What about Israel?

One important feature of Premillennialism is the insistence by most that the ethnic nation of Israel will be regathered in Palestine in the last days (largely fulfilled in 1948), when the Lord will supernaturally bring salvation to Israel as a nation, and then and there fulfill many promises made to them in the Old Testament that have yet to come to pass in history. These promises have to do with the land of Palestine and the city of Jerusalem, where the worship of God in Israel at Jerusalem will be a prominent feature among all the nations coming worship God when also God’s blessing upon the whole regathered nation of Israel will result in God exalting them above all the nations of the world. This idea is commonly called the Restoration of Israel, meaning the ethnic nation of Jews in contrast to the idea of the Israel of God which many Amillennialists refer to being the church (made up of believing Jews and Gentiles…Gal 6:16) that has superseded Israel (also called Replacement Theology). Premillennialists read these promises in the Old Testament and believe they must have a literal fulfilment in history in order for God to remain faithful to His Word, and so they look forward to the Second Coming and the Millennial Kingdom where God will fulfill these promises to Israel. It is typically the hermeneutic (method of interpretation) that Premillennialists use (literal-grammatical-historical) that drives them to this belief. This is held in contrast commonly to the hermeneutic of Amillennialists (redemptive historical) where they read these Old Testament prophecies as typology (types, symbols, shadows) of Messianic salvation in the church having there fulfilment in the New Covenant realities of the church age and the Eternal state. This Amillennial view of Israel is often called “Supercessionism” or “Replacement Theology.” These two different ways of interpreting the bible make a stark contrast when it comes to the Millennial Kingdom and also the fulfilment of God’s promises to the ethnic nation of Israel, which Premillennialists believe is yet to come to pass in history. Therefore Premillennialists see many of these promises in the Old Testament coming to pass in the Millennial age, before the Eternal state, and this Millennial age is often called the “Intermediate Kingdom.” In what follows briefly I want to just make you aware of the New Testament teaching on Israel’s future restoration by God and also some of these promises in the Old Testament that clearly inform us of the nature and scope of that last days restoration of Israel according to God’s eternal purpose.

I cannot give at time an exhaustive treatment of Supercessionism and the issue of distinctions between Israel and the Church (Continuity and Discontinuity) in this teaching. Let me suffice to say that being a committed Premillennialist I hold a certain level of Discontinuity, that is that Israel is distinct from the Church, even in the New Covenant age in some degree. The New Testament clearly teaches that believing Israelites become one body and temple together with the Gentile church in Christ (Eph 2:11-22), and that in Christ the racial and religious barriers are broken down (Gal 3:28) through the sonship and peace that Christ brings, especially in the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 3:26-29 - 26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise. NASB

Clearly, Jew and Gentile become heirs together of God’s Abrahamic Covenant and brought into the privilege and blessing of sonship. This does not however remove the Jewish identity of ethnic Israel any more than it removes our gender identity of male and female. In what follows I will show that God does indeed have eschatological purposes for the ethnic nation of Israel, and in the last days He will exalt them above all the nations of the world under the Kingship of Jesus in the Millennium. This
He does according to His **Covenant faithfulness** to them where He will literally **fulfill** all the **promises** He has made to them. There are no grounds for somehow assuming that God has **cancelled** or forgotten His **promises to Israel** just because Jewish nation has **rejected Christ** as a whole, and that now individual Jews can be brought into Messianic salvation by grace through faith. What is at stake here is the **character** and **nature of God** and His **Word** in being faithful to fulfill His promises in spite of Israel’s rejection of their Messiah, something the prophets emphasized. This is the subject of Paul’s **explicit treatment** of the issue of God’s **elective purposes** for Israel and their **eschatological fulfilment** in the last days in the book of Romans chapters 9-11. One must understand that Paul is a converted Jewish Pharisee, and writing from the perspective of someone who **knows and understands** the entire Old Testament. He assumes that those who read his letters have some exposure to the rich Old Testament narrative and prophecies, something which is very much neglected in our day and time.

**The Future Restoration and Salvation of Israel**
The New Testament clearly lays out a **future restoration** and **salvation** for the **ethnic nation** of Israel. This comes in a key section of the New Testament where Paul is giving a **treatment** on the **ethnic nation of Israel**, specifically in regard to God’s **election** of them, His **faithfulness** to them (even though they rebelled), and the **nature and scope** of God’s **present** and **future purposes** for them. After bringing up the **“Israelites,”** (Roman 9:4) Paul goes into a lengthy treatment in Romans chapters 9-11 discussing the **election of Israel**, God’s faithfulness according to His **electing purposes** for them, and their **present** and **future state**.

**Romans 9:1-6** - I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I **have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.** 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, 4 who are **Israelites,** to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, 5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. 6 But **it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;** NASB

This **treatment** of ethnic Israel in Romans 9-11 can be seen in an overview in this outline.

I. **Israel's Past: The Election of God**
   A. Paul's Sorrow
   B. God's Sovereignty
   C. 9:1-29
   D. 9:1-5
   E. 9:6-29

II. **Israel's Present: The Rejection of God**
   A. Israel Seeks Righteousness by Works
   B. Israel Rejects Christ
   C. Israel Rejects the Prophets
   D. 9:30—10:21
   E. 9:30-33
   F. 10:1-15
   G. 10:16-21

III. **Israel's Future: The Restoration by God**
    A. Israel's Rejection Is Not Total
    B. Israel's Rejection Is Not Final
    C. Israel's Restoration: The Occasion for Glorifying God
    D. 11
    E. 11:1-10
    F. 11:11-32
    G. 11:33-36

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When Paul arrives in chapter 11, he begins to deal with Israel’s **rejection of Christ**, its consequences upon them in the **present age**, and God’s faithfulness in His **election** of them to **save** them **finally**, in spite of their **hardened hearts**. This we know that God finally does for the **sake of His own glory** and **faithfulness**, but nevertheless it results in a **powerful salvation** and **restoration of Israel** in the last
days. In verse 11:1-10 Paul makes the point that their rejection is not total in that even now in the church age some Israelites are being saved by grace through faith in Christ alone, and Paul refers to these Messianic believing Jews as a “remnant chosen by grace” (Romans 11:5).

Romans 11:1-6 11 I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 3 "Lord, they have killed Thy prophets, they have torn down Thine altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life." 4 But what is the divine response to him? "I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5 In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. NASB

There is then a remnant chosen by grace, who through election and regeneration believe in Christ and are saved (like us Gentiles), and the rest of the Israelites in this present age (Church Age...) times of the Gentiles are given a blindness and hardening by God to the Gospel.

Romans 11:7-10 7 What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; 8 just as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, Eyes to see not and ears to hear not, Down to this very day." 9 And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, And a stumbling block and a retribution to them. 10 "Let their eyes be darkened to see not, And bend their backs forever." NASB

Now in verse 11:32 Paul makes the point that even though they have received a blindness and hardening by God in the present age, their rejection of Christ is not final and they will again be restored by God, because of God’s faithfulness in electing them for blessing and privilege. So Paul argues that they will not be totally cut off, but finally restored and saved by God and in God’s time. Paul argument progresses and builds to include the supernatural work of God and re-grafting Israel back into the olive tree (the true and genuine elect of God). Notice how in this text/context that Israel (they, their, them) is set in contrast to the believing elect/chosen Jews (v-1,5) and Gentiles(v-7,12-13) who are described as (you, you).

Romans 11:11-24 11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. 12 Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! 13 But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. 15 For if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 And if the first piece of dough be holy, the lump is also; and if the root be holy, the branches are too. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. 22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more shall these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? NASB

Paul has built the argument to this point to set this important and fundamental point of God’s covenant faithfulness in view. Israel was “cut off” for unbelief, blindness and hardness of heart, but God will for the sake of His great name, electing love and covenant faithfulness graft them back in in spite of their sin, and bring about a supernatural restoration and salvation of the whole ethnic nation of “Israel,” who is clearly in this context the blood descendants of “Jacob.”

Romans 11:25-27 25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will
He furthers the contrast of the unbelieving ethnic nation of Jews with the elect Jew/Gentile believers in verses 28-32, calling them beloved enemies of God who have an irrevocable calling from God by His election, and that ultimately in the same way He saved us Gentiles through His mercy in the Gospel, He will again save them through His mercy verse 31.

Romans 11:28-32 - 28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so these also have now been disobedient, in order that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. 32 For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all. NASB

Don’t miss this important last verse 32. God has allowed Jew and Gentile to go astray in sin so that He might manifest His the glory of His mercy upon them all. This absolutely incredible thing that God has done with the nation of Israel in redemptive History, including the mystery of the Gospel in saving the Gentile Church, is an astounding epic saga of events that has taken thousands of years to unfold. During this time Israel has been scattered among the nations of the world, sorely pressed, harassed, persecuted and hated, which is exactly what He said would happen to them by the mouths of the prophets. And through it all, they were without a homeland, having been dispersed from the Land of Judea, and yet God has supernaturally preserved them as a nation of people for the grand finale, which is His glorious Millennial Kingdom He will bring about in Judea in the last days. There He will fulfill all His covenant promises to Israel as He brings the whole remnant of the nation under the salvation of Christ, through the Gospel and saving faith. This special election of Israel and His plan for them through the ages is an event of ineffable glory that brings the Apostle to doxology and praise for God’s unsearchable wisdom.

Romans 11:33-36 - 33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? 35 Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. NASB

This we know that God finally does for the sake of His own glory and faithfulness, but nevertheless it results in a powerful salvation and restoration of Israel in the last days.

This idea that Israel would go through a time of blindness, hardening and judgment from God, was mentioned in the Old Testament, but not clearly understood until the fuller light and revelation of the New Testament, revealing of the mystery of the Gospel and the times of the Gentile’s salvation.

Hosea 3:4-5 - 4 For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols. 5 Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days. NASB

In light of the history of Israel and Judaism in the last 2000 years, Hosea’s prophecy is clearly seen to be fulfilled during the times of the Gentiles. We clearly see that the Jews have remained “for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols.” But the prophecy has a glorious end for the wandering Jews that have been scattered to every nation under Heaven, exiled from the land of promise. But let us see Paul’s promise that Israel will be saved in the last days confirmed in the mouth of the prophet Hosea in verse 5, “Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days.” You see, Redemptive history is unfolding and God has grand plans for the future of Israel and their final salvation. We now know that God has a Messianic saving purpose for the Gentile church and that Israel is blinded and
hardened as judgment from God as a result of the rejection of Christ. But God will clearly save and restore them when the “times of the Gentiles” are fulfilled. Then God will again move to regather, save, and restore the glory of Israel in the last days. This makes so many of the Old Testament passages that refer to Israel’s glory in the last days finally make sense, in light of their hardening and rejection of the Christ. They are seen in the prophets of being under the judgment of exile and dispersion (diaspora) by God, until in the last days God once again regathers them in the land of Judea to bring about a national Messianic salvation for them, for the sake of His own glory and covenant faithfulness, and in spite of their disobedience and rebellion against Him.

Zechariah 12:6-14 - 6 "In that day I will make the clans of Judah like a firepot among pieces of wood and a flaming torch among sheaves, so they will consume on the right hand and on the left all the surrounding peoples, while the inhabitants of Jerusalem again dwell on their own sites in Jerusalem. 7 "The Lord also will save the tents of Judah first in order that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem may not be magnified above Judah. 8 "In that day the Lord will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the one who is feeble among them in that day will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the angel of the Lord before them. 9 "And it will come about in that day that I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. 10 "And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born. 11 "In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. 12 "And the land will mourn, every family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; 13 the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shimeites by itself, and their wives by themselves; 14 all the families that remain, every family by itself, and their wives by themselves. NASB

There is much happening in this text in Zechariah that concerns the last days and Israel. But what I want you to see here is that Messianic salvation will come to the entire ethnic nation, just as Paul described in Romans and Hosea referred to. Notice verse 7, the “Lord will save the tents of Judah,” and also the “house of David.” Hardly words describing a few individual Jewish converts to Christianity. Zechariah goes on, verses 10-12 to describe this massive regeneration of the whole Jewish population in Jerusalem, as they see Christ and mourn over the fact that they killed their own Messiah. "And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born.” By God’s grace in bringing about regeneration for the whole nation they come to see Christ as Savior and in mourning and repentance they come trembling to God, who cleanses away their sins.

Zechariah 13:1 - 13 "In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity. NASB

This will come about at the Second Coming of Christ when He has returned to destroy the kings of the earth who have gathered in Judea (Megiddo-Armageddon) to make war against Him (Psa 2:1-5, Rev 16:13-16, 19:17-21).

Zechariah 14:1-5 - 14 Behold, a day is coming for the Lord when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. 2 For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished, and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. 3 Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. 4 And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. 5 And you will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him! NASB
Did God forget this prophecy? Is he really going to pour out grace and supplication upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and then come to save them with all of His holy ones stepping on the Mount of Olives and splitting it into a great valley? Your better believe He is, and then he will rule with nations with a rod of iron (Psa 2:6-9, Rev 2:27, 12:5, 19:15). Zechariah goes onto speak of Christ ruling “over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one.” Zechariah 14:9-11 - 9 And the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one. 10 All the land will be changed into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; but Jerusalem will rise and remain on its site from Benjamin’s Gate as far as the place of the First Gate to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king’s wine presses. 11 And people will live in it, and there will be no more curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security. NASB

We will treat these passages further below concerning the Millennial Rule of Christ. But consider first concerning Israel’s final salvation, that it is an all important part of the promise of the New Covenant in Christ.

Israel and the New Covenant
The New Covenant salvation that has come in the Lord Jesus Christ is not entirely or exclusively a Gentile salvation. It is actually, “first to the Jew, and then to the Gentile” (Rom 1:16). God’s New Covenant is a Covenant that He has first promised to the “house of Israel and Judah.” This is a reference to the entire nation of Israel before the Kingdoms where divided into two Kingdom, Israel to the North and Judah to the South after the reign of David’s son Solomon. The Gentile’s have through the mystery of the Gospel become heirs together with Israel in the New Covenant blessings and brought into the household of God through faith in Christ (Eph 2:11-22). But they have been brought into the covenants of promise” which have always and still do belong to ethnic Israel. Ephesians 2:11-13 - 11 Therefore remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands — 12 remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. NASB

I point this out simply to say that the New Covenant bears within it the final salvation of the whole nation of Israel, not just a believing remnant during the times of the Gentiles, as Paul clearly taught in Romans 11. There remains a day yet future when God will save the nation just like Paul, and Hosea, and Zechariah have confirmed.

It is important to take notice that Israel’s privilege and blessing is always tied together with their prosperity in the land that God promised to them in the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants, a “land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex 3:8, Deut 11:9). When Israel obeyed God they would live in prosperity in the land. And when they rebelled and disobeyed they would be exiled from the land. This Moses taught them again and again.

Deuteronomy 11:8-17 - 8 "You shall therefore keep every commandment which I am commanding you today, so that you may be strong and go in and possess the land into which you are about to cross to possess it; 9 so that you may prolong your days on the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give to them and to their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 For the land, into which you are entering to possess it, is not like the land of Egypt from which you came, where you used to sow your seed and water it with your foot like a vegetable garden. 11 But the land into which you are about to cross to possess it, a land of hills and valleys, drinks water from the rain of heaven, 12 a land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning even to the end of the year. 13 "And it shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, 14 that He will give the rain for your land in its season, the early and late rain, that you may gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil. 15 And He will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you shall eat and be satisfied. 16 Beware, lest your