

Refuting Replacement Theology

God's Covenant with Abraham

Since so much of bible prophecy as I understand it from scripture hinges on God's unconditional covenant with Abraham, I thought it was important to research that covenant and its implications as taught in scripture. So many people today have embraced "replacement theology," the teaching that the church has replaced Israel; and I really don't see how they can do that in light of scripture. Paul makes a powerful argument in Romans 9-11 that God has only set Israel aside for a time and fully intends to restore her to a position of blessing according to His covenant with Abraham. Old Testament scripture is full of prophecies regarding God's preservation of a remnant of the nation of Israel that will one day enjoy a place of prominence among the nations when God establishes His kingdom on earth. Most important to the child of God today, God is a covenant-keeper; He embodies truth and cannot lie. If He is not faithful to keep His covenant with Israel, why should He be trusted to keep His promises to the church?

I have not done a study on this subject per se except as encountered in my verse by verse study through the scriptures. I will begin with what scripture tells us about God's covenant with Abraham and His commitment to His word, followed by a look at the Old Testament prophecies and closing with the study in Romans.

We first encounter "Abram" in Genesis 11 as part of a listing of Shem's descendants. We are told that Terah, Abram's father, decided to uproot his family and take them out of Ur of the Chaldees. They got as far as Haran and stayed there until Terah died.

Genesis 11:31 "And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there."

After his father's death, Abram sets out for Canaan with his family.

*Genesis 12:1-5 "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: **And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.** So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came."*

I am only going to focus on the narrative as it relates to God's covenant with Abram. The LORD has promised to make Abram, who was childless, the father of a great nation that would be greatly blessed and would prove to be a blessing to all people on earth. He also promised to bless those that blessed Abram's family and curse those that cursed them. At this point, the covenant is conditional; it is based upon Abram taking His

family to Canaan in obedience to what God had told him. The narrative is clear in stating that Abram obeyed God's command.

An Unconditional Everlasting Covenant

In Genesis 15 we have a narrative of God affirming His covenant with Abram.

*Genesis 15:1-6 "After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward....And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but **he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.** And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."*

Abraham had no children at that time, so he didn't understand how God could keep His promise. The Lord then instructs Abram to prepare a sacrifice by which God will confirm His promise.

Genesis 15:12-18 "And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram....And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years....afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again.... And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates...."

I almost left this section of scripture out except that it testifies to some important truths that apply to our study. God is basically building a foundation of faith for Abram. He assures him through an accepted ritual that He is going to keep His word. The ritual was to include both parties passing between the animal pieces. The LORD, however, arranged it so as to walk through the pieces alone, absolving Abram of any responsibility regarding the keeping of this covenant.

The LORD also prophesied to Abram concerning what history identifies as Israel's captivity in Egypt, specifying the timeframe and declaring that they would eventually come out of Egypt with great substance. It is also interesting to note that Abram's land inheritance is to stretch from "the river of Egypt," the most obvious of which would be the Nile (though most commentaries do not agree with that understanding), and the Euphrates River. It's interesting to note that Israel has never yet possessed that whole allotment of land.

The prophecy concerning the captivity and deliverance from Egypt is important as another affirmation of the LORD as LORD. Only God can prophesy future events hundreds of years in advance. Also significant to note is that the LORD's promise included specific boundaries for the promised land, some of which comprises the nation of Israel today.

I believe God repeats this covenant several times in scripture to strengthen the faith of the patriarchs as they and their descendants looked forward to its complete fulfillment. The next mention of the covenant comes in chapter 17 when God changes Abram's name to Abraham.

*Genesis 17:3–8 “And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but **thy name shall be Abraham**; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. **And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.** And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”*

The most important truth in this restatement of God's covenant is the fact that it is “an everlasting covenant.” In other words, this covenant will endure for perpetuity. This promise is to Abraham and “his seed,” his physical descendants “in their generations.” This brings up another interesting truth that I discovered in my study of Galatians.

Galatians 3:16 “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”

It is obvious from the Genesis passage that reference is being made to Abraham's descendants, but Paul reveals that there is another hidden application. The reference to Abraham's seed included a direct reference to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The LORD is making a promise of a future kingdom to His Son even as He affirms His covenant with Abraham. That revelation just helps this parent understand from the human viewpoint God's tremendous patience and mercy toward His chosen people—His promise was to His Son, who was to come from this people.

Isaac Inherits the Covenant

As the narrative continues, the LORD makes clear that it is a child born to Sarah and Abraham that will inherit the covenant promises. Eventually, that seemed to be an impossibility since they were both too old to physically reproduce. God, however, made it very clear that it was through Isaac, a child birthed by Sarah, that the covenant would be established.

*Genesis 17:19–21 “And God said, **Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.** And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.”*

Again, the covenant is declared to be an everlasting covenant; one that will be inherited by Abraham's descendants through Isaac—not Ishmael.

The next reference to God's promise to bless Abraham comes after he shows his faith in God by intending to sacrifice Isaac according to the LORD's command. As we know, God provided a lamb to be sacrificed in the place of Isaac. I do not believe God ever intended Isaac to be sacrificed. He was providing another faith-building lesson by allowing Abraham (and Isaac) to once again experience His provision when acting in obedience to His commands. He was also establishing a type or example showing that He would provide the sacrificial Lamb necessary to deliver all people who would choose to follow Him in faith and obedience. Once again, He spoke to Abraham.

*Genesis 22:16–18 “And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; **and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.**”*

Again, the LORD promises to greatly multiply the seed of Abraham. More significant to this study, the LORD also promises that Abraham's people will take possession of land currently controlled by their enemies and will be a source of blessing to all the nations on earth. History shows that the Israelites conquered most of the land of Canaan and established their nation as led by the LORD. The blessing to the nations would come in the person of Jesus Christ as the Savior to all who will accept Him. Yet future is the blessing that all nations will experience by having Jesus on the throne in Jerusalem as King of kings.

*Isaiah 9:6–7 “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. **Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.**”*

*Jeremiah 23:5–6 “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. **In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**”*

*Matthew 25:31–34 “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: **And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.**”*

Revelation 20:4 “and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

I am emphasizing this truth since it is important to understand that God is going to establish His Son as King over the nations from the throne of David in Jerusalem as stated by Isaiah. I think it is important to note from the prophecy in Jeremiah that Judah

and Israel (the whole nation) will dwell safely during the rule of this King who will rule the whole world. Though designated by John in the book of Revelation as enduring for 1000 years initially, scripture is clear that this kingdom will be eternal and will endure after the final judgment of humanity has been completed. John is also clear in identifying “Christ” as the King.

Jacob Inherits the Covenant Promises

As the narrative continues, we find out that Isaac fathers twin sons; but God chooses Jacob, the younger son, to inherit the covenant promises. The LORD spoke to Jacob one night in a dream as he was traveling to Haran to take a wife from among his kin. His purpose—to confirm the covenant made with Abraham and Isaac.

Genesis 28:13–14 “And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”

Jacob, whom the LORD renamed Israel, eventually fathered twelve sons whose descendants would form the nation of Israel.

*Exodus 1:1–5 “Now these are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt; every man and his household came with Jacob. **Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, Dan, and Naphtali, Gad, and Asher.** And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls: for **Joseph** was in Egypt already.”*

As referenced previously, the LORD delivered the people out of Egypt with miraculous power. He then went on to establish a conditional covenant with them through Moses before allowing them to take possession of Canaan. This covenant was directly connected to their maintaining possession of the land and continuing to experience God’s blessings. Leviticus 26 gives a thorough explanation of the conditions of this covenant. Most of the book of Deuteronomy emphasises the importance of not breaking covenant with God once they are in the land. Obedience will result in great blessing, and disobedience will result in great cursing. The LORD revealed to Moses that He knew the people would break covenant and even declared that He would remove them from the land and scatter them among the nations in judgment.

*Deuteronomy 30:1–6 “And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: **And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart,***

and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live."

Important—God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was unconditional; God's covenant with the nation of Israel through Moses was conditional, but it did not negate the covenant with Abraham. Though Israel would incur judgment and eventually be dispersed among the nations because they broke covenant with the LORD, scripture is clear in declaring that the LORD will preserve a remnant and bring them back into the land and a position of blessing before Him in honor of His original covenant with Abraham.

The LORD also declares through scripture that He retains ownership of the land even though He has given it to His people to bless them.

*Leviticus 25:1&23 "And the LORD spake unto Moses in mount Sinai....The land shall not be sold for ever: for **the land is mine**; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me."*

*2 Chronicles 7:19–20 "But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them; Then will I pluck them up by the roots **out of my land which I have given them**; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all nations."*

*Jeremiah 2:7 "And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, **ye defiled my land**, and made mine heritage an abomination."*

*Ezekiel 36:4–5 "Therefore, ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD; Thus saith the Lord GOD to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes, and to the cities that are forsaken, which became a prey and derision to the residue of the heathen that are round about; Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Surely in the fire of my jealousy have I spoken against the residue of the heathen, and against all Idumea, which have appointed **my land** into their possession with the joy of all their heart, with despiteful minds, to cast it out for a prey."*

*Joel 3:1–2 "For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, **and parted my land**."*

It's tempting to digress at this point, but I will refrain.

God's Covenant with David

Before moving on to the prophecies regarding the preservation of a remnant and the future establishment of the kingdom, we need to look at one more covenant—the one God made with King David.

2 Samuel 7:8–16 “Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the LORD of hosts....I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime....And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom....And **thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.**”

The most important points in this covenant are that the throne of David is eternal and will always be occupied by a descendant of David. That wording used to puzzle me since there obviously hasn't been a king on the throne in Israel for thousands of years. I remember learning at one time that the validity of the position is not dependent upon whether or not it is occupied. The next king that takes the throne of David in Jerusalem will be a descendant of David. When Jesus Christ establishes His kingdom, He will take the throne of His forefather David. The prophet Jeremiah confirmed the promise made to David.

Jeremiah 33:14–17 “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. **In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.** In those days shall Judah be saved, and **Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness.** For thus saith the LORD; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel”

It is also important to note that this promise declares that the time is coming when the people of Israel will dwell in their own land never to experience wickedness at the hands of their enemies again. Jeremiah describes it as a time when Jerusalem shall dwell safely. I don't think that anyone can argue that this must be referencing a time yet future since Israel has never dwelt safely in peace under her own king since the Babylonian captivity.

God's covenant to David is also affirmed by the psalmist.

Psalms 89:3–4 “I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations.”

Both the covenants with Abraham and David were unconditional. Though the covenant made with the people through Moses was conditional regarding possession of the land and experiencing God's blessings, it does not negate either of the other two. It also provides for restoration of covenant blessing when the people respond to the LORD in repentance and faith.

The LORD has revealed to us through His prophets that such a time is coming.

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

*Zechariah 12:8-10 "In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. **And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.**"*

The Lord Jesus also affirmed this truth. When talking to the Pharisees, He declared that His return was predicated upon their accepting Him as their Messiah and King.

*Luke 13:35 "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, **until** the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."*

The Promise of the Remnant

After having studied each of the covenants individually, it is easy to conclude that the existence of the nation of Israel is necessary to the fulfillment of each. Though the people broke covenant with the LORD and ended up scattered among the nations in judgment (as foretold), God always preserved a remnant through whom those covenants would eventually find fulfillment. The first use I could find of God declaring His preservation of a remnant was related to His sparing of Jerusalem from the invading Assyrian forces during the reign of Hezekiah. Hezekiah made all the right physical preparations for defense, but He went to the LORD in prayer as His primary defense. This is part of the answer that Isaiah relayed to him.

*2 Kings 19:30–34 "And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. **For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the LORD of hosts SHALL DO THIS.** Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. **For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.**"*

It is interesting to note that the LORD is determined to save Jerusalem not only in consideration of His own honor, but also in consideration of His servant David. Though God protected "the remnant" at that time, He would not long thereafter determine that this remnant required a refining fire of judgment.

*2 Kings 21:10–15 "And the LORD spake by his servants the prophets, saying, Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, which were before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols...**I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies; Because they have done that which was evil in my sight, and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt, even unto this day.**"*

The prophet Isaiah also declared that God would preserve a remnant, and Ezra records his response in thanks to God for allowing that remnant a fresh start in the land of Judah.

*Isaiah 10:20–21 “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. **The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God.**”*

*Ezra 9:8–9 “And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God, to leave us **a remnant to escape**, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.”*

In the very next chapter Isaiah declares the return of a second “remnant” to the land of Israel.

*Isaiah 11:1–12 “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: **and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.** And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. **They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.** And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. And it shall come to **pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people**, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.”*

I think it was necessary to include such a large section of scripture to establish the context of the return of this second remnant. This remnant will return from “the four corners of the earth” or from all over the world. This return will be facilitated by One described as descending from Jesse (the father of David) and possessing the fullness of the Holy Spirit. He will rule over the earth in righteousness and supernatural power. During His reign, children will be able to safely play with snakes; lions will no longer be carnivores, and cows and bears will graze side by side. During His rule, the earth

will be “full of the knowledge of the LORD.” This is a prophecy regarding the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth in literal fulfillment of His covenants with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and David.

No one who accepts the scripture as the word of God can dispute that this is describing a time a yet future, for there has never been such a time. I am sure that for hundreds of years people had a hard time believing this prophecy could be literally fulfilled. Since the reestablishment of the nation of Israel in 1948, I don’t see why anyone should deny that God intends to fulfill this prophecy according to His covenant promises.

The Coming Kingdom and the New Covenant

Isaiah is not the only prophet to foretell of the future reign of Messiah on the throne of David in Jerusalem.

*Daniel 7:13–14 “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, **that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him:** his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”*

*Jeremiah 23:5–8 “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that **I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.** Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that they shall no more say, The LORD liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land.”*

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

*Zechariah 14:9–16 “And **the LORD shall be king over all the earth:** in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one....Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited....And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.”*

I know I am including lots of scripture, but it is far more important to hear what God says in His word than it is to hear what I say.

Most of the scripture we have utilized in this study so far has been from the Old Testament scriptures. Throughout the Old Testament, the focus has been on God’s dealings with the nation of Israel. After approximately 400 years of silence, a prophet (John the Baptist) once more emerged on the scene in Israel declaring a message of repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. He eventually identified Jesus as that Messiah.

John 1:29–31 “The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.”

Jesus made clear that He was sent to once again minister to the house of Israel.

Matthew 15:24 “But he [Jesus] answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” [brackets mine]

Before Jesus was born, the angel Gabriel appeared to His mother Mary and affirmed that He would one day assume the throne of David for eternity.

Luke 1:30–33 “And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”

Scripture is clear in revealing that the people of Israel as a whole, led by their spiritual leaders, did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. This rejection eventually led to His death, burial and resurrection.

During His ministry, Jesus often referred to His kingdom. The following verses make it clear that He was promising positions of leadership to the twelve disciples in a future kingdom of Israel.

Luke 22:29–30 “And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

The Lord also made clear that He was establishing a New Testament (or Covenant from the Greek) through His death, burial and resurrection.

Luke 22:19–20 “And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.”

God’s plan to introduce a new covenant to Israel had also been revealed by the Old Testament prophets.

Jeremiah 31:31–33 “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Ezekiel 36:24–28 *“For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.”*

Though Ezekiel doesn't mention the word **covenant**, it is obvious that he is talking about a time in Israel's future.

The Mystery of the Church

After His resurrection and before returning to heaven to await the time determined for His return as King of kings, Jesus answered a question from His disciples regarding the establishment of the kingdom.

Acts 1:6–8 *“When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”*

In other words, the disciples were not to be given this information; the kingdom would be established according to the plan of the Father. Until that time, they were to serve as witnesses of Jesus in Jerusalem and throughout the world. Matthew gives us a more detailed account of that charge.

Matthew 28:18–20 *“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”*

The body of believers that accepted Jesus in faith as the Messiah, their Savior, eventually became known as “the church” (*ekklesia* in the Greek). This name was actually used by Jesus when responding to Peter's insight as to His identity and when giving instruction as to how to deal with sinful actions between Christians.

Matthew 16:15–18 *“He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*

Matthew 18:15–17 *“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not*

*hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear **the church**, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."*

The Apostle Paul was the one through whom God revealed the "mystery" of the church. This "mystery" referred to revealing something that had been hidden. I think he explains it best in his letter to the Ephesians.

*Ephesians 3:1–12 "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How **that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery**; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) **Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel**: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; **And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.**"*

A Look at Romans 9-11

Having established that God has had a plan for the nation of Israel and for the "church" since the beginning of the world, I think it will be best to use Romans 9-11 to gain a better understanding of the position of each in relationship to one another.

Paul begins by declaring that he is stating the truth with a clear conscience, identifying the Holy Spirit as his witness. It grieves him that his people, the Israelites, have rejected their Messiah. He notes that God chose them as a special people through whom He would establish His promises and reveal His law. He also makes it clear that Jesus was the promised Messiah, descended through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David.

As Paul looked at the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel at the time of his letter to the Romans, it seemed that God's word had been proven false. He declares that such is not the case. Not everyone who is an Israelite by birth is a true Israelite—a part of that chosen family of God.

Paul goes on to identify the difference between the spiritual heritage of Israel and the physical heritage of Israel. Abraham was God's chosen man to father the children of faith. Abraham had other children in the flesh. Isaac, however, was unique in that he was the child of promise that was birthed through the supernatural provision of God.

Isaac is the father of the physical seed of the people of Israel, but you can't be born of the flesh into the family of God; you can only become a child of God through faith. Isaac was the child of promise to Abraham and Sara that was born through faith;

therefore, all his descendants who become followers of God through faith are considered the true children of Abraham.

Romans 9:9-12 "For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger."

Isaac was born in due time according to the direct revelation of God to Abraham (Genesis 18). Isaac eventually fathered twins, Jacob and Esau, through Rebekah. It was God's choice that Jacob would be the son through whom the covenant with Abraham and Isaac would continue. Paul makes it clear that this decision was made before the babies were born—before they had done either good or evil. Jacob wasn't better than Esau—he was just privileged to be God's choice.

God is Sovereign. He has the authority to make choices as it pleases Him. These choices don't involve right or wrong; EVERY choice God makes is right. God was very clear with His people regarding His sovereignty from the very beginning, and Paul quotes from the Torah to establish that truth.

Exodus 33:19 "And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy."

The obvious question, "Who are the people to whom God shows mercy?"

Psalms 25:10 "All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies."

Psalms 86:5 "For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee."

The Psalmist declares that those who obey the word of God and those who come to God seeking forgiveness always receive His mercy. As he continues to develop his thoughts, Paul will eventually emphasize that last point. Any unbeliever who comes to God in faith will receive His mercy.

Romans 11:32 "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all."

Paul emphasized God's sovereignty by quoting from the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah.

Jeremiah 18:3-6 "Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel."

Isaiah 29:16 “... for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?” (Note: This is a rhetorical question with an obvious answer—NO.)

Paul next quotes from the prophet Hosea to make the point that the children of faith would consist of Jews and Gentiles.

Hosea 2:23 “And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people [the Gentiles], Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.” [brackets mine]

Paul then makes a very important point in verse 30 of chapter 9.

Romans 9:30 “What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.”

The Gentiles (who make up the “church”) from the wicked pagan nations have been imputed the righteousness of God through faith in the Son of God. The Israelites, who had begun as nation of faith, had resorted to focusing on the keeping of God’s law and had failed (as does everyone who tries to live by the law). Why did they fail? Because they were trying to work their way into God’s good graces through ritualistic practices instead of just following Him in faith and obedience as LORD.

Again, Paul quotes from Isaiah.

*Isaiah 8:13-14 “Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And **he shall be** for a sanctuary; but for **a stone of stumbling** and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.*

*Isaiah 28:16 “Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, **Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.**”*

In Isaiah 8 the “LORD of hosts” is identified as the stone of stumbling. In Isaiah 28 YHWH states He will lay a “precious corner stone” in Zion. Isaiah 28 is a passage about the Messiah and connects Him to the Lord of hosts.

Psalm 118 is another Messianic passage that Peter references in his great sermon recorded in Acts 4 in which he identifies this stone as Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Psalm 118:21-22 “I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.”

*Acts 4:10-11 “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that **by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him***

doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner."

In the book of 1Peter, the Holy Spirit connects all the dots.

*1Peter 2:5-8 "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, **the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.**"*

The people of Israel were so caught up in their legalistic practices of empty ritual, that they rejected Jesus the Messiah when He came. They (the nation as a whole) refused to accept Him as the promised Messiah in spite of His many miraculous proofs.

Why were they so eager to reject Jesus as the Messiah? It's like they never had read Isaiah 53. They were so eager for Messiah the King to deliver them from the bondage of Rome that they were blinded to the truth. They just didn't expect the suffering servant. They were so fixed on adhering to the law, that they rejected the message of salvation through faith that Jesus taught.

As I thought about this some more, I thought again about how false expectations have such a strong influence on us. The people of Israel were so focused on a deliverer who would become their king that they rejected the scripture that spoke of Messiah's suffering. They just didn't understand that He had to die and conquer death through the resurrection to atone for sin before He could set up His Kingdom. The suffering servant was to become the king. They rejected the Messiah based on their desire and expectation rather than the truth of God's word. God had given them the truth through His prophets, but they chose to accept only part of that truth—not the whole truth.

The "church" today has the same mindset. We want to interpret God's truth according to our desires and expectations. That doesn't change the truth. It just puts us in the dangerous position of missing out on the blessings of God and, in many instances, in leading people away from true saving faith. I am continually asking the Lord to help me read and hear His word without prejudice and with an open heart to His truth. It is only through knowing His truth as revealed to us by the Spirit through His word that we can develop a growing relationship with the Savior and live a life of victory and obedience over sin. It is dangerous to try to make God fit in the box of our expectations. His wisdom is so very far beyond our understanding.

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Paul's great desire was that Israel, the Jewish people, would accept Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, and turn to Him for their salvation. He was very aware, through past personal experience, that the Jewish people were ignorant concerning true

righteousness. When Jesus taught the righteousness of God in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), it was a revelation of how differently God looks at things vs. how men look at things. Through the centuries, the spiritual leaders of Israel had developed an interpretation of the law that was far from the original intent of the Lawgiver; they had established their own righteousness. The teachings of Jesus revealed the error of that system. Matthew 23 records His strongest accusations against the spiritual leaders and emphasizes their wrong understanding of God's law. They were focused on outward acts of obedience with no understanding of the truth that it is the character of the inner man that is the key issue.

Matthew 23:23-25 "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess."

They were so caught up in their own "wisdom," that they *ignored* the wisdom of God in the person of Jesus Christ. They refused to accept the proofs that identified Him as the Messiah, the Son of God. They did not recognize Him because they revered the teaching of men more than the teaching of God as revealed in scripture. They should have recognized Jesus as the Christ from the teaching of the prophets.

*Matthew 16:1-3 "The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; **but can ye not discern the signs of the times?**"*

*Luke 12:54-56 And he said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; **but how is it that ye do not discern this time?**"*

The whole of the sacrificial system pointed to the provision of Christ. He was sent by God to provide righteousness for man. The sacrificial system allowed for the sins of the people to be forgiven on a temporary basis. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus allows sins to be permanently forgiven for every person who will *believe* or have faith in that provision. Paul stated it this way in his letter to the Corinthians. (I like the NIV wording.)

2Corinthians 5:21 "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Paul goes on to emphasize the truth that in the matter of faith for salvation, there is no difference in Jew and Greek. He had made this case throughout the whole first portion of this letter to the Romans. All people are on level ground at the foot of the cross. There is not one Savior for the Jews and another for the Gentiles. Jesus is the only Savior for all; He is "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

Paul then quotes from the prophet Joel to affirm this truth.

Joel 2:32 "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered:"

The key word is "whosoever," meaning "any person whatever" (Webster). The Lord will not refuse anyone who comes to Him in faith for salvation.

Paul explains that God even told the people through Moses that he would provoke them to jealousy and anger through the Gentiles. The reason—their lack of faith. God knows the future. He knew how His people would rebel against Him.

*Deuteronomy 32:18-21 "Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. And when the LORD saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters. And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, **children in whom is no faith**. They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation."*

"No people" is a reference to those that were "nothing special" (from the Hebrew) in comparison to the people of Israel, who were God's chosen people. "Foolish nation" is a reference to wicked Gentile nations who had no spiritual understanding.

Isaiah boldly reiterated the truth spoken by Moses so many years previously.

Isaiah 65:1 "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name."

He foretold that the Gentiles would respond to a gospel that was preached to them by faithful believers. They weren't seeking God; men of faith shared the gospel in obedience to the command of Jesus. A good example would be the response of the people of Nineveh to Jonah's message of repentance. The people of Nineveh were not seeking God; but when God sent Jonah to declare His message of "repent or be judged," the people responded in repentance and were spared judgment.

Paul stated emphatically that God has not disowned the nation of Israel. That would be a horrible thing for Paul to contemplate because he was an Israelite descended from Abraham through the tribe of Benjamin.

Romans 11:1 "I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin."

God had promised that there would always be a remnant preserved in Israel.

Isaiah 10:20-22 "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth."

The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God. For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return...."

Jeremiah 23:2-4 "Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD. And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD."

Ezekiel 6:7-8 "And the slain shall fall in the midst of you, and ye shall know that I am the LORD. Yet will I leave a remnant, that ye may have some that shall escape the sword among the nations, when ye shall be scattered through the countries."

Micah 2:12 "I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold: they shall make great noise by reason of the multitude of men."

Zechariah 8:12 "For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong."

The Jews were meant to draw the Gentiles to God through their testimony of the blessings associated with submitting in obedience and faith to God. Because they rejected God by rejecting Jesus, God chose to reveal Himself through the Gentile body of believers, the church, to provoke the Jewish people to jealousy—to make them want the salvation that was first presented to them. The Jews prided themselves on being God's chosen people; now they would have cause to question whether God had decided to bestow His favor on another group of people. The purpose was to bring about a response of repentance and faith.

The Jews' rejection of Jesus caused God to set them aside for the time being and empower and bless a people of faith from among the Gentile nations. The result—the message of salvation was taken all over planet earth. When Israel turns back to God through faith in His Son, He will gladly restore them to fellowship and their place of favor among the nations.

Paul finally gets to the heart of the issue. He proceeds to warn the Gentiles about boasting about their privileged position or thinking that they had replaced Israel.

Romans 11:16–21 "For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of

unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee."

Paul paints a word picture of Israel growing from a root into a tree with holy branches. Then he compares those of the nation of Israel who rebelled against God to serve idols and those who rejected His Son as the Messiah to branches that are broken off (because he is only referencing "some" of the branches). The Gentile believers who accepted Christ as Savior, the church, are pictured as wild olive tree branches grafted in to the original tree to become part of the whole. Both the original branches of the tree and the branches that were grafted in are sustained by the root (Christ, the source of their holiness) and its oil (from the Greek for "fatness"). Oil often represents the Holy Spirit in Scripture (used in anointing for special service and to bring light, comfort, healing, and refreshment).

Romans 11:19-21 "Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee."

In these verses, Paul anticipates that the Gentile church will reason, "The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in." The key is in verse 17.

Romans 11:17 "And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree"

"Some" of the branches were broken off—not all. You were grafted in *among* them to partake of the root and oil *with them* (as companions or co-participants from the Greek).

The branches that were broken off were broken off because of unbelief. The Gentile believers are accepted as branches of the original tree because of their faith. Israel was set apart as a nation of faith before the nations. The nation as a whole did not fulfill its purpose; but there were many Jewish people of faith throughout their history. This should serve as a notice of warning, not as a reason to boast. The church should not have an attitude of arrogance, but rather an attitude of reverential fear. If God discarded some of the original branches because of unbelief, you can be sure that He will do the same to you. (I have to remind myself that the church as a whole includes impostors. Paul is obviously not threatening true men of faith, but he is exhorting the body of believers to examine themselves as to whether their faith is real. Does their life prove their faith?)

Romans 11:23 "And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again."

God sovereignly determines when to cut a branch off or graft a branch in. When Israel as a nation turns back to God in faith and repentance, God will restore them to fellowship and their favored position among the nations; He will graft them back into the tree.

Now for another key verse:

Romans 11:25 "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in."

"I would not....be ignorant" – Paul uses this type of terminology in his letters when he is making an important point. This point should keep those in the church humble before the LORD—"...blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in."

The blindness is obviously spiritual blindness. "The fullness of the Gentiles" is a reference to the completed body of believers composed mainly of the Gentiles, the church.

"in part" – In other words, there are still Jewish people coming to faith in God through Jesus as part of the church, just as there were and will continue to be Gentile believers coming to faith in God once His focus returns to Israel. Turning to God in faith has always been an option for every man and woman born on planet earth.

I found the following quote from Jack Kelley that was enlightening on the phrase "fulness of the Gentiles be come in."

"The Greek word translated 'full number' is a nautical term and refers to the number of crewmen necessary for a ship to set sail. And the phrase 'come in' means to arrive at a destination. Once the required complement of soldiers and sailors was aboard, the ship could leave the harbor and set sail for its destination. So it is with the Church. Once the number required to make up its membership is reached, the Church will depart for its destination in Heaven; and God will open the eyes and soften the hearts of His people Israel."

Romans 11:26-27 "And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins."

Instead of being a nation composed both of men of faith and those who have rebelled against God, Israel will become a nation composed only of men of faith.

Romans 11:29 "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. "

In other words, God doesn't change His mind regarding the gifts He gives and the invitations He issues. Once you receive a gift from God, it is yours. Once an invitation is accepted, He won't rescind the offer. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob accepted God's call. (Note: Once Abraham responded to God's call, His invitation to follow Him in faith, God's commitment to Abraham was sure.) Their descendants ended up behaving wickedly, but God will not renege on His promise.

Based on the predominant culture today, people, at least in America, have a hard time understanding this type of integrity. Our society is full of loopholes to contracts, and a man's word is certainly not the binding factor it once was. Man's tendency is always to

justify his actions and to view himself from the most favorable position possible. I think this is a large part of the reason why certain sections of the “church” have twisted the scripture to support the idea of “replacement theology.”

Israel’s purpose in God’s plan was to reveal God to the nations and example the blessings that would cause men to turn from their wicked ways to God in faith. When Israel rejected God, He had to establish another people of faith to continue to fulfill His purpose. In the end, God’s plan will be accomplished in spite of the failures of His chosen people—both Israel and the Church. The fact that Israel returns to God in faith and is restored to favored status in no way takes away from the blessings and privileges that He has given the church. It is a result of God working to ensure that His covenant with Abraham is fulfilled to the last detail.

Conclusion According to Scripture: Israel is Vital to the Fulfillment of God’s Plan

From the establishment of God’s covenant with Abraham, the nation of Israel as descended through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has been an integral part of God’s eternal plan for humanity. This covenant assured the people of Israel not only spiritual blessings, but also material blessings that center around a specific parcel of land in an area now known as the Middle East. Though God’s covenant with Abraham was unconditional, obtaining and maintaining possession of the land promised to these descendants of Abraham was based upon their obedience to the covenant revealed to the people from God through Moses; in other words, it was conditional. God’s subsequent covenant with David was also unconditional and eternal in nature.

The very character of God is at stake in the fulfilling of each of these covenants according to His word. Scripture tells us that God is truth and that every word He speaks will come to pass.

Deuteronomy 32:4 “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.”

Psalms 33:4 “For the word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth.”

Isaiah 55:11 “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”

Scripture and history are clear in affirming the truth of God’s word as foretold by His prophets. That the people of Israel were scattered throughout the nations of the world gives evidence to that truth. The rebirth of Israel as a nation is another fulfillment of prophecy as foretold by the prophets—most specifically by the prophet Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 37:3–14 “And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD....Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are

the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD."

Ezekiel 37:21-23 "And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God."

The regathering has begun, but the culmination point of an established nation under God in faith and obedience is yet to come. The fulfillment of prophecy concerning Israel is vital to the plan, purpose and person of God. Thankfully, we in the "church" have been blessed to have a part in that plan and purpose; and our promises in Christ are just as sure as His promises to Israel through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David.

The signs of the times are clear that fulfillment is near-----I can hardly wait!!