

Max Lucado tells the story of being dropped by his insurance company... because he had one too many speeding tickets... and a minor fender bender that wasn't his fault. ... One day he received a letter in the mail... informing him to seek coverage elsewhere. ... As he reflected on how he wasn't "good enough" for his insurance company... the spiritual tie-in was too obvious. ... "*Many people fear receiving such a letter [from God],*" Lucado writes. "*Some worry they already have.*"

Lucado then imagines this correspondence, straight from the "Pearly Gates Underwriting Division":

Dear Mrs. Smith,

I'm writing in response to this morning's request for forgiveness. I'm sorry to inform you that you have reached your quota of sins. Our records show that, since employing our services, you have erred seven times in the area of greed, and your prayer life is substandard when compared to others of like age and circumstance.

Further review reveals that your understanding of doctrine is in the lower 20 percentile and you have excessive tendencies to gossip. Because of your sins you are a high-risk candidate for heaven. You understand that grace has its limits. Jesus sends his regrets and kindest regards and hopes that you will find some other form of coverage.

I can see why some believers have such worries – if they have not adequately dealt with the matter that Paul has been addressing in our study of Romans. ... God has not deserted His Covenant People (the Jews) – as a whole... and neither will He abandon... forsake... discard... you and I.

In our passage today... we are going to see that **#1**. *Israel has "stumbled," but their stumble is not final.* ... **#2**. *Their "stumble" had a purpose: it would be used by God to bring salvation to the Gentiles.*

In covering this first point... (*Israel has "stumbled," but their stumble is not final*)... I want to bring-in several other passages from the Old and New Testament that reveal how God is going to bring them back to Himself.

But before we go there... I need to tell you that there is a rather large segment of Evangelical Christianity... who believe the exact opposite of this. ... Many "Covenant Theologians"... (But let me be clear – not ALL) ... "MANY" of those who subscribe to "Reformed Theology"... believe that the church is the New (or "*spiritual*") Israel... and when Israel rejected Jesus as Messiah... God simply transferred all the promises that He made to Israel to the Church. ("*He is finished with Israel*" is their claim.) This is called "*replacement theology*" – and it is believed by a vast number of Christians.

Now... in my study each week to prepare for these messages... I do a lot of reading... and it includes those who come from the "Reformed Theology" background. I benefit greatly from their insights.

I have to admit that I was very nervous about reading what my Reformed "brothers-in-the-Lord" had to say about today's passage. ... (But at the same time... I was excited.) ... These are very smart men who have integrity... so I wanted to learn (*not only*) what their conclusions were... but why they came to them.

But as I read their material – I made a *delightful* discovery! Both James Montgomery Boice and R.C. Sproul had (in their writings about our passage today) denounced "replacement theology." ... Boice and Sproul (who are two "heavyweights" among the Reformed Community) pointed to Romans 11:10-15 and said there can be no other conclusion... other than God is not finished with Israel... the Church did not replace Israel... God

has **not** taken His promises from the Jews and given them to the Church. The church and Israel are not the same. ... God has a **distinct** future plan for Israel – to bring them back to Himself.... And He has a **distinct** future for the church... that differs from Israel's. (We see this in today's passage.)

(But **apart** from our passage today)... we also see this truth expressed elsewhere in Scripture. ... A simple study of God's promises to Abraham about the **boundaries of the land** that God was giving to Israel (which are very **specific**... and are **repeated**) – presents a problem to those who say God is finished with Israel. (You see)... Israel has **never** possessed it all!

God first specified the borders of His promised Land to Abraham in Genesis 15:18-21.... (later God had Abraham walk through and examine the territory)... But these very exact borders have **never** been occupied to the full extent by Israel.

Now... either **(1.** God made a huge mistake... or **(2.** He told a whopping lie to Abraham (and then repeated it to Isaac – and again to Jacob)... or **(3.** He **will** give it ALL to Israel (some day) in the future. It seems rather absurd to think that the church (as “spiritual Israel”) is going to receive Israel's very **specific promise** of land. ... No! (I think) **Israel will** occupy every square inch of it... during the future period known as “the Millennium” ... once the Nation of Israel has been restored.

But aside from **this** problem - to the thinking *that many of our Evangelical brothers and sisters in the Lord ascribe to*... we have Romans chapter 11... which makes very clear – God is **not** finished with Israel. The church has **not** replaced the nation... by giving us their promises.

A few weeks ago... knowing that we were coming to Romans 11... before my discovery about James Montgomery Boice and RC Sproul's conclusion... I reached out to a Reformed friend of mine who believes in "replacement theology." I wanted to make sure I treated this passage fairly. His reply was very short: "Yes, *Romans 11 is a problem for us.*" O.K. Well... thanks for your honesty! ... [P A U S E] ...

One thing that we have to keep in mind... is that (we – every one of us - are all fallible human beings)... and once we get to Heaven... we are all going to discover that there was so much that we thought we understood properly... but we didn't. (We might as well start being humble about it now.)

We need to be humble and be willing to change a particular part of our theology - when and if - Biblical evidence shows us that we should. ... We also need to be humble whenever there is a strong divide among Bible scholars - who also look to the inerrant Word of God (the Bible)... as our authority. ... Now... (with that said)... here is what feeds my understanding that God is not finished with Israel – yet still respecting those who disagree.

Romans 11:11-15

Please look at the beginning of verse 11 with me again...

Romans 11:11 (ESV)

¹¹ So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means!

In English "stumble that they might fall" looks like an awkward phrase..." (The words "stumble" and "fall" seem redundant.) But in the Greek language... "stumble" and "fall" (together like this)... progressively

intensifies the meaning. ... The Greek tense of the word “*fall*”... and its contrast with the verb “*stumble*” create a powerful image and conveys the idea of - “*falling beyond recovery.*”

So Paul asks... *Is it the design of God that the Jews should totally and irrecoverably be cast off? ... Is it the purpose of God (finally) to exclude them (as fallen) from mercy?*

Paul immediately responds with “*me genoito!*” Here for the 10th time in Romans... Paul used this strong phrase that shouts “*No way! Not even remotely possible! ... Don’t even think it! ... The Jews have - in no possible way - fallen beyond recovery.*”

Paul states in this same verse that God is using their “trespass”... in order to include Gentiles... and that we Gentiles are to have a vital ministry to Israel. (**NOTICE** - Israel and the Church have two distinct roles!) ... *Saved Gentiles are to provoke Israel “to jealousy.”* (The Church and Israel are **not** the same!)

But I would like for you to look again at verse 15...

Romans 11:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ *For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?*

The second part of verse 15 refers to Israel being “**accepted**” (“*what will their acceptance mean...*”) – Paul writes of it as a certainty - a *sure thing*. They will be “accepted” by God once again. ... And *then* Paul puts it in terms of their having “**life from the dead.**” Verse 15 says that this will be even more glorious than God’s reconciling the world through their *rejection.*

This is a tremendous prediction... (a description of what can only rightly be called a national resurrection.) In our day Israel is spiritually dead... but the nation is to rise again... with such a glory that it eclipses the glory of yours and my salvation! ... A worldwide quickening and spread of spiritual life will come to Israel. ... The difference will be so dramatic that it can only be described as the difference between life and death.

Now... let me show you how consistent our Bible has been about this. (Stick with me here.) We are going to do some old-fashioned Bible-thumping in both the Old and the New Testaments. ... I want to show you how constant and unswerving God's revelation has been on this. ... Now... here's why! ... I would like for you to leave today with a deeper conviction that - Both God and His Word can certainly be trusted!

So... we will begin with Zechariah. ... Chapters 12... 13... and 14 from this prophet of God have the current of Israel's restoration running through them. Zechariah 13 speaks of Israel cleansing itself of their sin (because of Messiah's return.) Zechariah 14 is about Messiah establishing His earthly kingdom with the Jewish nation. (**But!**)... all of this is conditioned upon Zechariah 12... verse 10!

Zechariah 12:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ *"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.*

What this AMAZING prophecy tells us... is that BEFORE Israel goes through it's national cleansing – which happens when Messiah's comes to

them (Zechariah 13)... and BEFORE Messiah establishes His Kingdom among them (Zechariah 14)... Israel must first look to the One Whom they have pierced... and they must plead and mourn for His return... with the same kind of gut-wrenching sincerity - that a mother who has lost her first-born child - has. ... Look again at the prophecy.

Zechariah 12:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ *“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.*

... [P A U S E] ...

Hosea (as God’s mouthpiece) also wrote about this... Speaking as though He is God Himself... Hosea writes...

Hosea 5:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ *I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.*

I... (God)... will return to My place... (Where is that?) – Heaven. ... OK... so... **God** (sometime in Hosea’s future) will leave Heaven... but will also return to Heaven. ... What does that sound like...? - Jesus’ first coming... doesn’t it? ... God (Jesus) will return to Heaven - until a time when the Jewish nation finds themselves in distress... and they earnestly seek Him.

(Here is Hosea 5:15 – once more)

¹⁵ *I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.*

... [P A U S E] ...

Now... I will show you what Scripture indicates is the distress that Hosea (here) says is going to cause this deep pleading and mourning... but first I want to show you how Jesus makes reference to this prophesied event that will happen. ... Let's go now to Matthew 23.

Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem for the week that we call "Passion Week." He has come to Jerusalem to present Himself as the prophesied King of Kings (the Messiah)... and to accept worship from the people. ... But He also came to be led by the Jewish national leaders to a Roman crucifixion. He knows that all of this is about to happen... and as He gets to the top of a hill that overlooks the city that He is about to enter... He paused and cried out...

Matthew 23:37-39 (ESV)

³⁷ "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁸ See, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹ For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Because of their rejecting Jesus... they will not be gathered. Instead... they will be scattered... and their Temple will be destroyed. (This is what DID happen in 70A.D.) ... Jesus cried over it and then Jesus made a reference to the prophesied event in Zechariah and Hosea: "you will not see me again, UNTIL you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' is a Jewish welcome. It is a heartfelt greeting. Jesus said "*I am about to go away (back to Heaven) and you will not see Me again until you have this intense welcome of Me...*"

“*When Israel REALLY wants Me... I will return.*” And we know from Hosea 5:15 that some national distress is going to cause them to desperately want Him.

That national distress... which will make the Jewish nation desperately want Jesus)... is going to be the coming 7-year Tribulation (which is also called “the Time of Jacob’s Distress.”)

OK... But... why are the Jews going to suddenly turn to Jesus in their distress during the 7-year Tribulation? ... For centuries they have ignored Him. They did not even turn to Jesus during the German Holocaust that happened with WWII. What will (then) make them see Jesus as their Messiah Who would help them...?

In Revelation chapter 7... we read how God is going to raise up 144,000 effective evangelists... (12,000 from every tribe of Israel.) Just imagine (!) 144,000 Jewish “*Billy Grahams*” !!! ... There will be a lot of significant revivals among the Jews... during the Tribulation! ... No! God is not finished with Israel! In His mercy... He will effectively show them that they missed the Messiah (Jesus.) All of the Gentile believers (who God took at the Rapture) – will make them jealous . They could have avoided this!

God will be very effective at getting His message out. In Revelation 11... we also learn about two very special witnesses that God will send with the ability to do miracles. All of this is God’s work of redeeming His people – making them jealous... and turning to Jesus. ... [P A U S E] ...

However... with all of the revivals that will be happening... many of these new believers will be martyred... and end up under the alter in Heaven... crying out to God and asking “*How much longer will the tribulation last?*”

But a remnant of these new Jewish believers in the Messiah will make it to the end of the Tribulation. This remnant of believers (mixed-in with many of the still unbelieving Jews) are going to be brought to a special place that God will prepare for them in the wilderness. Isaiah 33:16 tells us that it will be in a mountain of rocks. Isaiah 41 and 65 tell us that God is going to provide them with food and water. But Micah 2:12 might actually be pinpointing the place exactly.

Micah 2:12 (ESV)

¹² I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob; I will gather the remnant of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture, a noisy multitude of men.

(Hold this verse for just a minute.) Look at the words in the middle of this verse: “*like sheep in a fold.*” The word that is translated “fold” (or “enclosure” or “pen”) is the Hebrew word “Bozrah.” “*I will set them together like sheep in Bozrah.*” Bozrah is an actual place. It is located in the wilderness of a mountain of rocks. (It is very close to Petra.) ... And (now get this!) - Bozrah is smack-dab in an area - that Daniel 11:41 prophesies that the AntiChrist will not have under his control. He will control the world – all except for this one area.

Daniel 11:41 (ESV)

⁴¹ He shall come into the glorious land. And tens of thousands shall fall, but these shall be delivered out of his hand: Edom and Moab and the main part of the Ammonites.

The area where Bozrah is located... (Daniel prophesied) will not be under the control of AntiChrist. I think this is a pretty good indication that this is going to be where the Jews will flee from AntiChrist during the Tribulation. And Revelation 12 discusses Israel’s fleeing to this special place that God prepares for them.

Revelation 12 (with apocalyptic imagery) describes the struggle between a dragon (which is Satan)... a woman (which is Israel)... and a male child that was born to Israel (and this is Jesus.)

Revelation 12:5 (ESV)

⁵ She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne,

Jesus (the One Who will one day rule all the nations on earth) was born among the Israelites (the woman... here... in Revelation 12.) But He returned to God (in Heaven.)

Some time after Christ's return to Heaven (and we are now more than 2,000 years... since He returned – but apocalyptic writing does not express itself in the time sequence of a modern novel)... Israel (in large part) will flee to the place of God's protection in the wilderness.

Revelation 12:6 (ESV)

⁶ and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

This will happen during the last half of the Tribulation (the second 1,260 days... which is 3 ½ years.) The next several verses here in Revelation 12 describe how Satan will be cast to the Earth in the middle of the 7-year Tribulation... and will go after God's people with an intense fury to destroy them. This is what the prophet Jeremiah refers to as "*the Time of Jacob's Distress*" in Jeremiah 30:7. ... The second half of the Tribulation will be (even) more intense than the first half.

Revelation 12:13-16 (ESV)

¹³ And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

¹⁴ But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that

she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. ¹⁵ The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. ¹⁶ But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth.

Time will not allow for me to continue with the other prophecies that describe how Christ will return... (ending the Tribulation)... after Israel calls out to Him in their distress... and how Christ will establish His 1,000 year reign on Earth (from Jerusalem)... and what His special relationship with the 12 Tribes of Israel will be like. (We will save all this for another time.)

But know this: God's Word is very clear that He has future plans for His people – the Jews. They have not stumbled... so as to never rise again. The covenants God made with Israel will be kept... and not forsaken.

So why should this be important to you and I...? What is the big "so what?" to all of this? ... Well... God ALSO has some pretty big plans for you... and some pretty big plans for me... in these last days before Christ returns.

Take a look at what Paul says (about them) in Philippians 1:6

Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

The day of the Lord is coming... and God has a plan to complete in you and in me... His plans are central to His saving us... Look how our salvation and His individual plan for us... are so closely linked...

Ephesians 2:8-10 (ESV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ

Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Discover what God has prepared for you (each and every day.) God wants to use **you** in these final days. Do you say it can't happen? (Not to you?)

Maybe you have turned your back on the Lord for so long... or committed some horrible sin. Yet... even still... (of course it can happen to you)! Do you think you are a more difficult case than Israel (who rejected their Messiah and had Him killed?)

Let God redeem you... let Him bring you back into His service... just as He will do for Israel! Ask God to show you the good works that He is putting into every one of your days. Discover them and do them.