

A little more than a hundred years ago... "Frederick the Great" (King of Prussia)... was having a discussion with his chaplain... about whether or not the Bible is true. ... The king had become skeptical about Christianity. He had been largely influenced by the famous French atheist - Voltaire.

The King sneered and said to his chaplain:

*"If your Bible is really true, it ought to be capable of very easy proof. So often, when I have asked for proof of the inspiration of the Bible, I have been given some large digest that I have neither the time nor desire to read. ... If your Bible is really from God, you should be able to demonstrate the fact simply. Give me proof for the inspiration of the Bible in a word."*

The chaplain replied, *"Your Majesty, it is possible for me to answer your request literally. I can give you the proof you ask for in one word."*

Frederick was amazed at this response. *"What is this magic word that carries such a weight of proof?"* he asked.

*"Israel,"* said the chaplain.

Frederick was silent. ... **[ P A U S E ]** ...

There are many other proofs for Christianity... of course. But it can hardly be doubted that the continuing existence of Israel (as a distinct people) throughout the four thousand years of her history is anything less than **miraculous**. ... Every other ancient race of people has been swallowed-up and completely disseminated into other people groups... so they are no longer distinct. ... But not Israel.

They have been kicked-out of their homeland several times... scattered throughout the world... and yet (unlike any other race) Israel has remained a distinct people... (with direct lineage to Abraham.) ... The preservation of Israel as a people... is strong evidence for the Bible being the inspired and inerrant Word of God.

If the survival of Israel was the ONLY evidence... it would be enough to prove that the Jewish people are God's people... and that God has a plan for them in the last days. ... But it isn't the only evidence. The Old Testament prophets give us much more... frequently writing of this.

Ezekiel was one of them. ... Most of us are probably not too familiar with Ezekiel. (Many believers could not tell even a single thing that is in his Old Testament book.) ... Yet there is a story in Ezekiel 37 that most of us do know. It is the story of Ezekiel's preaching in the valley of dry bones... which is acknowledged in the chorus of a Negro spiritual: "*Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones! / Now hear the word of the Lord.*"

### **Ezekiel 37:1-10 (ESV)**

*<sup>1</sup> The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. <sup>3</sup> And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." <sup>4</sup> Then he said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. <sup>5</sup> Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup> And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD." <sup>7</sup> So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. <sup>8</sup> And I*

*looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them.* <sup>9</sup> *Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live."* <sup>10</sup> *So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.*

Now... there is a popular song that plays on contemporary Christian radio stations today... that sets me on edge every time I hear it. The artist completely ignores what this prophecy means. ... But she uses its imagery... and sings:

*Breathe, oh, breath of God  
Now breathe, oh, breath of God  
Breathe, oh, breath of God, now breathe*

*As we call out to dry bones, come alive, come alive  
We call out to dead hearts, come alive, come alive  
Up out of the ashes, let us see an army rise  
We call out to dry bones, come alive*

This popular Christian artists sings this to today's **church**. But Ezekiel's prophecy is **not** about Christian revival. It is **not** about having dead churches come alive. ... **WE** don't do the calling-out to dry bones... whenever we see a church that has become sluggish. The Son of Man – Jesus – will resurrect Israel as though He was calling-out to dry bones. Last week in our study of Romans 11... we saw that Israel will come back to life from the dead.

Now... I am straying (just a little) from the topic of our passage in Romans... to make a point that must be said. ... We need to be very careful about making the Bible say whatever we want... especially as we

live so close to the time of these events! It is very dangerous to take our own ideas and force them onto a Bible passage. And Scripture warns us that many will do this in the last days. Let God's Word say what it says.

Ezekiel's prophecy is about the glorious resurrection of Israel. And as we just read... it will be in two stages. First they will be gathered. They will be assembled... but there won't be any breath in them. They won't be alive.

... In Ezekiel's vision the assembled bones will have structure (skeletons... tendons... flesh... and skin)... but there will be no life (no spiritual breath) in them.

(Folks!) After two thousand years... stage one (the assembled bones) has happened! Israel NOW has structure once again (a government)... and in light of President Trump's recent actions... Jerusalem is now their internationally recognized capital. In a few minutes I will show you the significance of this. ... And Muslim nations are signing peace agreements with Israel!

But having rejected their Messiah... Israel currently has no Spiritual breath. However that will happen (in stage two) as we saw last week – Jesus is going to breathe life back into them... at the end of the Tribulation... when they call out to Him. ... All of this is very close!

Today... we get two more images... and we will see why God has delayed this (what His plan is... before Israel comes back to life from the dead.) ... Paul writes about "first fruits"... and then about a cultivated olive tree whose branches were broken off... and of a wild olive tree... whose branches were grafted into the cultivated stock.

The olive tree illustration (in particular) pictures the inclusion of the Gentiles in Israel's spiritual blessings. ... But... then... in what is surely an *impossible* situation (in terms of horticulture science)... Paul will speak of the broken and discarded branches being grafted back into *their own* olive tree. (Branches once broken off a tree – **die** – and cannot be regrafted.) True enough. But we are not speaking here about things that are merely possible or impossible in nature. We are speaking of **God**... and with God all things are possible.

Please keep in mind: *“What is not done in nature, and cannot be effected by the power of man, will be done by God, with whom all things are possible. He is able to make the dry bones live, and to restore the severed branches of the Jewish nation.”* This will be the main point that I want you to “take home” from today's sermon. “With God – all things are possible!”

### **Romans 11:15-16**

When Israel first entered the Promised Land... the Lord instructed them to observe a ritual involving “first fruits.” ... The Jew always gave the first part to God... and by giving the first part... they were saying to God that they were dedicating **all** of their food to God. ... It was not necessary to offer every mouthful to God. The offering of the first part sanctified all of the rest.

This same principle applied when a woman mixed a batch of dough... she would set aside a small sample... bake a bread cake... and give it to the priests. ... Like the first of the harvest... this “first fruit” sample represented the whole portion of grain that she had.

Paul's point in using this as an illustration... is that (in the same way) Abraham was the "first fruit" of an entire race of people. God accepted the founder of the nation (Abraham)... and in so doing... set apart his descendants as well. God accepted the patriarchs (Abraham... Isaac... and Jacob)... in spite of their sins and failings. This means that God also accepts the "rest of the lump"—the nation of Israel.

The Jews are a special people because of their descent from Abraham... and this is true of them even in their rebellious and unregenerate state. It means that even yet... God has not given up on Israel. ... Israel's stumbling is temporary rather than permanent and the nation will be restored as God's people.

Then Paul used another illustration. This one is the olive tree. King David... Jeremiah... and Hosea... all used the image of the olive tree to depict Israel. The olive tree was the most useful... productive... and valuable tree throughout the Mediterranean. It was precious to the economy and welfare of all the nations of the region.

Ancient growers discovered that the roots and stock of wild olive trees could tolerate harsh conditions (such as wind and drought) ... BUT cultivated trees (which produce good fruit) were not nearly as durable. ... So... they combined the best elements of both... the hearty root system of the wild tree and the oil-rich fruit of the flimsy cultivated tree. ... Farmers learned how to graft feeble (but) fruit-bearing branches of a cultivated plant into the sturdy (well-established) stock of wild olive plants.

But as we read this next set of verses... here is what you need to notice: Paul's illustration will give the image a surprising twist. ... In his example...

wild olive branches (which – *remember* - cannot bear fruit and are useless to the farmer) are grafted into the weak and feeble cultivated stock. As a human effort... this would be very foolish... and the Apostle Paul's original readers would have caught this immediately.

*“What is not done in nature, and cannot be effected by the power of man, will be done by God, with whom all things are possible.”*

### **Romans 11:17-22**

What a tremendous picture of God's grace. Gentiles (pictured here as wild olive branches – which cannot bear fruit – are grafted into Israel's cultured root system... where they will be nourished from Abraham's faith and labors. They will be nourished from Israel's cultivated history (thousands of years of lessons about being in relationship with God... and from His holy Scriptures.)

They were not grafted in... because the Gentiles were bearing fruit for God. As wild olive branches... they weren't! They were grafted in... only because of God's grace.

Paul warns us (Gentiles) not to boast over Judaism because of our current favored status. The Jews were unfruitful - and so were we. What's more... the Gentiles will also be rejected if we follow their bad example.

This is a serious warning... one that we must take to heart.

Prosperity seems always to lead to some kind of boasting... and this is true of spiritual prosperity as well as of material prosperity. ... When we go through hard times... we usually sense our inadequacy and draw close to God... calling on him for help. ... But as soon as things go well for us... we

find it easy to think that *it is because of who we are... or what we have done* ... and not because of God's unmerited grace and blessing. ...Then we cease to trust God... (we drift away from him and fall into sin.) It was an awareness of this ever-present danger that caused Paul to write forcefully to the Christians here.

The danger of pride and boasting on account of privileges is not less in the church than elsewhere. Paul saw that some of the Gentiles *might* be in danger of exaltation over the fallen Jews... and therefore cautions them against it. ... The (unworthy) ingrafted shoot... deriving all its vigor and fruitfulness from the stock of another tree... ought not to boast against the branches. ... *Faith* is to promote *humility*... and a sense of our dependence on God.

Bragging is self-centered and self-destructive. Proverbs 16:18 warns that "*pride precedes a disaster, and an arrogant attitude precedes a fall.*"

But hold on! (Before going any further) ... Does Paul indicate in verse 22 that we might lose our salvation...? Paul writes: "*otherwise you too will be cut off...*" Is he saying: If we don't continue in God kindness (in other words... if we turn away from His grace)... we will be cut off...?

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

No... why would he contradict what he so clearly taught in Romans 8:31-39 (?) – we *cannot* lose our salvation. Bear in mind that Paul is discussing people groups (not individuals.) He is writing about Jews (as a group) and Gentile groups (churches of different ages and territories.) No... once you *as an individual* trust Christ as your Savior... you do not have to worry



about being cut off from God. But the church in America might ...and I believe we are (in large part) losing the blessing of God that we once enjoyed.

The threat of Romans 11:22 is not an idle threat. Let me give you several examples of when it has actually happened.

1. *The church in Asia Minor.* Asia Minor is what we (today) call Turkey. This was the first major area where the church thrived! Paul established several (once flourishing) churches in places like Derbe... Iconium... Lystra... and Ephesus... Smyrna... Pergamum... Thyatira... Sardis... Philadelphia... and Laodicea.

Yet where is the church of Asia Minor today? ... Its early vitality faded... and the Moslem invasions of the early Middle Ages overwhelmed it and almost entirely snuffed it out.

EXAMPLE # 2. *The church in North Africa.* This used to be the hotbed of early Christianity. So many of our doctrines and theological insights came from great Christian thinkers from there. We have benefited so much from men such as Tertullian... Cyprian... Clement... and Origen. These influential men gave us so much... that they are known as "*the early church fathers.*"

Under such leadership... Christianity thrived in North Africa for several centuries. But... again... the church of North Africa lost its vitality... faded... and was eventually replaced by Islam.

EXAMPLE #3. *The church in Italy.* After the celebrated conversion of the emperor Constantine... Italy became the next "hotbed" of Christian

thought... teaching... and leadership. ... But by the time of the Middle Ages... it had become nothing more than an evil... power-hungry... and secular institution.

EXAMPLE #4. *The church of the Reformation in Europe.* Our next “hotbed” of Christianity (burning oh-so hot) was fostered by men such as Martin Luther... Zwingli... and John Calvin. The church was MIGHTY in Germany... France ... Switzerland... and Holland. However the same decline overtook the Reformation churches. The Reformation churches soon forgot the true gospel... grew weak internally... and are now attended by only a small minority of people. (Less than 4 percent of Europeans attend church, even on religious holidays.)

England had it's turn... with great revivals led by George Whitfield and the Wesley brothers (Charles and John.) But where is England's fervor today...? ... And what about the church in America (as I have already mentioned)? ... Who does not sense that churches in the United States... though attended by substantially large numbers of people at the moment... are nevertheless declining? ... Who would say that the present influence of Christianity on our cultural value system is as *great* today as it was even a decade ago... not to mention during the early years of our country's history?

Can such a thing happen to a conservative... Bible-based church... like Living Water? ... Of course... it can.

## **1 Corinthians 10:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> *Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*

It will happen if we do not continue strong in the faith once delivered to the saints. ... We stand by grace through faith. ... But if we forget that it is by grace that we stand... or if we stop believing what God teaches in the Bible... then **we** will fall — as surely as those formerly thriving churches that have preceded us on the stage of world history... and what we are seeing in our current day!

## **Romans 11:23-24**

Verse 23 stresses that God **has** this power! At issue is **not** God's **ability** but God's **decision**.

*“What is not done in nature, and cannot be effected by the power of man, will be done by God, with whom all things are possible.”*

## **Romans 11:25**

The word “**fullness**” is extremely important to note. God knows the **number** and the **identities** of all the Gentiles He is bringing to Himself... and He has orchestrated world events around the time of their belief. ... How long is that? ... Only the **Father** knows...

## **Matthew 24:36 (ESV)**

<sup>36</sup> *“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.*

All we know is that ever since the days of Israel’s Babylonian captivity... the Jews have lived under the heel of the Gentile world. ... But... when the

time is right... when all of the elect Gentiles have entered the fold... the gate will close and the partial hardening of Israel will end.

(I should mention)... that when Paul says "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in," he is saying almost exactly what Jesus said when He noted that "Jerusalem" (Israel's celebrated capital) will be "*trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*" (Luke 21:24).

Now that we see Jerusalem (not Tel Aviv) is the internationally recognized capital of Israel (the United States recently moving our embassy there)... the Gentile dominance of Jerusalem that Paul and Christ spoke of... seems to be coming to an end. ... We are so close to all that we are studying (here)!

When the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled "all Israel will be saved" (verse 26).

### **Romans 11:26**

Paul quotes (here) from the last two verses of Isaiah chapter 59. Paul cites (yet another) prophecy about Israel's return to the Lord. But Isaiah's next chapter (Isaiah chapter 60) is something that you REALLY ought to read! It is all about their coming back to life! (I wanted to read it now... but time will not allow.) This coming time for Israel will be glorious! ... At that time... the Hebrew children of Israel will finally receive all of their covenant blessings. They will have their Promised Land — all of it! ... And they will have their King — the perfect righteous King of Kings!

## Romans 11:27-29

The gifts and calling to Israel are irrevocable... just as the gifts and calling to you and I are irrevocable. This is God's never-changing character.

### Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

*<sup>6</sup> 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.*

I don't know if you have noticed... but there has been a sentence that I have (purposely) repeated several times in today's message. It is: "*What is not done in nature, and cannot be effected by the power of man, will be done by God, with whom all things are possible.*"

This truth runs throughout our passage today. ... Because God is God of the impossible and of resurrections... God is also more than adequate for your problems in life right now - whatever they might be.

I have had people tell me that their problems are insolvable. They have been trapped in a sinful sexual relationship (or addiction) that they could not break... or they are trapped in a chemical addiction from which they could not free themselves. ... Or they have explosive anger issues. ... Is that your story?

If it is... let me assure you that it is not impossible for God to solve. If Jesus can raise the stubborn nation of Israel from the dead... He can break your destructive habits. He can free you from any sin... however dreadful it may be... or however long you may have practiced it. ... He can release you to serve Him.

Other people have told me that a relationship that once meant a great deal to them has "died." ... People often speak this way of a marriage that is going through difficult times. ... What do you do when love seems to have departed and affection seems to have failed? ... The world is ready to break off such marriages (of course!)... claiming that they must have been mistakes.

But if this is your situation... I tell you on the authority of the Word of God that you have the hope of a God Who resurrects from the dead... and you can stand against this "easy" escape... and prove by the resurrection of your marriage that God is still the God of miracles.

We are not talking here about human possibilities. ... We are speaking about what God can do (and will do)... if you will ask Him to do it and determine to obey Him (however costly that may be.) ... What is more... if you will do it... you will find that the demonstration of the life-giving power of God in your life... will be used by God to draw others to faith.