

Introduction

The Return of Christ

By Jeff Noblit

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I want you to go to Romans 11. If you're visiting today, the verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter exposition of the word of God is our mainstay here but occasionally I'll take a biblical theme and try to exhaust it and I'm beginning a series on a subject this morning that I have been avoiding for 34 years and the reason for that is because it's challenging, it's difficult. I honestly don't think I have prepared for anything in my ministry where I had as much warfare as I did preparing for this. There are just so many, many, many different views, interpretations, order of events, sequence of events, when you talk about eschatology or the last days or the return of our Lord. I honestly feel like I've been wrestling with a 400 pound Sumo wrestler and he's had me in a headlock on the floor and I think Saturday morning I squeezed out and kind of got a feel for where I'm supposed to go. So actually I took half of another message and made this morning's message.

Romans 11, look at verses 28-36, this is Paul talking to a Gentile church, the Roman church,

"28 From the standpoint of the gospel they," the Jews, "are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. 32 For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all. 33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? 35 Or Who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

This is a unique kind of sermon. I don't often do anything like this but I think it's necessary to get us started on this series called "The Return of Christ." This portion is entitled "Things to Know First." Things to know first and our text that I just read actually makes the foundation for my first point so let's go there. I. Christ returns for his own

great glory. Of course, I'm not negating that Christ returns for his bride, Christ returns for his redeemed sheep, but preeminently, Christ is coming again to complete what he started and the redemption of his people for his own great glory. Let's look at it together again in Romans 11, first of all in verse 28. Paul is writing to this Roman Gentile church and he says, "From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers." So here we have since Israel rejected the gospel, they in effect are enemies. As a matter of fact, they did become the enemies of the gospel but because of their unbelief, God grafted in or opened a door for the non-Jews, us Gentiles, to receive the gospel. So he says, "God was doing some good things here in his sovereignty. Though Israel pushed the gospel away, it opened a door for God to bring the gospel to the Gentiles."

Then he says, "But wait just a minute." Last part of verse 28. So "From the standpoint of the gospel, they are enemies," last part of verse 28, "but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers." Here's what Paul is saying, "Don't be misunderstood here: God still has chosen Israel." That's exactly what he says. You can't make it say anything else.

Now look at the last part of verse 28 and verse 29, he says, "they are beloved for the sake of the fathers," that means the promises and I'll expound on this greatly in a moment, the irrevocable, unconditional promises God made to their fathers starting with Abraham. Then verse 29, "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable," that is, God will not default on his promises to Israel that in the end time he will redeem her as an ethnic group, a nation of people called Israel will turn to Christ and be established on the earth under the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Because the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Because the Jews were probably thinking they rejected the Messiah, they hated the one sent to them first, they are enemies of the gospel. Paul says, "But wait a minute, God's calling is not altered by their present wickedness and unbelief." Talking about the doctrine of election. Talking of the doctrine of predestination. That's the point he's making. God has predestined and elected a people that he has chosen to do something unique and special with and that people is Israel.

Then he amplifies things in verses 30-32 where he simply says, "They were disobedient to God and in that disobedience, you were shown mercy, you Gentiles and you got in on the gospel and the covenant of grace." Verse 31, then he reverses it and says, "So also these who are disobedient, because of the mercy to you, they also may now be shown mercy." So he says, "God's going to turn it all the way back around and cause a jealousy to occur whereas the Jews see that the Gentiles have come to know God through the gospel and then they're going to want to know their Messiah and know forgiveness and know God."

Then verses 33 and 34. "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became his counselor." Here's Paul's statement, "Who would have ever thunk this up but God? Who would have ever dreamed of it? Who could have ever had the wisdom and the power and the beauty to devise such a glorious plan and program but God? A program for the church and a program for Israel?" It just magnifies the greatness of God.

Verse 36, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." So Paul's doxology here right in the middle of the letter, it's like he can't help himself, "From Him, through Him and to Him are all thing. To Him be glory forever." Paul says, "When you contemplate the greatness of God, the wisdom of God in saving the Gentiles but also saving Israel and bringing it all to a culmination when he returns, praise and glory to God forever!" He says, "It's just so awesome."

So the first thing I want you to know and we will repeat this theme over and over is: the return of Christ is primarily for his great glory. Now, aren't you glad you get in on it? But it's to show off the greatness of who our God is and what he can accomplish.

Now, II. Studying the return of Christ does not need to be contentious. It does not need to be contentious. After 34 years of avoiding this topic but doing some degree of study and research and prayer and in the last several weeks, more intentionally, I've come to a position that I think is biblically sound as far as the sequence of events and how God is going to unfold the end times up to the return of Christ. But here is what I am not going to do: I am not going to debate with you. I'm not going to argue with you. We're not going to be ugly about it. Amen? If you have a different view. I'm the preacher here. I get to yell my point of view. You have to listen. But I will say that good men and godly men have differing opinions on how eschatology, the study of the end times, unfolds and we need to love and respect each other and go on and serve the Lord however the years unfold.

First of all under this that it doesn't have to be contentious, let me just say first of all, this is a blessed thing. It's a blessed ministry to our souls studying the return of our Lord. It's a two-sided coin but first of all, it's a blessed ministry to our souls. First of all, because it produces humility or at least it ought to produce humility. Some time during my study break, I don't know what I was reading or thinking but I just became overwhelmed with my insignificance. I came just very aware of how completely unnecessary I am. I don't know, I just did. I guess it was just the Spirit of God and I don't mean that as to put myself down. It's kind of a good place to be. It's good to know that you're not necessary but God might use you in grace but when you think about the infinitely holy God, the one to whom all will bow and the one who has all authority, when you think that he is coming it ought to humble us. Secondly, it ought to humble us that he in his sovereign perfection did not spell it out in the Scriptures so that we can be dogmatic about exactly how it's going to unfold. That's humbling too and when we form our position on how we think the end times are going to unfold from the Scriptures, we need to be humble and admit that there are challenges, there are difficulties and there are other interpretations and we can't be brazenly dogmatic about our position. So it's a humbling thing to study this. It's a blessing to our souls to be humble.

Secondly, it should produce holiness. The Bible says in 1 John 1:3 that focusing on our Lord's coming should produce a holiness, a deeper attitude to be done with things that don't matter, to set aside and take more lightly the things that are not eternal, to enjoy the

common graces God gives us in this life but not to clutch them quite so firmly. It ought to inspire a deeper holiness.

Thirdly, it ought to stir us onto the harvest. Brothers and sisters, in one sense there's one good reason why Jesus hasn't returned: the church isn't complete. There are more souls to be saved. There are more of the lost to be reached and the time is short. Knowing, studying and contemplating on our Lord's return should stir us anew to be about the harvest.

Now, we have a well-ordered and structured ministry here at Grace Life Church. We're convinced it's thoroughly biblical. If you find something that's not biblical, please show us and we'll try to sharpen it and change it to make it more biblical but if you want to get in on the harvest, you need to dive into your small group and be faithful, be accountable, be humble, be teachable, be a worker so that your small group might get in on seeing somebody come to faith in Christ this year. Amen? You may not be a John the Baptist, you may not be the guy or the lady that's supposed to go boldly and confronting somebody with the gospel but you can be a part of the team effort. You can say, "Our Lord is coming and it stirs me to be a part of the harvest." For some of you, you need to commit in your hearts that you know the foundation stone to the harvest is God's local church and it's time for you to take the proper steps to align yourself with a biblically sound, Christ-centered, local church and say, "Count on me. I'm here. I'm a part of the work. Let's go for souls for the glory of God." Give Josh T. a great offering next week so that we can say, "Lord, the men you raised up and sent out from us, we've blessed them and helped them that there might be a harvest up in Pittsburgh at Grace Life Church in Pittsburgh."

Just in the last 2-3 days, I've been reminded of a new partner church or potential partner church from our work in two new church plants that may be happening soon. It's just amazing the things God is letting us get in on and I think we're going to be accountable to this question: did we do a good job? You do understand that everything we're about at Anchored in Truth Missions came to us? You do understand that? Jeff Noblit didn't dream this up. Now, we may have developed our purpose and strategy and we may have been striving but God opened these doors and said, "Okay, you coming through?" We want to be in on this harvest for the glory of God.

Not only humility and holiness and a new desire in the harvest but hope. It produces hope. Hope gives peace of mind. Hope gives security. Hope alleviates anxiety. Do you know why some of you are full of anxiety and worried and downcast and, "What's our world coming to?" I can tell you why: you're watching too much of Fox News and not enough of the word of God. Do you know why I just said that to you? Because on one of my Sunday's off, I went and listened to Brother John S. and that's exactly what he said and I had to sit there in my pew and repent. I love Fox News. I love anything that's not liberal. But I realized there are times I get kind of discouraged and downcast because 24 hours news, well, they've got to think of something to report on. Brothers, we've got the up-to-date news right here. This will give you hope and as we look at the returning of our Lord, may it build and brew and overflow a new joy and hope. It doesn't matter what's

going on in the world, it's precisely on God's timetable. Everything is happening just like it's supposed to. It builds a new hope. In John 14, Jesus came and I'm convinced and I'm going to talk about this later not today but in another week, where he said, "Let not your heart be troubled. If you believe in God, believe also on me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it wasn't so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." I think he's talking about the rapture. I'll share why later, but what was he doing? They were troubled about him going away and he said, "Well, don't worry about it. I'm going to come and get you and we're all going to go away together later." That's what he's saying. Hope, it builds hope.

Also unfortunately, not only does the study of the return of Christ perform a blessed ministry for our souls, it also can produce contentions. I want to just talk about this briefly. Maybe I'll just skim through this but I'm convinced that there gets to be a contentious spirit between believers when they begin to more look at the coming of Christ than looking for the coming of Christ. I mean, sometimes we work out the precise sequence of events, we've got our charts, we've got it all laid out and we can get pretty hard-nosed about, "You've got to fit right into my viewpoint or we've got trouble in fellowship." Sir, that's the wrong attitude. Let me ask you to have the attitude of Wayne K. Wayne K. loved eschatology. Wayne K. studied it, charted it. He had charts galore but he had a sweet and deferring spirit about him. That's the kind we need. Look, have your position. I'm really not concerned about that at Grace Life Church but my messages go a lot of places and a lot of people are either way on an extreme dispensational viewpoint which means God deals with different people at different times in different ways. Some go all the way to say that God has one plan of salvation for the Gentiles in the church age, and a different plan of salvation for the Jews in the tribulation. I categorically absolutely reject that. There is only one way any man anytime is ever saved and that's by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But some get over into extreme dispensational, some more of a covenantal viewpoint that means that God deals with people by making covenants. Some of those brethren can get way over into a viewpoint where everything about God's promise to Israel as a distinct and unique people and having a distinct and unique program from God for them, they kind of explain that all away and say that's all fulfilled in the church, all of those promises are just spiritual and symbolic. We don't want to go there either.

So let's not make this any type of fellowship tester. We were in a staff meeting this week and Brother Tom said that he had heard that there are some things that we have to agree on together or we don't go to heaven together. We've got to agree together that Jesus is the only Savior. We've got to agree together in the substitutionary atonement of Christ. If you don't believe he died for you on the cross, you're not going to get to heaven. So there are some doctrines we must be in agreement on or we can't go to heaven together. There are some doctrines and two people may be generally born-again Christians but they may not go to church together. Perhaps one of those would be baptism. If you sprinkle babies, you probably won't like Grace Life Church. We believe in the baptism of disciples only. I don't have time to go into all the arguments there but there are some things that brothers can disagree on. I have Presbyterians who are precious brothers and

sisters in the Lord. They blew it on baptism. That's okay. We can still love each other. We might not join the same church but we still love each other. Amen?

Then there are some things we can disagree on and we can go to church together and love each other and get along just fine and that's most of the points of eschatology. Now, there are some major things that you ought to believe but most of the points of eschatology, we just can agree to disagree and go on and serve the Lord together and go and win some souls together. But let's in humility show deference one to another, one brother to another, about differing secondary points concerning the end of time and not fall into the prideful position of finding ourselves looking at his coming more than from a heart of joy looking for his coming.

For our purposes, I do not plan to teach on nor even overview all the major points of eschatology or all the major doctrines of eschatology. There are so many of them and then you get to some of the major viewpoints, there are subdivisions under those. I'm not going to do that. I may refer to one or two along the way as I feel necessary. But I do want you know up front that I do believe that the Bible taken in its natural and literal interpretation, teaches a pre-tribulation rapture of the church. I believe it teaches a pre-millennial coming of Christ. I believe it teaches a future redemption and restoration of Israel to God in a glorious thousand year reign on the earth where Israel will reign under Christ and be a blessing to all the earth. I believe it teaches that there is a final revealing at the end of that thousand years and a final resurrection in judgment of the earth and all unsaved persons. Then finally, the establishing of a glorious eternal state. We're going to purpose to unpack each of those as we go along. God willing, next Sunday morning we'll look at the eminent return of Christ. A couple of Sundays later, the permanent return of Christ. We'll unpack these as we get to those.

Now if you would, put our statement of faith up there, Tommy, from the New Hampshire Confession. This is what we voted as a church that we believe about the end times. I think it was about 1830 or so, Baptist and America got together and said, "We need to write out what we believe because some of the brethren are getting way off on stuff." When they came to the last days, I think they did something very wise. They gave the basic premises and precepts without getting into a lot of the fine details of sequences or events and that's where we stand. If you hold to that, we serve the Lord together. We believe that the end of the world is approaching, that at the last day Christ will descend from heaven and raise the dead from the grave to final retribution, that a solemn separation will then take place that the wicked will be judged to endless punishment and the righteous to endless joy and that this judgment will fix forever the final state of men in heaven or hell on principles of righteousness.

So that's where we stand. However, the Bible does say a lot more than that and that's my purpose to unpack for you some of that and we're going to get into a major portion of the foundation stone, something we need to know first before we go any further and that is this: III. God's irrevocable, unconditional promises for a future national Israel. Irrevocable and unconditional promises God has made concerning a future Israel. I believe and Dr. John MacArthur I think has some great work on this if you want to study

further, but I believe that a natural and literal interpretation of the Scriptures leads one to the sure conclusion that God has predestined Israel to a special future. He will restore her spiritually, nationally and geographically and Christ will reign over her in a glorious kingdom. Now, God's program for the church is different than God's program for the nation of Israel. Listen, all are saved by the same gospel. All are saved by the same agency of faith. All are saved by the same Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. However, the church universal and the future redeemed nation of Israel are two distinct entities and God has two separate programs for them. If you don't hold to that, you end up spiritualizing and explaining away scores of clear understood specific promises to Israel. I think that's a dangerous place to be. When you start taking so many specific literal promises and say, "These are now fulfilled in the church. There is no longer a promise to Israel." Then you open the door for liberals to say, "Okay, let's reexplain everything in the Bible that's literal," and then they get to the meaning of the cross and the meaning of Christ's death and the meaning of Christ saying he's equal to God and all those things begin to be explained away as symbolism. I just think it's a dangerous place to stand. However, I want to be fair and I want to be humble. There are some godly and good men who hold that position and I respect them. I just think they're wrong.

Now I myself would not be a strict dispensationalist. I might be more dispensational than covenantal but I'm not a strict dispensationalist. On some things I would probably lean toward the covenantal interpretation but we want to avoid extremes in any view. The Scriptures teach that Israel is God's elect. The Scriptures teach that the church is God's elect. And the Scripture teaches that Jesus is God's elect Savior. Now inconsistency to our rules of interpretation, hermeneutics if you want to use that word, we hold that the clear and personal promises made to Israel will be fulfilled, listen, just as the clear and direct promises to the church will be fulfilled. Isn't it interesting and it happens a lot in the New Testament, you get to Paul, the great champion of the church in salvation by grace through faith and even he keeps pointing out that there are differences here. "You are saved as Gentiles but God has a plan for Israel." Don't you think that by this time in the chronology of progressive revelation that if that was indeed what God was doing, Paul would have just laid it all out and forgotten the whole separation by now? But it still keeps coming up.

Some hold to what we call replacement theology. Replacement theology, again, is where every promise to Israel in the Old Testament is now being replaced by the church, that the church fulfills that promise. Israel is not even an issue anymore. As a side note, there is a lot in history concerning anti-Semitism that comes out of reformers who I believe went too far and so wrote Israel off that they denied the Christ, they betrayed the gospel, they are now replaced by the church and it has bred evil men to come up with a theology where it's justified to persecute the Jews because they are cast off, the church has replaced them. Even Hitler rode that horse and Hitler talked about being a Christian. He talked about providence protecting him and he warped the Scriptures to come up with his gross and vile and violent opposition to all Jews. I just think it's something that thoughtful men ought to look at carefully.

Now let's talk about this mystery the New Testament talks about. You're going to see a lot of verses and you're going to think you're getting a drink out of a fire hydrant, I guess, but I just think we need to see the weight of this position. Luke 21:24, "and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations," that's Israel. Israel is being persecuted, the nations are enslaving them, "and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." So he's saying there has been a program of what God's doing with the Jews and it's separate from what God's doing with the Gentiles. He's doing something through the Gentiles. When that's done, then he's going to turn back and do something with the Jews. I don't know how you can interpret that any other way. It's what the text says.

Romans 11:25, "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery - so that you will not be wise in your own estimation - that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." What was the mystery? Well, the mystery to a Jew was that anybody could get saved other than a Jew. That the Messiah would receive anybody other than a descendent of Abraham. The mystery was that God is going to start saving all kinds of people from all peoples, tongues, tribes and nations and the mystery included that in doing that, God was going to temporarily harden Israel and open a door for the Gentiles to come into faith. You see, the Old Testament didn't spell that out. It was there, but it was there in types and in figures. It wasn't there very clearly so it wasn't unknowable, that's not what he means by mystery, it just hadn't been revealed yet all that God was doing.

Romans 16:25, "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past." Once again, the Jews didn't grasp that God was going to have a season where they would be hardened, the Gentiles would be made available to receive the gospel and then God would turn it back around again as we saw earlier in Romans.

Ephesians 3:9-10, "To bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places." Again, wrapping all of this up, God was going to save for himself a people outside of the Jews but did not eliminate God's promises specifically to the Jews.

Now let's go to the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel. Daniel 12:1, "At that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time." In other words, when this time of horrible tribulation comes, you won't have to wonder, "Is this the tribulation?" It's going to be horrible beyond compare. He said there will be a time of distress that hasn't occurred since there was a nation up to that time, "and at that time your people," when that starts happening, God is doing something, now not directly with the Gentiles though I do accept Gentiles may be saved during that time of tribulation but during that time, God's refocusing on your people. Well, to Daniel who is your people? Jews. Israel. "Your people, everyone who is found written in the book will be rescued." So God says a great, great awful time of tribulation, persecution, trials.

Man, a fourth of the earth's people are going to die and God's going to humble Israel and he's going to rescue a generation of ethnic Jews bringing them to salvation.

In Daniel 12:4 and 12:9, God tells Daniel, "seal these things up," listen, "until the end of time." So when was this going to be fulfilled? In the next couple hundred years in ancient history? No, no, no, this is for the end of time when God will turn again and have a special plan and program for Israel.

Jeremiah 30:3-7, "'For behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.' The LORD says, 'I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers and they shall possess it.' Now these are the words which the LORD spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah: For thus says the LORD, 'I have heard a sound of terror, Of dread, and there is no peace.'" This is an awful time period in history. Verse 6, "Ask now, and see If a male can give birth. Why do I see every man With his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth? And why have all faces turned pale?" What he's saying is, "It's going to be so awful men are going to be so full of anguish and stress and pain they're going to look like a woman who is giving birth." His point is: this isn't your average persecution and captivity like you had with the Egyptians and like you had with the Babylonians and like you had with the Medo-Persians. This is a unique trial that's coming of great severity. Then he says in verse 7, "Alas! for that day is great, There is none like it; And it is the time of Jacob's distress, But he will be saved from it." Once again, some will say all that was already fulfilled in this persecution of the Jews a couple of thousand years ago or in this issue. Folks, the text makes it clear. A literal and natural interpretation tells us that kind of persecution hasn't happened yet. Then he says you'll be saved from it. There is going to be a unique salvation of Israel in and through that time period.

Now, sometimes people say, let's go to Jeremiah 30:17 and 18 first, "'For I will restore you to health,'" talking to Israel, "'And I will heal you of your wounds,' declares the LORD, 'Because they have called you an outcast, saying: "It is Zion; no one cares for her.'"" Is that not true in the world today about Israel? It's coming isn't it? You can see it brewing. Verse 18, "Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob And have compassion on his dwelling places; And the city will be rebuilt on its ruin, And the palace will stand on its rightful place.'" Well, some people say, "Well, that happened back in 1948 when the Jews reestablished themselves in the Promised Land. They got their city back." Yes, but there is something that hasn't happened. Jeremiah 30:22, "You shall be My people, And I will be your God." That hasn't happened. I'm telling you today, Israel may be in the geographical land but they are full of wicked, ungodly unbelief. They are not clinging to God. They're not his people and he's not there God. Not in the sense that they have come to faith in Christ.

That's yet to be fulfilled but God says it's going to happen. Here's my point to you and I'm not done and I'm leaving out a whole bunch: I just don't think you can take all of the promises to Israel and say those are just symbolic. I just don't think you can do that. Zechariah 12:9-10, "And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem." So here God says there is coming a point in time when all the nations

who oppose Israel are going to be destroyed. Notice this, there is a spiritual revival coming in Israel. "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem," now folks, that's very specific. That's not talking about the church. It's the house of David. That's the lineage. That's the Jews. The inhabitants of Jerusalem. What's he going to do? He is going to pour out a "Spirit of grace and of supplication." So what are they going to do? "They will look on Me whom they have pierced," that's Jesus, "and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn." What does this mean? God says there's coming a day when a generation of ethnic Jews are going to en masse be broken over their sins and rejection of Christ and weep, longing to have him as their Lord and Savior. Folks, that hasn't happened yet and I don't think it's symbolic for something else.

Zechariah 14:3-4, "Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives." Where is that? That's in Jerusalem. "Which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south." There is going to be a cataclysmic event that occurs in the earth, literally on the Mount of Olives when the Lord Jesus plants his feet down to rule and to reign with his now redeemed nation, Israel.

Jesus returns and takes his place in the earth. Zechariah 14:9 says, "And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one." So there is coming a terrible and horrible tribulation season. Israel will be humbled and she will suffer but she will not be completely destroyed. All of her persecutors will be destroyed. Israel will be saved and Jesus will reign over her from Jerusalem. Once again, I cannot bring myself to explain away these and many other literal, irrevocable, unconditional promises to Israel that God is going to do. I cannot accept that the church now fulfills all of these. I really believe if I took that kind of hermeneutic, I could explain anything in the Bible away to mean anything I want it to mean. Then again, I don't mean to be demeaning to other brothers and scholars who have different views. I just don't see that. I don't see the church having replaced Israel and receiving all these promises and I'm certainly convinced that all of these promises have not yet taken place. Was Israel chosen and now they are not chosen? Was Israel God's elect and now they are no longer God's elect?

Now let's look at some New Testament passages. We're about done. Romans 11:11-12, we've already looked at some of this but let's look again real quick. Paul says, "I say then, they," the Jews, "they did not stumble so as to fall, did they?" In other words, when they rejected the gospel and they had fallen, is it completely over them? What does Paul say? "May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world," that means the non-Jewish world, "and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!" Here's Paul in the New Testament now saying, "They were hardened. They rejected but God has a fulfillment of coming to God, being saved, for them particularly. How much more will their fulfillment be?"

Romans 11:25-29, "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery - so that you will not be wise in your own estimation - that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." Once again, reading between the lines a little bit but I think it's clear here, Paul is saying to the Romans, "Don't get cocky about this thing. Don't think that ah-ha, we Gentiles who didn't have any of the fathers, the prophets, the Scriptures, we received the Messiah and you Jews are now cast away." Paul says, "Don't do that yet because God is not through yet. Don't be proud. Don't do that." Verse 26, "And so all Israel will be saved." What do you do with that? Let me tell you what that means in the Greek: all Israel will be saved. That's what that means literally in the Greek. "Just as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.'" That is a spiritual transformation he's going to do in their hearts. That certainly hasn't happened yet. Verse 27, "This is my covenant with them," that's Israel, "when I take away their sins." Verse 28 again, "From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." What is his point? God has promised them. He called them as his people. He would do something special with them in the end and that's irrevocable.

Jamison Fossett Brown says in their commentary about these things, "Those who believe that there are no predictions regarding the literal Israel in the Old Testament that goes beyond just their Jewish economy of the Old Testament, are obliged to view these quotations by the apostle as mere adaptations of Old Testament language to express their own predictions." Then they say, "How forced is this?" Now these are eminent scholars who are saying, "Those guys who are doing that are greatly forcing their own presupposition on the text." That's what Jamison Fossett Brown is saying. So they're saying, "When it comes to Israel, this very same love which chose the fathers and rested on the fathers as the parent stem of the nation, will rest on their descendents at large and will yet recover them from unbelief and restate them in the family of God."

Now I believe when you come to the gospels, you have the Lord Jesus teaching in the Olivet Discourse. I believe that is primarily focused on Israel. When you get to Revelation chapters 2 and 3 and what do you have? You have all the emphasis on the church: to the church at Ephesus, to the church at Smyrna, to the church at Pergamum, to the church at Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea. Then all of a sudden that ends and then you get to chapter 4 and in chapter 4 of Revelation, it says "after these things." After what things? After the church has been dealt with. In other words, the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. God has done that work in the Gentiles calling out his church. Then you get to Revelation 5 and 6 and you have the seven seals being broken. One seal after another and great, unbelievable famines, pestilence, war, a fourth of the earth is killed. Terrible things are happening but between the sixth seal and the seventh seal, you have chapter 7 of Revelation and lo and behold, what do we see? As a matter fact, you have no mention of the church in chapter 4 almost to the very end of Revelation. But who do you have mentioned in chapter 7? 144,000 saved of the nation of Israel. 12,000 from each individual tribe and the scholars tell us that while there are times when Israel means the spiritual reality or the saved church, but when God goes so far as to talk about a specific

number of the nation, even naming 12,000 of each tribe, you just can't explain that away spiritually. It means Israel. God will convert them. God will redeem them. God will establish them through that awful tribulation on the earth.

Now in summary, I believe again a natural and literal interpretation of the Scripture teaches that a generation of ethnic Jews will be saved. They are going to be restored to their land. They will be a blessing to the whole world. They will reign under Jesus as justice, righteousness and peace covers the earth for a thousand years. "Pastor, why have you gotten on this so heavy?" Because you've got to get God's program for Israel to get all the unfolding of eschatology. Now once we've got this down, we don't have to deal with it that much anymore, alright? Don't come to me and say, "Well brother Jeff, what about?" I'm going to say, "I don't know. I'm going to eat lunch. Bye." If you want to come to me and say, "Man, I'm grieved over my sin." I'll stay all day long. Amen? But I'm not debating eschatology with you. When you put in 34 years, come see me and we'll talk.

Romans 11:36, back to our original text and I really am done now. Romans 11:36, as the apostle summarizes these great magnanimous truths that were hidden, they were a mystery, now they are being unfolded, Israel would reject the Messiah, reject the gospel, God would harden them and turn his gospel to the Gentiles, the Gentiles would receive the gospel, God would use that to make the Jews jealous, through an awful tribulation season, the Jews as an ethnic nation of people will be saved and turn to the Lord. Paul has been unfolding all of that for us, warning us not to be arrogant, that we as the Gentiles received Jesus when the Jews didn't because he says that later they are going to receive him. The whole nation of them will. Then he ends by saying, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." God in order to glorify his own name, that is to manifest his great power, wisdom and beauty, has chosen Israel and has a glorious future predestined for Israel. God also in order to glorify his own name, that is to make manifest his great power, wisdom and beauty, has chosen the church and has predestined a glorious future for her and his chosen agent to redeem and secure both and to glorify himself through both is his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ and he will receive all the honor, all the glory and all the praise for all these things forever.

That's what you've got to etch down into the bone marrow of your soul. "What is that, Pastor?" That God did it this way to glorify his own name. Do you know why? You wouldn't have done it that way and you couldn't if you wanted to so in the right sense and I don't mean to be trite or trivial, I mean this genuinely, God is going to show off by saving the Gentiles, turning and breaking and humbling and then saving the Jews and Paul said the end of that is going to be for glory to him for every. Glory to him forever.

Well, these are just a few of the things that you need to know first. Lord willing, we'll look at the eminent return of Christ next Sunday.

Let's stand together.