua, by stating that in love God gave His Son so that “whoever believes in Him shall not perish.” Faith in His name will result in not being judged for sin, for “whoever believes in Him has eternal life,” but without that faith the wrath of God justly abides on him (v. 18). These verses are in the context of Yeshua’s discussion with Nicodemus, a good man, a Law-observing Jew, a Pharisee, and a Jewish leader. If Nicodemus needed conscious faith in Yeshua to be born again and forgiven, certainly all other Jewish people do as well.

JOHN 6:28–29

The multitude asked Yeshua, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?” They wanted to know what God required of them. Yeshua’s response was quite simple. To fulfill God’s requirements they were to “believe in Him whom He has sent.” This is faith in a specific object, namely, Yeshua, the One sent from God.¹⁰

ROMANS 9:31–32

Although the Old Testament required faith in the God of Israel, now with the coming of Yeshua, the Messiah, He is the object of faith for salvation. Although the Old Testament affirmed the need for faith in God, most Jews chose to pursue salvation by works of the Law. “But Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works” (9:31–32). As a result, when Messiah came, they rejected Him. They “stumbled over the stumbling stone” (v. 32), not because of their faith in God but because of their devotion to works of the Law.

ROMANS 10:9–10, 13–15

Everyone, and particularly Jewish people, in order to be saved must confess Yeshua as God and believe in their hearts that God raised Him from the dead (Rom. 10:9–10).¹¹

Paul then applied this crucial principle: Since Yeshua is the

¹⁰ The Gospel of John includes a number of other verses that plainly state the need for conscious faith in Yeshua, some of which are 6:40; 8:24; 10:9, 26–28; and 11:25–26.

¹¹ The confession of the mouth is not an act of works in order to attain salvation; instead it is an expression of true faith.

true object of faith for salvation, He must be called on for anyone to be saved. And in order to call, one must believe. And in order to believe, one must hear the message. And to hear the message, a proclaimer of that message must be sent with the good news that Messiah has died for sin and has been raised to prove He is indeed God (vv. 13–15). This passage could not be clearer. Jewish people must believe in Yeshua explicitly, so there needs to be intentional outreach to bring that message to them. Apart from faithful proclamation of the gospel, there is no alternative way for a person to come to a knowledge of what is necessary for salvation.¹²

THE ABSOLUTE UNIQUENESS OF YESHUA

Some might acknowledge the lost condition of Jewish people and even the need for conscious faith in Yeshua, but then state that faith in Yeshua is only one way to enter a forgiven relationship with God. It may even be the best way but certainly not the only way. However, the Bible does not offer this as an option, insisting that *Yeshua is the only way to God*.

JOHN 14:6

Thomas asked Yeshua, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?” to which Yeshua responded, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (14:5–6). Verse 6, when taken plainly, excludes any other possibilities for salvation. The use of the article before each of the three nouns dismisses the possibility that Yeshua is only one of many ways, one of many sources of truth, and one of many kinds of life. Some may suggest that it is possible to experience His uniqueness apart from conscious knowledge of Him. However, this would be contrary to the need for faith in Yeshua as presented in the rest of the Gospel of John.¹³ There are no other alternatives; Yeshua is the only way to the Father.

ACTS 4:12

At a hearing before the Sanhedrin Peter declared to this body of Jewish leaders, “There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by

¹² Paul anticipated the objection that some Jewish people do not believe because they have not heard. His response is that there is sufficient general revelation to condemn (Rom. 10:17–19).

¹³ Particularly John 3:16, 18, 36 (see the earlier discussion on these verses).

which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Geivett and Phillips make four observations that lead them to conclude that these words must be interpreted in a particularist way. First, the use of the phrase “under heaven” indicates how extensively all other names are excluded as possible ways of salvation. Second, the word ἀνθρώποις (“humanity”) implies that the necessity of salvation through faith in Yeshua is all-inclusive, for all human beings. Third, the word δεῖ (“must”) indicates the absolute necessity of faith in Yeshua. Fourth, the word ὄνομα (“name”) expresses Yeshua’s fullness in His person and work. Moreover, believing in His name means explicit knowledge of Him (4:17–30; 5:28–32, 40–41; 8:12, 35; 9:15, 27; 10:43; 19:13–15; 26:9; Rom. 15:20; 3 John 7).¹⁴

Pinnock, however, objects to this interpretation.

Peter’s declaration does not render a judgment, positive or negative, on another question . . . the status of other religions and the role they play in God’s providence or plan of redemption. Now I grant that Peter judges the religion of Judaism, in confrontation with the preaching of Jesus as Messiah in Acts 3–4, to be an inadequate vehicle of God’s endtime salvation (the same would hold true, a fortiori, of any other religion in this situation). But Peter does not say what would hold for Judaism or any other religion in the situation where Christ has not yet been named, where the contest has not been joined. . . . Thus we should not see him as denying that there have been and are lesser instances of saving power at work in the world where Jesus’ name is unknown. Peter is magnifying a mighty act of God bringing in the kingdom, not discussing comparative religions. We should not generalize his remarks so far beyond the context of Acts 3–4.¹⁵

The problem with Pinnock’s objection is that he wants to limit Peter’s words to a select group of Jewish people. But the Book of Acts consistently demonstrates that the apostles preached that everyone needs to believe explicitly in Yeshua, both Jews and Gentiles. Peter said to God-fearing Cornelius, that it is “through His name every one who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins” (10:43). Paul concluded his message to the Jewish audience at Pisidian Antioch with an appeal to believe in Yeshua because it is “through Jesus [that] the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified” (13:38–39, NIV).¹⁶

¹⁴ Geivett and Phillips, “A Particularist View: An Evidentialist Approach,” 230–31.

¹⁵ Clark H. Pinnock, “Acts 4:12—No Other Name under Heaven,” in *Through No Fault of Their Own*, ed. William V. Crockett and James G. Sigountos (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 110–11.

¹⁶ Also Paul argued that through faith a believer in Yeshua receives complete justification, a benefit not available through the Law of Moses. Paul’s “distinctive themes of ‘forgiveness of sins,’ ‘justification,’ and ‘faith’ . . . resound in this first ad-

If salvation were available apart from conscious and explicit faith in Yeshua, that would conflict with Paul's and Silas's words in Acts 16:31, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." Conscious faith in the name of Yeshua is the only way.

Moreover, if Pinnock were correct, then Paul would certainly have realized it and would have restrained his determination "to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named" (Rom. 15:20) in order not to bring judgment on those who had never heard. Although Pinnock does affirm the missionary enterprise,¹⁷ his view is logically contrary to it. Proclaiming Yeshua to those who had previously not heard of Him would bring the possibility of judgment. Thus declaring the good news would cause more people to be lost rather than saved.

THE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR UNBELIEF

All people in general, and *Jewish people in particular, will be held accountable for failing to believe in Yeshua as the Messiah.* This fact is found in several passages.

DEUTERONOMY 18:15; 34:10

Deuteronomy 18:15 records Moses' prediction that the Lord will send Israel an eschatological prophet like Moses. Numbers 12:6–8 clarifies that Moses' unique characteristic as a prophet was that he spoke to God face to face. Therefore the prophet like Moses would be required to communicate with God in a similar way and could not be just any prophet of Israel. Deuteronomy 34:10–12, an epilogue added to the Torah many years after Moses (likely during the time of Ezra, at the close of the canon), includes the observation, "Since that time [i.e., since the days of Moses and Joshua] no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face" (v. 10). Thus at the close of the canonical period Israel was reminded that no prophet had ever fulfilled the prediction of a prophet like Moses; therefore Israel should keep looking for the Messiah, the eschatological prophet.¹⁸

Attached to this messianic prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:15 is the warning in verse 19, "Whoever will not listen to My words

dress ascribed to him in Acts just as they do throughout all his extant letters" (Richard Longenecker, "Acts," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981], 427).

¹⁷ Pinnock, "Acts 4:12—No Other Name under Heaven," 114.

¹⁸ For a more detailed defense of the messianic interpretation of Deuteronomy 18:15–19 see Michael Rydelnik, "Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Messianic Prophecy," *Mishkan* 27 (1998): 50–57.

which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.” This means that if the people of Israel do not heed the messianic prophet like Moses, God will hold them accountable. Since Yeshua fulfilled this prediction, any Jewish person who fails to hear and obey His words is responsible to God.

PSALM 2:12

According to both classical Jewish and Christian interpretation, the Son in Psalm 2 has been understood as referring to the Messiah.¹⁹ The end of the psalm is significant. It offers blessing to all who take refuge in the Son, but it also warns of the disaster of failing to do so. The psalmist wrote, “Do homage to [lit., ‘kiss’] the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled” (v. 12). Again failure to follow the messianic King will result in facing Him in judgment.

JOHN 5:45–47

At the end of a Sabbath controversy Yeshua challenged His Jewish audience about their virtual bibliolatry. “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life” (5:39). As a result of their wrong focus, they failed to understand the Scriptures and to recognize that Yeshua is the Messiah. However, Yeshua warned that only by coming to Him is it possible to have spiritual and eternal life (v. 40). Their failure to recognize Him means they would be accountable. He warned, “Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (vv. 45–47). According to Yeshua true faith in Moses and the Torah should result in faith in Him.

Some suggest that Jewish people who are loyal to the Torah have expressed an implicit faith in Him.²⁰ However, Yeshua flatly rejected this idea. True fidelity to Torah compels faith in Yeshua as Messiah. Failure to recognize Yeshua from reading the Torah will

¹⁹ For a defense of a canonical process approach to reading the Psalms as messianic see Bruce K. Waltke, “A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms,” in *Tradition and Testament*, ed. John Feinberg and Paul Feinberg (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 3–18. David C. Mitchell has defended an eschatological/messianic reading of the Psalms in *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997).

²⁰ For example Mark S. Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 224–25.

bring accountability to the Father and the Son and also to Moses, the author of the Torah.

Thus the biblical evidence shows that Jewish people are lost without faith in Yeshua and must have conscious faith in Him in order to be saved. Jewish people have no means of salvation except by faith in Yeshua. Therefore God the Father will hold them accountable for rejecting Yeshua. Because of the severity of these issues, some have offered alternatives and objections.

THE OBJECTIONS TO PARTICULARISM

Understandably many people long for a wider hope for the Jewish people instead of the narrow way described in the Scriptures. These people are motivated by love and concern and should be respected for their great desire for Jewish people to experience the world to come in the presence of God. Nevertheless their objections must be evaluated biblically.

THE POSSIBILITY OF UNRECOGNIZED MEDIATION

Some have expressed the hope that the benefits of Messiah Yeshua's atoning death and resurrection would be applied to devout Jewish people, even if they do not recognize Yeshua as the Messiah. While accepting that Yeshua is the only way to God and that His is the only name by which salvation is possible, people who hold this view believe that perhaps God will apply the benefits of Yeshua's atonement to devout Jewish people who do not consciously believe in Him.

Several passages of Scripture speak directly to this objection. One example is Acts 2, in which Luke described the thousands of Jewish people present at the feast of Passover as "devout" (Acts 2:5). Yet despite their devotion and spiritual sincerity, Peter still called on them to repent for the forgiveness of their sins (v. 38). If there is any doubt as to the object of their faith, Peter clearly called on them to "be baptized in the name of Yeshua." Peter was not asking for a general repentance for sins committed, but for repentance for not believing in Yeshua and a conscious turning to Him in faith.

Another passage is Romans 10:1–2, in which Paul stated that his "heart's desire" and prayer for the people of Israel is that they might be saved. Paul recognized that his people were lost without Yeshua, but still he acknowledged "that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge." Thus devotion is an insufficient basis for obtaining salvation.

Some appeal to the situation of the Roman centurion Cornelius, of whom Peter said, "I most certainly understand now

that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him" (Acts 10:34–35). These verses, it is claimed, show that God will save people who fear Him and do what is right. However, if that were the case, then why was Peter directed by the Lord to preach about Yeshua to Cornelius? The answer is that despite Cornelius's devotion, he was not yet saved. In 11:13–14 an angel is said to have directed Cornelius to send for Peter so that he might "speak words to you by which you will be saved." The point of 10:34–35 is not that fearing God and doing good apart from faith in Yeshua is salvific. Rather, that regardless of nationality, those who seek God are welcomed by Him and so God will, in His sovereignty, extend greater light to such people.

According to John 5:23 piety apart from faith in Yeshua is inadequate for salvation. There Yeshua says, "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." Regardless of personal devotion to the Father, without faith in the Son such devotion falls short.

THE PROBLEM OF TRANSITIONS

Some people argue that Jewish people in Old Testament days before the coming of the Messiah were saved without conscious faith in Yeshua. Since the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin (Heb. 10:4), the atonement of the Messiah, it is argued, had to be applied to the faithful of Israel without their conscious faith in Him. Thus it is presumed that the blood of the Messiah may be applied to Jewish people today who respond in faith to the promises of God but who lack conscious faith in Yeshua. Pinnock uses this argument when he writes, "People like Abraham knew God even though they did not know Jesus." He refers to "Old Testament saints who lived before Jesus and therefore could not have called upon his name for salvation."²¹

This proposal misunderstands how people have always been saved. Only one way of salvation is available, and it remains so in every generation. People are saved by grace through faith in the revealed will of God. Believers in Israel were saved by grace through faith in the God of Israel. This was the revealed will of God for them and they were not required to have a conscious faith in Yeshua as the Messiah. However, with the coming of Yeshua, God has revealed the truth of His messiahship, deity, sacrificial death, and resurrection. All people are called on to believe this

²¹ Pinnock, "Acts 4:12—No Other Name under Heaven," 112–13.

message because it is the revealed will of God today. As Hebrews 1:2 states, "In these last days [God] has spoken to us in His Son." With the first advent of Yeshua it is no longer possible to rely on Old Testament circumstances for salvation.

A variation of this objection contends that Jewish people already saved by grace through faith in the revealed will of God at the time of Yeshua's coming would somehow have automatically lost their salvation when He came (or perhaps at His death, resurrection, or ascension) because they had not yet heard of Him. Since this is an unthinkable possibility, it is considered proof that even the progress of revelation does not mandate explicit, conscious faith in Yeshua.

This argument fails to see the function of Acts as a transitional book, recording the events in a period of change. It shows the progress from the Old Testament revelation to the New, by taking the good news of Messiah Yeshua "to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). As the gospel spread, those Jewish believers saved on the basis of the previous revelation would then have heard of Messiah's coming and believed in this new revelation. By the time the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, no longer would any of these "transitional" believers have been alive. Hence this period of change closed, and the requirement for conscious and explicit faith became normative.

THE FAIRNESS OF GOD

This objection argues that God would not hold people accountable for failing to believe in someone of whom they had never heard. It is argued that this is uniquely true of the Jewish people because for the most part the only message they have received of Yeshua is the distorted one often proclaimed throughout church history. The anti-Torah, anti-Jewish Jesus forced on the Jewish people for centuries blotted out the true Yeshua. In this view God would be unjust if He failed to overlook Jewish unbelief because the good news of Yeshua was so distorted by the church.

True, many have been guilty of obscuring the message of the true Yeshua to the Jewish people, besides other Gentiles also. However, if God will hold pagans accountable for unbelief solely on the basis of general revelation (Rom. 1:18–20), how much more can He expect of the Jewish people who have access to the special revelation of Scripture that predicts the Messiah. This objection is easily answered with the words of Abraham to the rich man, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them. . . . If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:29, 31).

THE EXCEPTION FOR INFANTS

Pinnock chides particularists for inconsistency in that many “hope for the salvation of children who die in infancy, even though babies cannot call on the name of Jesus and the Bible never actually states such a hope clearly.”²² Based on this “exception” some then argue that there may also be exceptions for other people who do not believe for lack of full information about Yeshua.

In response it is unfair to compare the lack of faith of those who are incapable of belief (infants) with those who choose not to believe (adults). Also all particularists do not hold the same position with regard to infants who die before reaching an age of accountability.²³ Whatever the explanation for infants who die before they are able to believe, Yeshua did say of children that “the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14). This seems to indicate that children are part of the world to come. But there is no similar promise for adult Jews or Gentiles who fail to believe for lack of receiving a clear proclamation about Yeshua.

THE NUMBER OF THE LOST

Some writers argue that if the particularist position is true, far more people would be lost than saved, and this seems contrary to the love of God, who does not wish that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9).

However, the Bible clearly states that multitudes from every nation will be saved (Rev. 7:9). The Lord does love the world and chooses to embrace myriads of people of many nationalities. Yet with great sorrow Yeshua warned of the danger of following “the way that is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.” But people ought to “enter through the narrow gate . . . for the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matt. 7:13–14). Although this is painful to accept, Yeshua was saying that the path to life is indeed narrow.

In Romans 11:1–5 Paul identified Jewish believers in Yeshua as the remnant of Israel. The word “remnant” (λείμμα) means “what is left over,”²⁴ and when referring to people it specifies a

²² Ibid., 113.

²³ See Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004), 3:430–54, for an overview of salvation and infant mortality. See also Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight: Childhood and Children in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 217–41.

²⁴ V. Hertrich IV, “λείμμα,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 523.

small group of survivors. The point is that Jewish believers form a small part of the whole nation of Israel. Paul illustrated the idea of a remnant in this age with the Elijah story in which seven thousand people did not bow their knees to Baal. Paul's point was that even in the Old Testament the vast majority of Israelites did not know the Lord. Then, as now, God worked through a remnant. Therefore not surprisingly only a remnant of Israel will be saved today.²⁵

For those who know Yeshua, being part of the remnant and walking on the narrow path ought never be a source of triumphalism or gloating. Rather it should break hearts and serve as motivation to share the message of the Messiah in the most effective way to the most people possible.

Despite the difficulties involved in affirming a particularist view of salvation with regard to all people, and especially Jewish people, it is what the Scriptures teach. Since that is so, how should this fact affect those who have put their trust in Yeshua?

THE RESPONSES OF PARTICULARISM

Too often particularists are characterized as arrogant or unloving toward the people whom God loves, consigning them to perdition rather than life. In responding to this hard truth particularists ought to maintain a much different attitude.

HUMILITY

Those who have experienced God's grace should be overcome with humility. Receiving salvation was certainly not a result of any merit on the part of any believer. Becoming a part of the remnant of Israel is a result of "God's gracious choice" (Rom. 11:5). An attitude of humility should prevail. God alone is the Judge of all the earth, and it would be presumptuous and arrogant for any believer to opine on the destiny of others.

MOTIVATION

In the words of Paul, "knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). God has committed to all followers of Yeshua

²⁵ Paul looked forward to the eschatological Day of the Lord, when the Deliverer, the Messiah Yeshua, will come and the nation of Israel as a whole will turn to Him. Then the remnant will become the whole (Rom. 11:25–26). God's words to Jeremiah will then come to pass: "They will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer. 31:34).

“the ministry of reconciliation,” and so they are to serve as God’s ambassadors to a world that He loves, urging unbelievers to be reconciled to God (vv. 18–20). Taking seriously that the “broad way” is filled with Jewish people, believers should be motivated to bring them the good news of salvation through Yeshua.

TRUST

Believers need to trust that God is just and knows what He is doing. Though they cannot fully grasp God’s ways, they can trust Him, aware that He is supremely gracious and is always extending Himself in love to a world that wants very little to do with Him.

CONCLUSION

When my cousin called to notify me of my father’s death, as we were about to hang up, she remembered one last thing she wanted to tell me. On the day before he died, a woman from the United States entered my father’s hospital room to visit her own father in the next bed. She happened to see my father’s name on a piece of tape on the wall. So she turned to him and asked if he was related to Professor Michael Rydelnik from Chicago. He responded by saying, “He used to be my son, but he is dead to me.” I do not know who this woman is. She has never made any effort to contact me. But according to my cousin she angered my aunt by coming to my father’s deathbed and sharing with him about Yeshua. She told him that Yeshua is the Messiah and that atonement and forgiveness of sin are available through Him. So far as I know, my father rejected her message and died the following day of kidney failure. Yet I can see the mercy and grace of God, for at the very end the Lord sent another ambassador to my father, in the form of an unknown American Jewish believer. That is why believers need to trust God about the Jewish people and salvation. He cares about His chosen people more than any human can, and He is doing much more to reach them than even can be known.