

Remember His Covenant Forever, pt. 2 (I Chr 16.12-17)

Building a House for God's Name: Studies in I & 2 Chronicles

I. REVIEW

- A. Last week we began to look at this section of Scripture with a view toward understanding how God fulfills his word and how we, as new covenant believers, are to walk in a posture of “remembering” the covenant faithfulness of God.
- B. Many believers do not understand what to do with passages of Scripture that talk about the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This often leaves believers confused when reading the OT and wondering what these passages mean (and what they mean for them).
- C. Last week we covered six principles that undergird the New Testament's presentation of God's covenant faithfulness as expressed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
 - 1. God's covenant faithfulness has been preeminently accomplished in Christ.
 - 2. Jesus is the ultimate seed of Abraham
 - 3. Christ's people — Jew and Gentile — are the true offspring of Abraham
 - 4. Israel was a “type” that was to be fulfilled in Christ
 - 5. The land was a “type” that is to be fulfilled in the new creation
 - 6. Christ is coming again to fully realize God's promises
- D. This means that as the people of the new covenant, we are to remember the covenant faithfulness of the Lord by rehearsing, delighting in, and proclaiming the life, death, resurrection, and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is to be the anchor for our hope — that which enters into the veil of God's very presence, in order that we might find help and assistance to remain steadfast by his grace in times of difficulty.
- E. Yet, believing this still leaves us with many questions: is there still a purpose for the people of Israel? Does God still have a purpose for the land of Israel? What, if any, does the present nation-state of Israel have to do with God's purposes? How should we think about what is currently happening in Israel as it pertains to God's purposes?

II. GOD'S PURPOSES FOR ISRAEL (ROM 9-II)

- A. These very questions are what Paul attempts to answer in his letter to the Romans. In this letter, Paul is seeking to expound on the glory of the gospel of God as it has been made known in Christ (Rom 1.1, 16-17). His exposition of the gospel shows that in it God has made a way for people to receive a right standing with him — and every attendant blessing that comes with that standing (cf. Eph 1.3). This right standing comes as a free gift through the work of Jesus Christ and is given to any who will simply receive that gift by faith.
- B. One of the realities of this gospel is that although it was promised beforehand in the Scriptures by the prophets (Rom 1.2), the *manner* in which it came about was different than any would have expected (cf. Rom 9.32-33). First, it was inaugurated by the coming of the Son of God in absolute humility, resulting in his death on the cross. His life and ministry were then vindicated when he was raised from death on the third day. Then, after sending his Spirit upon his church, the door of salvation was thrown open to the Gentiles to become recipients of God's covenant fidelity through the same means as was offered to the Jews.
- C. Although this message is beyond glorious, it does raise a significant question: reading the OT we are continually confronted with the central role of Israel in God's redemptive purposes and the promises to them as a people. The turn of events around the first coming of Jesus resulted in the Gentiles receiving the blessings of salvation, while the nation of Israel (on the whole) rejected him. The question then would be: if the blessings of God's covenant have now come to the Gentiles, and those who believe in Christ are now the offspring of Abraham (cf. Rom 4.16), then what has become of Israel?

- D. Beyond this, the question becomes even more significant: if God had made such promises to Israel in the OT that seem to be thrown off, was he unable to accomplish his word? Or worse yet, did he change his mind? The implications of this question are far-reaching for God's ability to be faithful to his covenant promises.
- E. This is precisely what Paul is seeking to address in Romans 9-11. He is attempting to definitively show that God's word has not failed in how he is presently accomplishing his purposes in Christ. He does this by demonstrating that God's present faithfulness is directly in line with how he has always worked and what he had always promised throughout the OT Scriptures.
- F. Although this is a complex section of Scripture, there are five predominant questions that Paul seeks to answer to help us understand what God is at work doing to fulfill his word.

1. ***Has God's word failed (Rom 9.6)***: The first question Paul implicitly asks is whether God has failed to accomplish his word. His response is that God's word has not failed. He substantiates this claim by demonstrating that God never intended the promises to Abraham to be understood as a promise that the covenant blessings would be universally experienced among all of Abraham's ethnic descendants.

⁶But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named. ⁸This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. (Rom 9.6-8)

2. ***Is God unjust to fulfill his purpose through election (Rom 9.14)***: Here, Paul asks the question of whether God is just to elect one son to receive the covenant blessing and not the other. To this question, Paul declares that God has always revealed that it is his right to have mercy upon whom he will and to harden whom he will. The potter has the right over the clay to make with it what he will to accomplish his purposes. This demonstrates for all that it is not according to human will or exertion (or birth right) that his purposes are accomplished, but according to his unmerited grace.

¹⁴What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! ¹⁵For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion..." ¹⁸So then, he has mercy on whomever he wills, and hardens whomever he wills. (Rom 9.14-18)

3. ***Why did the Gentiles receive God's covenant blessings while the Jews did not attain them (Rom 9.30)***: Paul then asks why the Gentiles were able to attain something they were not seeking, while the Jews did not attain it even though they sought after it. The answer is simple: because the Gentiles submitted to the way God chose to reveal his righteousness — namely, by receiving the gospel through faith in Christ.

³⁰What shall we say then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it... ³¹but that Israel who pursued a law... did not succeed in reaching that law. ³²Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone (Rom 9.30-32)

4. ***Has God therefore rejected Israel (Rom 11.1)***: The implication then might be to conclude (which many in the church have wrongly done through history) that God has therefore cast off the Jewish people completely. However, Paul argues that this could not be farther from the truth. Paul himself was a Jewish believer, and this demonstrates (just as is seen throughout the whole of the OT) that God has ***always worked through a believing remnant*** who possessed faith!

¹I ask then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendent of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ²God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? ³"Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." ⁴But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." ⁵So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. ⁶But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. (Rom 11.1-6)

5. ***Does the stumbling of Israel mean that they have fallen beyond salvation (11.11):*** The question then remains, if they have been hardened by God in his sovereign purpose, have they fallen so far that they cannot be saved? The answer again is “may it never be!” Paul wants the Gentile believers to remember that they (a wild shoot) were grafted into an olive branch that was not native to them by the power of God. How much easier would be for God to do the same with the natural shoot, if they were to humble themselves and submit to the manner in which God has provided for them to attain his righteousness — namely, through humble faith in the Messiah, Jesus.

“So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous... ²³And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. ²⁴For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree (Rom 11.11-24)

- G. There remains a question related to the ethnic decedents of Israel and their possible future ingathering into salvation. This is an issue that believers understand and interpret differently. Some believe that Paul means here that in a future day (near the second coming) that every ethnic descendant of Israel will be saved. Others believe that Paul is stating that the partial hardness will remain all the way until the end of this age, but that through Jesus the entire remnant of Israel will be saved. Regardless of the interpretation, there are several points that we ought to hold as Christians related to viewing the Jewish people:
 1. ***Salvation is only through Christ:*** Even if there is a day of future salvation for a mass of ethnic Jews, it will only come through Jesus Christ, and will come in such a way as to further emphasize that it was not because they were owed something (i.e., on the basis of their ethnicity) — but is according to the sheer mercy of God (Rom 11.28, 32).
 2. ***We should cultivate affections and prayers toward their salvation:*** The apostle declared that his “hearts desire” was for their salvation (Rom 10.1). I believe that Gentile Christians glorify the purposes of God by humbly seeking to live into his covenant faithfulness and blessings in fullness without a spirit of superiority and arrogance toward others — longing that Christ would extend mercy in the same way we have received mercy (Rom 11.13-14, 20-23).
 3. ***A parable applied:*** One helpful parable for our understanding of these things ought to be the parable of the two sons and the gracious father found in Luke 15. Gentile converts are like the younger brother who has been welcomed back into the family after years of living outside of the house of God. However, we must not imagine that the Father would not be delighted to welcome the older brother back into the house in order that the “party might really get started”!

III. A CONTEMPORARY CASE STUDY

A. Background: A contested land

1. ***Abraham’s two sons:*** The Bible clearly identifies that the promises of God were to come through Isaac and not through Ishmael (the son of Hagar through Abram). Whether there is a belief in a future promise to ethnic Israel in the gospel, the Scripture is clear that the promise plan of God for redemption is to come through Isaac.
2. ***Reinterpretation of the promises in Islam:*** In the early 600s AD, a man named Muhammed began receiving a series of revelations by the angel Gabriel in a mountain cave near Mecca (cf. Gal 1.8-9). This was the beginning of the religion of Islam. In these visions, the “angel” gave Muhammed a different interpretation of Biblical events, outlining that it was Ishmael, not Isaac, who was the son of promise. In Islam, Jerusalem is the third most holy place outside of Mecca and Medina.
3. ***The nation of Palestine and the reemergence of Israel:*** In 70 AD, the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the Second Temple (rebuilt after the return from exile) as a response to continued Jewish

rebellion against Rome. After several more uprisings, in 135 AD the Roman Empire banned Jewish people from Israel, repopulated the nation, and renamed it Syria Palestine (a name likely derived from the Biblical “Philistine”). After eighteen-hundred years, the U.N. granted national status to Israel in 1948. Under the partition plan for Palestine, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank were granted to Palestine as nation-states for Palestinians. Since 1948 there have been many wars between Israel and Palestine.

4. ***This is not political:*** It would be easy to assume that the driving force behind this conflict is political. However, it is clear that this conflict is ***spiritual*** (driven by principalities and powers, as well as driven by God’s own purposes to bring about his purposes), ***religious*** (driven by deep seated religious beliefs claiming divine right), and ***cultural*** (the concept of homeland and place are deeply valued in most cultures — especially when tied with religious tradition).
5. ***The war for Jerusalem:*** The Bible teaches that Jesus will one day return to Jerusalem (cf. Zech 14.1-6; Acts 1.11). The city ultimately belongs to him. He is the son of David who will inherit both Jerusalem and the whole world. It is likely, based on the nature of Biblical witness, that Jesus will return at a time when the nations of the earth are in conflict with one another related to the land of Israel and Jerusalem (cf. Ezek 38-39; Zech 14.1-2; Rev 16.12-16; 20.7-10).

B. How should Christian’s respond:

1. ***Spirit of humility:*** We must understand that our opinions and assessments are limited in scope. Therefore, we should be slow to speak when pronouncing judgment. This includes a spirit of grace extended toward other believers who may hold differing views.
2. ***Be clear on the gospel:*** We must be clear that salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ Jesus alone. Salvation is not based on ethnic identity, but on inclusion into the true vine that is Christ. This is true for both Palestinians and Jews. Any who are not of faith are enemies of God and need to be born again by the power of his Spirit.
3. ***Stand against injustice:*** We must be clear on what is unjust (on both accounts). The actions of Hamas were vile and atrocious and will be dealt with according to God’s eternal holiness. We must also understand that God grants national sovereignty in order to protect citizens (cf. Rom 13).
4. ***Reject the spirit of the age:*** There is a spirit within the western world that is catalyzing around exalting, affirming, and honoring *anything that is done* in the name of overthrowing so-called oppression and injustice. The way of Jesus does not affirm injustice done in response to oppression — but calls us to pray for our enemies, go a second mile, and bless those who have done wrong to us.
5. ***Pray for peace:*** Spend time invoking the Lord to release his peace in Israel and Palestine. Pray for reprieve among the leaders of those nations from the cloud of demonically charged heat that is filling those places. Pray that God would turn the hearts of leaders (Prov 21.1) in a way that allows people to live peaceably and quietly (1 Tim 2.1-2).
6. ***Pray for the church:*** Both the church in Palestine and in Israel. Pray that the Holy Spirit will build and sustain the church in the midst of testing and trial. We can remember the promise of Jesus that the gates of hell will not prevail against his church (Matt 16.18).
7. ***Pray for a bold witness and open doors:*** Ask the Lord to open a wide and effectual door for the spread of the gospel (2 Thes 3.1). Jesus has a plan and a purpose to bring Jew and Gentile into his family, and often times of chaos and uncertainty are fertile times for the furtherance of his kingdom.
8. ***Remember the wall shattering power of the gospel:*** We must remember and seek to embody/delight in the wall-shattering power of the gospel of Jesus. Jesus declared that the greatest witness to the validity of his work would be when the world witnessed his church walk in a spirit of love (John 13.35).