

**Romans (17):
Our Father Abraham
(Rom. 4:1-31)**

Introduction:

Let us turn in our Bibles to Romans 4. Now, although we have arrived today to this important chapter of Scripture, we will not examine begin to consider the content of the verses themselves, until next Lord's Day, Lord willing. We need to address first some preliminary matters in order that we may understand the subject matter of this chapter precisely and accurately.

The entire chapter is the third and final section of the major division of Romans that began with Romans 3:21. Here is an outline of the subject matter in this portion of Holy Scripture.

- III. God's Righteousness in the Sinner's Justification (3:21-4:25)
 - A. The righteousness of God in the believer's justification through faith (3:21-26)
 - B. The righteousness of God through faith and the law of God (3:27-31)
 - C. Abraham as the Father of All who have Faith (4:1-25)

In the last several weeks we have given our attention to the great and foundational doctrine of biblical Christianity, justification by God's grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Paul stated the teaching toward the end of Romans 3, and then here in chapter 4 he substantiated the teaching from the Holy Scriptures, our Old Testament. Paul called upon the Patriarch Abraham, as well as King David, to show that justification through faith alone had always been the manner in which God had brought guilty sinners into relationship with Himself.

But as we begin to consider this chapter of God's Word, I want us to be aware of this important matter. Not only has Paul called upon Abraham to illustrate the truth of justification through faith alone, but Paul has an additional reason for having done so. One of the principle themes of his epistle is the effort to show the great work of God in the fulfillment of His purpose in history respecting His people, Israel. After Jesus Christ had died upon His cross and rose again the third day, God the Father exalted Him, enthroning Him in heaven as King of kings and Lord of lords. The onset of the reign of our Lord Jesus over the kingdom of God was the fulfillment of God's promises to both Abraham and David. The expansion and success of the gospel throughout the world in this church age was the realization of God's Old Testament promises given through the prophets. They had announced that the Messiah would bring salvation to a remnant of Jews, who were those Jews who believed on Jesus, but the prophets had also declared that the Gentile world that would be brought into the Messiah's kingdom. And so, in addition to showing Abraham as having exhibited faith alone as the means of his justification, Paul set forth in Romans 4 the truth that *God had all along intended to bring many Gentiles into the covenant community of Israel*. Paul argues that **Israel** is not to be understood as comprised of physical descendants of Abraham, but rather Abraham is the father of **spiritual Israel**, comprised of all people everywhere who have the same faith as their spiritual father. And so, in addition to illustrating justification through faith alone, Paul sets forth...

C. Abraham as the Father of All who have Faith (4:1-25)

As Paul's common manner, after he declared a teaching, he demonstrated that it is consistent with and even taught in the Old Testament Scriptures. Here in Romans 4, Paul showed in a number of ways that Abraham, as well as King David, showed forth the teaching of justification through faith alone. Let us now read the chapter.

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” ⁴Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, ⁶just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

⁷“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;
⁸blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

⁹Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. ¹⁰How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. ¹¹He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, ¹²and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

¹³For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring--not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”--in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” ¹⁹He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. ²²That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” ²³But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

There is much here for our instruction and edification. And if you are the typical evangelical that believes what most evangelicals have been taught, then I would assert that there is much here to correct you, for the role of Abraham in God’s purposes in history is commonly misunderstood and misrepresented within Christendom. But this confusion and collusion regarding the role of Abraham in God’s program reaches beyond Christendom as well. There is much misunderstanding and error regarding how Abraham relates to various peoples in the teaching of several of the major religions of the world. The *Jewish people*, of course, claim that Abraham is their father, for they are the physical descendants of Jacob, who was renamed Israel. Jews believe that they are the heirs of the promises that God gave to Abraham because they are his physical descendants. However, the *Arabic people* believe that they are the true descendants of Abraham, having been born to Abraham’s first-born son, Ishmael. They believe that they are the heirs of the promises that God gave to Abraham, for Abraham’s son, Ishmael, was the legitimate heir, not Isaac. We would argue that neither one of those groups, Jews or Arabs (i.e. muslims) may legitimately claim to be descendants of Abraham, the inheritors of God’s promises to Abraham and his descendants. Interestingly, the vast majority of *evangelical Christians* do *not* believe that they are related to Abraham and that they are in no way heirs of God’s promises to Abraham, but the Scriptures quite clearly state that this is actually the case. The Word of God teaches, as any objective reader of Romans 4 can plainly conclude, that those who have the same faith of Abraham, whether they are Jewish or Gentile, are the true, spiritual children of Abraham, who are due to inherit the blessing that God had promised their father. *Spiritual Israel is comprised of spiritual descendants of Abraham, who are the elect from all nations.* Just as

Isaac was the promised son of Abraham, who would inherit the blessing God promised to Abraham, so each one of the elect are promised children whom God the Father had promised to His Son, Jesus Christ. We may read of this truth also in **Galatians 4**.

²¹Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman¹ and one by a free woman². ²³But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. ²⁴Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. ²⁵Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. ²⁷For it is written,

“Rejoice, O barren one
Who does not bear;
Break forth and cry aloud,
You who are not in labor!
For the children of the desolate one will be more
Than those of the one who has a husband.”

²⁸**Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.** ²⁹But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. ³⁰But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.” ³¹So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. (Gal. 4:21-31)

Here Paul declared that believers in Jesus Christ are as Isaac was, children whom God had promised. He declared that Jewish people who believed that they kept God’s law as the way of salvation, who had failed to believe on Jesus as their Messiah, were spiritually speaking, children of Hagar, in other words as Ishmael. They have no promise of God’s blessing, for God had purposed to bless Isaac and his descendants, not Ishmael. Here we see that natural born descendants of Abraham are not members of true Israel. Rather, Paul showed that **true believers in Jesus Christ are the true Israel of God**; they are the promised descendants of Abraham who would inherit God’s promises to him.

This conviction is one of the points that distinguish us as ones who espouse **covenantal theology** from most evangelicals, who hold to **dispensational theology**-- our understanding of the relationship between Israel and the church. Dispensationalists hold as one of their most basic beliefs that when reading the Bible one must always distinguish between the nation of Israel comprised of Jewish people, and the New Testament church comprised of believers, whether Jewish or Gentile. One must never confuse the distinction between God’s promises to Israel and His promises to the church, for they are two separate entities. They say that this is one of the most important teachings of Scripture that you must maintain in order to understand the Bible rightly. For example, this teaching that is reflected in the following quotes:

Generally speaking, . . . those who distinguish clearly between the church and Israel have recognized the present age as an unexpected and unpredicted parenthesis as far as Old Testament prophecy is concerned (John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, pp. 23f).

Or this,

¹ This is a reference to Hagar, the slave of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.

² This is a reference to Sarah.

In no sense have these promises (to Abraham and David) made to Israel been abrogated or fulfilled by the Church, which is a distinct body in this age having promises and a destiny different from Israel's (C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Pre-millennial Faith*, p. 12).

Dispensationalists believe that in God's purpose of history He has two different plans for two different peoples. God has given certain promises to the nation of Israel, those who are Jews by physical birth, and these promises are distinct and not to be seen as given to the church. Israel and the church are two different entities, with two different destinies. God has promised them different blessings, to Israel they are largely physical—a land, prosperity, and rule over the nations of the earth, to the church God has given promises that are spiritual in nature. Dispensationalists teach that God has promised a literal, physical kingdom to Israel, to be ruled over by David, but God has promised a spiritual kingdom to the church, to be ruled over by Jesus Christ. Dispensationalists say that if you fail to maintain this distinction between Israel and the church, you cannot understand the Bible rightly nor interpret biblical prophecy rightly. To them the greatest of errors is to apply the promises and blessings of Israel in the Old Testament to the church of the New Testament.

In contrast to dispensationalists, we hold to covenantal theology, that which was historically held and believed by all of the Protestant Reformers. We understand the Scriptures to teach that the New Testament church is the fulfillment and realization of the promises that God gave to Israel in the Old Testament. The church is Israel reconstituted under a new covenant, the old (Mosaic) covenant having been replaced by the new established by Jesus Christ. We understand New Testament Christians to be the spiritual children of Abraham, to whom the promises of Abraham are to be applied and realized. We would argue that to fail to see this teaching of Scripture is to fail to see the eternal purpose of God to bring all things together through Jesus Christ. Through the nation of Israel's rejection of their Messiah, the blessing of Abraham has come upon the Gentiles who believe, as having been foretold to and through Abraham. If you are a believer of Jesus Christ, you are a child of Abraham, a child of promise, as Isaac was (cf. Gal. 4:28). We would argue that this is taught quite clearly in Romans 4.

Let us also consider what **the Lord Jesus Himself** said regarding these matters. In John 8 the Lord discredited Jewish claims of having Abraham as their father regarding God's promise, for although they were Jewish, they refused to believe on Him as their Messiah. Let us read **John 8:31-44**.

³¹So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

³³They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"

³⁴Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

³⁷I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. ³⁸I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father."

³⁹They answered him, "Abraham is our father."

Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, ⁴⁰but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. ⁴¹You are doing the works your father did." They said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father--even God." ⁴²Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. ⁴³Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. ⁴⁴You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies...

We see that the Jesus first acknowledged that they were the physical offspring of Abraham. **Verse 37** reads, "I know that you are offspring of Abraham." But though they were Jewish, being Abraham's physical descendants, they were not the children of Abraham who were due to inherit God's promise of blessing for His

people. Jesus said, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did” (vs. 39f). Here Jesus is alluding to “Abraham’s children” who had the same faith as Abraham. If these Jewish men were ones who were due to inherit God’s promises to Abraham, they would have embraced Jesus in faith, not oppose Him and intend to crucify Him.

We may also consider the very clear and straightforward statements of **the apostle Paul** as we look at **Galatians 3**. Here Paul appealed to the Christians in the churches of Galatia, who were both Jews and Gentiles.

⁵Does He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith-- ⁶just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? ⁷Know then that *it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham*. ⁸And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” ⁹So then, *those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith*.

¹⁰For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” ¹¹Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” ¹²But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”

¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”-- ¹⁴*so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles*, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith...

²⁶*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus*. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹*And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise*. (Gal. 3:5-14; 26-29)

This understanding of the present glory of the kingdom of God should move us to be a happy, joy-full people, a confident people, a people of strong moral conviction, and a people with an unsettled and expectant outlook on what We will one day most certainly receive—even the fullness of our salvation when Jesus our King returns to finally and fully vanquish His foes.

And yet it is a sad thing that many disciples fail to see the present reality of the kingdom of God. Many see a future fulfillment of the kingdom at the Second Coming of Christ, but they are blind, ignorant, or even unbelieving with respect to its present manifestation. Their world-view has not been formed by the Word of God; rather, by teaching which in the end robs the people of God of their joy and power. It removes their basis of *comfort* and *encouragement* in what God is currently doing in history. It removes the ground of *rejoicing* in what God is accomplishing in the world. It robs them of *hope* and *assurance* of what God can and might do in and through them if they would live in faith and obedience before their risen, enthroned King.

Let us consider some of the Old Testament background to these matters. When God had first called Abraham to faith, who was the father of the nation of Israel, Abraham was an idol worshipper living in a land wholly given over to idolatry. But God in His grace had revealed Himself to Abraham, and had promised him that he would father a great nation. God had, therefore, to and through Abraham, promised to bless the Jewish people uniquely as an ethnic race and as a corporate nation (**cf. Genesis 12:1-3**). God had made a commitment to Abraham that He would bless him and his descendants. Nevertheless, we read in Genesis 12:3 that although God’s blessing was particularly directed to Abraham and his physical descendants, it would ultimately extend to “all the families of the earth”; in other words, the nations, or the Gentiles.

Years later, when Abraham was dwelling in Palestine, God promised Him that his physical descendants would one day possess the land of Palestine. **Genesis 13** records the following promises of God.

¹⁴And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: “Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; ¹⁵for all the land which you see I give

to you and your descendants forever. ¹⁶And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. ¹⁷Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.” (**Gen. 13:14-17**)

Here we see that God had bound Himself to show favor to Abraham’s physical descendants. They would be great in number. On day, from Abraham’s perspective, his descendants would possess what came to be known as *the Promised Land*.

Let us now turn to **Genesis 15** where we read of further details of God’s plan for Israel.

¹³Then He (God) said to Abram: “Know certainly that *your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years*. ¹⁴And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. ¹⁵Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites *is not yet complete*.”

¹⁷And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. ¹⁸On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: “*To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates.*”

Abraham’s descendants did go down into Egypt and abode there 400 years. But according to God’s promise, the time came that He brought Israel out of bondage through Moses. He gave them possession of the Promised Land in fulfillment of His promise. It is recorded in **Joshua 21:43-45**.

⁴³So *the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers*, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. ⁴⁴The LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. ⁴⁵*Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.*

But God had made a covenant with His people that *Israel would be a special nation preferred above all nations only if they their kept covenant faithfulness to God*. God had said to Moses in **Exodus 19:4-6**,

⁴“You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself*. ⁵Now therefore, *if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine*. ⁶*And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*’ These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

Moreover, God had bound Himself to Israel that they would remain in the Promised Land *only if they ordered their national life according to His law*. **Deuteronomy 5:32** reads,

³²“Therefore you shall be careful to do as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. ³³You shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live and **that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess**.

We also read of this legal covenant stipulation in **Deuteronomy 30:15-20**.

¹⁵“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, ¹⁶in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. ¹⁷*But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them,* ¹⁸*I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess.* ¹⁹I call heaven and earth as witnesses today

against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; ²⁰that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He *is* your life and the length of your days; and ***that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.***”

When God brought His people Israel into the Promised Land, He was faithful to give them all of the land that He had promised to give to the patriarchs of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel). Our dispensational friends attempt to argue that although God had given Israel much of the land promised, there never was a time in which Israel possessed all of the land God had promised to them. They argue, therefore, that the Jewish people are yet to experience the full realization of God’s promise to them. Many Christians believe the modern state of Israel, therefore, has a biblical warrant over all the land from the border of Egypt to the Euphrates River, which is located in present day Iraq. Many seek to encourage the state of Israel to take all of that land aggressively, after all, God had given it to them.

But we would argue that the land grant that God had promised to Abraham’s physical descendants was given to them in full, not in part. Consider these two passages of Scripture that were stated in a manner to clearly show God had been true to all of His promises, all had been fulfilled. We read in Joshua 23, toward the end of Joshua’s lifetime of subduing the promised land, these words of God:

“Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed. (Josh. 23:14.)

Earlier it is stated even more clearly. This is a summary statement, which was given at the end of Israel’s subjugation of the land under Joshua.

“So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. ⁴⁴The LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. ⁴⁵Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass. (Josh. 21:43-45)

But further, we would say that God’s promise for physical Israel to occupy that land as its own was contingent upon its ordering its national life according to the Mosaic covenant, the Ten Commandments. But when Israel had failed to keep its covenant, but had broken it, God jettisoned those people from the land. Consequently the land that God has promised His people is not that bit of land on this earth in this time, but rather God has promised the inheritance of a new heaven and a new earth, which the Promised Land was but a figure, a foretaste, that the true people of God, the spiritual children of Abraham, would one day inherit. The writer to the Hebrews reveals how Abraham never viewed the land of Canaan as his actual full possession. He lived in tents because he saw this life and this world as transitory. Abraham lived anticipating a new Jerusalem in a new world.

⁹By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; ¹⁰for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. ¹¹By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. ¹²Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude-- innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. ¹³These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. ¹⁵And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. (Heb. 11:9-16)

God had granted physical Israel as a political entity possession of earthly Canaan, but it was conditioned on its obedience to God's law. We would argue that Israel never kept God's law fully or consistently throughout its history. Israel broke its covenant with God. The time eventually arrived when God brought the curses of His covenant upon His people, judging them and ejecting them from the land. We read of His judgment upon the northern kingdom of Israel in **2 Kings 18:9-12**.

⁹Now it came to pass in the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea the son of Elah, king of Israel, that Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria and besieged it. ¹⁰And at the end of three years they took it. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, that is, the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken. ¹¹Then the king of Assyria carried Israel away captive to Assyria, and put them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes, ¹²*because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed His covenant and all that Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded; and they would neither hear nor do them.*

Later Judah also fell under God's judgment for the same reason. **2 kings 24:18-20** read:

¹⁸Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. ¹⁹He also did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. ²⁰*For because of the anger of the LORD this happened in Jerusalem and Judah, that He finally cast them out from His presence.*

Nevertheless, because God had sworn to the Patriarchs (as well as to King David) that He would preserve His people forever, God promised to send a Savior, the Messiah, who would redeem His people from their guilt, and restore them to His favor. He promised that He would not do this for all Israel, but rather for **a remnant** of His people. A remnant would be a small percentage of His former nation upon which He would bestow His grace in order to be true to His promises to the Fathers. God had spoken repeatedly through His prophets of His intention to save a remnant of Israel (cf. **Isaiah 10:16-23**). The remnant that God refers to is those Jews that survived His judgment and after having been exiled from the land but who later returned. God sent the Messiah to save these people from their sins.

We read in the gospels of our Lord's direct but limited mission to Israel. He said that He was only attempting to reach the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt.15:21ff). But upon Christ's death and resurrection, all this changed. With His death, and the proclamation of His Gospel to Israel, God was just and right to turn from Israel and to expand the kingdom of God to encompass Gentiles also. In other words, Jesus Christ could commission His church to make disciples of *all the nations*, not just disciples from the nation of Israel. This, too, was a fulfillment of the Word of God of the Old Testament. **Isaiah 42:1-9** records the prophecy of our Lord's mission.

¹“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold,
My Elect One in whom My soul delights!
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.

²He will not cry out, nor raise His voice,
Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.

³A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench;
He will bring forth justice for truth.

⁴He will not fail nor be discouraged,
Till He has established justice in the earth;
And the coastlands shall wait for His law.”

⁵Thus says God the LORD,
Who created the heavens and stretched them out,
Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it,
Who gives breath to the people on it,

And spirit to those who walk on it:

⁶“I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness,

And will hold Your hand;

I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people,

As a light to the Gentiles,

⁷To open blind eyes,

To bring out prisoners from the prison,

Those who sit in darkness from the prison house.

⁸I am the LORD, that is My name;

And My glory I will not give to another,

Nor My praise to carved images.

⁹Behold, the former things have come to pass,

And new things I declare;

Before they spring forth I tell you of them.”

Also we read of our Lord’s mission to a remnant of Israel but also of His expanded mission to Gentiles. **Isaiah 49:1-6** read:

¹“Listen, O *coastlands*, to Me,

And take heed, you peoples from afar!

The LORD has called Me from the womb;

From the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name.

²And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword;

In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me,

And made Me a polished shaft;

In His quiver He has hidden Me.”

³“And He said to me,

‘You *are* My servant, O Israel,

In whom I will be glorified.’

⁴Then I said, ‘I have labored in vain,

I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain;

Yet surely my just reward *is* with the LORD,

And my work with my God.’”

⁵“And now the LORD says,

Who formed Me from the womb *to be* His Servant,

To bring Jacob back to Him,

So that Israel is gathered to Him

(For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD,

And My God shall be My strength),

⁶***Indeed, He says,***

‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant

To raise up the tribes of Jacob,

And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;

I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,

That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

The New Testament church age is the age of fulfillment for the Old Testament prophecies that spoke of these days. Peter had declared, “Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days” (Acts 3:24).