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The Future of the Church (Part 1)



When Shall These Things Be? - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses the future of the Church, presenting both optimistic and pessimistic views regarding the end times. He clarifies the post-millennialist perspective, stating that they aim for the Church to politically and even militarily conquer the world, while the millennialism system itself does not make specific predictions about the Church. Gregg argues that God has great plans for the Church to grow into a mature and glorious body of Christ, with huge conversions among Jews happening before the Second Coming. He draws from the Old and New Testaments to support his claims while emphasizing the importance of repentance and faith in Christians' spiritual growth.

Transcript

In the next two sessions, we want to look at the subject of the future of the Church, and I have given you in the packet of handouts on eschatology a single sheet entitled The Future of the Church. It will take us two sessions to cover the material on this sheet. Actually, I'm being optimistic.

There are seven major points on the sheet. It could easily take seven sessions to cover it. But actually, the reason I say it will take two sessions is because that's all we have, and that's what I intend to use.

I suppose we could extend it to three sessions if necessary, but I hope not. I don't want to drag it out too long. So, the future of the Church.

Now realize that when people talk about eschatology and the end times, there's generally one of two opinions that people can have. One is an optimistic picture of the end times, and the other is a pessimistic picture of the end times. In terms of optimism or pessimism, I suppose everybody is, in a sense, optimistic.

All Christians are optimistic if we think in the end, in the very end, Jesus comes back and makes everything turn out all right, as it has never been since the fall. He will restore order. He will restore righteousness forever, and it will be a wonderful thing.

I guess all Christians are optimistic in terms of what will the final result be, but the

question is what about just before that? What are the last stages of history as we know it, going to be characterized by? And we as Christians, particularly, should be concerned about what about the Church, the body of Christ, that entity with which we identify? What is its future? And that's where we see a difference in terms of optimism or pessimism on two possibilities. There are those who believe that the Church is doomed, that the Church is going to become corrupted. Well, in fact, many of them would say it already is there.

It's corrupted, apostate, and this is its final stage in history. And that when Jesus raptures the Church, it will be a relatively small remnant of those that are really occupying the Church meetings, because the Church will be so infiltrated with evil, so shot through with compromise, so apostate and departed from the truth, that very few of the people in the Church will be part of the true Church, will be true disciples of Jesus, and therefore the Church will be very weak and compromised and apostate in the end times. And Jesus will rapture a very small remnant of true believers out of the Church, and the remainder who are mere professors of Christianity and not the real thing, will simply be here for the tribulation, and as far as that goes, the Church will continue to exist as a compromised institution, but not the true Church.

The true Church will be gone. And therefore, the view of this camp, and that is the dispensational camp, dispensational premillennial, is that the Church is destined to get weaker, the Church is destined to get more compromised and less pure in general. That is what I would call a pessimistic outlook about the Church in the end times.

On the other hand, you have post-millennialists who believe that the Church is going to become not only strong and influential, but actually that the Church will conquer the world through the gospel. I need to make this clear, because some post-millennialists are accused, wrongly, of saying that they want the Church to take over the world politically, or even maybe militarily. But the post-millennialists do not say such things, as far as I know, at least not the ones I'm aware of.

Classic post-millennialism teaches that the gospel will continue to be preached as it is now, by missionaries going to all the world, and by Christians and churches within already evangelized realms, and that the gospel will continue to spread and to gain influence, and there will be more of what we usually call revivals and so forth, where whole communities become evangelized and whole communities become saved. And when this happens, there will be transformation of society, where the post-millennial vision is that eventually almost everybody will be converted, and that we will see in the end times a Church that is dominant, triumphant, almost universal in terms of its membership. The Church will become not a compromised weakened apostate Church, but rather the true gospel will permeate society like leaven in a lump, and will cause the whole of society to rise like a lump of dough by the presence of the leaven in it.

And this victory of the Church is the outlook of the post-millennial vision. Now, amillennialists are not by definition either pessimistic or optimistic. You see, dispensationalists are by definition pessimistic about the Church.

Post-millennialists are by definition optimistic about the Church in the end times. Amillennialists are neither by definition. That is, amillennialism itself as a system does not predict anything particular about the state that the Church will be in in the end times, good or bad.

But of course, individual amillennialists hold their own views about such things, and some are influenced a little more by the dispensational vision, and some are influenced a little more by the post-millennial vision. Therefore, you will find optimistic and pessimistic amillennialists. I myself am more influenced by the post-millennial vision than by the dispensational vision of the end times Church.

And therefore, I would identify myself as an optimistic amillennialist as opposed to a pessimistic one. And this is not just because I have a bent toward optimism. I do not, actually.

I tend to look at the things and expect the worst. But when I look at the scriptures, I am instructed to expect glorious things for the Church of Jesus Christ in the end times. Now, I will say this.

I do not follow the post-millennial vision in terms of seeing a conversion of all people or even necessarily a Christianized society. My optimism extends toward the spiritual purity and state of the Church in the end times, not its political triumphalism. I do not particularly hold the view, although I do not deny it either.

I don't hold it or deny it. I don't particularly foresee in Scripture a time when the Church will rule the world in a sense, I should say Christ will rule the world through the Church's influence. That everyone will essentially become Christian or almost everyone will become Christian and the world will be a Christianized world.

That is not the type of optimism that I think the Bible presents for the Church, although I understand the scriptures that are used to suggest that by those who believe that. But I personally believe that there is a glorious future for the Church and that the Church is destined to become like Christ. And this, ultimately when Jesus comes back, but I believe even before that, that is the direction the Church will be growing.

Rather than seeing the Church evolving into a corrupted, apostate, pitiful excuse for itself, I expect the Church to grow up into, in all things, into Christ who is the head and to resemble Christ. But that does not necessarily translate into a vision of post-millennial splendor in the sense of any kind of political or social recognition that would renovate the whole world necessarily. I just believe that internally, in the body of Christ, God has

great plans for the Church to grow into a mature and glorious Church.

And I want to examine the scriptures together with you about this. Now, the dispensationalists have a negative and pessimistic view of the future of the Church for this reason. They believe that Israel is really God's first love.

God loved Israel first. God was disappointed because Israel did not accept Christ when Jesus came. He came and offered himself as a political king, they believe.

Israel did not accept him in that role, and therefore he withdrew the offer of the kingdom of God, postponed it until his second coming. And just prior to his second coming, it is thought by the dispensationalists, there will be a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Israel. The nation of Israel which rejected Christ at his first coming will, prior to his second coming, begin to have a change of heart so that massive conversions among the Jews will take place.

And this is considered to be part of the whole complex of things God will be doing in Israel in the last days, which includes a returning geographically to their land from all nations to which they have been driven. It includes a rebuilding of their temple, the reestablishment of the temple sacrifices, the escape of the faithful Jews from Jerusalem when the Antichrist sets up his image in the temple there, and basically God pointing out his spirit on the remnant and eventually on all Israel, and one of the key scriptures of this view is Romans 11, 25, all Israel will be saved. Now, therefore, the dispensationalists believe that in God's program in the end times, it is not the church that is the glorious one, it is Israel that has the glorious future.

The church, as I said, has got the opposite future for dispensationalists. The church is going to just get worse and worse and in the end times God is going to rapture out the few who are his remnant and the rest is just going to fall under its own corrupt weight. But Israel, now that's what to be watching.

Many people who teach on eschatology say keep your eyes on Israel. Keep your eyes on Israel because that's where God is working in the last days. Now, you might say, Steve, I know that you don't agree with the dispensationalists on this, but what do you think about Israel in the last days? What do you think about the current gathering of Jews to Israel now and the plans there are to rebuild the temple? Some of which plans are being supported financially by Christian dollars.

There are huge dispensational churches that are sending huge sums of money to Israel toward the project of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. Now, I don't know how you feel about this, but I'll tell you very plainly how I feel about it. I personally believe that the temple in Jerusalem, if it is ever rebuilt, and I do not believe that that is prophesied, but it may be anyway, whether it's prophesied or not, if the temple in Jerusalem is rebuilt, it will be an act of rebellion against Jesus Christ.

You see, when Jesus died, God showed his finishedness with the temple in Jerusalem. He had the veil of the temple torn from top to bottom to show that that system which excluded men from entering into the direct presence of God in the Holy of Holies, that system was over. It was over because Christ has made a new and living way into the Holy of Holies in heaven.

The Jews, however, rejecting Christ, apparently replaced the veil and kept the temple worship going illegitimately without God's approval. Jesus had already said of the temple, your house is left to you desolate, and he left. He said the temple was desolate, the temple was worthless.

He showed his rejection of that system when God tore the veil. The Jews, however, rejected all that Jesus said, rejected God's denunciations of the temple, rejected what Christ did, and put the temple veil back together again and just kept on going business as usual until God said, well, if I got to do it the big time way, I'll do it the big time way. And then he sends the Romans in and they just destroy the temple and leave not one stone standing on another.

And he left it in that condition for now over 1,900 years, almost 2,000 years. If they rebuild the temple, is this not just a continuation of the rebellion against Christ? There is no need for a temple. There is no need for animal sacrifices, and that's what the temple is for, is for animal sacrifices.

Christ is the final sacrifice. If the Jews establish a temple again and begin to offer animal sacrifices again, is this not just a graphic playing out of their continual rejection of Christ as the final sacrifice? They're saying, I don't care about this Messiah Jesus. He's not our Messiah.

We're going to go for the bulls and the goats and the lambs that we kill to cover our sins. This is an act of rebellion against Christ. It's an act of rejection of the gospel, which the Jews, from the time of Christ to this present, continue to reject the gospel.

And it doesn't impress me one bit that there are many devout Hasidic Jews today who kiss the wailing wall and weep over the sins of their people. I'm sure there's many Muslims who bow down seven times to Mecca every day. But if they reject Jesus Christ, they are lost.

And I don't care how many pious things they do according to their rebellious religion against God, and how piously moved they are, and how sentimental they are, and how much they weep over it. It's a very sad thing. Esau wept also over his lost birthright, but he didn't get it back.

Because he despised his birthright, he'd sold it and he did not ever get it back, though he wept and sought it much. The Jews today can get their birthright back in one sense.

They can come to Christ on terms of the new covenant.

They can become Christians just like we did. And they can do so with or without weeping. But weeping over the wailing wall and putting together a temple system again in rebellion against Jesus Christ is not the kind of project that I believe churches should be sending money to support.

We might as well send money to build mosques in Iran, or to build schools of communism in China. Why not? China's communism, or Islam in Iran, or Judaism in Israel, they're all anti-Christian institutions. The astonishing thing is that there's this blind loyalty to Israel on the part of dispensational Christians that blinds them to the fact that Judaism is anti-Christ, just as Islam or communism are anti-Christ.

That's why the Jewish leaders, not just some miscellaneous Jews in the crowd, the Jewish leaders, the high priests, had Jesus crucified and persecuted the Christians, sought to it that James was beheaded, tried to get Peter killed, chased Paul all over the Roman Empire trying to get him killed. This is the Judaism that many Christians are trying to restore. Why? Because they believe that by doing so they will hasten the coming of the Lord.

They believe that there must be a rebuilt temple. They believe there must be a reinstatement of Jewish religion and a restoration of the Jews to their land in the end times so that Jesus can fulfill the prophecies that they think are taught in the Olivet Discourse and Revelation and so forth about the tribulation. If you don't have a temple sacrifice going on, after all, how can the anti-Christ set up his image in the Holy of Holies in the temple? You've got to have a temple for that first.

Now, our previous lectures, of course, indicated that I don't believe there's anything in the Bible that says anything about an anti-Christ setting up an image in any temple. There's no reference to it in the Bible. There are scriptures that are pressed into the service of that scenario, but if you look at the scriptures that are so pressed, you'll find nothing there saying any of these things.

You don't find any reference to an anti-Christ setting up an image of himself in any temple. And yet, because dispensations believe that that's a key part of the unfolding of the final end times scenario, they are encouraged when they hear, oh yes, the Jews are planning to build their temple here. Let's help them out.

Let's speed this up. In fact, there are even Christians who are working at trying to breed a certain strain of cattle. You may have heard about this.

In order to rededicate any temple, according to the Law of Moses, they need to have a particular red heifer. I guess the particular color of red is pretty rare among heifers, but there's someone, they say recently in Israel, or maybe it wasn't in Israel, but it was

somewhere, some cattle breeder had a particular calf born that was red. And they said, oh, the red heifer.

God has done this so that we can rebuild the temple. And see, according to the Law of the dedication of the tabernacle, they had to burn up a red heifer to ashes and put those ashes in water and made it kind of a sprinkling holy water kind of thing for dedication. And they haven't had any red heifers for a long time.

And now they've got a red heifer. And there's a big deal about Christians all over on the internet. Oh, a red heifer has been born.

Oh, great, the temple can be reinstated. Well, okay. When people say, Steve, do you think that the Jews will rebuild their temple? I say, maybe.

I don't know. I don't even care. If they do, I'll have to stand against its validity.

I certainly don't see anything in the Bible that predicts it. And by the way, I've looked at the Bible pretty closely. I used to think it was in there.

Because that's what I was taught. It's only when I began to read the Bible and read it for myself that I couldn't find it in there. And read it again, still couldn't find it.

Now I've read it through a dozen or more times. Since I've changed my mind and I can't find it in there anywhere. It's not in there.

But let me say this. This is the dispensational vision. Israel is the key player in the end times.

God's purposes, God's grace, God's great deliverances are going to come to Israel. The church won't even be in the picture. Church is a hopeless failure.

And Israel's the real love of God. And he's going to deal with them in the end times. And they have a glorious future to come.

We have a glorious future only in heaven, according to dispensationalism. There will be no glory for the church on earth, of the true church. Now, on the other hand, there have been Christians throughout history who believe that there are promises that God has made for the ultimate success of the gospel in reaching the world and that the church that carries the gospel of the world will eventually be a glorious entity.

It is, in fact, the embodiment of the kingdom of God, which is destined to fill the whole earth. And so I want to talk to you about some of these things. Let me first of all define what we mean by the church.

The church is, unfortunately, a term that means something to most people when they hear it, and what it means to them is not necessarily what it means in the Bible. We've

talked on other occasions about what I understand the church to be. This is not in this eschatology series, but in an earlier series.

And the Bible does use the word church more than one way. It does speak of the church as the global body of Christ. It does use the term church to speak of a local sampling of the global body of Christ in a town, the church in Ephesus or the church in Thessalonica or Philippi.

And then it also uses the term church to speak of individual gatherings in people's homes, for example, the church in Priscilla and Aquila's house. And so we have the term used many different ways. I would like to use the term church in the way that the Bible considers it to be the ultimate church, the body of Christ.

This is not an idea that comes up, first of all, in the New Testament. The word church, the Greek word is ekklesia. It literally means the called out ones.

Ekk in Greek is out of, and kaleo is a Greek word that means called. And so the ekklesia are the ones who are called out of. This term was first used in the Old Testament, the Greek Old Testament, of Israel because they were the ones that God had called out of Egypt and they were called out to be his congregation in the wilderness.

And in the Septuagint, which is the Greek version of the Old Testament, the term ekklesia is used frequently of the congregation of Israel. Even in the New Testament, the congregation of Israel that came out of Egypt is at least once referred to as the ekklesia. In Stephen's sermon in Acts chapter 7 and verse 38, Acts 7, 38, Stephen is referring to Moses when he says, this is he who was in the ekklesia in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us.

He's referring to Moses. God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai. And it says that Moses was in the congregation, the New King James says, the King James says church, and the Greek says ekklesia, which is the regular word for church in the New Testament.

Stephen referred to the Jews following Moses in the wilderness as the ekklesia, the called out ones, the church. Now when the New Testament began to refer to the Christian believers as the ekklesia, this was not a coincidental use of the same word. This was a deliberate use of the same word.

Because there was an understanding in the New Testament times, and it's still in the church among some who understand it, and certainly the apostles understood it, and that is that Israel, the nation, never really was in the truest sense the church. There was a sense which every Jewish person who came out of Egypt was an ekklesia. They were called out of Egypt.

But there was a truer sense of being called out. That meant to be called out to be

separate from the world in its spirit, in its manner, in its behavior, and God's laws were given to define the kind of behaviors that the godly church should follow in order to be separate and called out from the world. And in the Old Testament times there was ever only a remnant of Jews who really in spirit as well as in body were called out of Egypt.

You see many people came out of Egypt, but a whole generation fell in the wilderness. Why? Because they were physically out of Egypt, but Egypt was still in their heart. God got them out of Egypt, but God didn't get Egypt out of them.

Even several times they wanted to make a leader to replace Moses to take them back to Egypt. They missed the leeks and the onions and the food and the security or whatever of being slaves in Egypt. Egypt never got out of the heart of some of those people, but there was a remnant even of them that were truly called out.

And their hearts, they were called out in their hearts too. We have Joshua and Caleb and Moses. These three are pretty much the whole remnant.

Spiritually it was a very small remnant, and only Joshua and Caleb really were allowed to enter into the promised land of that generation because the remnant was so small and they were pretty much it. There were others who were faithful to God during that time, but many of them died in the wilderness just because probably of old age or whatever. But as far as those three million people or so who came out of Egypt, only two of them actually came into the promised land.

They were the remnant, the true church. Why do I say that? God said of Caleb repeatedly, he says, Caleb has followed me with all his heart and he is a man of another spirit. And it was a spiritual thing to be part of the remnant, part of the Israel of God that was the remnant.

And so we find again and again the prophets referring to this remnant. If you look at Isaiah, Isaiah is typical of the prophets in one respect, but stands above them all in terms of the magnificence of the visions that he had. In Isaiah chapter 10, here is an important prediction.

Beginning at verse 20 and going through verse 23, Isaiah 10, verses 20 through 23, And it shall come to pass in that day that the remnant of Israel and such as have escaped of the house of Jacob will never again depend on him who defeated them, but will depend on the Lord, the Holy one of Israel in truth. The remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob to the mighty God. For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them will return.

The destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness for the Lord God of hosts will make a determined end in the midst of all the land. Now on the surface, this looks like in the context, a reference to the remnant of the Jews who survived the Assyrian conquest

of the Northern kingdom. If you don't know enough of the history of Israel to make sense of what I just said, let me just put it this way.

Israel in the days after Solomon divided into two kingdoms. The Northern kingdom was called Israel, the Southern kingdom was called Judah. In 722 BC that Northern kingdom of Israel was defeated in war and was conquered by the Assyrians and largely massacred and carried off into captivity.

The Southern kingdom of Judah survived a little longer. It was taken into Babylon in 586 BC. But the Northern kingdom and its defeat by Assyria is what chapter 10 of Isaiah in the earlier portions is about.

We don't have time to look at the verses that prove that, but there's not a scholar in the world who would dispute that. It is a prophecy about the Assyrian judgment, the Assyrians instrumentality in the judgment of Israel, the Northern kingdom. And then it talks about a remnant that will return, those who escaped from the house of Jacob in verse 20.

And one would get the impression this must mean those who survived that horrible Holocaust in 722 BC, those that survived the Assyrian invasion. However, that is not the case. The timing of the fulfillment of Isaiah 10:20 looks beyond that time to a different remnant.

How do I know that? Well, partly by internal information in it and partly by its quotation in the New Testament. Internally we see evidence of it in this statement, verse 21, the remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob to the mighty God. Now, the expression, the mighty God is found one other place and it's in the previous chapter to this.

If you look at Isaiah 9 in verse 6, it says, for unto us a child is born unto us a son is given and the government will be upon his shoulder and his name will be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace. Now, who is that child? There's no question about that. That's Jesus.

He is the mighty God. That's Isaiah 9:6. So, one chapter later, in verse 21 of chapter 10, when Isaiah says the remnant will return to the mighty God, he's already said who the mighty God is. It's this child that is born, the one whose name is wonderful counselor, the mighty God.

He's referring to the remnant of Jews come to Christ. What he has done, and by the way, the prophets do this not infrequently, is to describe a judgment scene that would be not so far in the future and to jump from there to an ultimate deliverance. The prophets did this all the time.

When you say the prophets, you'll find this to be frequently the case. That the prophets will be talking about some short-range judgment or something God's going to do in the

near future, the Babylonian exile, the Assyrian invasion, whatever, and from there we'll just jump to the Messianic age, to the time of the Messiah, to God's ultimate fulfillment of his purposes with his people. And that's what Isaiah has done here.

Although he's going to wipe out the northern kingdom of Israel, which by the way never was restored and never will be, yet there will be a remnant, he says, who will be saved, who will return to God. Now when he says the remnant will return, one might think, oh this means return to the promised land. No, no, they're not returning to the promised land.

They're returning to the mighty God. And who is the mighty God that Isaiah has already identified as Jesus. So look at verse 22, though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them will return.

In other words, only a small number will actually come to the mighty God. Only a small number will turn to Christ. There may be a multitude of Jews in the world, as numerous as the sand of the seashore, but only a small number are going to come to Christ.

Now, I say there's a second reason I know he's talking about this, not only the internal evidence I just mentioned, but also the fact that Paul quotes this verse in the New Testament and applies it to the church age. If you would look over at Romans chapter 9, by the way I cannot take you to all the Old Testament passages that talk about the remnant, but it's a common theme and many promises are made to the remnant that will be saved in the Messianic age. But you can see, for example, in Romans 9, let me, I need to run through this real quickly because people think that Romans 9 through 11 has a lot to do with the nation of Israel in the last days.

Let me clarify what things are happening here. In Romans 9 verses 1 through 5, Paul says that he has great burden on his heart for the loss of his own national brothers, the Jews. Paul is a Jew, of course, as Jesus and the Apostles all were, and he was, he had a great grief in his heart, he said, and great sorrow for his kinsmen according to the flesh who are Israel.

And yet, Paul is mindful that he and his readers will be aware of promises that God made in the Old Testament to Israel. One of those promises is found, please keep your finger, if you would, in Romans 9, but one of those promises is found in Isaiah 45. In Isaiah chapter 45 and verse 17, there's this promise, but Israel shall be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation.

You shall not be ashamed or disgraced forever and ever. Notice, Israel shall be saved, Isaiah promised, by the Lord with an everlasting salvation. So, Israel, it is thought, the nation of Israel should be saved.

And yet, Paul is aware that most Jews in his day were not saved. They were, in fact,

persecuting the saved. They were persecuting the church.

Likewise, if you look at Jeremiah 23 verses 5 and 6, Jeremiah 23 verses 5 and 6, God said, Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will raise to David a branch of righteousness, a king shall reign and prosper and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In his days, Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell safely. Now, this is the name by which he will be called Jehovah Tzadkanu, which means the Lord our righteousness.

Now, notice it says, In his days, Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell safely. So, here is the salvation of Israel, the salvation of Judah predicted. When? In the days of the Messiah.

Now, Paul teaches very clearly that Jesus is the Messiah and Jesus has taken his reign up at the right hand of God, the Father, where he sits and reigns today. So, the question arises, well, why is it that the Jews aren't saved then? If, indeed, God promised that Israel will be saved in the Lord, why is it that the salvation of the Messiah has come and mostly Gentiles are being saved and not Jews? Where is the promise of God to Israel being fulfilled? Now, Paul anticipates this question in Romans 9, and in verse 6 he answers it and begins to answer it, and it takes him three chapters to finish the answer. But he answers it this way in verse 6, But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect.

What word of God? The promises of God about saving Israel. It's not that these words have failed. No, he says, For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.

Now, what's he saying there? They are not all Israel who are of Israel. Let me suggest, and his later discussion proves that this is his meaning, what he is saying is that God has, in fact, made promises to save Israel. But we need to understand how to define the word Israel.

Not all who are of Israel, that is, of the nation of Israel, not all of them are Israel. And if we use Israel in quotation marks, the Israel that Isaiah said would be saved, the Israel that the prophets said would be saved, not all those who are of Israel are Israel, the saved ones. Now, therefore, Paul is saying that he is grieved for the nation of Israel as a whole, because most of them are not saved.

The fact that they are not saved does not mean that God's promises to save Israel have fallen short of fulfillment. But rather, we need to understand that those promises to save Israel, we need to understand what he means by Israel. When he says he is going to save Israel, he means a certain thing, and not all who are of Israel are that thing.

What is that thing? That thing is the remnant. He said he would save the remnant of Israel. And Paul then goes on to point out in the next verses, 7 and following, how that

even Abraham's seed, whether it was one, two, or three generations removed from Abraham, never was it the case that all of Abraham's offspring were saved.

Abraham had eight sons, only Isaac was of the chosen. Isaac had two sons, only Jacob was chosen. And in later generations, Jacob's offspring numbered in the multitudes of millions.

But it was never the case that all of them were saved. What Paul is pointing out is that being physically descended from Abraham or Isaac or even Jacob is not necessarily a guarantee of salvation. It's not a guarantee of being of the Israel that is saved.

Not all who are of Israel are Israel who is to be saved. Then who is Israel who is to be saved? Well, Paul makes this very clear a little later on. He says in verse 27 of the same chapter, Isaiah also cried out concerning Israel, though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved.

Now that's a quotation, of course, you'll recognize it of Isaiah 10.22, which we just read a moment ago. One thing is a little different because in Isaiah 10.22 he said, though the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant shall return. Paul substitutes the word return for be saved.

Why? Because this returning is not geographical, this is returning to the mighty God, this is returning to Christ, the Messiah. And therefore, it's a prophecy of their salvation, not of their returning to Israel. It's a prophecy of them coming to Christ, to the mighty God, as Isaiah said.

So Paul says, hey, look, God never said that all the national Jews, that all the ethnic Jews would be saved. God Himself said only a remnant of them will be saved. Now, Paul did not believe that all Jews will be saved.

Far from it. He believed, as Isaiah had said, that only a remnant of national ethnic Jews will ever be saved. But this doesn't mean God's promises to Israel have failed because that remnant is the Israel.

To whom the promises apply. And they have, in fact, been saved and been being saved for the past 2,000 years. God has been collecting this remnant through the preaching of the gospel for now 2,000 years.

But in Paul's day, he saw a sizable portion of it. Right? In the church in Judea, there were many Jewish people saved. Even in the Gentile churches, there were some Jews who were saved.

There were some Jews who had come to Christ. But it was far from the majority of Jewish people. The majority of Jewish people were not in any sense saved or even interested in being saved through Christ.

Therefore, Paul says, listen, God's word has in fact come true. That Israel will be saved. But you have to realize that the Israel that he's talking about is not everybody who's descended from Israel, but rather a remnant of them.

But that remnant also includes some Gentiles who are added to the group. Therefore, he says in Romans 9.23, that God might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, even those whom he called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. Paul said that the vessels of mercy, the ones who will be saved, are not just Jewish, they're Gentiles too.

So, what do we make of this? Well, what we make of it is this, that in every generation in the Old Testament, there were some Jews who were saved, because they were truly in heart, the called out ones. They had been separated unto the Lord in their heart and in their spirit, like Joshua and Caleb. There were also a multitude of Jews in every generation who were not saved.

I mean, they were technically, visibly a part of the nation of Israel, but they were not in their heart God's people ever. Only a remnant have ever really been saved, and the promises of God have never applied to anyone other than that remnant that were faithful. Never the nation as a whole, but always the remnant.

Now, furthermore, in the Old Testament, there were always some Gentiles saved. There were always a few Gentiles who were part of the group. When the Jews came out of Egypt, it says in the scripture, there was a mixed multitude.

There were some Egyptians with them. Some who decided to throw in their lot with the Jews and their God, rather than with the Egyptians and their impotent gods. It was a mixed racial multitude.

It was mostly Jews, but there were some Gentiles there too. Later on, we have people like Rahab joining the Jewish religion. She was a Canaanite.

You have people like Ruth or Moabitess joining the Jewish religion. In any time, any generation in the Old Testament, you would find the saved people consisted of some Jews and some Gentiles. It was never the majority of the Jews who were saved.

Only a remnant of them were saved. And certainly the majority of the Gentiles were not saved, but only a small number of them. But those who were saved were those who had faith in God, the God of Israel.

And they were a mixed group of Jew, that is the remnant of Israel, and the few Gentiles who happened to believe with them. And this was the case throughout Jewish history in the Old Testament. It is still the case, because when Jesus came, the devout remnant of Israel recognized him as the Messiah and joined themselves to him.

They became from that day on what we call disciples of Jesus, or Christians. But that gathering of Jewish people, the 12 disciples, the 3,000 on the day of Pentecost who were saved, the 5,000 a few days later, the multiplied thousands of Jews who came to Christ in the early days of the church, they were and are, because there are still Jews who come to Christ even now, the remnant of Israel. They were the Ekklesia, the true church.

They are the ones to whom the promises apply. And they were entirely Jewish for a while, but there were some Gentiles who came in. There was an Ethiopian eunuch, there was a house of Cornelius, a Roman, then eventually more and more and more until there were more Gentiles than Jews.

But you see the difference in the Israel of God today, the difference between the remnant of Israel today and the remnant of Israel in the Old Testament is simply this, that the saved congregation in the Old Testament was more Jewish than Gentile. There were more Jews than Gentiles in the saved company in the Old Testament. In the New Testament times, it has come about that there are more Gentiles than Jews.

But this is the same company. It's just a racial shifting. It's just a matter that initially all the incoming part of the remnant were Jewish.

But when the Gentiles started coming in, they came in like a flood and now outnumber the Jews. But to call it a Gentile church, as some do, is a misnomer. There's no such thing as a Gentile church.

In Christ there's no Jew or Gentile. People who were once Gentiles and people who were once Jews become one in Christ with the middle wall of partition broken down that used to be between them. There's no Jew or Gentile in Christ and there's no Jewish church or Gentile church.

There's just the church. But what I want you to understand is that this church is nothing else but the believing remnant of Israel with Gentiles who have also become believers in Israel's God and have become one with them in what is called the body of Christ because there is not a faithful remnant Jew on the planet today who is not a Christian. You can't be faithful to God and reject his son.

The faithful remnant of Israel in the first century accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and their Savior and all Jews who did not were never part of the remnant, never were any promises made to them. And that's been true of every generation since. When a Jew hears of the gospel of Jesus Christ and rejects it, he shows himself to not be part of that remnant, at least not at the moment.

He can change his mind later perhaps if the Holy Spirit moves him, but at that moment he is not part of Israel. He may be part of the nation of Israel, but the Israel to whom the promises are made, no. And what Paul is saying is, listen, the reason most Jews have not

been saved is not because God's promise to save Israel has not come true.

The reason is because when God made that promise to save Israel, he didn't mean all ethnic Israel. He meant a remnant of Israel will be saved. And Paul states it in no uncertain terms there in Romans chapter 9 and verse, he quotes Isaiah there in Romans 9, 27 and 28.

Now further in his discussion in chapter 11, he uses this illustration. He says in Romans 11, 16, for if the first fruit is holy, the lump is also holy, and if the root is holy, so are the branches. Now if there is a tree that has a holy root, then every branch on that tree is holy.

Now this tree we will find that Paul has in mind is an olive tree is the image he is using. Israel was called an olive tree. In Jeremiah 5, 10 and in Jeremiah 11, 16, God referred to Israel as an olive tree.

And Israel there is the remnant of Israel, the faithful remnant that are God's people. Now Paul picks up that image from the Old Testament. The remnant of Israel is an olive tree.

It has faithful roots. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are the roots of that tree. And if the root is holy, then all the branches are holy.

So everyone who is on that tree is part of the Israel of God. Everyone who is part of that tree, every branch on that tree is holy. But Paul makes it clear as he goes on, some natural branches, that is Jews, are not on the tree anymore.

And some Gentiles who weren't originally on the tree are on the tree now. And if the tree represents those connected to the roots of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that means that lots of Jews aren't connected and lots of Gentiles are. Let me read what Paul actually says in his own words, verse 17.

If some of the branches were broken off and you Gentiles being a wild olive tree were grafted in among them and with them became partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, that is the root was holy. And if you Gentiles are grafted on, you participate in the holy calling of that tree. You partake of the root and the fatness of that olive tree.

Do not boast against the branches, meaning the Jews who were cut off. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.

Well said, because of unbelief they were broken off and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear, for if God did not spare the natural branches, the Jews, he may not spare you Gentile branches either. Therefore, consider the goodness and the severity of God on those who fell severely, but towards you goodness, if you continue in his goodness, otherwise you also will be cut off.

And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree, which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into the good olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? Now what Paul is saying is the olive tree is the elect. The olive tree is that which grows out of the root of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to whom the promises were made, and the holiness of that tree depends, or the holiness of any branch depends on being attached to that tree.

What Paul makes clear is that there are many natural Jews who are not attached to that tree. Why? Because of their unbelief. In whom? In Jesus.

Jews who do not believe in Jesus are not attached to that tree. They are not holy. They are not separate from God.

They are not part of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's organism. They have no claim on the promises of God. But who does have that claim? Those who are attached to the tree.

Who is that? Believing Jews and believing Gentiles who have been grafted on. What do we call that? We call that Christians. We call that the church.

Do we not? Is it not the case that if you take believing Jews and believing Gentiles and put them into one organism, is not that organism what we call the church? It is. And that is not speaking of the organized institutional church, the Catholic or Protestant or Eastern Orthodox. What it's talking about is the spiritual organism, the remnant.

You see, Israel was an institution throughout its Old Testament history that only a spiritually defined remnant were the true church in Israel. Likewise, the church so-called since Christ has become an institutionalized monster, but only a spiritually defined remnant within it are the true church. And Paul defines them as those that are attached by faith to this tree.

Those who have the faith are part of it. It doesn't matter if you go to church or if you even have Jewish blood. If you don't have faith, you're not part of the tree.

The tree is a spiritually defined, not institutionally defined organism. It is made up of the true Israel of God, which has both Jew and Gentile elements. Now, Paul makes it clear that some branches, natural branches, have been broken off from belief.

They can be grafted back on if they don't continue in unbelief. He says, if God could graft a Gentile in, how much more can he graft in a Jew who had an original place there? But that grafting on of the Jew is dependent upon something, and that is, in verse 23, if they do not continue in unbelief. That's a big if.

Most Jews live and die in unbelief. Therefore, most Jews are never grafted in. Some Jews, however, do repent of their unbelief.

They do become believers in Christ, and they get grafted into the church. I hope this is very clear to you. It's very clear to me, and I'm trying to make it clear, tediously so, that the Israel of God, as far as Paul is concerned, is that tree, which has its roots in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

That root is holy. All the branches on the tree are holy. But Paul says, not all Jews are branches on that tree.

A lot of Jews are not attached because of unbelief, and a lot of Gentiles have been made attached because of their faith. In other words, the Israel of God is defined by having faith in Jesus Christ. If you have faith in Jesus Christ, it matters not whether you have Jewish blood or Gentile blood, you're on the tree.

You're part of the Israel of God. God has, in fact, fulfilled his promise to save Israel. It just so happens that Israel has a large Gentile contingency attached, by faith, to it.

Now, the next verses in Romans 11 are very important, and often misunderstood. Look at verses 25 and 26. This is the next verses after those we read.

Romans 11, 25, and 26. Now, what are these verses predicting? I was always taught, and most people apparently are, because they quote this as if it means this, that Paul is talking about eschatology here. Many people believe that we should read verses 25 and 26 this way.

I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that hardening temporarily has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, and then all Israel will be saved. Now, I didn't read it the way it's written, but I read it the way I was taught it. The way I was taught it was that there's a temporary blinding of Israel until the Gentiles come in, and then, after the Gentiles have come in, Israel will be saved.

That is, the Jews. So, I was taught that the Jews as a whole were blinded for a temporary period of time. That's what is meant by blinding in part, or hardening in part.

In part means temporary. And he says, until the Gentiles come in, and then there's the rapture of the church, and then after the rapture of the church, all Israel, the Jews, will be saved. Now, I never quite understood how this works together with, only a remnant shall be saved, a few chapters earlier.

And I certainly didn't understand how we tied that in with the 144,000, because I was taught at the same time that the 144,000 Jews in Revelation were a remnant of Israel that were to be saved during the tribulation. And yet, I was also told that all Israel would be saved. I wasn't quite sure what to do about that.

Still don't know what I would have done about that if I had stayed in that system. But,

fortunately, I got delivered by reading the scripture itself, rather than continuing to go forever with what the commentators told me on it. And that is this.

Paul did not say that the hardening of Israel is temporary. He said hardening in part has happened to Israel. That means some of the Jews have been hardened, and some have not.

He's not talking about any reversal of that situation. Many of those Jews that were hardened, they died that way. It was not temporary.

It was permanent. Hardening in part has happened to Israel does not mean temporary hardening. It means, in fact, what he said in verse 7 of the same chapter.

Romans 11, verse 7, he says, What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks, but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were hardened. What does hardening in part mean? It means part of the Jewish population was hardened. The other part wasn't.

The elect. The remnant. The remnant of the Jews have come in, as God said they would.

The other part of Israel were hardened, the ones who were not the remnant. Therefore, when he says hardening in part has happened to Israel, he's not talking about a chronology here. He's not saying this is a temporary situation.

He's just saying that if you look at Israel at any given time, part of them are hardened. Part of them are the remnant. There are Jewish Christians in every age.

But the majority certainly are not Christians, and they are hardened. But what then? They have been hardened until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. Now, does Paul say something else is going to happen after that? Well, I always thought that verse 6 should read, And then all Israel will be saved.

Meaning, after the Gentiles all come in, then the Jews are going to come in. But that's not what Paul says. Paul says, And so all Israel will be saved.

The word so in the Greek means thus, or in this manner. You can look it up if you'd like. All translations either render it so or thus.

And thus, all Israel will be saved. Thus, in this manner? What's that mean? In what manner? Well, what did he say in verse 25? Here's what he said. A portion of Israel was hardened, the other portion was not hardened.

So a portion of Israel has come in, has been saved. The portion that was not hardened. Then there are a number of Gentiles that are coming in to join those Jews who are already there.

There are some branches that are still on the tree, Jewish branches. The others have

been broken up. But now there's some Gentile branches being grafted in among them.

And in this way, God is fulfilling his promise to save Israel. Who is Israel? It's the church, the Jews and the Gentiles who come in. Thus, or in this way, all Israel will be saved.

And in that statement, all Israel will be saved, I find the echo of the exact language of Isaiah 45, 17. Where Isaiah said, Israel will be saved in the Lord. The very kinds of promises that Paul was responding to in chapter 9. Why then hasn't the promise come true? Why has God's word fallen to the ground? What about these promises to Israel? Paul's argument from chapter 9 all the way through 11 is, God's promises have come true.

It's just that Israel isn't what you think Israel is. You think that all people who are of Israel, of the nation of Israel, are Israel. But Paul says, no, they're not all Israel who are of Israel.

Only some Jews belong there. And now some Gentiles have been grafted into the same tree belong there. And in this way, all the true Israel is in fact being saved as God promised Israel would be saved.

But we have to now redefine Israel, Paul's saying. Israel is this tree that has Jewish and Gentile branches. Or as he put it back in chapter 9, Israel is the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he has called, not only of the Jews but also of the Gentiles.

Romans 9, 23 and 24. In other words, the discussion of Romans 9, 10 and 11 is simply this. It's one consistent discussion.

It's not like he's jumping all over the place as some people seem to think he is. It's just one consistent argument sustained all the way through the passage. Yes, there are promises that Israel will be saved.

They're found in the Old Testament. The fact that most Jews are not saved does not give the lie to those promises. Those promises have come true nonetheless.

But they have come true to the Israel that God had in mind, which means the remnant of the Jews who were in fact believers, as well as Gentiles who were believers, who were added in with them. And this new entity made up of believing Jews and believing Gentiles is nothing other than what the remnant of Israel was in the Old Testament. The believing portion of Israel and some believing Gentiles in there too.

The only difference is there are more Gentiles than Jews now than there were back in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament there were more Jews than Gentiles in that group. Now there are more Gentiles than Jews, but it's still the same entity.

There's been throughout history one consistent ecclesia, one consistent church of God, the Israel of God, the one to whom the promises apply. And does Paul believe that the promises of God to Israel belong to the church? You bet he does. Look at 2 Corinthians 1. 2 Corinthians 1, verse 20.

This is just one of many verses we could use. You can simply look at all the times that Paul quotes from the Old Testament and you'll find that he applies the statements about Israel from the Old Testament and he applies them to the church. But this statement is very important because some people say, you know, if you say that the church is Israel today, then what you're doing is stealing promises from Israel and giving them to the church.

Well, who stole what from whom? It's possible that dispensationalists are stealing promises from the church and giving them to Israel. Let's see who's stealing from whom. Look at 2 Corinthians 1. 20.

Paul said, For all the promises of God. A sweeping statement. What promises of God? Where do you find most of the promises of God? Well, you find far more of them in the Old Testament than in the New, but they're all made to Israel.

But notice it says, For all the promises of God in Christ are yes, and in Him, amen, to the glory of God through us. That is, through us, the church. That God's promises are yes, and amen, to the glory of God in us.

That is, they are confirmed, they are affirmed in us, the church. Why? Because we are, as Paul said in Galatians chapter 3, in verse 29, somewhere like that, If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and you are the heirs according to the promise. That's Galatians 3.29. If you belong to Christ, you're there.

You're in that tree. You're part of the true Israel. And anyone who takes the promises of God away from the church and gives them back to national Israel, including those branches that are broken off the tree, who don't believe in Christ, that person is certainly of a different religious conviction on this subject than Paul, or Jesus, or anyone in the New Testament.

The New Testament writers consistently applied the remnant of Israel promises to the church. Let me show you something on this, if I could. In Isaiah 11, we looked at Isaiah 10.

Let me show you a scripture about the remnant in Isaiah 11. You see, the dispensationist believes a lot of these remnant promises in the Old Testament will be fulfilled in the millennium. Paul believed they were fulfilled in the church.

The dispensationist thinks they'll be fulfilled in the millennium to the nation of Israel. Paul believed they were fulfilled now to the church, which is the new Israel. In Isaiah 11,

verse 10 and 11, it says, And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, a reference to Christ, who shall stand as a banner to the people, for the Gentiles shall seek him, and his resting place shall be glorious.

It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people who are left, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elim, from Shinar, from Hamath, from the islands of the sea. He'll set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. Admittedly, this looks like a geographical gathering, but this is the language... By the way, so did chapter 10 and verse 22 look like a geographical gathering, or actually verse 21, The remnant will return.

But Paul quoted that verse as saying, The remnant shall be saved. This remnant is moving, but they're moving spiritually. The language of the prophecy sounds like geographical movement, but they are moving spiritually.

After all, Jesus is not literally a root. He's not literally a banner either. This is figurative.

It's like God sets up a banner, and the remnant of Israel and Gentiles come flowing to rally under that banner. Who is the banner? The banner is Christ. Now, how do I know the time of the fulfillment of this? Is this the millennium and the end times, or is this the church age? Well, let's let Paul answer that, since he's an inspired apostle, and knows better than Bible teachers today would, unless they listen to him, then they might know as much as he does.

In Romans 15, 12, well, let's look at the verses before this included. Romans 15, verse 8 through 12. Paul says, Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision, that's the Jews, for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy as it is written.

And now he quotes several scriptures, one from Psalm 18, one from Deuteronomy 32, another one from Psalm 117, and in verse 12 he quotes Isaiah. He says, Now that's the quote from Isaiah 11, 10 that we just looked at. In that context, the remnant of Israel is gathered to a banner, and the Gentiles are gathered to this banner also.

And Paul applies it to the Gentiles coming to Christ. Christ has come to confirm the promises, and to bring the Gentiles into those promises, even as the prophets said, and he quotes twice from the Psalms, once from Deuteronomy, and once from Isaiah to prove the point. What point? That the Gentiles were predicted to have a part in this salvation with the remnant, unto the Messiah.

And Paul is saying, it's happening. Paul applied this scripture to now, not to some later date, not to a millennium in the future. He's applying it to the subject of the church.

And you'll find this again and again, no matter where you look, you'll find the promises that God made to Israel, when they are quoted in the New Testament, they're always applied to the church, and that is done not infrequently, but often. Now, let me, in the last few minutes we have of this session, move down to the third point on the notes I've given you, the destiny of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God today is identified with the church.

Now, again, in saying that, I am saying something that is not agreeable at all with what dispensationalists teach. But let me just be more concerned about agreeing with the scripture than with what dispensationalists teach. Look with me, if you would, at Exodus chapter 19.

When God brought the Israelites to Sinai, in Exodus 19, He made this promise to them. In verses 5 and 6. He said, Now 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, 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.

Now, Moses was giving this message to the Jews. If you will obey my voice, God says, if you will keep my covenant. Now, that's a big if.

Does anyone know whether Israel at that point obeyed God's voice or kept His covenant? Anyone ever read the Old Testament story at all? Did the Jews keep His covenant? How about a few days later when they made a golden calf? That was a breach of covenant. It's like committing adultery against your husband. And they did this perennially through their history.

The whole book of Judges. The whole books of Kings. Their sad, grotesque testimony to the abundant spiritual adultery and breach of covenant that the Jews throughout their history committed again and again and again and again and again against God.

But he said, if you keep my covenant, which they did not, then you will be a special treasure to me above all people, for all the earth is mine, and you shall be a kingdom of priests. You should make note of this. Exodus 19 and verse 6 is the first place in the Bible to mention God having a kingdom.

Anyone who wants to study the important issue which is so prominent in the Gospels and in the New Testament of the kingdom of God should make note that the first reference in the Bible to God's kingdom is here. Prior to this, there's no suggestion in the Bible that God would have a kingdom. Now, when he mentioned His kingdom, he said it would be a kingdom of priests.

He also said that Israel, if they were obedient, would be that kingdom. Now, it's important for you to recognize how the word kingdom is used in Scripture. We might use

the word kingdom a variety of ways, including geographically.

Of a place. Some people use the word kingdom of a time. They think that the millennium in the future is the kingdom of God.

Some people just think of a certain place. Israel is the kingdom of God. But actually, God used this term not of a place.

He did not use it of a time period. He used it of a people. The people who keep covenant with Him, the people who obey Him, are His kingdom.

The word kingdom actually refers to the domain of a king. And a domain of a king is made up of people. Subjects.

What God was promising Israel is that if they would be a subject nation to Him, a faithful nation to the covenant, then they would have the privilege, above all nations, of being His kingdom. Now, you read the later Old Testament history and you find that they did not remain faithful. What's worse, they actually rejected His kingdom outright.

In 1 Samuel 8, we find in the days of Samuel that the elders of Israel came and outright rejected the kingdom of God. They rejected God as their king. In 1 Samuel 8, it says in verse 4, Then the elders of Israel came together and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, Look, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways.

Now make for us a king to judge us like all the nations have. But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, Give us a king to judge us. So Samuel prayed to the Lord.

And the Lord said to Samuel, Heed the voice of the people and all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. Now, they were a unique nation, a peculiar people, in that they were the only nation that had no earthly king. They didn't need one.

They had God as their king. They were the kingdom of God. They were not the kingdom of Og or some other king that was present at the time on the earth.

They were the kingdom of God. But they came to Samuel and said, We don't want this anymore. We want to have a normal king like everybody else.

We want to be like all the nations. And in this they were rejecting the status that God had called them to be a peculiar nation, unlike other nations. But they said, No, we want to have a king like all nations.

Samuel recognized this was a defection from God. And God said, Yeah, don't feel personal about it, Samuel. It's not you, it's me they're rejecting.

That I will not reign over them. In other words, the Jews not only broke covenant with

God, they outright rejected his kingship. Now, God did give them kings, but he also gave them prophets.

And those prophets predicted that a time would come when the kingdom of God would be restored again to Israel, to God's people. And this would be restored in a person, a Messiah that God would send, a king. He was likened many times to David in that he was like a shepherd, as David was like a shepherd, and yet a ruler.

He would be a conqueror. He would conquer the enemies of God's people and deliver them and be their savior and be their master and their lord and their shepherd. All these promises are scattered throughout the Old Testament about the Messiah who would come.

And when he would come, then the kingdom of God would be restored to God's people, Israel. And so, when John the Baptist appeared, even before Jesus publicly appeared, John the Baptist began to preach the kingdom of God is at hand. And when John was put in prison, according to Mark 1, 15, Jesus began preaching the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.

The Jews knew what he meant, or they thought they did anyway. The prophets had predicted that God would make Israel his kingdom again someday through the Messiah. Why? Because through the Messiah, a new king who was God would appear.

And those who submitted to the Messiah would be the subjects of God's kingdom because they'd be the subjects of God's king. And therefore, Jesus came to Israel saying the kingdom of God is at hand. He told parables of the kingdom.

He sent out the disciples two by two, first 12 and later 70, told them go to all the villages and say the kingdom of God is near. And so again and again, the announcement was made in the life of Jesus that the kingdom of God, the fulfillment of the promises of the prophets was near. And then Jesus told, near the end of his ministry, the parable of the vineyard.

This is in Matthew 21. And he told how that God was like a man who owned a vineyard, which was Israel. And he had sent people over it, which were the leaders of Israel.

And they were supposed to produce fruit for God. In Isaiah chapter 5 and verse 7, the fruit that God was looking for from his vineyard was righteousness and justice. If you read Isaiah chapter 5 verses 1 through 7 sometime, you'll find there Israel is said to be God's vineyard.

And the fruit from his vineyard he looked for was justice and righteousness. Well, in this parable of Jesus in Matthew 21, which begins at verse 33 and goes on pretty much to the end of the chapter, Jesus said that when the leaders of Israel, the tenants of the vineyard, were confronted by the owner's servants, the prophets, that they should

produce the fruit, justice and righteousness, that these servants were badly treated. And he says, so he sent more servants, and they badly treated them too.

He's referring to Israel's Old Testament history, how that God sent prophets to call Israel back to himself, to be a fruit-producing people, to produce justice and righteousness, the fruit of the kingdom, actually. But they killed their prophets and rejected them and cast them out. And then we have this extremely important line, and that is in verse 37, then last of all, very important statement, after all the prophets had been sent to Israel and rejected, it says, but last of all, He sent His Son to them.

What does that mean? Well, it's obvious that we're talking about Jesus, but what more does that mean? Does it mean any more chances will be given to Israel after this? How many do they need? For over a thousand years, God sends prophets, giving chance after chance after chance, and they kill all the prophets. Last chance! Last of all, He sends the nation of Israel, the most important messenger of all, His own Son. He says, last of all, He sent His Son to them, saying, they will respect my Son, certainly.

But when the vinedressers saw the Son, they said among themselves, this is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance. They caught him, cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

As far as the fulfillment of that, there's hardly any other question about what he's talking about there. The Jews saw the last messenger God was sending them. He sent them scores of them in the form of the prophets in the Old Testament, but now, their last chance.

The nation has one chance more to get it right. And this is it. Here comes Jesus.

The owner sends His Son. They don't receive Him either. They kill Him, too.

He's out. They're out. That's their third strike.

They are definitely out. And so Jesus asked the listeners this question in verse 40, Therefore, when the owner of that vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers? What's he going to do to Israel? They, who were listening, who were not disciples, but the Pharisees themselves, they said to Him, He will destroy those wicked men miserably and lease His vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to Him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus said to them, Did you never read the Scriptures? The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This was the Lord's doing, and it's marvelous in our eyes. Look at verse 43. Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.

Now, they themselves had pronounced their own judgment. Since the Jewish leadership

killed the Messiah, Jesus said, What should the owner of the vineyard do to those guys? What would you do if you were Him? He said, Well, they should utterly destroy those guys. They didn't realize they were pronouncing their own death sentence.

He'll utterly, miserably destroy those wretched men and lease the vineyard out to someone else. And Jesus said, That's the right sentence. And that's what's going to happen.

In 70 A.D. He came, and He destroyed those miserable sinners who crucified His Son. And what did He do? He leased it out to others. Who are they? This is what some people call replacement theology.

Good reason. The vineyard has been taken from one group, one nation, and given to another nation. Now, some people say, Well, He just means that the kingdom was not taken from the nation of Israel per se, but from the leadership of Israel.

But no, He didn't say that. He didn't say, The kingdom will be taken from you and given to other leaders. He said, The kingdom will be taken from you and given to another nation.

The nation of Israel in Exodus 19, 6 was told that they could be the kingdom of God if they would be obedient. They never, ever, ever, ever were. And in His almost infinite patience, God waited 1,400 years to see if they'd ever get it right.

Finally, and I emphasize finally, sending His Son to them, and they killed Him too. Now, not every Jew did that, and the Jews who were faithful followed Jesus and became part of His church. But the Jews who rejected Him were judged.

And guess what? As Jesus said in verse 43, that vineyard was given to someone else, another nation. The kingdom of God is taken away from you, Israel, and given to another nation who will bring forth the fruits of it. In the New Testament, who is it that brings forth the fruits of justice and righteousness? Well, look at Romans chapter 14 and verse 17.

In Romans 14 and verse 17, Paul said, The kingdom of God, that's what we're talking about, the kingdom of God, is not food and drink. It has nothing to do with the Jewish dietary laws. What is it then? But it is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Here's the fruits of the kingdom. Righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Who brings forth that fruit? Well, those who have the Holy Spirit, of course.

It's the fruit of the Spirit. This fruit comes from the Holy Spirit. And those who have the Holy Spirit are what we call today the church.

And who bring forth the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The kingdom was taken from Israel and

given to a nation that would bring forth the fruit of it. What is the fruit of it? Righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

This fruit is produced by the church. Now, someone might object to the fact that the church is not a nation, is it? No, not a political nation. But look over at 1 Peter chapter 2. 1 Peter chapter 2, verses 9 and 10.

Peter is certainly writing to the church. And he says, But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. The church is a holy nation.

His own special people that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light who once were not a people. That is, the Gentiles were not God's people at one time, but they are now. But are now the people of God who had not obtained mercy, that is in Old Testament times, as a people, but now have obtained mercy.

God has extended His mercy to a new people. Formerly not His people. Largely Gentiles.

But the point that Peter is making is that the church is now all those things that the Old Testament said Israel was. A chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. If Jesus has taken the kingdom from one nation and given it to another nation, there is no question as to which nation it was taken from and which nation it was given to.

Now, it's not so much that God has rejected Israel. It's just that He rejected the apostate Israel. The remnant of Israel is still part of His kingdom.

When the king arrived, the remnant of Israel followed him and remained faithful to him. But He made a new covenant with them in the upper room. When they drank the cup with Him, He said, This cup is the new covenant in My blood.

It replaced the old covenant. There is no longer any covenant status between the nation of Israel and God. A new covenant has superseded it.

This is made as clear as day in Hebrews chapter 8 where the writer of Hebrews points out that a new covenant has come and he points out the ramifications of that fact with reference to the old covenant. In Hebrews chapter 8, he quotes Jeremiah 31. In Hebrews 8, verse 8, he says, But finding fault with them, meaning the trappings of the old covenant, he says, and there's a lengthy quote here from Jeremiah 31, Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

And we know that this was made with the remnant of Israel in the upper room. Jesus said so. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them at the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, the Sinaitic covenant, because they did not continue in my covenant and I disregarded them, says the Lord.

God rejected them because they did not keep covenant with Him. For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their mind, I will write them in their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be my people.

None of them shall teach his neighbor and none of his brothers say, Know the Lord. For all shall know me, that is all those who are in Christ in the new covenant, know Jesus. They don't need a priesthood to tell them who God is.

They have personal relationship with God in the new covenant. From the least of them even to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.

Now, the writer of Hebrews in verse 13 makes this comment. In that he says a new covenant, quoting Jeremiah, Jeremiah used the term new covenant, in that he says a new covenant, he has made the first one obsolete. What's the first one? The one at Mount Sinai.

Now this is Bible. The Bible says that when God made a new covenant he rendered the old covenant obsolete. And the writer of Hebrews says, Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

And he is referring of course to the fact that very shortly after this letter is written the temple was destroyed and all the trappings of the old covenant vanished. The covenant was over. It was obsolete already when he wrote this but it had not fully vanished away as it would from the temple and all its trappings were destroyed.

What do we read here? We read that Israel was given a covenant with God. If they had kept that covenant they could be his kingdom. They did not, so he disregarded them.

It says in Hebrews 8 and 9. He made a new covenant with the remnant of them who were faithful, that is the disciples in the upper room with whom Jesus said, This cup is the new covenant in my blood. The remnant got saved. Later, more Jews were added to that remnant through the evangelism of the Jews through the apostles.

Later on Gentiles came in too. What do we call all this? We call this the church. The new covenant is made with Israel the church.

The remnant of Israel plus the Gentiles who have been grafted in among them. Therefore, the kingdom of God once belonging to Israel has now been given to another entity. The kingdom of God is taken from you, Jesus said, and given to a nation that will bring forth the fruits of it.

Now, there is a prediction about the church. It will bring forth the fruits. Very important to note that.

Now, remember the church is not to be defined institutionally. We're going to have to wrap this up and we'll have another session on it later. The church, when I'm using the term and the way I'm using it here is more the way that Paul spoke of the tree with the branches on it.

The believers are on the tree. The unbelievers are not on the tree. The tree is a living organism and it shares the life with all branches attached to it.

Put another way, Jesus put it this way in the 15th chapter of John, I am the true vine. My father is the husband, and he said later, I am the vine and you are the branches. Using the same idea, the life of Jesus is in every true Christian.

The body of Christ, the true church, is made up of the branches who are really attached to Jesus. He says in John 15, verse 4, Abide in me and I in you, as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine.

You are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit. The kingdom has now been given to those who will bring forth the fruits of it.

How is that done? Those who abide in Jesus. Who are they? Christians. The church.

You abide in me, you bear much fruit. Without me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered, and they gather them and throw them into the fire and they are burned.

Now, Jesus is using an image very much like that which Paul used in Romans 11. Both talk about a living organism. That living organism is holy.

That living organism is elect. That living organism is saved. And that living organism has branches.

Jesus uses the image of a vine and its branches. Paul uses the image of an olive tree and its branches. But the imagery is the same.

If you are attached, you are saved. You are in. You are fruitful.

You are in the kingdom. You are in Israel. If you are unattached, you are lost.

You are burned. You are going to be burned up. Gathered up and burned.

And the imagery is the same. But the idea here is this. The theme of the Israel of God, the kingdom of God, the true Israel that is the true kingdom of God is made up of the people who are abiding in Jesus.

Now, common sense would tell you if you just look at what we call the church today, the

organized church, that in every organized church there are some people who truly abide in Christ. But in every church there are also many who haven't even started to abide in Christ, have not even become Christians. Therefore, we cannot, when we talk about the destiny of the church, we cannot equate it with an organization.

The Catholic, the Protestant, the Baptist, the Mennonite, the Assemblies of God. It's not that. The church is not made up of a building or an organization or a denomination or a structured institution.

The church is made up of branches attached by faith to the vine, bringing forth fruit. These branches might be in an organized church or they might not be. There's nothing about this description of the church that requires particular kind of organization.

It is a living dynamic that makes them part of the real church. The real church is made up of those who have the spirit of Christ and who are attached to him by faith and remain attached to him and bring forth the fruit of the kingdom. This is the kingdom of God.

It is to be identified with the true church, the true remnant of Israel. And I want to, when we come back to this subject, talk about what the Bible actually says is the destiny of the kingdom of God. And then I want to look at some of the other images frequently used in Scripture that tell us about the future of the body of Christ.

But one thing we know just from what we've seen so far, the body of Christ, the church, is going to bring forth the fruit of justice and righteousness. That is guaranteed. Jesus said the kingdom of God is taken from you and is given to a nation that will bring forth its fruit.

Therefore, true Christians will be the ones used of God because of their attachment to Christ, divine, who will bring forth the fruit of righteousness and justice in the earth. That is guaranteed. That is promised.

That is part of our destiny. But there's more, far more, and some of it's fairly exciting. So we'll stop there and finish up this topic next time.