

K-479 Israel in Exile

by Art Katz

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding Israel's exile and its implications for the Church's understanding of itself and its relationship with God.

Duration: 1:00:10

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:11, Jeremiah 30:11, Matthew 6:33, Romans 11:17-33

Topics: "Israel"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the shock and devastation that occurs when people's confidence and expectations are destroyed. He emphasizes the importance of not boasting or being arrogant, as God has the power to break off branches and remove individuals from His plan. The speaker also highlights the significance of understanding the mystery of Israel and the church, and how it relates to the overall wisdom and knowledge of God. He concludes by suggesting that disillusionment and a failure to understand devastation may contribute to a falling away from faith in the end times.

Transcript

Well, the theme that has been occupying me as I look for a point of beginning is the subject of exile. It's a precious little book here written by a Lutheran theologian called Israel in Exile. It is even called the Theology of Exile, because one of the great problems that Israel's expulsion from the land in its history had presented was how to understand this crisis.

How could God expel a nation that he himself had brought to the land and established in his own holy city for his own purposes? How could the temple be destroyed, which was the sanctuary of his own presence? And it raised enormous crisis questions for Israel that to this day have not yet been answered. The Holocaust would be a continuation of the same kind of question. How does God allow devastation, ruin to his own chosen people? Seems to be a contradiction.

Where is his covenant faithfulness? And could it be that the sins of the nation are such that would justify that kind of severe dealing of blood? And if he brings them to the point of near extinction, how then can they be the people through whom his own kingdom is to come? There are enormous questions. And what makes them more than academic is that I believe we have every right to anticipate another exile and crisis of an even greater proportion, because the scriptures tell us that there's a time of Jacob's trouble coming, such as the world has never known or ever will again know, that exceeds and eclipses every previous devastation in Israel's history. And my own understanding is this, that the church does not have any

anticipation of the soon coming calamity, let alone Israel.

So what happens when something of this kind should fall on an unprepared people? It would be devastating not only physically, but morally, psychologically, and spiritually. It might even and could conceivably lead to the forfeiture of their faith, particularly if they have an expectation contrary to what is in fact coming. I'm going to be repeating myself many times over, and you'll appreciate every repetition, because this thing has got to come into our consciousness, and it bears repetition.

Even that segment of the church that is disposed toward Israel does not have this expectation. But there's something about our human nature that desires the best for that which we love and for we esteem. And so the hope of even the church that is sympathetic to Israel is that present Israel, despite its great problems and controversies and difficulties with an Arab and Palestinian presence within its own borders, will somehow find a way to reconcile these differences.

And that the hopeful nation, though right now does not seem to give evidence of the spiritual quality and character appropriate to God's call, will progressively and over the course of time come to that. That these problems will be resolved, that we need to pray for their leadership, and men like Arafat and other enemies of Israel will become tractable and disposed to cooperate in this peace proposal. So I would say most of those who are disposed to Israel have this mentality.

My own view is altogether different. I would say that my own view is apocalyptic. That is to say, it expects devastation, and that devastation is in fact required, and that out of that devastation and death will come, out of that ashes, through the power of resurrection, a nation whose character is in keeping with its call.

If we seem to be majoring on Israel, it's because that nation deserves that attention. I always have to make this statement. I'm not speaking on this subject because I'm Jewish.

If God had chosen Pygmies, I would be speaking about Pygmies. I'm speaking about Israel because in fact it is the nation that God has chosen. At the end of the age concludes with God's dealings of that nation that everything that is introduced by the conclusion of the age, God's millennial kingdom has to do with that nation's restoration.

The single greatest subject for the church's consideration, now in this point of time in history at the threshold of these concluding divine actions, is the subject of Israel. And I'm so persuaded about its centrality that I often say that the church that ignores, neglects, or refuses to consider that centrality is *ipso facto* by that very thing nullified as church. That the issue of the church is the issue of Israel and that the issue of Israel is the issue of God.

Israel from the very first was God's witnessed nation. He established them for that purpose, to reveal himself through the conduct and demeanor and character of a people visible among the nations of the earth. That Israel has failed to fulfill that calling is historically and presently evident.

And I'm going to show that not only even in their failure, but by virtue of their failure, God is more powerfully revealed than if they had succeeded. There are enormous questions. Where is God in their calamity? What are their sins that would invite calamity as judgment? How can God bring judgment and yet fulfill his own promise toward that nation? His word is at stake.

His honor is at stake. And the fulfillment of that word would require a demonstration of his power that is unknown, not only by the nations, but even by the church. So the subject of exile is enormous.

And I've never had the opportunity to sit down like this and seek to develop it. I've written some papers myself. I've got a few things that I've composed in the last few days of extracts from these two books that will be a kind of a springboard for us to consider these questions.

So I just want to begin by saying something about exile itself. And I want to give some reasons why a study of the subject of exile will be profitable for us and for the church. And I think I've already mentioned it in what I've said.

That if these calamities come and the church is unprepared for them, it will be devastating to the church's own faith. If it has a happy and optimistic anticipation that is not fulfilled. If, for example, present Israel should again be cast out among the nations, that's what exile is.

Exile is expulsion. Many will be totally unprepared for that. And the great question will be raised for them is, where is God? Although the scriptures don't say it explicitly, it may well be that the last days falling away that Paul gives as one of the symptoms of the last days may have something to do with this.

That out of a disillusionment by what appears to be the failure of God to succeed in Israel's establishment, and to allow again a devastation and a calamity to come to that nation, that the question of God himself is raised about his own power to fulfill his own intention for that nation and to preserve and to keep them is the honoring of his covenant toward them. How does he allow that? And where is he? And is he in fact God? The God that cannot preserve his own people and perfect and fulfill his intentions through them raises a question about whether in fact he's God. And that question has already been raised in places that we don't know, but essentially in theological places, in seminaries where men are being trained for ministry.

The doctrine of God is up for grabs. Men are seriously considering that maybe we have naively misunderstood that God was not all powerful, or if he were, how could he have allowed the Holocaust? Or he's not all righteous, because if he had the power to intervene to stop it and allowed it to continue, where is his righteousness and where is his mercy? Devastation and exile raises great questions about the character of God as God. And those questions have not been successfully answered.

Even from the first expulsion of Israel in 586, the Babylonian captivity and the expulsion into the nations, which is the basis of Israel, world Jewry's present condition, has not been sufficiently understood. Few modern Jews ever think that being born in Moscow or Brooklyn or Los Angeles or Germany is a statement of judgment and expulsion. We have so much succeeded in the places of exile that we do not recognize that being born out of the land is a statement of exile, and therefore have missed the profound reason for which God has given us the experience that exile, being out of the land and out of the place of God and the place of our calling, was to have raised the question of why, and to have sought God in a repentant spirit in the acknowledgment of sins that have brought such a consequence upon us.

That is totally absent from the consideration of modern Jews and totally absent from the consciousness of the Church. And as we'll go into it, the role of the Church to the Jew and to Israel is absolutely profound for the Church's own understanding of itself. The relationship between the Church and Israel is the heart of the matter.

So the Church's failure, even to communicate to Jews in their places of exile why they are there, has robbed God of the great potential that could have come if the Church could have rightly interpreted for world Jewry its condition. It means that the Church itself does not understand the workings of God, that

the Church itself doesn't understand divine judgment, or that God will go that far, which means that if it should happen again, the Church could really be knocked off its fence. It could really be, to say disoriented is to understate it, could be devastated in its own inadequate faith, and may be brought to the place where it would forfeit that faith in some kind of resignation or dejection like, where is God? These are enormous questions for the future, and all that's wanting is for the event itself to take place.

And we're sitting on like a time clock calamity waiting to go off. It could go off momentarily. Someone said that June 9th was going to be a day of great outpouring, evil was going to be ripped from the earth, cataclysmic events were going to take place.

The only cataclysmic event that I could rightly expect that could have taken place on June 9th would have been the devastation to Israel that I expect will happen. It doesn't happen on June 9th, it could happen on July 9th, or sometime in the near future, but I think that the expectation for it is realistic. A devastation and a failure of world Jewry's hope in a restored nation, and the prospect again of being expelled into the nations and to experience exile.

So this is trauma, this is devastation, and so not the least of the reasons that we're called to the church is to be fitted somehow to anticipate and to communicate reasonable and realistic expectations for the church and to be able to interpret events when they come, which is part of what the prophetic function is. As it is a crisis unto death, no aspect of the biblical faith will be left untouched. One of the reasons why I feel so keen about the subject of Israel in exile is that it requires an examination of every aspect of the faith.

What is the church? What is prophetic calling? What is faith? What is judgment? What is sin? Who is God? What is the end of these things? The subject of the end is eschatology, the study of things pertaining to the end. The whole issue of the kingdom of God, Israel's relationship to that kingdom. Why will Israel suffer in the nations and at the hands of the nations? Why has that historically been Israel's experience? Why is there something working that seeks Israel's extermination? How do we understand that? The powers of darkness, the principalities and the powers, the whole moral and cosmic drama of God vying for dominion over his own creation in contest with other powers of darkness, in which the issue of Israel and the church is critical.

Every one of these things that constitute the faith come in for a special examination in this subject. There's something about crisis that brings a focus, an intensity of examination that cannot be obtained on any other basis. And exile is crisis.

It's ultimate crisis. I'm not satisfied with anything that I'm expressing that can really put that in your spirit, trusting that as we go into this, the reality of it will break. So Paul speaks about an end-time apostasy that many will fall away, a great falling away.

The love of many will grow cold as iniquity abounds. I'm suggesting that another factor for the falling away will be disillusionment in a misunderstanding of God and a failure to understand devastation when it comes. We're not prepared for it.

We're not schooled for it. The flesh does not want to consider it. It's not a pleasant consideration.

Things that are apocalyptic, that have to do with sudden devastation, judgment, fire, burning, for Israel first and then also the nations, is not a pleasant consideration. And more than we know it, we're humanistic in

the deepest desires of our heart to see resolution and change to come in ways that don't require devastation. We'd rather see progressive improvement or some resolution of conflict that brings about the desired end rather than an apocalyptic dealing of God.

So the whole issue of apocalyptic, to get that word down, is a choice word for last day's consideration. And the question of how to communicate that to God's people. How do you fit people for an end-time expectation that has at its heart apocalyptic devastation? And how to understand God in that? And I think that these very dealings will be God's provision to fit the Church for its own role that it will play at such times and for its own millennial destiny.

As little as the Church expects apocalyptic conclusions to the age, so also do they have as little understanding or expectation of the Church's own millennial destiny. There's a ruling and reigning with Christ from heavenly places that is the Church's destiny and for which the last days is our preparation. So the very same things that search out Israel will also be searching us out.

And the whole refining and purging work of God that comes through these crisis events is also at the same time this provision to bring the Church to its place of preparedness for its millennial destiny. So two great words have already been mentioned, apocalyptic or apocalypse and millennia or millennium. And these words have only the faintest and shallowest understanding on the part of God's people.

And I can tell you I think the essential reason why. Both words are profoundly connected with the subject of Israel. It is Israel and Israel's destiny that opens up the whole issue of millennium.

And because the Church has historically had an anti-semitic disposition that did not want to consider that Israel as a nation would even have a millennial destiny, that much of the whole subject of millennium has itself been lost. So if it has been lost by the rejection of things pertaining to Israel, how shall it be found? By returning to and restoring the things that pertain to Israel in our own understanding. That's why Israel is a key, the key in my opinion, for the whole view of the faith which if it is not millennial is not apostolic.

A faith that does not embrace and see as critical a millennial future is not the faith. That has to do with hope, with expectancy, and reward. And we'll probably be going into all of these things in the days ahead.

So the blessed hope of the Church that sustained it in previous times of persecution in its early history is not now part of the Church's understanding. The Church is more moored or established in the world and in the present than it is in the hope of the future. So what I'm saying is, all of these are introductory remarks, that the whole character of the Church is defunct and below par beneath God's intention for the absence of these considerations that are rooted in the subject of Israel.

And the ironic thing is that even that segment of the Church that is partial toward Israel but has a sentimental rather than what I call an apostolic view is in no better place than that Church which rejects the view of Israel altogether. Unless the subject of Israel is seen apocalyptically, it's not being seen. Unless it's understood in the context that I'm hoping to set forth, it's not really understood, it's not seen.

In fact, it could even be doing a disservice to God's purposes and be contrary to his purposes. A replacement theology which substitutes the Church for Israel not only does disservice to Israel, it does disservice to the Church. And the very fact that it exists and that it's powerful and has an increasing influence shows that unless this subject is probably communicated and understood, something else will come and substitute for it, namely views of this kind.

And what is in keeping with this replacement theology that not only displaces Israel is that it displaces the Lord himself, in my opinion, because it sees the Kingdom as coming exclusively through and by the Church, that in fact the Church is the Kingdom and that the Kingdom comes independent of the King himself, that when he comes it's presented as an established fact, as a gift, rather than waiting upon his coming. So the whole thing about the Lord and his coming and what that coming signifies and what is to be expected is very much affected by this whole theological view that has replaced Israel. It's ironic, but once you begin to substitute for Israel the Church, you begin to substitute something for God himself and the Lord's own coming.

And so these are already powerful factors and there's a real doctrinal theological struggle that is going on and this is going to be the environment of the Church already presently is now, that we will have to face as men and women working in the Church. There's one brother who thinks that the subject of Israel is so central that he thinks that theology ought to have a separate category. It has eschatology, the study of last days things.

It has ecclesiology, the study of the Church, and many other ologies that have to do with the Holy Spirit and things. But he believes that the subject of Israel is so distinctive that there ought to be in theology the subject of Israelology. Well, if I don't use that word, I agree with his thought.

It's absolutely central and for that reason powerfully opposed by the powers of darkness and powerfully opposed by the flesh. There's something that rises up in our flesh that is offended by God choosing a people. We don't like God being selective and particularly to choose something other than ourselves and to make that other foremost in his own consideration as the apple of his eye.

And all the more that when we know that that people don't deserve that kind of recognition and that kind of consideration. There's something in us that is chafed that he would select and choose the Jew or Israel. And that is not an accident.

I believe that that is God's way of probing the deepest levels of the heart of the Church that even though it subscribes externally and outwardly to the doctrine of grace, inwardly operates on the basis of merit and deserving. If there's a deep undercurrent in the Church that it itself does not recognize, that disposes its judgments and evaluation on the basis of merit and qualification while it speaks the language of grace, then what does that say for the Church's condition? It's schizophrenic. It's a contradiction.

It's not a Church that's whole. And I believe in fact that that is the condition of the Church. Well, though we subscribe technically to the doctrine of grace in the deepest corridors of our secret thoughts, there's much that is predicated on merit and worth.

Our secret evaluations of men and how we esteem them and how we value them has more to do with how we see them on the basis of their performance than on the basis of grace. See what I mean? And the thing that identifies and flushes that out is the subject of Israel. The genius of God, and you'll come into this, you'll see this, in choosing that nation and its history and its peculiar character, its exclusiveness, everything that would rub Gentiles the wrong way, even Gentile Christians, is calculated by God to identify, flush out, and bring to the surface things that we would not otherwise have recognized in ourselves, and that would have been a fatal flaw in our own Christian life, conduct, and service.

Israel serves such purposes of God for the Church, even in its apostasy and in its unbelief, that is remarkable. That you just have to fall before God and you begin to glimpse this and bow before his great

wisdom. All the depths, Paul says, of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God who has been his counselor.

And Paul says that in Romans 11, you'll hear that from me daily, over the mystery of Israel and the Church. You've got to begin to get something into your spirit. This is not a technical subject.

It's a mystery of which Paul says he would not have us to be ignorant. Even for the Church to say, yes, Israel is a valid concern, and Jews deserve the gospel like everyone else, sounds on the face of it like an honorific statement like, yes, well said. Actually, that statement stinks to high heaven.

Israel is not an ethnic, another ethnic group that deserves the attention of the Church, like Puerto Ricans or Venezuelans or some other. Israel has a focus and meaning, a significance beyond any other nation, especially and significantly because it is chosen as the vehicle for the soon-coming theocratic rule of God. God has not elected that Puerto Rico is to be the locus of his soon-coming kingdom, but Israel is to the Jew first.

And to the Jew first, that's another aspect of it. And this very emphasis, this election of God, I will choose, I will elect whom I will elect, is infuriating. It's an irritant, even to the most spiritual believers.

And until we have not just made our peace with that, but embraced God's choosing, and love what he chooses, and understand the wisdom of his choice, and understand that the issue of his choice is the issue of his glory, we have not yet laid hold of it. And that's why I say, merely even to be sentimental about Israel, or to favor Israel's success, or to say that the Jews deserve the attention of the Gospel, like any other people, is falling so short of God's desire. And until the Church embraces in full the mystery, it falls short of the glory of God.

I'm going to sound like a deranged character, like I'm foaming at the mouth, and I'm absolutely off the wall, and totally exaggerated in my view. But the way I see the Church, I marvel that the Church today has any coherence at all. That it functions independent of the embracing of this mystery, is altogether one of the statements of God's greatest grace.

The Church is an abnormality. The Church is a grotesque distortion. It is completely out of whack, because it is missing that central consideration that makes Church, Church.

And though you think that that may be an outlandish statement and an exaggeration, if anything, I am understating the case. Everything that is wanting in the Church today, its authority, its power, its witness, its prophetic function in the world, can be traced, in my opinion, in the last analysis, to the absence of the consideration of Israel as God intended it should be considered. So I'm setting out a radical proposition, and I hope to persuade you about the truth of it.

But even as I say Israel, I know that that has a different kind of resonance in everyone around the table here. It means something else to each one of us. But I mean it as God himself sees that nation.

That kind of seeing is critical for the Church. So the issue of exile, for the brothers that are just coming late, we're beginning this morning with the subject of Israel and exile. Of Israel being cast out of the nation, the land of promise, its calling, seeming to contradict God's every intention, the devastation that God allows to come upon his own people.

Expulsion is ultimate crisis. And one of the things that left Israel unprepared for it historically in the sixth century, in the Babylonian captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem, was that God would never allow his own holy city to be destroyed. God would never allow his own sanctuary, the sanctuary of his presence, the Shekinah glory that housed in the Holy of Holies in the Temple of God to be destroyed.

That Israel considered Jerusalem and the Temple of something in the same way that in the time of Eli, the priest, they took the Ark of God out into the battlefield with the Philistines and thought that that Ark would guarantee their victory. Instead, not only did defeat come, but the Ark itself was captured. There's no way to find words to express what is the shock and the trauma and the devastation to the thought, the heart, the spirit of men, when the things in which they have rooted their most deep confidence and expectancy is destroyed.

Where is God to have allowed it? Particularly of people who have not a consciousness of their sin and have rejected the testimony of the prophets whom God had raised up early and sent to them daily to persuade them of it. Remember what Paul says in Romans 11 about don't boast against the branches that have been broken off for this very failure, because if God did not hesitate to break off those branches, will he hesitate to break you off? Therefore, do not boast, but fear. So here's another interesting aspect.

I said the church is not the church. The church is a stunted caricature, even in its best forms today, of God's apostolic intention. And one of the profound elements missing from church that makes church church is the fear of God.

And I believe that the absence of that fear is altogether related to the loss of the things that we're considering, because we have not understood God's severity toward Israel, and that he would go that far to break them off and to cast them out, the outcast of Israel and the dispersed of Judah, and allow their city and their temple to be destroyed. We do not sufficiently fear God for ourselves. And if Israel was capable of transgression sufficient for that judgment, what would keep us from like failure if we think somehow that we're made of better stuff than they? God even says these things are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the age have come.

Israel is the church's textbook, and the failure to properly understand the severity and dealings of God with Israel leaves us in an unhappy state. You can see that the relationship between Israel and the church is so remarkably profound, that to miss that is to leave the church without a proper understanding of itself and for itself, and puts the church in the same place of jeopardy that Israel itself experienced and failed in. So the last days falling away may well be the proof of the kinds of things that I'm suggesting.

And if these things are true, to what degree would the powers of darkness not only seek to obliterate or to exterminate Israel, but to rob us as the church of the understanding that God intends for us about that nation and that people and our relationship to him? That's what they call a rhetorical question. It answers itself. He will do everything to blunt, to distort, or to actually remove Israel from the consideration of the church.

And he has. He has succeeded enormously. And not just with the rank and file Christian, but even with the fathers of the faith, even the apostolic fathers have lost ground on this issue.

Luther is an outstanding example, and I can name others of the earlier church fathers, who, though they were great in other aspects of the faith, missed it with regard to the subject of Israel. And were even vehement enemies of Israel and encouraged anti-Semitism in the church against Israel. What is the

church's world mission? What is the great commission for the church? Is it to save the nations or a people for his name from among the nations? Because the task of the ministry to the nations is not the church's, per se, but restore Israel's.

In other words, even that question is very much affected by the understanding of God's distinctive call both to Israel and to the church. And for the church to take on a task that is not its, but belongs to another, is to distort and to rob the church in its own energy. What does that mean? Does that mean entire nations must be saved? And we're expecting ourselves and we're disappointed that only a few thousand were saved and established as the church or a people for his name from among all nations.

What is the fullness of the Gentiles? See, even that question has to be studied and understood in relationship to the mystery of Israel. For when it is obtained, something happens to Israel and for Israel independent of itself. So here, even this with the great commission is defined in relationship to Israel.

I don't know how to say it. The church that cannot even see itself, define itself, understand itself, except in relationship to this other entity that God has created with which it is to be joined, Israel. And it's not a people that we would have chosen to be joined with.

There's everything about them that is irritating and abrasive and we want to put them off or just give them the most nominal acknowledgment. And yet God says we're locked in with this people and we will never be, for him, what he intends as the church, independent of our relationship with them. But it's got to be a like relationship, not a sentimental one.

And it will require everything of us, maybe even our martyrdom. Perhaps even at their hands, as even the first martyr came as the result of Jewish opposition to the gospel. In the heated controversy of the inception of the church, it may again be the experience of the church at its end, when every issue will be heated again.

And to be a victim at the hands of the people with whom we have an identification and even a love seems an irony. But unless we're willing to bear that, we may miss the whole critical frame. Because that first martyrdom was the key to Paul's conversion.

It took the greatest enemy of the faith and made him the leading apostle. By what was demonstrated in the martyrdom of Stephen, the man filled with the spirit, who saw the heavenly things that were open to him and could bear that suffering without complaint and even a cry out to God of mercy against those who were stoning him. It may require a demonstration like that at the very end of the age, to take historic Jewish opposition and break it as Paul saw his opposition was broken, and bring them again into being a apostolic call to their own God.

Would we be willing to be the foreign guy? Would we be willing to be the Stephens of the last days, who necessarily must suffer that for Israel's coming into a apostolic call? We have to give an answer to a people who will be so devastated and so without hope that they are nigh unto death. And if they perish because of the lack of faith--in fact, studies of the Holocaust show that men who were victims, as against those who survived, that the principal difference was the issue of hope. Men died because they had not hope for their survival or for their future.

There are other men suffering exactly the same destitution, the same starvation, the same brutal conditions, who survived because there was a component in them of hope and expectancy despite their

present abject conditions. And what I'm saying is this. Not the least of the Church's tasks in the last days is to communicate hope to the despairing, both Israel that will be down and out, and to the Church itself that will be knocked off its pins like, well, what's happening? But especially for Israel, a word of hope has got to come to it that will sustain it until the Lord himself comes to be their deliverer and to establish them.

We'll come into these texts where it says, say to them that your God comes and speak to the lame. The lame will leap and the eyes of the blind will be opened because someone will say to them, your Lord is coming. Hang in there.

But that's more than just a word of pat-on-the-back encouragement. It's a prophetic word of life-giving time that actually sustains the physical life of people who would otherwise die in their despair and preserves them for God's final deliverance. Because if there is not a final deliverance and a return and an establishment of that nation, there is no coming of the Lord and there's no kingdom.

And the Church is the key in its proclamation of hope in the midst of despair to save the nation that would otherwise perish. It's not a word of encouragement that we give humanly, it's a word that we give prophetically. But if we ourselves don't believe it, or we have only a nominal subscription to it, it's not a word that has been made flesh, it's not integral to our whole being, despite every appearance to the contrary, we will not be able to proclaim it.

I hope they do not think me exaggerating when I say that what takes place over this table is absolutely critical for the historic future. And that one little thing that we are in the kingdom of God is this little thing, that God has given me this view and this perspective of the Church in its prophetic calling and constituency to be a voice of hope in a word that is creative and life-giving at a time of Israel's ultimate despair in exile and expulsion, which is to, at this very moment while we're speaking, not expect it. As dread as Israel's present conditions are, as much as their negotiated peace seems to be coming apart at the seams, and Arafat is a disappointment, and as even in South Africa, openly in a mosque talk about the holy war, the jihad, and that Jerusalem will again be theirs, and has devastated the leading Israeli politicians who have worked out this peace with him, there is still an inveterate, deep Jewish optimism that will somehow still make it.

This shall not come to pass. It can't, it's unthinkable. Devastation is unthinkable.

I mean, is all of this 40-year history to be in vain, and we've come all this way and built these cities, and to be again cast out in the nations without hope? It's unthinkable. And I want to say that if you want to define what a prophet is or a prophetic church, it's the uncommon ability to think the unthinkable and to anticipate it, and to be able to bring hope to those who have been devastated when the unthinkable in fact comes. And how distant is that realization? It could come next month or within the next year.

Certainly, I believe, before the end of this decade, we're going to see the most phenomenal shakings of God that we could never have conceived as possible, and there's very little present expectation of that in the church, let alone a stature and a maturity to bear it when it comes, and to be able to speak into that situation prophetically to those who would otherwise perish if they did not hear the prophetic word of hope. And it's not, I hope, I hope, I hope, where you're rubbing a genie lamp. It's a hope predicated on the knowledge of the word and God's clear testimony of what is yet to be fulfilled, and that has been prophetically spoken.

Well, what will happen if the rapture does not come when one expects it? And if you can understand this, a lot of the sentimental affection and regard for Israel stems from a dispensational view that believes that the church is raptured and that Israel remains for the time of tribulation. And so there's a kind of a guilt there, and we want to do now for Israel what we can, knowing that when the hard time comes, we'll be gone, and we'll have to face it. So even this is an unclean motive.

It's not a pure priestly view and love for Israel for its own sake, but it stems out of a kind of a guilt that they'll be here to face the music while we have been conveniently raptured away. And this kind of mishmash, you know, is completely obfuscating the church. It's confusing it, and leaves it in the kind of condition that it's in, that these are the realities of the church, but over it is played its songs, its praise and worship, and its choruses, and its amens and hallelujahs, and ain't we got fun and slaps on the back, and this is the greatest of all worlds, and there's something unreal.

You see what I mean? God is God. He's the God of truth. The church is the grounded pillar of truth, and so we're covering over a whole mishmash of confused understandings, and compromised motives, and guilt, and things that are not pure with a whole layer of so-called praise and worship.

And even now, one of the most recent developments called Revival are people falling down in hysterical laughter, and that's sweeping the country. I can't understand historical laughter when we should be in the depths of anguished repentance. In fact, he warns the church that not long after I leave, there'll be those rising up from your own ranks who will draw men to themselves, and will turn away from the whole counsel of God.

And in fact, by the second and third century, you already have church fathers who have anti-semitic attitudes. Well, I think the basic turning point was the advent of the Holy Roman Empire, the so-called, it comes later, conversion of Constantine, and who saw a sign, you know, a cross on the heavens, and had the whole nation to become Christians, and saved the church out of its severest persecution. And men who were persecuted by the same Roman Empire now became state officials, lived in palaces, were given retirement benefits, and every kind of a thing.

They went from severe persecution to being honored and flattered, as the Christianity became christened dumb, and enveloped the whole pagan world. And so the great influx of pagan Gentiles soon robbed it of its, not only its Hebraic character, but they consciously turned from any Jewish elements, as for example, Easter being the expression of their pagan spring festivals, and lost the Hebraic thing that had to do with Passover and with resurrection, in such a way that it broke off altogether and became exclusively a Gentile community, and opposed to anything that was Jewish. Those things that were Jewish were looked upon as threatening, or Judaizing.

And so we have inherited that Christianity, that Christendom, and even the Reformation did not heal that situation, as Luther himself, who's the father of the Reformation, was himself a notorious anti-Semite. He had a famous conversation with three rabbis, and if he was going to show them the clear testimony of the Messianic prophecies, and was absolutely stupefied when they turned every one of those prophecies around, and gave such an interpretation, so much as not only to discredit them, but to cast blasphemous aspersions upon the faith and upon the Lord. And he felt that then the very presence of Jews would threaten the Reformation, and discredit it, and so on.

And so that sphere then became rabid, and then anti-Semitic. He wrote a book called The Lies of the Jews. There's a great deal of truth in that book, but when it's read with an unspiritual eye by a person, it

can be incendiary, it can fire up the anti-Semitic hatred that the Nazis expressed four centuries later.

Christostom was an early church father, anti-Semitic. The thing that rubbed the church raw in the early days was the insistence by Jews in exile, where the churches were in the Mediterranean world, that there would be a day of return, that God would rebuild the temple, and that Israel would have a place of millennial glory, and be the foremost nation among the nations of the earth. And that so made the church to writhe from the friction with Jews that they couldn't bear to hear it, although it's true.

You know, when the disciples said to Jesus, is it time now to restore the kingdom to Israel? That was a very valid question. It was part of traditional historical biblical Jewish expectancy. The only thing is that their definition of the kingdom was nationalistic and narrow.

They did not understand it as it being intended as a blessing for all nations. So, these are all historic elements that make our subject more difficult to work our way through all of the historic fallout that has come from that. There was the Assyrian devastation of Israel, the northern, there's the northern Israel, Israel, and the southern, Judah and Israel.

So, I think around 722 BC was the Assyrian devastation, where those ten tribes were completely devastated and expelled from the land, and into the whole Assyrian empire, and intermingled and lost their identity. In 586 was the Babylonian expulsion to Judah and Benjamin, the two southern tribes whose headquarters was in Jerusalem. And they were expelled, but they were expelled as a people, and they lived in Babylon and retained their identification as Jews.

So, that's the difference between the two expulsions. And virtually the whole of the prophets are the warnings about the expulsions to come, and then the post-exile or post-exhibit prophets about a return. So, Zechariah and Ezekiel lived in the time of the Babylonian expulsion.

Ezekiel was in Babylon, and Jeremiah was in Jerusalem, warning about the devastation, and he was not heeded. So, these are prophets of exile. And here's a very interesting thing, that the same prophets who did not spare Israel from warning of devastation and expulsion to come, which indeed came, were the same prophets to whom God gave the honor of speaking a restoration to come.

And yet, even at the time that they gave their unwelcome prophecies of devastation, their severest opposition came from false prophets who said, peace, peace, when there was no peace. And if that was the situation then, in 586 BC, what will it be now? The very same tension between prophets of one kind and prophets of another kind exists right till this moment. In fact, as some of you know, I'm presently called a false prophet, because I'm speaking a word of coming judgment, expulsion and doom, of devastation and calamity for Israel that men don't want to hear.

And they're speaking peace, peace. So, we're not just considering something historical, we're considering something contemporary, and we consider Zechariah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, which we will be doing. And I said that this issue of Israel touches every aspect of the faith.

The aspect that John is identifying now is the issue of the interpretation of Scripture itself. This whole allegorizing, you know what an allegory is? Jerusalem does not mean Jerusalem the city. It's an allegory for the church.

Zion does not mean the place where God's government literally issues from a hill. It's a spiritual people. That's an allegory.

You make something to stand for something else. It does not mean what it literally says, but it has a symbolic or figurative meaning. Now, is it true that the Scriptures can be used like that? And used profitably, yes, it's true.

But when God intends something to be literally understood, and you misconstrue it and spiritualize it, or give it that kind of an allegorical meaning, you are robbed of God's literal intent. And because the church fathers had not the faith or the desire to see a literal fulfillment of Israel, they moved into this figurative and allegorical method of interpreting Scripture, which remains with us still. So the whole issue of Scripture, and rightly dividing the Word of God, and how it is to be understood and to be interpreted, is a critical issue.

And if the church has taken that liberty to itself, to give its own interpretation as against God's intention, what does that mean for the church? What does it mean when you handle the Word of God in the light of your own desire and choosing, because you're unwilling to accept the literal, radical requirement of that Word? See, that's doing not just the service, it's the same kind of injury as crucifying the Son of God afresh. He's the Word. And we're doing with the living Word what men have done with the Word made flesh, and yet purport to be the church.

And the heck of it is, you can preach great sermons that way, inspirational sermons that have wonderful, rich meanings to believers, but you've missed the literal intent of God. And this has never been corrected. So here, too, is a very great question.

The principles of Scripture interpretation are called hermeneutics, because once you've taken the liberty of misinterpreting Scripture as against Israel, where do you stop? Once you've taken the liberty of saying that the church is now Israel, where do you stop where the church then becomes God, and God's own coming? And what kind of a church is it, then, where these things are opposite? It's a disfigured church, it's a contradicted church, it's an apostate church. So the issue of the church becoming the church and being restored, in its apostolic integrity, is the issue of bringing Israel back again into the focus that God intended from the first. And that is our labor, and that, I believe, is the work of restoration.

The Lord will not come till Elijah first come and restore all things. And there's a great work of restoration, all of the things that we have been touching this morning, in just this beginning introduction of an entire, vast, complicated subject. Well, let's take a little break.

Lord Jesus, we just thank you, my God, for breaking in. And may you just continue, Lord, to open up understanding and sink something deep into our hearts and our spirits. And we want the restoration, my God, of what has been lost.

And we ask your patient forbearance with us as you bring us, my God, to that so foundational, so fundamental, for the church of the last days that it is to stand and to perform those very saving functions that has to do with the coming of your kingdom. Lord, bless us, Lord, to give us a breath, a change, a refreshing, and bring us back, my God, for this morning to conclusion. And we thank you for the beginning that you've given us in Jesus' name.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net