

# The Battle for Israel Pt 1

by Billy Strachan

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*Billy Strachan emphasizes the importance of understanding Israel's distinct identity and destiny in God's plan amidst widespread confusion in the church.*

**Duration:** 1:06:11

**Scripture:** Isaiah 1:2-15, Isaiah 45:17, Isaiah 45:25, Isaiah 59:1-8

**Topics:** "Israel"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the lack of awareness among the people in the church about the troubling events happening around them. He quotes from the book of Isaiah, emphasizing that God is not pleased with their religious activities and sacrifices because their hearts are filled with sin and deceit. The speaker also highlights the need for the church to examine itself and be willing to go through the refining process that God desires in order to become what He intends it to be. The sermon concludes with a reminder that the people of Israel, whom God had nurtured and brought up, were the ones rebelling against Him, and that they needed to turn back to Him.

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## Transcript

We'll turn to our allotted theme for these two meetings today, which is Battle for Israel. When I accepted the invitation to speak here in Westminster Chapel Friday and Saturday, Ken Burnett later offered me the titles for the messages. Friday, Battle for Britain, and Saturday, Battle for Israel.

Well I'm a one for battles, so I thought that's good, I'll accept that. I had no idea what I was going to say at the time. Well we've dealt with Battle for Britain yesterday, to the best of my ability.

So today we're going to deal with the theme of Battle for Israel. And as I meditated on this and prayed in preparation for these meetings, I felt God was showing me that the battle for Israel, particularly at this time, is a battle for the truth. It seems to me that Israel occupies a very special place in God's program for the nations, for this age, and for the next age.

And I believe Satan is aware that this age cannot close and the next age be ushered in. Until God's plan for Israel has been fulfilled. Consequently I think Satan does everything he can to retain the measure of control that he has over Israel.

Because once he loses that, he's lost everything. That's his final uh stronghold. And so I do believe that there is the most intense battle, in the spiritual realm and in the natural realm, going on for God's destiny for Israel.

And it seems to me that a major part of Satan's strategy against Israel has been to obscure the truth as revealed in the word of God. I think it's quite amazing the measure of confusion that has existed and still exists in the church today, concerning God's purposes for Israel. So I want to do the best that I can to bring out the truth, the biblical truth, concerning Israel.

And then to suggest practical ways in which we should respond to that truth. At the present time I think the truth needs to be emphasized, particularly in regard to two things. Israel's identity and Israel's destiny.

Amazing though it may seem, there has been almost limitless confusion and ignorance and distortion in the church for a good many centuries, concerning the identity of Israel. This is really somewhat amazing, because the statements of the Bible left to themselves are so clear and positive. But it is a fact that there has been enormous confusion in the minds of multitudes of Christians, concerning the identity of Israel.

Who is Israel? And so I want to begin to the best of my ability, by establishing the scriptural identity of Israel. The problem is that Israel has frequently been used by Bible teachers and commentators. And even in biblical texts, as a synonym for the church.

For instance, in the Authorized Version Bible, that I use preaching here in London, in the 1950s. All the prophetic passages in Isaiah, about the restoration of Israel, had headings like this, God's gracious promises to the church. And I think many people thought that was part of the text.

It wasn't, it was put in by editors. And actually it's a complete misrepresentation of what Isaiah was saying. But I think this thing is so deeply rooted, much of it is what they call subliminal.

It's not that something is consciously stated, but it simply infiltrates us without our realizing. So I want to make some categorical statements, which will be shocking to some people. Probably most of the people that would be shocked, won't be here this morning.

Otherwise they, they're not the kind of people, would come to a prayer meeting for Israel you see. Well I just want to say this, emphatically. Israel is never a synonym for the church, in the Bible, never.

And the phrase that's so frequently used, the spiritual Israel, describing the church, is not found in the Bible. You cannot find the phrase spiritual Israel in the Bible. I'm not saying that people are not free to use that phrase.

But they need to explain how they're using it. And if they want to relate it to the Bible, they need to state that it is not found in the Bible. I was talking to a group of people in Israel, some of the most committed that I know, to God's plan for the Jewish people.

And I happen to say that Israel is not a synonym for the church. And one of these people, has been a friend of mine for years, brought up in the church, grown up in the things of God, and totally committed to Israel. Said that, said to me, that's the first time I've ever heard anybody say that Israel is not a synonym for the church.

So that gave me some idea of how widespread this misinterpretation is. Now we have to state, that multitudes of times, more than we can count, Israel is a type of the church. Paul himself says that, about the experiences of Israel, in first Corinthians chapter 10.

He says all these things happen to them for examples, or types. And they're written for our admonition. But it's quite different for Israel to be a type of the church, and for Israel to be a name for the church.

They're totally different. Let me give you a little imaginary illustration. Generally speaking, George Washington is considered to be the national father of the United States of America.

So you might take some more recent figure in history. For instance, Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya. And you might say, well Jomo Kenyatta is the George Washington of his people.

In other words, much that applied to George Washington, applied to Jomo Kenyatta. I'm not saying that's a totally correct view of history. I'm just saying that's a possible way of using expression.

But to say that Jomo Kenyatta was the George Washington of Kenya. It's totally different from saying that George Washington was Jomo Kenyatta. Do you understand? A type is one thing, a name is another.

Now I fully acknowledge that there are countless examples in the Bible, in which Israel is a type or a pattern of things that apply to the church. But the Bible never calls the church Israel. Consequently the things that the Bible says about Israel, apply to Israel.

That's such a simple statement but it needs to be said. And the things that the Bible says about the church, apply to the church. Generally speaking a Christian principle and interpretation, that has never been explicitly stated I think is, all the blessings apply to the church and all the curses apply to Israel.

That is not a valid principle interpretation. Now I want to give you some figures. This is, this is not what I would say entertainment, this is education.

The word Israel or Israelite occurs altogether 74 times in the New Testament. And never once is it a synonym for the church. Now a lot of people may be, tend to question that.

But I have taken the trouble to look at every one of the 74 occurrences. I'll give you just a few simple statements. Nine times the name Israel in the New Testament occurs in direct quotations from the Old Testament.

And in every one of those direct quotations from the Old Testament, where the name of Israel is used. The meaning of the name is not changed in the New Testament. It still means exactly the same in the New Testament as it did in the Old.

As far as I'm concerned the writers of the New Testament are the ultimate authority on the Christian faith. So if we depart from their usage, we have no real authority for what we are saying. Occasionally there is in the New Testament a restrictive use of words such as Jew, Israel or Israelite.

And we'll look at those. I'm aware that this will give you a somewhat misleading impression. Because to look at all the 71 places where there is no possibility of any other meaning, would take so long that we can't do it.

So I'm going to make what is in a sense a tactical error. And I'm going to look at the places where potentially you would say, perhaps in these places the meaning might be changed. We'll turn first of all to Romans chapter 2 verses 29 and 30.

This is the end of a chapter in which Paul has been explaining, with particular reference to the Jewish people, that knowledge of God's will through the law does not justify a person. A person is not right, righteous, simply because he knows what is right. On the contrary Paul says that merely increases the person's responsibility.

And Paul applies this very specifically to the Jewish people of his day. However before we say, aha there you are. We need to bear in mind that 19th centuries have elapsed.

And what was true primarily of the Jewish people in Paul's day, is much more true of professing Christians today. Today it is we who claim to have the full knowledge of the revealed will of God, in the total Bible. And Paul's warning to the Jews of his day, is probably just as needed by the church of our day.

The warning being the fact that we know the will of God and what is right, does not make us righteous. On the contrary it merely increases our responsibility. Anyhow, Paul having pointed out that in many cases, the Jews of his day had fallen short of God's will and substituted a very legalistic form of religion for the real purpose of God in the scriptures.

He closes the chapter with these words in verses 29 and 30. For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. For he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter, whose praise is not from men but from God.

Where Paul says whose praise is not from men, he is playing on the Hebrew meaning of the name Jew. Which is taken from the name of the tribe Judah. And Judah it means praise or thanksgiving.

And when Leah gave birth to her fourth son, she called him Judah or Yehudah, because she said I will praise the Lord. So the meaning of Yehudah or Judah or Jew is praise. That's the essential meaning.

So Paul says if you are a Jew, if you're a real Jew, your praise should come from God and not from men. So in a certain sense he's giving a restrictive use of the word Jew here. He's saying it's not enough to be a Jew outwardly, but you have to have the kind of inner condition of heart which earns you the praise of God.

But it's important to understand he is not extending the use of Jew, on the contrary he's restricting it. Now I read an article in a magazine published here in Britain some years ago, in which it, the writer derived from this passage the theory that we're all Jews. I'd have to say that's totally out of line with the real teaching of the New Testament.

And I think it must confuse Jewish people. Because we tell them that when we come to Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile. And the next thing we say is but we're all Jews.

That's not what Paul is even contemplating. What he's saying as I understand it, is to be a real Jew. It's not enough that you have all the outward marks, but you have to have the inward spiritual condition which earns God's praise.

So he is restricting the use of the word Jew there, to those who fulfill certain spiritual conditions. It's just as if we could say, if you're a real Christian, when somebody strikes you on one cheek, you'll turn the other. That's what a real Christian does.

But we wouldn't really mean to imply that the people who might not turn the other cheek, are not entitled to the title Christian. Do you understand what I'm saying? We're giving the word Christian, in that particular context, a restricted use. The kind of person who really deserves to be called a Christian, is the one who turns the other cheek, etc.

etc. So Paul is saying here, the one who really deserves to be called a Jew, who's really entitled to the title, is one whose inward condition earns the praise of God. Now that's legitimate.

But if you take the total number of places in which the word Jew is used in the New Testament, it's nearly 200. And as far as I know, this passage in Romans, is the only place where it's given that restrictive use. So if you ever intend to give a restrictive use to the word Jew, you've got to have very strong reasons for doing it.

It's not something that you can do simply on the basis of the language. Do you see what I'm saying? There has to be a contextual reason for giving that limited interpretation to Jew. And as far as I know, there is no other context in the New Testament, where that restricted use of Jew, is ever given again.

Now I quite enjoy this, because my background is in philosophy and logic. And I enjoy it. I'm sure some of you don't, but it's good for you anyhow.

And bear in mind there are times when we do need our intelligence in church. We're going to come to the use of the word Israel now. And again, you have to search diligently in the New Testament, to find any place where it's used in any way differently from the Old Testament.

But I will lead you to places where there is a restricted use. If I didn't lead you there, most of you would never get there. And in Romans chapter 9 verses 6 through 8, Paul is here talking about the fact that Israel, in many instances, did not receive or obey the word of God which had been given to them.

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. This is Romans 9 verse 6, For they are not all Israel, who are of Israel. Nor are they all children, because they are the seed of Abraham.

But in Isaac your seed shall be called. That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God. But the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

For this is the word of promise, at this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son. So Paul is saying here, merely to be physically descended from Israel, that's from Jacob, is not sufficient. You have to have the faith that was in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Otherwise you don't really earn the title Israel. You see what he's saying? Is that clear? I think that's it. What I want to point out to you is, again it's a restrictive use of Israel.

He's not extending the use of Israel to include all believers. He's restricting the use to include only those descendants of Israel who are in the faith of the Messiah. So it's again a restrictive use.

It is a complete error to take this passage to say that Paul describes all believers as Israel. It's not so. But I want to point out to you that in the very same chapter, in other places, he uses Israel in the normal sense

of all who are descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

For instance, in verses three through five of the same chapter, he says, for I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites. To whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenant, the giving of the law, the service of God and the promises. Of whom are the fathers and from whom according to the flesh Christ came.

Who is over all the eternally blessed God, Amen. There you'll see that Paul calls Israelites, those who are not in the faith. He says they are my kinsmen.

I could wish that I were accursed from Christ for them. That I could take their place of unbelief and rejection by God. So it's very clear in that passage, he's using the word Israel or Israelite to describe all those who are descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

And that is the normal use throughout the Old Testament, throughout the New Testament. Now we come to one other passage which is really an interesting passage. And that's in Galatians chapter 6 verse 15 and 16.

Galatians chapter 6 verses 15 and 16. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything but a new creation. The only thing that really matters is not some religious rite, but a new creative act of God in the heart.

And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them and upon the Israel of God. Paul is talking there about two kinds of people. Those who without a background in circumcision or in Judaism have experienced the new birth and the new creation and are walking in that truth.

Peace be upon them he says and upon the Israel of God. He's talking about two groups. The other group are Israelites who are the Israel of God who have embraced the faith that descended through Abraham Isaac and Jacob and have recognized their Messiah.

So the Israel of God are those Israelites who have remained in the faith that was the mark of their ancestors. And through that faith have embraced Jesus as Messiah. Now it's very very interesting that one of the most used modern translations changes the translation.

And this is the new international version. And I have I've enjoyed much in the new international version. But I think you'll find, I don't have it with me here.

The new international version says, as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, even upon the Israel of God. Meaning what? That those who walk according to this rule are the Israel of God. See now that's not on linguistic ground.

That's on theological ground. Because the word there that's translated and, if you know Greek, it's Chi, Kappa Alpha Iota. And I would say less than once in 500 times can it be translated even.

You'd have to search through the New Testament to find any places where that word is legitimately translated even. Overwhelmingly it is and. Why did the new international version translators change and to even there? What was prompting them? This old tradition that the true believers are the Israel of God.

You see so I go this route because I want you to see how this thinking has permeated Christians to the point where they will actually, I would say change the real translation to bring it in line with their theology.

This is not an attack on the new international version translators. It's just an analysis of the depth of this theory.

The way it has penetrated the church. So what I'm saying is this, 99 times out of a hundred the words Jew, Israel and Israelites are used in the New Testament in precisely the same way that they used in the old. There are about three passages in the New Testament where the word Jew or the word Israel are used in a restrictive sense.

Never to include people who would otherwise not have been called by that name. But to exclude people who would be called by that name but haven't fulfilled the spiritual qualifications. Is that clear? If you can understand what I've said would you put your hand up.

Well that's a miracle thank you. I mean this is not easy. But if we don't do this mental work we'll be in a permanent haze.

Never quite knowing what we're talking about when we talk about Israel. See all right now most times in the New Testament the word Israel is used to distinguish them from the church. Not to identify but to distinguish.

We look at just a few passages in Romans chapter 11. Romans chapter 11 verse 7. What I write about the New International Version incidentally. Okay thank you.

Romans 11 verse 7. What then Israel has not obtained what it seeks but the elect have obtained it and the rest were hardened. Very obvious there that Israel is used to describe those who have not believed in Jesus the Messiah. Which is the normal way that it's used.

And then in the same chapter verses 11 through 14. Speaking about Israel. Paul says I say then have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not.

But through their fall to provoke them to jealousy salvation has come to the Gentiles. So there's a clear contrast between Israel and the Gentiles who've received salvation through faith in Jesus. Now if their fall is riches for the world and their failure riches for the Gentiles.

How much more their fullness. For I speak to you Gentiles in as much as I'm possible to the Gentiles. I magnify my ministry if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.

It's very clear that Paul sets Gentile believers in opposition to Israel. So far from Israel being a name for Gentile believers. He uses Israel to distinguish them from Gentile believers.

Okay and then in the same chapter. Chapter 11 verses 25 and 26. For I do not desire brethren that you should be ignorant of this mystery.

I think I've pointed out that almost every time Paul says I would, I would you were not ignorant. Most Christians are ignorant. It's an it's an uncanny fact.

Lest you should be wise in your own opinion that what is the mystery. That hardening in part has happened to Israel. That must be unbelief.

Until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. Again Israel the unbelievers are set in opposition to the Gentiles who have become believers. Is that clear? They are not identified.

They are distinguished. And then he comes out with this wonderful statement. And so all Israel will be saved.

Now if Israel were a synonym for those who are saved. That would be a ridiculous statement. Because Paul would be saying all those who are saved will be saved.

Do you see what I'm saying? Now as far as we know chronologically Romans chapter 11 is the last place in the writings of Paul where he speaks about Israel. So if he ever had an earlier revelation here we have his latest. Okay you see what I'm saying? I'm trying to close every door to any misconception of what the New Testament calls Israel.

Now if you've been kind of in a, in a world of fog, not quite sure. If you can accept what I'm saying. You can breathe a sigh of relief.

Because you'll find the Bible will make wonderful sense when we don't change it. When we just take it the way it is. We've never been asked to improve the Bible, edit the Bible, adjust the Bible.

We've just been asked to accept it and act on it. Now we're going to come to the destiny of Israel. Okay and here we come into one of the great, what would I say, theological issues of the Bible.

And the issue is what is called divine election. How many of you have heard that phrase? Divine election. All right it means God's choice.

And I believe much of the controversy that revolves around Israel, revolves around this issue of God's choice. If there's anything the natural mind of unregenerate man does not like. It's the revelation that God has chosen some people.

Now as long as we believe we're the people God has chosen. We can usually tolerate it. Much of the controversy that revolves around Israel, revolves around this issue of God's choice.

If there's anything the natural mind of unregenerate man does not like. It's the revelation that God has chosen some people. Now as long as we believe we're the people God has chosen.

We can usually tolerate it. Our problem comes when God says he's chosen people we wouldn't have chosen. That's where the issue is.

I venture to suggest to you that from the humanistic point of view, the truth of divine election, is like the proverbial issue of exposing a red flag to a bull. It is the one thing that causes them to charge blindly at what they don't like. And it's not an easy issue.

In my experience in the church where I travel and move, it is almost totally ignored in contemporary preaching. I don't know that I've ever heard a sermon that deals with the issue of divine election in 47 years as a Christian. And yet it is a major theme of the New Testament.

It's one of those areas where contemporary Christianity has chosen to ignore something which is of tremendous importance in God's revelation. So we're going to take a little while this morning to deal with divine election as it relates to Israel. Now I want to point out and I'll say it again, it does not relate merely to

Israel.

Every one of us here who are believers in Jesus Christ, we are here because of divine election. The church generally speaking doesn't recognize that. There's certain sections of the church, some sections of the Presbyterian church, that recognize that.

But they are regarded as being kind of off in a corner. It's an unfortunate example of the fact that those people have embraced a very important truth. But they've probably isolated it to some extent from other equally important truths.

All right we'll go to Romans chapter 9 and we'll read verses 10 through 18. Now Paul takes as the basis for this truth, a historical example from the Old Testament which is the birth to Rebekah of twins. Am I saying Rebekah, is that right? Yes, no.

Yes that's right, Rebekah. She conceived twins, Jacob and Esau. They were both conceived by the same father.

But before they were born, God had declared his attitude to both of them. And Paul says God did it deliberately so that everybody should know that it doesn't depend on what a person does. It depends on God's choice.

Now that's hard for a lot of contemporary Christians to receive. I hope I'll show you in a little while that it's just as true of true Christians as it is of Israel. And now let me read this passage.

And not only this, what when Rebekah also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac, for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand. In other words God's purpose based on his choice. Not of works but of him who called.

It was said to her the older shall serve the younger. Which was contrary to the accepted cultural rules of the day. As it is written, and it's written in Malachi, God says Jacob I have loved, but he so I have hated, before they ever came out of the womb.

There's nothing to do with what they'd done. It was based solely on God's choice. Paul then reacts, or imagines the reaction which is probably the reaction of most people when they read that statement.

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not. For he says to Moses I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion. Mercy and compassion come from God's sovereign decision.

Let me say that the real issue here is the sovereignty of God. Again a theme that is hardly ever touched on in the contemporary church. My definition of God's sovereignty is this.

It means that God does what he wants, when he wants, the way he wants, and he asks no one's permission. That's what really disturbs the humanists, that he didn't insult them. Going on in verse 16, so then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

It isn't all our effort, it isn't all our good works, it's God's mercy. Now that's just as true of Christians as it is of Jews. Well let's go on a little.

For the scripture says to Pharaoh, even for this same purpose I have raised you up, it's God speaking, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be declared in all the earth. So God raised up a singularly wicked ruler for his own purposes. That Pharaoh might become a demonstration of God's wrath and judgment on ungodly rulers who oppose the purposes and the people of God.

Now it's summed up in verse 18. Therefore he has mercy on whom he wills, and whom he wills he hardens. Now I suggest to you that the majority of you probably have never heard a message seeking to expound that truth.

Well that's a great gap in our understanding. I see everybody putting coats on. Is it getting cold? That's a pity isn't it? Can we do anything about that? Nothing, nobody will have mercy on us.

All right hold out, I feel the end of my nose getting cold too soon. Now what Paul is saying is, God determines whom he will have mercy on. God's choice is the ultimate in human experience.

And this applies to Israel. It's not the goodness of Israel, it's God's choice. I'll come a little later to the church.

So don't start to say to yourself well it was different for us, because it wasn't. But what Paul goes on to reveal is, that the those whom God has actually chosen are a remnant out of all Israel. So you go on to Romans chapter 9 verses 27 through 29.

Now some texts add another part there. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace. Otherwise work is no longer work.

What Paul is saying is, if you can earn it, it isn't grace. Anything you can earn is not grace. If you want to receive anything by grace, it has to go beyond what you earn, or what you deserve.

And he's saying with regard to the remnant of Israel, it's by grace. What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks, but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were hardened. Now if you read on to the end of that same 11th chapter, you'll find that the remnant will become all Israel.

Does that make sense to you? See this is how we resolve apparent a conflict. Romans 11 25 and 26. Let's just take 26.

And so all Israel will be saved. But the all Israel that will be saved, will be the remnant whom God has preserved. All right now somebody showed me just recently, a copy of an article published in a Christian magazine here, by an Anglican who is a friend of mine.

In which he points out some of the sins of Israel. I would say he did a very inadequate job in pointing out their sins. What I want to suggest to you is the prophets of Israel did a much more thorough job.

And you can't improve on the prophets of Israel when it comes to pointing out the sins of Israel. I mean they, they have done it thoroughly from A to Z. There's nothing left out. And it's in a way kind of anti-climax for you and me to start pointing out the sins of Israel.

I just want to take just a few passages. And the number of passages that I'm taking could be multiplied a hundred times. But it would take a long while.

But let's look in two passages in Isaiah. Isaiah. I'm getting used to saying that again now.

I just learned to say Isaiah and now I have to say Isaiah. Chapter 1 verses 2 through 15. Just see if you can add to this.

Hear O heavens and give ear O earth for the Lord has spoken. I've nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against me. The Hebrew emphasizes the they.

The very children I nourished and brought up are the ones that have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib. But Israel does not know.

My people do not understand. A last sinful nation. A people laden with iniquity.

A brood of evildoers. Children who are corrupted. They have forsaken the Lord.

They have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel. They have turned away backwards. Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt or rebel more and more.

The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in it. But wounds and bruises and putrefying sores they have not been closed or bound up or smoothed with ointment.

That's a picture of a nation that's sick from the crown of its head to the sole of its feet. There's not a single sound place in it. Your country is desolate.

Your cities are burned with fire. Strangers devouring your land in your presence and it is desolate as overthrown by strangers. So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a hut in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.

Unless the Lord of hosts had left to us a very small remnant. We should have become like Sodom. We should have been made like Gomorrah.

One of the things that always surprised me about that passage is. That God had to send a prophet to Israel to tell them what was happening in front of their very eyes. You'd think that they would know that their land was desolate and their cities were burned with fire.

I've asked myself many times why couldn't they see what was happening in front of their eyes. The answer to update it a little bit. They were so busy in church they didn't know what was going on all around them.

Does that strike a note? A Wednesday night Bible study, the Thursday night this, and the Saturday night this. The world is falling apart all around us and here we are with our little religious games in the church. So this is what Paul says.

Hear the word of the Lord you rulers of Sodom. Give ear to the law of our God you people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me says the Lord.

I've had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or goats. When you come to appear before me who has required this from your hands to trample my court.

Bring no more futile sacrifices. Incense is an abomination to me. The new moons, the Sabbath and the calling of assemblies.

I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They are a trouble to me.

I'm weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands I will hide my eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers I will not hear.

Your hands are full of blood. I don't think you could improve on that catalog or description of Israel's sin. But when I read it I say to myself how much of it applies to the contemporary church.

How many times do we pray prayers that God will not hear because we are not living the kind of lives that he demands. How much of our religious activity is merely a way of escaping from the unpleasant realities of the life around us. Read one other passage.

I just you understand I'm emphasizing that there really isn't anything left to say bad about Israel that hasn't been said by their own prophet. Isaiah 59 just the first eight verses. Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot see.

Nor is ear heavy that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God and your sins have hidden his face from you. So that he will not hear.

For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity. Your lips have spoken lies. Your tongue has muttered perversity.

No one calls for justice nor does anyone plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies. They conceive evil and bring forth iniquity.

They hatch viper's eggs and weave the spider's web. He who eats of their eggs dies and from that which is crushed a viper breaks out. Their webs will not become garments nor will they cover themselves with their works.

Their works are works of iniquity and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil. They make haste to shed innocent blood.

Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity. Wasting and destruction are in their power. The way of peace they have not known and there is no justice in their ways.

They have made themselves crooked parts. Whoever takes that way shall not know peace. Again I don't know of any modern writer that could pen an indictment of Israel that will go beyond that.

Now I say this because the same prophet that so very clearly and in detail depicted the sins of Israel. Also prophesied equally clearly and with equal detail the restoration of Israel. Now it seems to me totally illogical and inconsistent to agree with the condemnation and rejects the restoration.

You see if the prophets of Israel had been blind and sentimental and nationalistic and had overlooked the sins of their people. Then you could say their promises of restoration were unrealistic and wishful thinking. But since the same prophets that made these indictments promised the restoration.

I cannot see any kind of logic in embracing the indictment and saying that's true. But refusing the promise of restoration. I cannot see any way that you can call that a logical or a legitimate interpretation of Scripture.

So let's look now very briefly and again this could be multiplied a hundred times without any great effort. Let's look at some of the prophecies given through the same prophets of restoration. Since we started with Isaiah, Isaiah we'll go there again.

Chapter 45 just two verses, amazingly short verses. Isaiah 45 verse 17, Isaiah 45 17. But Israel shall be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation.

You shall not be ashamed or disgraced forever and ever. And then the same chapter verse 25, in the Lord all the descendants of Israel shall be justified and shall glory. That's so simple.

The word justified means acquitted, counted righteous before God. How many of the descendants of Israel? All the descendants of Israel. However you've got to bear in mind the all will be the remnant.

Let's look in Jeremiah 32 verses 36 and following. Jeremiah 32 36 and following. Now therefore doth says the Lord the God of Israel concerning the city of which you say, and that is Jerusalem.

It shall be delivered into the hand of the King of Babylon by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. Behold I will gather them out of all countries where I've driven them in my anger, in my fury, and in great wrath. I will bring them back to this place, which was the land of Israel, and I will cause them to dwell safely.

That is so clear isn't it? Also from my perspective I don't see how you can make sense of that by applying it to the church. It just has no way that it can be applied to the church. So you're left with this conclusion.

Either it will happen to Israel or God has uttered prophecies which will never be fulfilled. See what we're actually dealing with in the last resort, is not just the destiny of Israel. It's the authority of Scripture.

And this is the vital issue. Let's go on reading verse 38. They shall be my people and I will be their God.

Then I will give them one heart and one way that they may fear me forever for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from doing them good. But I will put my fear in their heart so that they will not depart from me.

Yes I will rejoice over them to do them good and I will assuredly plant them in this land. Which land? I mean there's no way to interpret anything but the land of Israel. I will assuredly a plant them in this land with all my heart and with all my soul.

If God does something with all his heart and all his soul, I want to know who can undo it. It surely isn't Arafat. For thus says the Lord, just as I have brought all this great calamity on this people.

So I will bring on them all the good that I've promised them. Now the calamity came on Israel. What people could the good come on? I mean I would consider it cheating if God said well in the meanwhile I've changed the meaning of Israel so it's not going to come on them.

Say God you can't do that. You're a God of truth. The calamity came on Israel as a matter of historical experience recorded in the pages of history.

Presumably the good will be a matter of historical experience which can be recorded in the pages of history. I see no way to interpret that statement any other way. We'll look for a moment in Jeremiah 50 verse 19 following.

Jeremiah 50 verse 19 and 20. But I will bring back Israel to his habitation, to his dwelling place. And he shall feed on Carmel and Bashan.

His soul shall be satisfied on Mount Ephraim and Gilead. Gilead at the present time being part of the state of Jordan. In those days and in that time says the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for but there shall be none.

And the sins of Judah but they shall not be found. For I will pardon those whom I preserve. I prefer to say reserve.

God intends to pardon the remnant that he's going to reserve by his grace. And when God pardoned. It always amuses me about the Jewish people and let me say I'm not Jewish.

Because you can be sure that somebody will be looking for their iniquity. But God says although people will be looking for it, it will not be found. Let's go on with a few more of these promises.

Some of them I'm sure are familiar to some of you. Let's look in Ezekiel 36 verses 22 to 30. Ezekiel 36 verses 22 and following.

Therefore say to the house of Israel, thus says the Lord God, I do not do this for your sake O house of Israel. But for my holy name's sake which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. God states explicitly it's not because you've deserved it.

That is grace you understand. If they had deserved it they wouldn't need God's grace. And I will sanctify, I will sanctify my great name which has been profaned among the nations which you have profaned in them in.

And the nation shall know that I am the Lord since the Lord God when I am hallowed or sanctified in you before their eyes. Now again I see no way that this prophecy can be applied to the church. For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries and bring you into your own land.

Whose land? Their land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean. People have said that the Jews have not repented.

They should not come back in, in unbelief. But God says I'll get you back in an unclean condition. Then I must start to clean you up.

I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

I would say, this is my personal subjective interpretation. We have arrived somewhere in the middle of verse 26 right now. That's going on.

Verse 27 I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and you will keep my judgments and do them. We certainly haven't got that far. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers.

You shall be my people, I will be your God. Again I cannot understand that there can be any uncertainty as to what's described by the land that God gave to their fathers. As far as I know any Sunday school child of age 10 would know that's the land of Canaan.

See what I want to say is the real issue is not what it says. Because it's what it says is totally clear. The real issue is do we or do we not believe it.

And that's very important. Because if we decide to set aside certain parts of Scripture, the inevitable result will be that we'll set aside other parts of Scripture. Let's continue.

Verse 29 I will deliver you from all your uncleanness before or after they return to the land. After that's right. I will call for the grain and multiply it and bring no famine upon you.

And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields. So that you need never again fear the reproach of famine among the nations. Then note verse 32.

Not for your sake do I do this says the Lord God. Let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways O house of Israel.

Very very clear it is not because the Jewish people have deserved it. Now don't sit back there and say unlike the church because we deserved it. Because I'm going to show you a little while later that the church didn't deserve it either.

All right and then very important verse 37. Thus says the Lord God I will also let the house of Israel inquire of me to do this for them. I prefer the old King James translation which says I will be inquired on by the house of Israel to do this for them.

Now in the passage that I read earlier. I once counted in the Hebrew. God says 18 times in succession I will.

Never does he suggest that it proceeds from any other source but his will. He has made up his mind what he will do. He has stated it.

He said it will happen. But now here is the delicate balance between God's determination and man's response. He says nevertheless though I'm going to do all this and it's settled.

I'll let the house of Israel ask me to do it. See I said again, I said yesterday the real purpose of prayer is not for you to get God to do what you want. The real purpose of prayer is for you to become an instrument for God to do what he wants.

Here is a perfect example. Israel are not asked to improvise or make a choice. God has declared what he will do.

He said all I ask of you is that you pray and ask me to do it. Now I think that's very important for a group such as prayer for Israel. Because I think that's probably your main function.

It's finding out what God has said he will do. And asking him to do it, on behalf of the Jewish people. Because they have not yet come to the place where they're ready to ask on their own behalf.

I know they will but they haven't yet come there. I want to read two other passages from the prophets. Both of which emphasize that these to whom these promises are given are a remnant.

Zephaniah chapter 3 verses 12 and 13. Zephaniah 3, 12 and 13. My Bible doesn't want to stop at Zephaniah.

Keeps hopping over to Zechariah. There we are. Zephaniah 3, 12 and 13.

Again this is addressed to Israel and to Jerusalem. I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel.

Notice that word remnant. Shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies. Nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth.

For they shall feed their flocks and lie down and no one shall make them afraid. You could say that God's whole purpose with Israel as a nation, is to produce that remnant. And it seems that it's taken him thousands of years.

But he's never given up on it. He still holds to his purpose. What is he looking for? A meek and humble people who will trust in the name of the Lord.

Now I've said that in many ways Israel is a type for the church. And I believe here is a very good example for us. What is God aiming to produce in the church? A meek and humble people who will trust in the Lord.

His aim is the same. And then just one more, Zechariah 13 verses 8 and 9. I am not saying for sure that I know, to what historical situation these words apply. But the principle is there.

Zechariah 13 verses 8 and 9. And it shall come to pass in all the land says the Lord, that two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die. But one-third shall be left in it. I will bring the one-third through the fire.

We'll refine them as silver is refined and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name and I will answer them. I will say this is my people.

And each one will say the Lord is my God. Again the Bible describes the process. Which is aimed at producing the remnant that God's heart is set on.

The remnant that God has chosen. And here the process is extremely ruthless. If I may say so.

God says two-thirds will be cut off. But one-third will survive. I will bring them through the fire and they will acknowledge me.

Now I think it's probably time to close, or draw to a close this session. But I'm going to go return to that theme later today. The processes that God uses to get his people to become what he wants them to become.

Because in my opinion, exactly the same principles apply to the church. God is going to put the church through whatever it takes to get the kind of people he wants. So rather than standing back and saying well let the Jews go through it, they deserve it.

I think we need to ask ourselves are we prepared to go through what it will take to make the church what God intends the church to be. Now I think we'll probably stop there.

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