

Chapter 8

Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.

For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

Commentary

{1} - Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens;

This is admittedly an odd chapter division. It begins with a summary statement based on the tenets that have already been spelled out. Chapter 7 declared the superior priesthood of Christ based on a superior lineage, which was without beginning or end. The priesthood of Christ was begun by Christ and fulfilled by Christ. He is both the “author and finisher” of His own spiritual dominion.

We, on the other hand, were in a miserable state, fallen into sin, and in desperate need of a High Priest who could truly redeem us. The law was weak and incapable of delivering the one thing we genuinely needed – perfection. But, the perfect priesthood, with the perfect sacrifice could wholly and completely purchase the eternal salvation of all those for whom the sacrifice was offered.

Christ’s resurrection guaranteed not only God’s acceptance of the perfect sacrifice, but our eternal security. Our high priest remains, ever constant and consistent, ever living to make intercession for us. And, that’s exactly what was required for sinners as desperate as we. “For such a high priest became us...” (Heb. 7:26)

Chapter 8 begins with the ecstatic declaration, “We have such a high priest!” He is presently sitting at the Father’s right hand, the place of dominion and favor. He is enthroned in majesty, dwelling in the light that no man can approach. And, lest we forget, this Creator, this Judge, this Resurrected Priest, the perfect Lamb, this eternal Atonement, is our Elder Brother who defends us in the high court of God’s righteousness. Our Advocate is also our Priest, who is also our Groom, who is also our Brother.

{2} - A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.

Continuing the contrast between the Old Covenant priests of Aaron, and the superior priesthood of Christ, the author turned his attention to the tabernacle in the wilderness. God instructed Moses to build a “tent of meeting,” where the priests could bring the yearly atonement sacrifice and meet with the “*shekinah*”

glory of God. Every detail of the tent was meticulously spelled out at Mt. Sinai. Moses was specifically instructed to build the tabernacle according to God's blueprint.

The "holy of holies", the most sacred place on planet earth, stood in the midst of that "tent of meeting." The place where God descended and met with the high priest, year after year, was in that tent. And, every time God moved the children of Israel they would pack up the tent and its furniture, according to every detail spelled out by God, and then they would pitch it again when God settled them.

But, the superior High Priest did not go to the "tabernacle in the wilderness" to make His atonement. He did not even go into Herod's temple to pour out the Lamb's blood before God. No, the author said that Christ's sacrifice was poured out before God in Heaven, itself. The earthly tabernacle, which the Hebrews held in such high esteem, was merely a foreshadow, a type, a symbol of the true place of Heavenly worship. And, only Christ, the true and final High Priest, was ever called to serve there.

The Heavenly sanctuary was built by God – only God could construct a dwelling place for God, only God could erect a temple sufficient for God – not built by men.

{3} – For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices:
wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer.

One of the primary functions of the priesthood was to bring the sacrifices, gifts and offerings of the people before God. Since the people were not allowed to enter the tabernacle, they needed a representative to take their offerings and sacrifices before God on their behalf. That was an ordinance of God.

Likewise Christ, in order to fulfill every aspect of the eternal priesthood, also needed to take a gift, an offering, a sacrifice, before God on behalf of His people. That gift was the sacrifice of Himself. Just as the priests of Aaron would pour the blood of the atonement offering on the "mercy seat", called the "*kapporet*," or "covering," which covered the ark of the covenant, Christ entered the holiest place of Heaven, pouring out His own blood to cover our sins and establish the New Covenant of grace and mercy.

{4} – For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that
there are priests that offer gifts according to the law:

This is an interesting piece of logic. The author argued that if Christ were merely an earthly priest there would be no real need of Him. The Aaronic priesthood was following the prescribed mandates of the Sinaitic Law. There was no need

for someone from another lineage to rise up and take over their duties. The children of Israel had all the priests they needed to keep that system going.

Hence, the only reason for a change of priesthood had to be because of a change in the law, itself. There had to be some higher principle, which the earthly priests were incapable of fulfilling, to mandate a new priesthood.

And, that is exactly the corner that the author is going to paint his audience into. He is going to argue that the old covenant is utterly done away with in favor of the newer, higher, better priesthood with its better gifts and perfect atoning work.

{5} – Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.

The priests and the tabernacle served as simply “types and shadows,” they were not the substance. The hundreds of years of Aaronic priests and the thousands of slain animals all pointed to one central event – the coming death of Messiah. And, because they were tools by which God would instruct His people, the details all counted for something. That’s why God was so emphatic with Moses that every minor facet of the building instructions had to be followed to the letter. The pattern was laid out in order that a model of Heavenly things could be erected in miniature on planet Earth.

The priests, the tent, the ark, the mercy seat, all the supporting furniture and every systematic process the residents followed day in and day out were all meant to teach the central truth that God would one day reconcile men back to Himself.

{6} – But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

The next proof the author offered up as to Christ’s superiority over the Aaronic priests was the fact that He oversees a better agreement between God and the people He shepherds. And, that agreement is based on infinitely better, long-standing promises. The priests of Aaron had conditional promises as the basis of their acceptance before the Lord, but even the slightest variation could result in death. The “better” covenant is without condition because it is based on the finished work of the One who sat down at His Father’s right hand.

The recipients of the Sinai covenant quaked in fear as the voice of God commanded their obedience. The recipients of the “better” covenant “come

boldly to the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16), beckoned by the loving voice of the Captain of their souls.

The Old Covenant said, "Do it and live. Fail and die."

The Better Covenant says, "Live! It's all done!"

The Old Covenant contained promises from God to people who could not live up to their end of the deal. The "better" covenant is based on promises God made to His Son - a people, an inheritance, and a bride.

That is truly a ministry that "excels."

{7} – For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

Some commentators have misrepresented this verse to imply God found fault with the first covenant, itself, so He deemed it necessary to create a second one. But that's not where the fault lay. The law was righteous, holy, and just. The fault was with the people who were placed under its jurisdiction. They failed to keep the law and fell under its curse. The central weakness of the law was that it was incapable of bending down to help fallen sinners. It could only judge and condemn, never forgive and heal.

Now God would have been completely justified if He had abandoned the Israelites for their failure and rebellion. God could very well have cut them off completely and held them accountable for their sin. He would have been nothing less than righteous in so doing. They were at fault, and they deserved to be judged.

But that is not what God did! Instead, He instituted a second agreement! Despite their sin, despite their rebellion, despite their utter failure, He - determined to save them from themselves and make them trophies of His grace - instituted a newer, better covenant.

The House of Israel and the House of Judah

In verse 8 we're going to run into two very specific terms - "House of Israel" and "House of Judah." These are terms that carry a vital historic significance. The misunderstanding or misappropriation of these terms has led to all sorts of eschatological confusion and (to borrow Fred Zaspel's term) "exegetical chaos."

In my comments on Chapter 7:14-19, I laid out a brief history of Abraham's descendants. For clarity's sake - and, at the risk of being redundant - I am going

to repeat bits of that history with a new emphasis on the significance of the two "houses."

The sons of Jacob, renamed Israel, were the progenitors of the twelve tribes. In Genesis 49, Jacob assigned blessings and cursing to each of his sons, saying, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days." (Gen. 49:1) So, his declarations had a prophetic character.

However, just prior to meeting with all twelve of the boys, Jacob had a private counsel with his favorite son, Joseph, and the two grandkids, Ephraim and Manasseh. These boys were born to Joseph and his Egyptian wife. Jacob could barely see and when the boys were brought in to him he hugged and kissed them. Knowing his dad was about to bestow blessings on the boys, Joseph made sure his eldest son, Manasseh, was at his father's right hand. But Jacob deftly switched his hands and put his right hand on Ephraim's head. He began the blessing,

"God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." (Gen. 48:15-16)

At that point Joseph realized the wrong boy was about to receive the birthright and he grabbed Jacob's hand, directing it to Manasseh. He contended,

"Not so, my father; for this is the first born; put thy right hand upon his head." (Gen. 48:18b)

But, his father refused, and countered,

"I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations." (Gen. 48:19)

So, the blessing continued,

"And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh; and he set Ephraim before Manasseh." (Gen. 48:20)

Then, when it came time to hand out blessings to the 12, Jacob cursed his eldest son, Reuben, who had slept with his father's concubine (Gen. 49:4). The next two, Simeon and Levi, were similarly passed over because "instruments of cruelty are in their habitations" (Gen. 49:5).

It was the fourth son, Judah, who received the first blessing. It was the Messianic blessing –

“Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” (Gen. 49:8-10)

The next boys in line - Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, and Naphtali - were each given specific descriptions, but no real blessings. But, the second youngest, Joseph received a very special blessing - the birthright promise handed down from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob –

“Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel): Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.” (Gen. 39:22-26)

Okay, now we are into the meat of this thing. Far too many Bible historians and theologians have missed this central fact in tracing the progress of the Abrahamic promise. When the promises were passed on to Jacob/Israel's sons, they were divided into two lines. One line would follow through Judah's descendants, and through that line would come the promised Messiah and the blessing on the whole world. However, the balance of the promises flowed through Joseph and then to Ephraim.

The nation of Israel was well aware of this fact, and it was reiterated in 1 Chronicles 5:1,2 –

“Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel, for he was the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel; and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright. For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler: but the birthright was Joseph's.”

King David was also aware of this historic split in the promises and wrote -

“Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my lawgiver.” (Psalm 60:7)

Just as Abel was preferred over his elder brother Cain, as Isaac was preferred over the firstborn Ishmael, as Jacob was preferred over the older twin Esau, and as the New Covenant is preferred over the Old Covenant, so Joseph was preferred over all his elder brothers, and his youngest son Ephraim was preferred over Manasseh.

Now, the Abrahamic Promise, which constituted the birthright - the deal which God made with Himself and swore on Himself - was repeated several times, with new addendum at each retelling. The list of promises which make up the Abrahamic Covenant include:

1. The physical descendants of Abraham must become as numerous as the dust, stars and sands, until they are virtually, if not literally, uncountable. (Gen. 13:16, 15:5, 17:2, 22:17, 28:14) [Let me see if I can head this first argument off at the pass - I know that Abraham's spiritual seed are those who follow after his faith. But, that lineage did not demand a physical descendant to make it happen. The promise of earthly, physical lineage is in sight here, because it all hinges on the promised child, Isaac - "For in Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen. 21:12, Rom. 9:7, Heb. 11:18). So, there is a decidedly physical element to this promise.]
2. Not just a single nation, but multiple nations must come from these descendants and many kings over these nations (Gen. 17:4-6, 18:18, 35:11).
3. These covenant promises will continue generation after generation, and God will be a God to the descendants everlastingly (Gen. 17:7).
4. The land of Canaan will be an everlasting possession of the descendants of Abraham (Gen. 13:14-17, 15:7, 15:18-21, 17:8, 28:13, 35:12).
5. They will spread abroad to the north, south, east and west (Gen. 28:14).
6. The descendants of Abraham will be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 28:14).
7. God will curse those who curse the descendants and bless those who bless the descendants (Gen.12:3).
8. They will possess the gates of their enemies (Gen.22:17).

9. This is an everlasting covenant (Gen. 17:7).

These are very important details. Every one of these promises must eventually be fulfilled and completed. The very faithfulness of God rests in these promises. And, here's the really, really important question ---

Who ended up with these promises?

All Israel? Nope.

Judah? Nope.

Dan and Naphtali, or even Zebulun? Nope, nope and nope.

Ephraim did.

It is impossible to say that these promises are all complete and finished until we are able to prove conclusively that they were completed in Ephraim.

So, let's ask.... what happened to Ephraim?

The nation of Israel was gathered in the land of Canaan and God allotted particular parcels of land to each tribe (except Levi). Initially the nation didn't fare very well. Being only one generation away from Egypt, with each tribe operating autonomously under local judges,

“In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” (Judges 17:6).

As a nation they were united initially under their first king, Saul. But, the zenith of their unity was during King David's reign. Nevertheless, in 1 Kings 11 we read that David's son, Solomon, loved many strange, or foreign, women. That rebellion against God's clear prohibition turned his heart toward foreign gods. So, God declared that He would rip the kingdom from him and give it to his servant. But, for David's sake, God would not do it until the kingdom had passed to Rehoboam, Solomon's son. And, also for David's sake, God left one tribe under the posterity of David's family - Judah, "for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen" (1 Kings 11:13). Ending a time of peace and prosperity, God stirred up the enemies of Israel.

Meanwhile, Solomon had made Jeroboam, a mighty man of valor, "ruler over the house of Joseph." Notice the use of the phrase "the house of Joseph". After Jeroboam left Jerusalem, Ahijah the Shilonite, a prophet, met up with him and ripped his brand new garment off his back. Ahijah ripped Jeroboam's garment into 12 pieces and said,

“Take thee ten pieces; for thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee. But he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel.” (1 Kings 11:31-32)

In verse 37 God identified the ten-tribe northern kingdom as "Israel". And, very importantly, in verse 39 God added this promise to the House of Israel –

“And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever.” (1 Kings 11:39)

Well, sure enough, there was a revolt against Solomon's son.

“So Israel [the northern kingdom] rebelled against the house of David [the southern kingdom] unto this day.” (1 Kings 12:19)

The tribe of Benjamin ended up siding with the southern kingdom because Jerusalem was in their territory. Those two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, along with the Levites who served in the temple, became known as "The House of Judah" (1 Kings 12:21).

Meanwhile, the northern kingdom - "The House of Israel" – was dominated by its primary tribe, Ephraim. There was also a mount of worship called "Mount Ephraim." Sometimes the terms "Israel" and "Ephraim" are used interchangeably, as in 2 Chron.25:7 and Hosea 5:3. Also, the northern kingdom is sometimes called "Samaria" after its capital, just as the southern kingdom is sometimes referred to as "Jerusalem."

Almost immediately after taking over the rulership of Israel, Jeroboam apostatized. Fearful that the children of Israel would bond again with their brethren, he took away every vestige of the old religion and replaced it with false idols (1 Kings 12). In His anger, God brought Assyria down on Israel, the northern kingdom, and took them into captivity. Eventually, even Judah fell into King Sennacherib's hands (2 Kings 18:13).

After Sennacherib was killed by his own two sons (2 Kings 19:37), the prophet Isaiah told King Hezekiah of Judah that God would deliver them and defend Jerusalem for His own sake, and for the servant David's sake (2 Kings 20:6), but in that same chapter came the threat of the Babylonian captivity. God, ever faithful, kept his word and saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (2 Chron. 32:22)

Meanwhile, during the Assyrian captivity, Sennacherib had placed foreigners to live in Canaan. After his death, when Assyria was falling to Babylon and Judah was freed, the house of Israel never returned to their homeland. They became marauding bands in Central Asia and scattered, as God had said, in all

directions. Layard's archaeological digs at Nineveh and the discovery of the Behistun Rock have produced the ancient names given to the tribes of Israel, confirming what the Bible says. In fact, Israel fought as mercenaries with Assyria against Judah (Is. 7:2, Is. 9:21). So, a great animosity grew between the two houses (Is. 9:21).

It is important to recognize that God saw the twelve tribes as two individual nations right from the start. In Ezek. 23, God likened them to two sisters even while they were in Egypt.

“Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother: and they committed whoredoms in Egypt: they committed whoredoms in their youth: there were their breasts pressed, and there they bruised the teats of their virginity. And, the names of them were Aholah the elder, and Aholibah her sister: and they were mine, and they bare sons and daughters, thus were their names: Samaria [the northern kingdom] is Aholah, and Jerusalem [the southern kingdom] Aholibah. And, Aholah played the harlot when she was mine; and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians her neighbors.” (Ezek. 23:2-5)

So Israel was scattered to live among the Gentiles and they remain scattered to this day. They are not only geographically lost, but they are culturally and religiously lost. From the start they abandoned their "Israelitish" heritage. Don't look for them to be keeping Hebrew holidays or continuing Hebrew forms of worship. They adopted the cultures and practices of their hosts, starting with Assyria. Don't expect them to look like Hebrews, physically. They have intermarried and lost their identity. Don't forget that Ephraim and Manasseh were half-Egyptian going out the gate.

The southern kingdom, the House of Judah, was kept by God and constantly restored despite Assyrian, Babylonian, Grecian, and Roman occupation and oppression. God kept his promise to Judah and delivered the Messiah to the House of David. He came to His own, but his own received Him not. In fact, these are the only people ever called "Jews" - the house of Judah. No member of the house of Israel/Ephraim is Jewish.

By the way, that fact means that the restoration of the nation Israel in 1948, while it may be a precursor of things to come, is not the fulfillment of the Abrahamic/birthright promise. The Jews who have settled there are the wrong tribes. The people who have resettled in Jerusalem are Jewish, keeping Jewish customs and continuing the Jewish heritage. They are descendants of the House of Judah.

In Jesus' day at least some portion of the House of Israel could still be geographically located. We know that because when Jesus gathered his apostles,

“These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Mat.10:5-6)

Also, when a Canaanite women came to Jesus seeking mercy for her daughter, Jesus replied,

“I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Mat. 15:24)

So, even as He walked among the House of Judah, who sought to kill Him, He declared that His ministry was to the House of Israel. Whatever else we may say about the ministry of Christ, we must align ourselves with that fact. He came with the intention of redeeming the lost, scattered sheep of Israel. His reference is not to believing Gentiles under the commonly misused heading of “true Israel,” but to the actual physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Ephraim.

My point is that the Jews are not carrying the birthright - only Ephraim is. That's why the book of Hosea has so much to say against Ephraim, who, wherever they are, are also carrying great promises of restoration - a restoration that has yet to be accomplished, but which comes into focus in this Hebrews' passage.

Alright, after that compressed overview of history, let's return to the text at hand.

{8a} – For finding fault with them...

God found fault with Israel's offspring and could have rightly judged their failure. But, He had promises to fulfill. He had a birthright hanging out there. If He had utterly turned His back on Israel He would have negated His own promises to His own elect people:

“For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel, mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.”
(Isa. 45:4)

So, He started over with them –

{8b} – ... he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

And so begins one of the most discussed and misused sections of the Hebrews letter. The author was quoting from Jeremiah 31. He was making the point that

the promise of a New Covenant was written down way back before the Babylonian captivity, even as the house of Israel was beginning to scatter. His original audience of Hebrews would have been very familiar with this history, and he wanted to point out that even their own scripture (the Old Testament) contained this irrefutable promise of redemption for Judah and Israel.

The particular promise the author quoted is found in the grand summation of Jeremiah 30 and 31. It is the longest quotation of an Old Testament text, repeated verbatim, found anywhere in the New Testament.

The author quoted the section of Jeremiah that dealt directly with his particular argument; to wit - Christ as the mediator of a newer, better covenant promise. But, the entire section has to do with the new covenant promised and established with Israel and Judah. The first century Hebrews may have been familiar with the promise's existence, but they probably hadn't realized that the New Testament in Christ's blood was that "one-and-the-same" covenant come true.

Of vital importance is the fact that the Hebrews' author repeated the promise without comment or interpretation. He left it in its context and insisted that the promise belonged to its original recipients – the House of Israel and the House of Judah. Remember, as I said in the introduction to this commentary, that the author was a Hebrew, writing to a Hebrews audience. If it was his intention that this promise of a New Covenant, brought in its entirety from Jeremiah, was established with the Gentile church to the exclusion of national Israel, or that the promise had been "spiritualized" to the degree that Israel had no more part in it, this would have been the perfect place to instruct the New Testament readers about this critical change. But, the author did not such thing. He let the promise remain in its context and wording, holding it out in front of his Hebrew audience to ponder and apply to their theology.

Let's look at Jeremiah's treatment of this promise in its entirety.

Jeremiah's Covenant Promise

Jeremiah 30:1 begins –

“For, lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.”

If that sounds familiar, it's part of the birthright promise. Jeremiah wrote this "post-David." So, Jeremiah's future fulfillment of that promise undermines the popular argument that Israel settling in Canaan under Joshua and having a time of peace was the complete fulfillment of the "land promise." Jeremiah saw Israel's restoration and return to Canaan as future to him, as part of the New Covenant.

After that, God predicted a time of travail, called "Jacob's trouble." It is a day like no other (Jer. 30:7) But, despite Jacob's pains, they will be delivered out of the time of trouble. God will break off the bonds of their servitude and they will never again be slaves. God will raise up David (!) to be their king, and they shall serve God (Jer. 30:9). Despite their rebellion, God called them His servants and promised to save them from afar (Jer. 30:10).

“For I am with thee; though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee; but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished.” (Jer. 30:11)

God went on to describe the punishment. He declared that they have a wound and an incurable bruise. No one could bind them up or offer healing medicine. God said that He created the wound because of their iniquity. Still, all the nations God used to afflict them will be destroyed.

“For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds.” (Jer. 30:17a)

God went on to declare that He will gather them again and their cities will be rebuilt on the rubble and heap of the old ones. They will be thankful and joyous.

“... and they shall be not a few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small.” (Jer. 30:19)

They will have their own nobility and their "governor" will come from the midst of them. God will cause the leader to "draw near," because no one has ever engaged his or her own heart to approach God (Jer. 30:21). He followed that up with an important declaration, which will be repeated several times -

“And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.” (Jer. 30:22)

Who is God talking to? Israel! Not "spiritual" Israel, or the church that supposedly "replaced" Israel. These are Israel's promises! But, wait, I'm just getting warmed up. There's a bombshell coming.

After two verses describing God's fury and fierce anger against His enemies, He reiterated –

“At the same time, saith the Lord, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.” (Jer.31:1)

That's twice now. All the families of Israel are holding this promise. Not just the "elect within Israel," but "all the families of Israel." Keep going. It gets better! How is it that they'll be recipients of such marvelous restoration?

"Thus saith the Lord, the people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness, even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest." (Jer. 31:2)

Grace! But, not just that...

"The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee. Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel." (Jer. 31:3)

God categorically declared His "everlasting love" for Israel, and though she played the harlot, He will make her as a virgin. Now, I am absolutely compelled to take a moment and point out that the modern Gentile church loves the declaration in the first half of this verse and has usurped it to themselves. They use it in defense of some wonderful doctrines, like Irresistible Grace, Eternal Security and the Perseverance of the Saints. But, they always truncate the verse before the second half. If the first half is true, so is the second. The promise of everlasting love is to national Israel, who shall be drawn and built by God and who shall stand as a virgin in His presence.

God went on to say that Samaria would be fruitful (Jer. 31:5). Now, however we may understand "spiritual" Zion (which the author will introduce in Chapter 12), there is no such spiritualization of "Samaria" in the New Testament. That's Israel's land, and it still has promises attached to it.

From Mount Ephraim they will go up to Zion to worship God. Verses 7-8 speak of the great ingathering from the "coasts of the earth." But, look very closely at verse 9. God is going to tell us why all this will happen:

"They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn." (Jer. 31:9)

God is going to do it because He is Israel's father, and Ephraim (!) is His firstborn (!!!). The birthright from God is going to land on Ephraim. By grace, because of everlasting love, the Everlasting Father promised to keep His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and His firstborn, Ephraim. And, it's going to be accomplished as part of a New Covenant:

"Hear the word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock. For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he." (Jer. 31:10-11)

As a shepherd, God will redeem and ransom Jacob. Sounds like familiar language, eh? We're building to the New Deal.

May I point out again, that this has not happened - yet. The appearance of the Gentile church has neither fulfilled nor negated these promises. Claiming that this whole thing is "typological" just gets us in more trouble, because it is impossible to satisfy the claims of these verses in any other body of people than Israel. Calling ourselves "spiritual Israel" (an unbiblical denotation, by the way) does not undo Ephraim's firstborn status or define in what way we may consider ourselves "Jacob." Nor was the Gentile church ever under the curses found in Jeremiah. We cannot "pick and choose" the blessings without also adopting the curses, if we are the body of people God had in mind when He spoke of Israel.

The next few verses proclaim praises and joyfulness. Weeping is turned to gladness, mourning is turned to comfort. The people are satisfied with God's goodness. Starting at verse 18, Ephraim submits to the Sovereignty of God –

“I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God.”
(Jer. 31:18)

In verse 19 Ephraim repents. God responds,

"Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still. Therefore my bowels are for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord" (Jer. 31:20)

The next several verses describe the time of restoration for the land of Judah. God promised to satiate every weary soul and replenish every sorrowful soul. It's a wonderful promise. Following that are promises of rebuilding and replanting, and the people will not be held accountable for the sins of their fathers.

"In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape and the children's teeth are set on edge." (Jer. 31:29)

And, that brings us right up to verse 31 –

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah." (Jer. 31:31)

I went through that entire exercise to make one primary point: The New Covenant was not made with anyone other than Israel and Judah. It was made because God will most assuredly keep His birthright promise to Ephraim.

To simplify - Gentiles were never under the first, or old, covenant. To them, it's kind of pointless to talk about a "new" covenant. To a Gentile, there is only one covenant - the one into which they were "ingrafted" contrary to their nature (Rom. 11:24) - the Covenant made with the people who were under the first covenant. The Gentile church, by the astounding grace of God, is brought into the blessings that were promised to Israel.

Now the fact that Israel has not attained those full blessings is of no consequence. They had not attained them for hundreds of years before Christ's death, either. But, that does not change the fact that they will, and must, attain them! (We'll address that point when we get to Hebrews 11:39-40.)

The promises were made to Israel long before Christ died and put His testament into effect. I, personally, did not take part in it until nearly 2,000 years after Christ died, so I'm not concerned over the fact that Ephraim is still awaiting their participation in it. The timing is God's business, not ours.

Okay, finally, back to Hebrews - which is actually a continuation of Jeremiah.

{9} - Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

Notice how specific the text is, here. God wants to make sure we understand which two covenants are being contrasted. The New Covenant is not over and against the promises made to Abraham. The New Covenant is opposed to the Law given after the Exodus. The New Covenant will not be of the same nature and character as the Sinai Covenant because Israel failed to keep that one. Re-instituting that law would be of no value; Israel had already come short of it, and God scattered them in response.

{10} - For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

In contrast to the Sinaitic covenant where God's laws were written on tables of stone, this time God will write His commands in their minds and in their hearts. It is true; you cannot change a man from the outside. Only a rebirth from the inside will bring true repentance. Notice, too, it is God who does it. Just as He changed every Christian believer and wrote His words in our mind and hearts, God will convert Israel the very same way. And, the third time, He states He will be their God and they will be His people.

{ 11 } – And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

This is still quoting Jeremiah. This is still part of Israel's promise. There is a day coming when the knowledge of God will be universal among the houses of Judah and Ephraim.

Now, to the "everything's fulfilled" folk, I ask that they look closely at this text. They usually say that this promise is completed in the contemporary church. But, is it really? I mean, aside from the fact that it is Israel's promise, can we really be convinced that the current church age satisfies this verse?

Paul tells us that God has provided gift ministers: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:11). Why? To spread the gospel and teach the saints. Or, what about the Ethiopian eunuch to whom Philip was sent? He did not understand what he was reading from Isaiah, saying, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:31).

Can we really say, even in this day and age, that there is no more reason to tell men, "know the Lord" or that from the greatest to the least every neighbor and brother knows Him? The obvious answer is, "No." That is still coming. It has not fully happened in the church and it has not happened in Israel. It will --- but it hasn't.

So, continuing Jeremiah's thought - which is God's thought - how is it that Israel will all be so familiar with the Lord? What about their years of sin and stiff-necked rebellion?

{ 12 } – For] will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will] remember no more.

Oh, man! This is really important! The people who want to advance the idea that God is finished with Israel, and that He has relegated them to merely typological status, say God was responding to their sin and rejection of His Son. But - to paraphrase this verse - so what?!!

The same God who has been merciful to you and forgotten your sins has promised to forgive and forget Israel's sins! The same God who chose you, chose them! The same God who elected you, elected them! And, if He is faithless to them, how can you feel secure that He will be faithful to you?

That, by the way, is the end of the Jeremiah quotation, and I must make plain the fact that the author brought that promise of Israel and Judah's redemption into the New Testament without interpretation or "spiritualization." He declared it, reminded them of it, and let it stand.

Jeremiah's words, quoted in Hebrews, were as true in Jeremiah's day as they were in the first century – and, as they are in 1999. God has never turned away from these words or negated these promises. Again, that's of vital importance. Nowhere in Scripture can you find these promises negated or turned over to the church in lieu of Israel. Nowhere. Not once.

“For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” (Rom.11:29)

The promise of a New Covenant is Israel's. It must have been thrilling and overwhelming to the first century Hebrew audience. Think about it! The long awaited promises made to the fathers were as certain as the appearance of Christ and the institution of the New Covenant of Grace. What terrific news that must have been to them! But, I can't leave Jeremiah 31 without quoting the next three verses of that passage:

“Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD.” (Jer.31:35-37)

However we construct our theology, it must be able to encompass these verses. To say Israel is cast off, or finished, or simply typological, is to deny the clear word of Scripture. To say that God is finished with "national Israel", or is holding them guilty for their history of blinded ignorance, is to shake your fist at this passage. To say everything's fulfilled and God will not return His attention to Israel, His beloved, His elect, His firstborn, is to assert that time has ceased.

{13} – In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

The author lets logic prevail. Inasmuch as God used the term "New Covenant," it is obvious that He considers the previous one "old." That is God's own terminology. With the inception of the "new," the "old" covenant, struck at Sinai, is done away with utterly and completely. In fact, it is going to disappear.

That's why we are "New Covenant" people. That is the only covenant we have ever known. By the time the Gentile church was brought into a covenant relationship with God, the first covenant was no longer valid.

A Quick Summary

In light of our knowledge of Ephraim's promised inheritance, it is difficult to see how anyone could support the notion of Israel being replaced by the church in

God's redemptive plan. While it is true the church has been blessed to receive some of the promises Israel has yet to attain, that does not in any way preclude God from completely fulfilling every "jot and tittle" of His promises to the people who hold the birthright.

That is really the heart of the matter. It is not enough to claim the church somehow supercedes Israel. Proponents of such a notion must be able to categorically identify Ephraim and prove that God has negated Ephraim's inheritance and "forever" promises, and there is not a verse in Scripture to support that notion. In fact, it is replete with declarations to the opposite effect - Israel's restoration.

Ephraim also poses a problem for the "everything's been fulfilled" folk. Unless they can prove Ephraim and Judah have been reunited in Jerusalem and their hearts have been renewed, there is still something left to be done. The "promises made to the fathers" include the Ephraim birthright in its entirety. Until every facet of the promise is complete, God is not finished.

As for the notion that we're "obsessed with Israel," we're in good company. God seems pretty committed to them, too. Without a full understanding of Israel's history of rebellion and redemption it is impossible to understand God saving rebellious sinners like us. Without understanding that God is committed to them because of His word of promise, we cannot fully grasp God's commitment to us and our promised inheritance. If God could turn His back on "Israel, mine elect" (Is.45:4), then what assurance is there in our own election? Israel's history is full of types and shadows, teaching us valuable lessons. Nevertheless, "As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes; but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes" (Rom. 11:20). Israel is still living under an unconditional promise God swore with Himself.

They are the firstborn of the covenant of grace. The fact that Israel has not responded yet has nothing to do with it. They are blinded, but not permanently, and, just as you didn't see the grace of God before He opened your eyes, Israel will remain ignorant until the fullness of the Gentiles is brought in (Romans 11). Then, just as He opened Gentile eyes, He will open Israel's eyes. Otherwise, God's Word is no good, and He does not keep his promises.

But, as I've said with overmuch repetition, that is not the way our God works.

EZEKIEL 37

At this point in the online commentary series, the moderator (prompted by my pre-everything-ist comments) asked that everyone consider a passage from the book of Ezekiel. Inasmuch as these comments are directly related to the Israelology presented in this chapter of Hebrews, I'm including them here. My response went as follows -

I think my comments thus far probably gave our readers a good idea of how I would approach your question. In fact, I was going to use this passage as another proof text, but I was long enough without it. But, really, that just emphasizes the point! Jeremiah, the dry bones, Hosea, Hebrews, Zechariah, etc. - they all say the same thing. Israel and Judah (in particular Ephraim and Judah) will be reunited.

God says it over and over and over. Redemption for Israel, resurrection for Israel, everlasting love for Israel, the firstborn promise to Israel, the New Covenant for Israel. How many times does God need to say something before we give in and believe it?

Your text of choice: Ezekiel 37:15-28

{15-16} – “The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and for all the house of Israel his companions:”

The same two divisions we detailed in our commentary - Israel and Judah – appear in this verse. They were separated and at odds with each. But, Ezekiel was told to create a symbolic representation out of two sticks and name them accordingly. (Hey, look! Symbols that represent a literal reality! Who would thought it?!!)

{17} - “And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand.”

The meaning is very plain - the two sticks are joined together in Zeke's hand. He is the type of God who will join Israel and Judah in His own hand - the very same hand that keeps and protects us.

{18} – “And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew us what thou meanest by these?”

Oh, good! We don't have to interpret or analogize. God, Himself, is going to be our exegete. So, we cannot do extra-textual back flips to make the meaning anything other than God's meaning. That would be dangerous, to say the least.

{19} – “Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand.”

Now, remember - this is Judah who is retaining the Jewish religion and culture, and Israel who is scattered and dispersed among all the nations. God declares emphatically that He will unite them in His hand. The tribes of Israel will be united under the headship of Ephraim, who retains the birthright promise, and they will all be united with Judah.

That is the only true and accurate interpretation of this symbol. "So," you ask, "Is it literal or spiritual in its fulfillment?" I'm glad you asked. God will answer.

{20} – “And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes.”

Ezekiel was to hold these symbols up before the children of Judah. Ezekiel was taken to Babylon during the second deportation. Most of his prophecies were delivered before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. His prophecies included promises of restoration of the land and the nation.

So, God instructed him to hold the sticks up in front of Judah and make the following declaration, even as they were under the hand of Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar.

{21} - “And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land:”

The Northern tribes had scattered after the Assyrian and before the Babylonian period. They were out there among the heathen. But, God promised to gather them from every direction and bring them back to their own land. The tribes of Israel were literal, historic people. They underwent the literal, historic Assyrian captivity (proven now by archeology). They were literally scattered across the continent and out into the "isles of the sea". Judah, meanwhile, was in literal captivity under Babylon, a historic kingdom.

I'm sure you're getting my point. There is absolutely nothing in the text, or in any New Testament writer's approach to this text, which implies any sudden shift from literal to spiritual fulfillment. That is something men made up later. But, that does not change God's mind. Those interpreters stand in opposition to God's interpretation.

{22} – “And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.”

One nation. That's the essential point. Despite descendants of Judah landing back in Canaan in 1948, the descendants of Israel are still all over the place. So, it's impossible to say that his prophecy has been fulfilled. It will remain a future promise until Ephraim is reunited to Judah.

“And 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, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim.” (Isa. 11:11-13)

And, who will that one king be? Well, that's coming up.

{23} – “Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.”

Redemption, redemption, redemption. That's God's plan for Israel. Will their sin keep them from Him? Their rebellion and false worship? Their blindness and rejection of Christ? No, no and no.

God declares that He will overwhelm them just as effectually as He overwhelmed us. He will forgive them just as He forgave us. He will draw them just as He drew us. He will gather them in just as He gathered us in. He will cleanse them just as He cleansed us.

And, my favorite phrase shows up for the fourth time - "So shall they be my people, and I will be their God." Want to go on? The next verse says –

{24} – “And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgements, and observe my statutes, and do them.”

How is it that they will be able to suddenly walk in God's statutes and judgments?

"But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." (Jer. 31:33 and Heb. 8:10)

The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah possessed their greatest peace and prosperity under the kingship of David, the man after God's own heart. David is going to be king over them again. Now, some will ask, "Really, literally? David? You honestly think that David will be their king? I thought Christ was going to rule and reign over them all."

Yes, Christ will reign over the whole world. I have no doubt about it. But, this notion of David ruling His particular kingdom in keeping with the promise that He would have an everlasting kingdom (2 Samuel 7:16-17) is not new to this passage. I'm going to hang with God. He made the promise to David and I believe He will keep the promise.

“And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them and he shall be their shepherd. And, I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it.” (Ezek. 34:23-24)

{25} – “And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.”

It takes a tremendous amount of exegetical wrangling to avoid the fact that God is here referring to the exact land that was promised to Jacob, which is Canaan, promised to Abraham. Once they are rejoined, Judah and Israel are promised to dwell in that land (God keeping His covenant, sworn on Himself) through generations unending. To ignore the word "forever" in these texts is to be willingly ignorant.

“The land that I have given unto Jacob my servant” is a very specific phrase which cannot easily be shrugged off. That takes us right back to the Abrahamic covenant and the birthright that fell to Ephraim. Until Israel is reunited in the land of Canaan, that promise is not complete.

{26} – “Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore.”

Again, God declares the everlasting covenant made with "them". It is a covenant of peace, "the ceasing of againstness." It is God who will make the covenant. He will place them. He will multiply them. He will set His sanctuary in the midst of them. This is all God's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

{27} – “My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

There it is again! I know the church desperately wants to assimilate this phrase to themselves to the exclusion of Israel, but there is far too much weight on the contrary side. God is the God of Israel – not "spiritual" Israel, not "typological" Israel - but, Israel! Over and again He states it, but over and again men refuse it. What gets into us? Our theology must absolutely be able to include this fact or we have constructed a false theology.

By the way, both terms - "sanctuary" and "tabernacle" - are exclusively Israelitish terms. Yes, within the church we are the dwelling place of the spirit of God, living stones jointly fit together to become the tabernacle and temple of God. No problem. But, that spiritual fulfillment of the tabernacle typology (which the New Testament writers do, in fact, conclude) does not in any way hinder or preclude the physical fulfillment of these promises to Israel of an earthly tabernacle and sanctuary. They are both true, and they are not mutually exclusive.

{28} – “And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.”

Okey-dokey, then. Here's the conclusion of it. Why is God going to deal with Israel so specifically? To bring glory to Himself - the same reason He dealt graciously with us rebels. And, the heathen – that's us, the Gentiles - are going to know for sure (though we who have God's word should know already) that Jehovah does, in fact and indeed, sanctify - set apart for His own use - Israel.

And, when will the Gentile nations know this? When the sanctuary of God is among the regathered tribes.

Has such a thing happened? No.

That's why it's so easy for the "everything's fulfilled" folk to take potshots at our understanding of these verses. It hasn't become reality, yet. But, nothing about Christ's dealings with the Gentiles under the New Covenant precludes a future establishment of all these things.

By the way, Christ has not come back yet. That's still to be fulfilled. The tribe of Judah has not "looked on Him whom they have pierced". (Zech. 12:10, John 19:37) That is still coming. So, I have no problem being confident that all of this will be fully taken care of by Sovereign God.

There just isn't enough time or space to open up all the passages that teach this same, exact thing. I didn't even get to mention Ezekiel's valley of dry bones:

“Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD.” (Ezek 37:11-14)

Or, the wonderful love story of redemption in the book of Hosea. But, I'll leave that for another time.

ROMANS 9-11

At this point in the commentary group, a discussion arose concerning New Testament writers and their approach to Israel. While the “spiritual Israel” and “Gentile church as true Israel” crowd continued to propound notions that they could scarcely support with Scripture, I replied with Paul’s wonderful discourse on the relationship between the church and Israel. The content of my reply is included here in order to fully develop a consistent, New Covenant Israelology. It went as follows –

INTRODUCTION:

Perhaps one of the most damaging things ever done to Scripture as a whole was the numbering of these letters into chapters and verses. Those arbitrary numbers inserted into Scripture are not divinely inspired. They were put there so we could all get to the same bit of writing at the same time. But, they have left the modern church with the impression that any single verse, taken out of its larger context, stands on its own as a complete thought. As a result, preachers and theologians may select a verse, pull it from its larger context, and talk about it for hours. By the time they get done it often barely resembles the intent of the original author.

My rule of thumb whenever I hear someone interpret a verse is to restate his or her interpretation in a single, cogent sentence and place that restatement back into the larger context. I then read the larger context to see whether that restatement makes sense with the logical flow of thought established by the original author. If it does not, something is wrong with their interpretation.

Okay, I said all that to comment on Romans 9:6 –

“Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:”

The last half of this verse is like the “Rosetta Stone” to the "Israel/Church Replacement" crowd. They yank it from its natural context and pull all sorts of extra-Biblical meaning from it. But, the actual meaning of Paul’s words can only be determined by the surrounding context.

For that reason, let’s take **a quick excursion through Romans 9-11.**

Romans chapter nine starts with Paul's declaration that everything he wrote was true before God. He had a great heaviness and sorrow for his brethren, his kinsmen after the flesh, and even went so far as to say that he could wish himself accursed if that were what it took to save them. He then defined these people as "Israelites", who received the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises, which belong to the fathers, and who are the fleshly race through whom Christ came, who is Lord over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Notice right off that Paul did not change or spiritualize the meaning of any of the terms "adoption, glory, covenants, promises, fathers, etc." These are all physical, natural, historic facts of Israel's heritage. He let them stand. Also, he did not argue that the promises had been fulfilled. He simply stated that they belonged to Israel.

Picking up at verse 6, we come to the verse that is at controversy. It is important to notice that verse seven starts with the word "neither". In other words, it is a contrast, a syllogism of sorts, along the same logical line of thought. The end of verse six and the beginning of verse seven are parallel in structure, forming a comparison, hence the term "neither". They read –

“Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel which are of Israel, neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children; but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.”

Paul was beginning a discussion about Israel's standing with God during the New Testament era. The natural, logical, first questions were, "If Israel had all these things (adoption, glory, covenants, law, service, promises) and yet Paul declared them to be unsaved, is the word of God completely ineffectual toward them? Has God cast them off? Are they out from under His saving grace? Can they be redeemed at all?"

"No, that's not the way it is," Paul began.

After all, the entirety of the OT Scriptures tell us that, from the inception of the race, God has always chosen specific children to continue the blessed lineage

who would carry Abraham's promises. As a consequence, they are not all Israel (the blessed line), which are of Israel (Jacob, the progenitor). Neither are both the offspring of Abraham counted as true children - Isaac was designated as the "only son" and Ishmael was cast off.

That is the sum total of Paul's point at this juncture. To read anything else into it is to force our suppositions onto Scripture. The structure of Paul's comparison forces us to read the first line in the same way as the second. Jacob's offspring were not all part of the blessed lineage any more than both of Abraham's offspring were.

But, let's continue with the context and we will see how vital this "hinge" is to Paul's larger argument. Verse 8 begins with the phrase, "That is..." which is Paul's way of saying "in other words." So, whatever point he restates here is the same point he made a minute ago.

“That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.”

Abraham sired two sons - one with his wife, Sarah, which was according to the promise of God. The boy was a miracle, born out of a dead womb. The other son was the result of Abraham and Sarah conspiring to fulfill God's promise in their own time by natural, fleshly means. Abraham went into Hagar's tent, Sarah's handmaiden, and they worked it out in their flesh, producing Ishmael. God instructed Abraham to cast off the bondswoman and her son, because "in Isaac shall thy seed be called".

Paul used that bit of Hebrew history to show the superior nature of the New Covenant, likening Isaac to a child of freedom, received by faith and promise, but likening Ishmael to the bondage of the flesh which cannot please God no matter how well-intentioned the effort (Gal.4).

But, to make the point, these verses in Romans spell out one central message – not every descendant of any man carrying the Abrahamic/birthright promise is automatically reckoned as in the covenant. Isaac was the child of promise and Ishmael was a child of the flesh. In the same way, not every one of Jacob's sons was counted in the covenant promise. Joseph's sons carried the birthright promise, and Judah was designated as the blessed lineage of the Messiah. But, others - like the eldest, Reuben, who slept with his father's wife - were passed over as children of the flesh.

The context is consistent. The meaning of Romans 9:6 is obvious. The interpretations that use it as a jumping off point to construct theologies that replace or do away with Israel have forced meanings into the text that are not there.

But, let's keep going.

Paul started at verse 9 to recount the blessed lineage - the word of promise came to Sarah that she would have a son, and it came to Rebecca who conceived by father Isaac. The children were still in the womb, having done no good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calls, when it was said that the elder would serve the younger.

So, the context continues to demonstrate God's narrowing of the blessed line, it does not reflect a widening of the blessed seed to include Gentiles. In fact, Rebecca's younger boy, Jacob, is the progenitor referenced in v.6, and his offspring are narrowed just as the previous generations were.

From verse 13 Paul goes into an extended defense of God's sovereign election. Does election make God unrighteous? Absolutely not. God had said as early as Moses that he would have mercy and compassion on whom He would. So, God's choosing is not based on a man's will or the ability to run, but it is of God who shows mercy. Even back in Egypt, God had declared that He raised Pharaoh up for the very purpose of proving His right to pick and choose. He will have mercy on - and harden - whom He will.

At verse 19, Paul deals with the natural excuse men will attempt to make –

“Why doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will?”

Paul's answer? Who are you to fight against the God who made you? The potter makes vessels to honor and dishonor, but it is up to Him. God is perfectly willing to show His wrath and demonstrate His power, but he is longsuffering toward the vessels of wrath, made for the destroying, that He could make known the riches of His glory to the vessels of mercy, which He had elected beforehand for glory.

But, the larger context remains God's dealings with Israel. And, Paul returns to that theme at verse 24. Who are these "vessels of mercy"?

“Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.”

Paul made a very important distinction, here. He knew the difference between Jews and Israelites. He knew that the Israelites were scattered and they remained in that state as he wrote. He knew that Jesus referred to them several times as "the lost sheep of the house of Israel". He knew that the Jews were the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (Paul's tribe), along with the Levites who served in the temple.

The early church was made up of Jews and Gentiles. On Pentecost, the three thousand who were saved were "Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). Israelites (the northern kingdom) were not devout men. They went off into idol worship immediately after the Assyrian captivity and never returned to "Jewish" worship.

So, to make the point, Paul understood the distinction between Israel (who retained the birthright promises through Ephraim) and Judah (who held the genealogical promise). Christ's appearance was the fulfillment of Jacob's promise to his son Judah. Hence, the New Testament recounts the fulfillment of those promises. But, what about the Abrahamic blessing put on Ephraim? Well, that was Paul's next subject. At verse 25, he restated the promise of Hosea –

“I will call them my people which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved, and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.”

That's a direct quote from Hosea, and in Hosea it refers to the northern tribes. They were lost and scattered, called not my people and not beloved. Unfortunately, some modern theologians have yanked this passage from its context and tried to apply it to the Gentile church. They use Paul's passing reference to Gentiles in the previous verse as proof that his focus has shifted from Jews to Gentiles. Hence, those who "were not my people" become Gentiles. Those were "not beloved" are the Church, who become "children of the living God."

But, the context is about to undermine such interpretations. Despite their attempts to prove that this is a promise made to Israel that finds its fulfillment in the Church, they must contradict Paul to prove their contention. Read Paul's next words ---

“Isaiah also crieth concerning Israel...”

The subject is still Israel. Paul quoted a verse from Hosea about Israel and he is going to quote Isaiah concerning Israel. He will get to specific OT quotations about the Gentiles in a few minutes, but for now the subject remains Israel. The promise remains that they will be called "beloved", "my people", and "children of the living God". Of vital importance is the fact that if Paul had meant to build a theology that circumvented Israel's direct reception of these promises, this would have been the place to say it! But, Paul said nothing of the sort. He continued to build toward his conclusion.

So, what did Isaiah say about Israel that Paul was anxious to quote?

“Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved. For He will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness; because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth.”

Here again our reading of 9:6 is consistent with the larger argument. Not all of Jacob's (Israel's) seed will inherit the promises. But, some certainly will. The remnant shall be saved. The subject, to be incredibly redundant, is not the church, or a Gentile form of "spiritual Israel". The subject is historic, factual, actual, genuine Israel.

So, has God protected Israel thus far? Yes! (v.29) As Isaiah also said,

“Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom, and been made like unto Gomorrah.”

Paul's point was that God continually narrowed the focus of the blessed lineage, and He had always had a remnant of Israel under His preserving hand. So, my question remains, "Do these verses show a distinction between Israel and the Gentiles, or an amalgam of them both into a form of "true Israel"?"

Paul continues, asking,

“What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.”

Good question. What about the fact that the Gentiles, who did not follow after righteousness (i.e. no Moses, no law, no covenant), have attained righteousness through faith in Christ? But, Israel, which had all these things, never attained right standing before God (i.e. they had become "not my people, not beloved, not my children.") ?

Does the introduction of the Gentiles into the "plan of salvation" prove that God has moved on, passing over unsaved Israel?

Paul explains that Israel sought to accomplish their righteousness without faith, by the works of the law. (v.31) They stumbled at the stone of Christ, just as Isaiah said would happen –

"And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken." (Isa. 8:14-15)

Israel's failure to recognize Christ was completely within God's plan, prophesied in advance. So, did Paul write Israel off, or say that the saved remnant was the all God had a future concern for?

Nope.

Romans chapter 10 starts –

“My hearts desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.”

Paul went on to discuss their zeal without knowledge, concluding that Christ was the end of the law for righteousness for everyone who believed (v.4). Then, he compared the law and righteousness by faith, saying that salvation by grace in Christ was open to everyone, Jew or Greek (v.12). Then, Paul declared the necessity of the preached word. That chapter closes with a stinging indictment against Israel –

“Have they not heard? Yes, verily! Their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. but, I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you.”

Okay, now that's the basis for Paul's continuing argument. Moses had predicted that God would provoke "jealousy" in Israel through the use of "them that are no people" - the Gentiles, a foolish nation.

He quoted Isaiah that God would be found by them that did not seek him and would be manifested to those who never asked after Him (v.20). But, to Israel Isaiah said,

“All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.”

Again, Paul continued his distinction between Israel and the Gentiles, finding OT passages to confirm that everything that was happening was entirely within the scope of God's plan. So, Paul asked the crucial question –

“Hath God cast away his people?”

His answer? Absolutely not! God forbid! What was his proof? Well, Paul was an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Notice, by the way, that Paul's answer is a direct parallel of Romans 9:6-7, which started all this, confirming our rendering of it. Not all the descendants of Jacob/Israel are the blessed heritage. Not all the descendants of

Abraham are the seed. But Paul was! That proves that God had not completely abandoned Israel. He continued to elect certain of them and bring them to faith in His Son.

Then verse 2 makes the emphatic statement,

“God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew.”

These were the very rebellious, stiff-necked, scattered, stumbling people he had been talking about up to this point. But, God had not finished dealing with them. Paul used Elijah as proof. He recounted how Elijah prayed against Israel, saying that Israel (the northern tribes under King Ahab, to whom Elijah was a prophet) had killed the prophets and torn down God's altars. Then, they sought to kill Elijah, and he was left alone. What was God's answer?

“I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”

Just because God had not introduced them to Elijah did not mean they were not there. God has always reserved a remnant to Himself. Paul's point?

“Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.”

So, God had not cast off His people, whom He foreknew (had an intimate relationship with in advance). He has always had a remnant of Israel saved by grace. But, Paul still posed a dilemma -

“What then? Israel has not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it; and the rest were blinded.”

Okay, now we have three distinct groups. We have -

- 1) Gentiles brought in to Israel's promised New Covenant for the purpose of making Israel jealous.
- 2) The remnant of Israel, which were saved by electing grace.
- 3) The balance of Israel who were, in accordance with prophecy, blinded.

“According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, unto this day.”

So, what about the blinded ones? Is God done with them? Verse 11 asks –

“Have they stumbled that they should fall?”

Paul's answer? Absolutely not! God forbid! They stumbled at the stumbling stone of Christ, which was in accordance with God's plan. But, it was not for the purpose of destroying them.

Then, what was the reason for their stumble?

“But rather, through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.”

God caused blinded Israel to fall so that He could bring in the Gentiles, who are the ultimate example of gracious election without the law, to provoke Israel to jealousy and seek God in a new and different way. Every bit of that plan was predicted in the OT.

Then Paul looked toward Israel's future –

“Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?”

That sounds like Paul expected God to return to them, doesn't it? Well, that is the crux of his ever-building argument. Paul magnified his own calling to the Gentiles when he provoked the Israelites, in the hope of saving some of them. Then, he repeated -

“For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?”

Paul's language inescapably expects a restoration of blinded Israel, like a resurrection or awakening from the dead. Paul was well-versed in Old Testament Scripture and knew the resurrection theology that Hosea prophesied.

“Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.”
(Hos. 6:1-2)

The parallel between Hosea's words for Israel and the resurrection of Christ are remarkable. Paul lifted that sentiment into the New Testament and called the restoration of Israel “life from the dead.” And, he based his confident expectation on the immutability of God -

“For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root be holy, so are the branches.”

Paul was constructing a metaphor. However we interpret the symbols in this verse, what we know for sure is that the original branches in the upcoming scenario are Israel. The blinded branches are going to be severed, but the elect Israel branches remain connected to the root. So, whatever we determine the "firstfruit" and the "root" to be - whether Christ, the forefathers, or the immutable oath of God which established the Abrahamic covenant - the inescapable conclusion is that the whole lump, or totality of branches connected to the root, is "holy", or "separated unto God". Personally, I believe the root is the Abrahamic promise.

“And, if some of the branches be broken off, and thou [the Gentiles], being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; boast not against the branches.”

Israel was already in the holy root prior to the Gentiles being grafted in. But, some of the natural branches were cut off in order that the wild Gentile branches could also partake. Knowing that, what should the Gentile reaction be? Don't talk against Israel! Do not presume that God is finished with the branches he cut off to make room for you! And, do not assume that you may usurp Israel's distinct, historic promises just because God was gracious enough to let you feed off the fat of His olive tree.

“Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee,”

The root in Paul's imagery must be the covenant made with Israel. The Gentiles do not bear that promise; the promise reached out to include the Gentiles. And, again, if you become prideful and speak arrogantly against God's chosen nation, bragging, "The branches were broken off that I might be grafted in" - i.e. "God is finished with Israel and has turned His whole attention to the Gentile church, "the true Israel" – you are in danger of God's judgment!

They were not broken off because God was determined to get you and just didn't have any other way to make room. They were cut off because of unbelief, and the Gentile believers stand because of faith. But, faith is a gift from the Almighty. So, don't boast. Don't be high-minded. Take an account of the grace wherein you stand, and be reverent of the power of God to call whomsoever He will.

“Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear! For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.”

The warning goes on. Paul was very serious about this!

“Behold the goodness and severity of God; on them which fell, severity, but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.”

And, what about the severed, blinded Israel branches?

"And, they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in; for God is able to graff them in again."

Pay close attention to that statement! If the blinded portion of Israel were to cease from unbelief and return to God in faith, God is fully capable of returning them to their former state of blessedness. And, have we seen verses that declare that God will return to Israel, forgive their sin, write His law in their hearts, make them His people and He will become their God? Yes, over and over! That's the whole promise on which the New Covenant is predicated!

Now, Paul poses the really, really important question –

"For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?"

They are the natural branches. It's their tree! It's their root! If God could bring you in against your nature, how much easier is it for God to bring them in? And, Paul puts it in the affirmative - "how much more SHALL these...be grafted into their own olive tree?"

He continued –

“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery [previously unrevealed truth], lest ye should be wise in your own conceits...”

In other words, “This is really important, and up until now it has not been revealed.” But, Paul was called to tell the Church about it. Don't get puffed up in your Israel replacement theology, because God is simply working out His foreordained plan.

“... that blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.”

There is clearly a demarcation happening here. The blindness of Israel will end when the fullness of the Gentiles, chosen by grace, have been grafted into the tree. Then, God will perform the easier task - grafting blinded Israel back into their own covenant.

"And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob."

This is great use of specific words. Paul was a master logician. God does not plan to turn Godliness away from "Israel", which means "prince who has power with God". He has to turn it away from "Jacob", the old "supplanter", the "heel catcher".

The elect remnant of Israel continues with God, discovering the righteousness of Abraham by faith. But Jacob is still rebelling. So, God promised to send a deliverer to Jacob. And, when that promise is fulfilled (Paul himself has put this out into the future), both the elect remnant and the scattered, lost sheep of the House of Israel will be saved. "And, so all Israel shall be saved." However we deal with those words, or how we define "all Israel" - whether all Israel alive at Christ's return (in contrast to Ezekiel's valley of dry bones), or all Israel who constitute the elect seed (in contrast to the blinded mass) - we must come to grips with Paul's declaration. In some way, in some very real form, after the fullness of the Gentiles is come in, ALL Israel must turn to God and be saved.

Read his stunning conclusion.

"For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins, As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes; but as touching the election, they are beloved for the father's sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance (or, "turning from")."

This is an emphatic piece of New Testament Israelology that must fit comfortably into our overall theological scheme. God has made an everlasting, immutable covenant with the nation of Israel. As concerning the gospel, they are temporarily enemies for the sake of the wild branch of Gentiles whom the irresistible power of God has drawn into the covenant of salvation by grace. But, as concerning God's election and foreordination, they are beloved by God. Hence, Jeremiah could declare,

"Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel;" (Jer. 31: 3-4a)

They are loved "for the father's sakes". They are loved because God made immutable covenants with their forefathers. The gifts, declares Paul, the promises which God gave Israel, and the calling of Israel to Himself, are without turning, without wavering, without repentance. God will never utter words to any person or group of people and then turn His back on those words.

Any theology that concludes that God has declared a final end to national Israel, or that the promises He made them are now exclusively the property of the New

Covenant church, is a theology at variance with the whole of God's Word, and the specific New Testament theology Paul spelled out with such exactness. If God turned from His people, whom He foreknew, then His gifts and calling are indeed turned from and repented of.

So, what should properly be the Gentile reaction to these things?

“For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief, even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy, they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.”

It's all about God! God was merciful to us so that we would praise His gracious salvation. Likewise, part of Israel is currently in the same state of unbelief God found us in, so that they also will know His grace and His mercy. Paul clearly stated that God would be merciful to stumbling, blind Israel. He will not cast them off and He will love them on account of the promises He made to their fathers, and the covenant He swore by Himself.

This is an amazing theology! God chose Israel first, but He had mercy on the elect Jews and Gentiles first. Just as the younger brothers, time and again, received the birthright blessings that belonged to the elder, and the Newer Covenant superceded the Older, so the young church obtained the blessing that by right belonged to elder brother, Israel.

But, importantly, everyone who ever finds their way to Heaven was initially an unbeliever. God designed His method of salvation that way. Even the nation of Israel, despite all the benefits of God's presence, God's service, God's tabernacle, the Scripture, the promises, etc. still wound up in unbelief. That way, God would be the merciful savior of all His people and no one could boast against His unfailling grace.

Notice also that Paul never declared the Gentiles to be "true Israel", but merely the subjects of God's mercy to provoke Israel (the genuine, honest-to-goodness, historic, physical Israel) to jealousy. That's the purpose of the Gentile church, and they are not to boast against the natural branches.

“O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory forever. Amen.”

I couldn't agree more.

CONCLUSION:

Romans 9:6 must be viewed in light of the larger context. It does not create a "true Israel" as opposed to "a false Israel." It is part of Paul's demonstration that the blessed seed has always been dependant on God's gracious election. Every generation, starting at Abraham, experienced a narrowing of God's focused blessing.

God is far from finished with Israel. They retain their status as His elect people. Some are currently saved by grace through faith, and the rest are temporarily blinded until God finishes bringing in the Gentiles. But, after that, according to Paul, "And so all Israel shall be saved."

The Gentiles were added to the covenant for the purpose of making blinded Israel jealous over God. Unbelieving Israel will be re-grafted into their own covenant by the same mercy of God that brought the unbelieving Gentiles in.

That's the plan of God, which was foretold in the Old Testament and repeated intact in the New Testament. Paul told it to the first century Gentile church, and it is just as true today.