

## **The Church in God's Eternal Plan (Part 2)**

### **Selected scriptures**

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You know, relationships are interesting things. Shortly after Sheila and I met, we had dated for just a little while, a summer came when we needed to part ways and go two different directions. I went with a camp team. I was traveling with a group of people basically running camps in various locations, Christian camps. I would preach all week and we would put together games and other activities and the folks with me would do the singing and the counseling and so we were kind of, we had a trailer with all kinds of fun things for camps, and we were sort of "Have camp will travel."

At the same time, Sheila's family took a tour up to the, it wasn't really a tour, it was a preaching tour, up to the East Coast and up in New England, and Sheila's dad ministered in a number of churches through the summer and Sheila traveled with them. They did get to see a little of New England. But it was difficult during that time because our correspondence was in just letters primarily. That was before cell phones and it was a lot more difficult to keep in touch. And so we would write letters to each other.

Now, I have never told Sheila this before, but in her letters she would include information about their plans, what they were going to see, you know, the next day or two and sort of the general direction of their journey, as well as some things about her family and those kinds of things that were going on. And, you know, I just figured that those were not really important to our relationship, so I just skipped those parts of the letters, and read on. So there were large sections of the letters that she would send me that I would never read. Now, you folks know that isn't true, right? You do, you need to know that it isn't true. I hung on every word. Now, why is that? Because relationships mean that I am genuinely interested in all that pertains to that person with whom I have a relationship and whom I have learned to love.

There is a great application of that tonight. Because on the surface, some of the things that we have recorded for us in Scripture don't seem immediately applicable, do they? They don't seem immediately to benefit me and my life. I mean, what is the take away value of tonight's lesson is the question we unfortunately often ask. And we want to ignore those sections of the Word of God, or at least sort of gloss over them, if they don't go to the heart of what we are struggling

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with day by day. That is why when you get those flyers in the mail from all these seeker sensitive churches, it is all about relationships and marriage, because those are the perceived needs and those are the things in the Word of God that they think will strike a chord in people. People don't want to hear about, for example, the relationship between Israel and the church.

But folks, the same application that happens in the relationship with Sheila and me, the same reason that I hung on every word of her letters, whether it was her plans for the next several days and what they were going to see and what her dad was preaching on, or whether it was about some detail in her family, was because I loved Sheila. The same thing ought to be true when we come to the Word of God. The Word is God's revelation of Himself to us. And if He believed it was important then it ought to be important to us, by virtue of the fact that we love our God and we believe that He is all wise, and that if He took the time and effort and energy to give us this truth then it must have value for us, whether we see that value or not.

So, that is where we come tonight, is back to the issue of the church in God's eternal plan. And specifically, we began last time to ask and answer this question, what is the relationship between Israel and the church? Now, by the way, as I mentioned last time there are very practical ramifications of this question. It determines what you believe about the future. It determines what kind of church you will attend. It determines whether or not you will have your children dedicated next week or baptized. There are a lot of very serious ramifications to this question that aren't always immediately obvious to people.

We were looking though at, so what are the various views? There are essentially three primary positions of the relationship between Israel and the church. One of them is covenantalism. This view says that either the entire nation of Israel, in the Old Testament, was the church, or a modified form of it is that the true believers in Israel were the Old Testament church. Now we will answer these arguments tonight as we examine the differences the Bible lays out between the church and Israel.

A second common view is the traditional or classic dispensational view. This view taught that God has two completely distinct purposes in human history. One for the Earth through Israel and a second for heaven through the church. And we answered their arguments last time by examining the great similarities that there are between Israel and the church.

A third view is the one that I would encourage us to embrace and that I embrace. It is often called progressive dispensationalism and it holds that in fact there are great similarities between Israel and the church, but there are a few noted differences. Let me remind you of the similarities that we looked at last time. Both Old Testament Israel and the church contained the true people of God. There are not two different ways of salvation. There are not two different paths to God. There is one people of God, that is part of God's plan, I am trying to think how I want to say this, that is part of God's plan in various phases. And we will see that in more detail in just a few minutes.

Both Old Testament Israel, another similarity, is both Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church are saved by the work of Christ. There is, in the doctrinal statement in a theological seminary here locally, a statement that claims that the Old Testament believer had no clue beyond the animal sacrifice and that is solely where their faith rested, was in that sacrifice. But as we talked about last time, beginning in Genesis 3 the people of God understood that a person would come to deal finally with sin. They didn't understand all that we understand about Him, but they knew there was a person who would come. And the detail about that person comes greater and greater as you find your way through Old Testament history, down to when you get to Micah, as I said, you find out exactly where He would even be born.

Thirdly, both appropriate salvation in the same way, by faith alone. There weren't two ways of salvation, in fact, there was one way, always the same way as Paul says in Romans 4, Abraham's way, David's way, the way that you and I need to take, which is by grace through faith alone. Both Old Testament Israel and the church benefitted from the work of the Spirit and both were assigned the same responsibility to be a witness nation. And then finally, both are beneficiaries of the new covenant. Now those are the similarities. But at the same time, the Scripture is clear that while there are great similarities, there are also clear distinctions between Israel and the church.

What are those distinctions? Well, there are three of them I believe, if I could summarize it this way. The first is that the Old Testament Israel and the church are different in their distinct identities. They are simply not the same entity. In the Old Testament, Israel, that term, throughout the Old Testament, refers to an ethnic people, the physical descendants of Abraham

and a nation. Always. An ethnic people, those who share the blood of Abraham, and a nation. In the New Testament, when you come to speak of Israel, the word Israel occurs 66 times in the New Testament. All but one of those references clearly refer to ethnic Israel, to Jewish people, to the physical descendants of Abraham. We will talk about that one in just a moment.

Jesus, when He spoke about the people of God, He spoke of the kingdom of God or of physical Israel. He only referred, as we have seen before, to the church in two contexts, in Matthew 16 when He predicted the church would begin, and in Matthew 18 when He explained how church discipline was to work. Those were the only two references. The only clear time reference pointed to the church as a future reality.

When you come to the early church you see this same distinction between Israel and the church carried out. For example, in Acts 1:6 the apostles wanted to know if the kingdom would, at that time, be restored to whom? To the nation Israel, composed primarily of Jewish people. Then you come to Acts 2 and at Pentecost Peter addresses the Jewish people as ““You men of Israel.”” And the church was born out of that group but was not equal to it, 3,000 of them became part of the church that day. At the founding of the church, the church and Israel are referred to as two separate distinct entities. And I won’t take you through, but in Acts, constantly, Israel is referred to as the Jewish nation, not the church.

Turn to just the last one I have there, Acts 21:19. Paul is now in Jerusalem, he is meeting with the James and all the elders, verse 18 tells us. In verse 19,

After he greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it they began glorifying God, and they said to him, ““You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law.””

So, in other words, James and the elders in Jerusalem said, there is Israel and out of Israel there have been those that have truly believed, and that constitutes the church.

In Romans 9 Paul clearly refers to Israel in distinction from the church and as ethnic Israel. And I show you this just because this is the pattern throughout the New Testament. Romans 9:3,

I could wish myself accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren,  
my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites

So constantly there is this separation, as he writes the Roman church, there is this separation between the church and Israel. First Corinthians 10:32, “Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.” In the mind of the apostle, obviously three separate distinct entities. Never once, in fact, is the church clearly referred to as Israel or the new Israel, never once in the New Testament.

Now, with that said, I told you there was only one passage that is debated. Let’s look at it briefly. Turn with me to Galatians 6 or you can see it here on the screen, whichever you prefer. Galatians 6:16, Paul says, in the context, of course, the Galatians heresy and the skewed version of the gospel, he says in verse 15, “neither circumcision is anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.” In other words, none of that stuff matters. The issue is, have you given up any hope you have of obtaining a righteousness of your own based on law keeping, whether it is circumcision or anything else, and clinging to Christ alone as your hope? Then he says, verse 16, “And those who will walk by this rule,” that is, giving up everything else but Christ, “peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”

Now, there are three interpretations of this verse, as you might imagine, all based on the meaning of that second and, “and upon the Israel of God.” The Greek word is *kai*, a simple copula like we have in English, and. Three interpretations based on the meaning of that word. The first is the church is the new Israel. They would translate it this way, “those who walk by this rule, even the Israel of God.” So the church is this new Israel.

A second view is that the church and Israel are completely distinct in every way. This is the traditional dispensational view, the first, of course, being the covenantal view. This view says it should be translated like this, “those who walk by this rule,” Gentiles, “and on the other hand, the Israel of God.” Two totally distinct, never meet, entities.

There is a third view that I embrace and I think our study bears out, and that is that the church now includes those who were once Israelites physically and have now become the true spiritual children of Abraham. So we would translate it like this, “those who walk by this rule, especially

the true Israel of God,” in comparison to, in contradiction of, the Judaizers that were there in the Galatian churches. Okay? So, this third view really seems the most likely since Paul nowhere else calls the church Israel. And there are two views that don’t have Israel and the church being the same thing.

Even Robert Raymond, who is a wonderful author, he has a great systematic theology, but he is a covenantalist, he has to admit, “It is possible that Paul intended to refer exclusively to Jewish Christians by this expression.” My point here is, this verse, the one verse on which they really primarily hang their hopes, does not in fact say what it is often made to say. Israel and the church, based on the preponderance of evidence, are different distinct entities.

There is a second way they are different. They are different in their distinct economies. Traditional or classic dispensationalists, listen carefully, you may have heard this and if you have heard this it is not good if you embrace it, okay? Traditional or classic dispensationalists argue that plan A when Jesus came was for Jesus to offer the kingdom to Israel during His earthly ministry and if they accepted He would immediately establish an earthly kingdom.

Now, just think about that view for a moment, that view has several huge problems. First of all, it makes the death of Christ for sins optional. Because if Israel had accepted the kingdom He would have immediately ushered it in and His death would not have occurred. Secondly, it makes the church plan B, as some would call it, a parenthesis in God’s program. Folks, it is much better, when you look at the weight of evidence, to see the church and Israel as distinctive but intentional phases of God’s great eternal plan. The church was not a whoops because, you know, Israel didn’t accept Him as her King. No, the church was part of God’s great eternal plan.

As we have seen, these economies, or phases of God’s operation, Old Testament Israel and the church, have great spiritual similarities, but there is one key spiritual difference that helps us see that Old Testament Israel and the church are distinct phases in God’s operation. And that key spiritual difference is the baptism with the Spirit. We touched on this last week. Let me briefly lead you through this. I am not going to spend a lot of time here but I just want you to see it.

This baptism with the Spirit was prophesied in the Old Testament in several different references and when John the Baptist came he prophesied that the Messiah would accomplish it. In

Matthew 3, for example, he says, ““As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” Then in John 1, John the Baptist makes the connection between Jesus and this prophecy. He says, this is the One, the One on whom the dove descended at his baptism, Jesus Himself; this is the One who I told you would baptize with the Spirit. But then when you come to Acts 1:5 it has not yet happened. In Acts 1:5, Jesus says to the disciples, before His ascension, ““John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”” When you come to Acts 11 it has already happened. Peter says,

“as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”

Of course, Peter is referring back to Pentecost. So, this baptism with the Spirit first happened at Pentecost. It is very clear. But, when you get to the Corinthian epistle, 1 Corinthians 12:13, this baptism with the Spirit is now standard operating procedure for anybody who is a part of the body of Christ or the church. Paul there, talking about spiritual giftedness, says to the Corinthians, to all the Corinthians who are in Christ, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” So, that has become now, a constant reality.

Obviously, there is a shift happening in the plan and program of God. This was something that was not true with Old Testament Israel that became true in the New Testament ministry of the Spirit of God. I can’t give you every little nuance of difference. I can tell you this, when I look at the Old Testament believer and the New Testament saint, spiritually speaking, this is the one primary difference I see, is that New Testament believers are baptized with the Spirit into the body of Christ. There is no hint that that was true in the Old Testament. In fact, all of these verses indicate that it was not true and that it actually began for the first time at Pentecost. That really is the key spiritual difference between us and them.

Now, there are a couple of other passages that show there was a shift going on, a shift in God’s great eternal plan between Israel and the church. Turn with me to Matthew 21. What I want you to see when I say there are distinct economies, maybe another word I could use would be phases,

in God's plan or program, this was all part of God's plan. Israel was not a mistake. The church was not a mistake. They both were intended to be exactly operating as they operate. But they operated under different time periods. There was a shift that took place with the ministry of Christ from the focus on Israel to the focus of God's work in the world being through the church. And we see this in a number of passages.

Look at Matthew 21:33. Beginning in verse 33 and running all the way through chapter 22 verse 10, Jesus tells two parables and these two parables illustrate this very reality. In verse 33 He says, "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey." Now, if you have a New American Standard or most translations will have that text in all capitals to show that it is actually taken, it is a quotation, from Isaiah 5. Any Jewish person hearing Jesus use these words would have understand that it was a reference, the vineyard here is a reference to the nation Israel. You see that very clearly in Isaiah 5, if we were to go back. They would have understood that was what He was talking about.

Verse 34,

"When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. The vine growers took his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and did the same thing to them. But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' [*You immediately make the connection here.*] But, when the vine-growers saw the son they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' They took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes what will he do to those vine-growers?"

Now, obviously the vineyard here is Israel. These slaves that are sent are the Old Testament prophets that were abused by the people of God, the Old Testament people of God, Israel. And eventually God sent His Son. Jesus is, of course, prophesying what will happen to Him at the end of His ministry. Verse 41, "They said to Him," not yet making the connection, "He will



bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons.” They were prophesying against themselves. These “other vine-growers,” that is an allusion to the church, to Gentiles.

There is a transition in God’s program and He goes on to describe that He Himself is being rejected by them. Verse 43, “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you,” now he applies it, “and given to a people, producing,” literally, to a nation, “producing the fruit of it.” Verse 45, they got it,

the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they understood He was speaking about them. They sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet.

So Jesus tells the Jewish leaders that there is a transition coming. The vineyard is going to be rented out to “other vine-growers.” That is a reference to the transition to the church.

You begin chapter 22 and you see a similar illustration,

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. He sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. Again he sent out other slaves saying, ‘Tell those who had been invited, “Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen, my fatted livestock, are all butchered, everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.”’”

Free food! Wedding feasts typically could last anywhere from several days to as much as a week. He is saying, “““come to the wedding feast,””” and

“they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business; the rest seized his slaves”

So what you have here is some apathy, just they don’t care, they go about their business. And some, absolute antipathy to God and His plan, “the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them.” That is again a reference to the Old Testament prophets. “But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers,” and this gets very personal,

“and set their city on fire.” This is a reference, a prophecy of Christ, to the coming destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

“Then he said to his slaves, [*verse 8,*] ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.’ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both the evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests.”

And then, of course, there is the illustration of the man who refused to take, all of them who came to the wedding were offered wedding clothes, a wedding robe, that was traditional, none of them had one, so this was an affront, this man who didn’t have a wedding gown, he was absolutely refusing to accept what the master and the king was offering. Again, a picture of the fact that somebody wanted to get in with their own merits. They wanted to be there because they deserved to be there, rather than taking the wedding robe, representing, of course, as we know, the great robe of the righteousness of Christ.

“The king said to his servants, [*verse 13,*] ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; and in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, [*speaking of the general call of the gospel*] but few are chosen.”

Only those who are chosen will respond, even as we have looked at the effectual call in the past.

So Jesus let us know in His ministry that a change was coming. You see it again in Romans 11. We could spend a lot of time in Romans 11, but we are not going to do that. I am just going to give you a real brief summary. This is a watershed passage. It has convinced even hard core covenantalists that there is some kind of future for ethnic Israel. John Murray, for example, writes, “Paul envisions a restoration of Israel as a people to God’s covenant favor and blessing. In Romans 11 this viewpoint is inescapable.” Amen.

Romans 9 through 11 is about Israel and its relationship to the righteousness of God. Paul tells us that Israel set out to develop its own righteousness, it didn’t understand God’s righteousness, and therefore it has refused His offer of the gift of righteousness. But, there is still a future.

Notice how Paul defines Israel at the beginning of this passage, Romans 9; I read these verses just a few minutes ago. When he is talking about Israel in this section he is talking about those who are his “kinsman according to the flesh.” Verse 3,

Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption of sons, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the temple service, the promises, whose are the fathers, from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, blessed forever.

You get the idea. He is talking about Jewish people. So when he comes to chapter 11, he wants us to know in verse 1 through verse 10 that while Israel as a whole has not embraced her Messiah, there is a remnant of ethnic Israel that are being saved. Just as there was a remnant in the time of Elijah, verses 2 and 3.

When you come to verse 11 down through verse 16, we learn that Israel’s failure was for the spiritual benefit of all of us, and he explains exactly how that happens. Verse 11, notice, Israel “stumbled.” Verse 12, “their failure resulted in riches for us.” Verse 17, there was this “rich root of an olive tree,” probably a reference to Abraham or to the promise made to Abraham, and “the branches were broken off,” that is the Jews. They no longer could partake of that promise made to Abraham and instead, “wild olive” branches, verse 17 says, “were grafted in.” That is us folks, Gentiles, we have been grafted in to receive the promises made to Abraham.

Verse 25, he says, “For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery – so that you will not be wise in your own estimation,” Romans, Gentiles, “that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” He is saying, listen, there is a change that has occurred, and don’t misunderstand it and think God has rejected His people because of it. It is that big a change that you might conclude that God has absolutely, once and for all, rejected His people. He begins verse 1 of chapter 11, don’t even think that, “May it never be!” And notice verse 26, he says, “all Israel will be saved.” There is still a time coming when God will deal with His people. We will talk more about that in the coming weeks.

So you see that in Romans 11 it is clear that a shift in God’s program occurred, “a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in.” You see the same thing in 1 Thessalonians 2. First Thessalonians 2:14, the end of verse 14 says,

you are enduring the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out. [*These are the Jews now he is talking about.*] They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

Obviously, this is a different mode of operation by God toward Israel than you see in the Old Testament. There is a change that is occurring.

First Peter 2:9, Peter takes that great reference in Exodus 19, given to the people of God at Sinai, given to Israel at Sinai, and he says, okay, they have been set aside from this great mission purpose,

you [*now church, to whom he is writing,*] are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you were once NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

Folks, just as there were redeemed people before Abraham and those people were not part of Israel, the redeemed today are not part of Israel. But all the redeemed of all ages are heirs of the spiritual aspect of the promise made to Abraham.

Robert Saucy, in his excellent book, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, writes, "Believing Israel and the members of the church are one in their participation in the salvation of the new covenant. They are equally and together the people of God. Their difference lies not on the spiritual plane but in their specific identify and corresponding function in God's kingdom program." Exactly right. They merely have served, in God's purposes, different time periods and different purposes.

And that brings us to the third and final distinction of Old Testament Israel from the church. They are different in their distinct promises. Now, let me just say first that the church and Israel share many promises. For example, the Abrahamic covenant. Over and over again we are told,

like in Ephesians 3:6, we “are fellow heirs” with them. I love Galatians 3:29. In fact, just look at it. Galatians 3:29, Paul says, the end of that chapter, “if you belong to Christ,” okay, “if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.” You get in on the spiritual aspect of the Abrahamic covenant if you belong to Christ. So we share those promises.

We also share the new covenant promises. In Jeremiah 31 God says, I am going to make a new covenant with Israel and Judah, but when we come to the New Testament, Jesus says He is dying to effect the new covenant. Paul calls himself a minister of the new covenant in 2 Corinthians 3. And Hebrews 12 tells us that we have come to benefit from and participate in that new covenant.

So, there are a lot of promises that we share. But there are promises distinctly made to Israel which will be fulfilled in the future. There are, in fact, distinct promises to Israel. I am not going to deal with this in great detail because we are going to get there when we get to prophecy in a few months or years, as the Lord chooses, maybe I shouldn’t blame that on the Lord, but there are two I want to highlight briefly for you.

Here are two very distinct promises that Israel has from us. First of all, a future restoration to an earthly land, to the land God promised them. You remember, in Genesis 17 God reiterated the covenant to Abraham and He says, “I am going to give to you and your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession.” Now, covenantalists read a verse like that and they would say this, that Israel forfeited these promises because of her unfaithfulness to God and so now the church receives these land promises, and it is really a reference to heaven. They would cite a verse like Hebrews 11:16, speaking of Abraham and those along with him, “they desired a better country,” not an earthly one, “a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.” In other words, Abraham was not really concerned about Canaan.

Well obviously there is an element of truth to their argument. If you have ever been to Israel you can understand why Abraham would prefer heaven to that. But here is a serious problem for the covenantalists, land is included in the new covenant promises to Israel. Turn with me briefly to Ezekiel 36. This is a promise that is still future, that God has not fulfilled to Israel. We participate in this new covenant, but it is not exhausted in us as the church. And it is pretty clear

when you look at the language of Ezekiel 36, it includes land. In verse 28, well, go back up a couple of verses, in verse 24 God says,

“I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart. I will put a spirit, My new Spirit, within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”

All of those things, we are told that we will benefit from, and do benefit from now, by the writer of Hebrews. But notice he goes on, verse 28,

“You will live in the land I gave to your forefathers; [*now folks, that is not heaven,*] so that you will be My people, and I will be your God. Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you. I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again the disgrace of the famine among the nations.”

And on and on He goes, down through verse 38. Verse 35, ““They will say, “This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden.”” He would not say that of heaven. He would never say that heaven was a desolate land that has now become like the garden of Eden. He is talking about the land of Canaan, the land promised in Genesis 12 and 17, and every time that Abrahamic covenant is repeated. He goes on to say, ““the waste, desolate and ruined, cities are fortified and inhabited.”” And He says, I am going to do this because “I am the LORD.” So, land is included in the new covenant promises to Israel. A future restoration is coming. Again, we will look at this in more detail when we get to prophecy.

A second thing that is distinct to Israel is they maintain a distinct promise of a future restoration to the land and a leading role in an earthly kingdom. Now, I don't know all that is going to be and, in fact, I will still be working that out when we get to eschatology. I am going to wait to

prove to you the existence of the millennium, which can very well be proven, but I am not going to do that right now, we are just going to assume that. But what is clear is that redeemed ethnic Israel will play a significant role.

And there are a number of passages in the Old Testament that point that out. Jeremiah 3:17, ““At that time they will call Jerusalem “The Throne of the LORD,” and all the nations will be gathered to it, to Jerusalem, for the name of the LORD; nor will they walk anymore after the stubbornness of their evil heart.””” In Isaiah 60:14-21, you see this same sort of reference to the nations looking to Israel and streaming into Israel in a time of a renewed earth.

You say well, how can we be so similar and Israel have a distinct role as a nation in the millennium? I don't know that I can fully explain that to you except to say this, spiritual equality does not mean identical roles and functions. Take for example Galatians 3:28. It says, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Folks, males and females are spiritually equal now. And yet we have different roles and functions in the purpose of God. Women cannot serve as elders in the church, for example. I think the same principle applies to the future role of Israel. It is not that Israel is going to be some earthly nation, entirely different and distinct and separate from us, in the sense of not enjoying the same spiritual benefits and having the same worship of Christ, and all of those things. I think there is going to be great similarity, more similarity than distinction. But it does appear, from the body of Scripture, that she will have a distinct role, separate from the role that we Gentiles will have in the purpose of God. The spiritual equality between Jews and Gentiles does not mean that redeemed Jews cannot, in the purposes of God, serve a distinct purpose. So while there are many similarities, there are at least these three key differences: distinct identities, distinct economies, and distinct promises.

Now I do want to ask a key question, why does this matter? As I said at the beginning, it matters because it mattered enough to God to reveal it to us. Second Timothy 3:16 has not changed, “All Scripture is [What?] inspired by God and is profitable.” Even those things that don't immediately appear to be profitable or applicable, but I think there is a great application. And I will give it to you as we close tonight. I think all of this matters, that there is a distinction, that

there are still promises to be fulfilled to Israel, because it guarantees that God will fulfill His promises to us.

Listen, God chose the physical descendants of Abraham as the special objects of His care and affection. If their sin, if their rejection, could change God's mind about them and cause Him to rescind His promises, then what is to say that God couldn't change His mind about us? But the fact that His promises remain intact prove His faithfulness to us. Turn to Romans 11 one last time as we close, Romans 11. Paul gives us this application I think. Romans 11:1-2, he says, "I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite."

So, here he is talking very directly and specifically about his ethnicity, about his relationship to Abraham as a Jewish person. Verse 2, "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew." There is that great word that describes not just knowing something ahead of time. It is a word that is an intimate word of choice and of love, of setting your love on someone, of determining to have a relationship with someone. God has not rejected His people whom He determined to have love for, and a relationship with, has He?

And then, notice verse 28, "From the standpoint of the gospel they," that is, the Jewish people, "are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice," God's choice of them, "they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;" and I love this, verse 29, "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." Folks, the fact, I believe, that there is a future yet for Israel, not as some would have us believe, totally distinct from us, but promises yet to be fulfilled. All Israel will be saved, Zechariah tells us, "they will look on Him whom they pierced and mourn for Him as an only son," and "a fountain of cleansing will be opened," and they will play a role, a function of some kind, in a future earthly kingdom.

The fact that God has not completely set them aside and done away with those promises He made is our guarantee, just as Paul says here, "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." That means God's calling of you, that effectual call when He drew you to Himself, when He foreknew you and determined to set His love upon you, when He determined to call you to Himself, that too is irrevocable. Thank God. Let's pray together.



Father, I pray that You would help us to have a love for Your Word, not merely a love for those issues that excite us immediately and obviously because they have direct application to us. But Lord, help us because we love You, because we care about You, to be concerned about all that You have shared with us, all that You have revealed, about Yourself, and Your plans, and Your program, to us.

Father, thank You that when You call, when You foreknow, that that is unchangeable, irrevocable, that it will always stand. Lord, we are grateful because that means we stand in Your eternal love. You knew us in eternity past and You chose to set Your love upon us and in time You drew us to Yourself and absolutely nothing that we are or can do will ever sever that calling. Father, we thank You that we stand in Your grace. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.