

**The Church Gathered**  
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Let's try the word association exercise that psychologists use to analyze our mental condition. When you hear or read the word "**church**" what is the first thought that comes to mind? So when I say, "**Church,**" what do you think?

What came to mind? \_\_\_\_\_

The theme of this year's **Lordship of Christ** Conference is *Christ and His Church* and my assignment is "**The Church Gathered**".

In order to understand the doctrine of "**The Church Gathered**" it is essential that we define our terms. There are two main ways that the term "church" is used in the Bible. You don't need to be reminded that this building is not the church; this building is a place where the church gathers to worship the Lord Jesus Christ.

- The most commonly understood meaning of church is the local and visible gathering of individuals who meet to honor and worship the Lord Jesus Christ. The local church may assemble in a home or in a building or "down by the riverside." We are here this morning in a meeting of the local church.

In any local assembly there are those present who profess to have faith in Jesus Christ and they do have saving faith; they are saved [justified; in Christ; no longer condemned; not guilty].

It may also be the case that there are some present who profess faith in Christ; but they are clinging to some shred of self-righteousness. They would not agree that God would be just if He sent them to hell.

They really believe that they are saved, but their true ground of trust is in something involving them.

They may anchor their trust in a religious experience, in a decision, in a certificate of baptism, in a reformation of their behavior, or in anything that they insist upon as being necessary and added to objective faith in Jesus Christ in order to be saved.

A brother once described this as "subtraction by addition"; adding anything to the sufficient work of Jesus Christ subtracts from His glory.

And tragically, those who cling to what they believe is necessary in addition to Christ may learn too late that they were on the “broad way that leads to destruction.” One of my concerns for this generation is that Jesus said, “... **broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.**” And no one seems to recognize where that broad way is! Our postmodern pluralism allows that any and all religions are equally valid.

#### **Matthew 7:13-14**

**"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.**

**"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.**

**"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'**

In another place those people who are traveling on the broad way that leads to destruction are referred to as “tares among the wheat.” A tare [darnel] looked like a head of wheat except that there was no fruit in the grain. Cf. Matthew 13:25 ff

Although we can see with our eyes those who profess faith in Christ we cannot see into their hearts; but “the Lord knows His sheep.”

So the local assembly of a people professing faith in Jesus Christ is a **church**.

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**You have never seen the Church! Only God sees the Church.**

That brings us to the true Church.

- The other meaning of **church** in the Bible is the Invisible or Universal Church. Every elect, called, and justified soul from the Garden of Eden to the calling and justification of the last one of God’s elect are in the true church of the redeemed of the Lord. There are no false professions of faith in this **Church**.

**Hebrews 12:22-24**

**22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.**

So sometimes in the Bible “church” means the local assembly and sometimes it means the universal church and it is very important to discern which meaning of “church” is intended in the context of where the word occurs.

As an exercise, tell me which meaning of “church” is used in the following verses, the local assembly or the universal church?

**Matthew 16:18**

**And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.**

**Matthew 18:17**

**And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.**

**Acts 2:47**

**And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.**

**Acts 5:11**

**11 So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.**

Now to deal with my assigned subject you need to know that **“The Church Gathered”** refers to that once ungodly gang of redeemed sinners, who while they lived on earth, were called and justified and who are now glorified. And some of them, before they go to be with the Lord forever, are here with us this morning.

Here’s how they are described in Revelation 7:9-17:

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" 11 All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying:

"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom,  
Thanksgiving and honor and power and might,  
Be to our God forever and ever.  
Amen."

13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?"

14 And I said to him, "Sir, you know."

So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. 16 They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

And so if all of the church is to be gathered around the throne of God, where do they come from? "... of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues...."

There are those who teach that the church is not to be found anywhere in the OT. They claim that there is no spiritual application to the church in the OT. They teach that the institution of the church is the "mystery" that is written about in the NT.

They teach that Jesus Christ offered the Jews a kingdom but when the Jews rejected Him, **then** God brought in the church.

They further teach that the church will be taken out of the world in a secret "rapture" and then God will set up an earthly kingdom and that Christ will reign for a literal 1000 years from a physical throne in Jerusalem.

This teaching also says that the church and Israel are separate entities and that they never come together either on earth or in heaven.

In my considerable number of years of Bible study I simply cannot find that scenario in the Bible.

A well-known, now departed, Bible teacher wrote: “To take the promises God gave to Abraham and apply them to the Church is nothing short of spiritual robbery. To spiritualize Israel and teach that the Church has taken the place of God’s chosen people is to wrongly divide the Word of Truth.”  
Daniel, by Oliver Greene, page 343.

And what does it matter? It matters because this view of the Church **destroys** the very makeup of the church: “...a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...”

If you want to learn the doctrine of the **Church Gathered** you find it in Ephesians.

**Ephesians 1:22-23**

**22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.**

**Ephesians 3:1-13**

**For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles — 2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: 6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, 7 of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.**

8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. 13 Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

#### **Ephesians 3:20-21**

20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

#### **Ephesians 5:22-33**

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. 28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. 30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

My design in this message is to show you from the Word of God that the local church is not God's "Plan B" and that the local church is a manifestation of the eternal purpose of God in Christ with Gentiles and Jews together in the same body. You will see I hope, that the true church of the redeemed spans all of human history and that there is nothing to follow the church at the end of this present age.

We will see from the Bible that the mystery of the ages that was revealed to the apostles by the Holy Spirit was not the institution of the church but rather the make-up of the Church; Gentiles and Jews in one body of Christ.

Also note that the eternal purpose of God which He accomplished in Christ Jesus is the Church. There is nothing beyond the Church in the eternal purpose of God.

## **Individuals**

What I find in the entire Bible, OT and NT, is that God has been calling and justifying **individuals** as His children ever since He spoke to Satan in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve standing there to hear God's promise.

### **Genesis 3:14-15**

**14 So the LORD God said to the serpent:**

**"Because you have done this,  
You are cursed more than all cattle,  
And more than every beast of the field;  
On your belly you shall go,  
And you shall eat dust  
All the days of your life.  
15 And I will put enmity  
Between you and the woman,  
And between your seed and her Seed;  
He shall bruise your head,  
And you shall bruise His heel."**

**Let's start gathering the church.**

Well the first souls to be in the Church were Adam and Eve. They were justified by faith when the LORD God took away their self-righteous covering of fig leaves and shed the blood of an animal to cover their nakedness. [Cf. Genesis 3:21]

### **Hebrews 9:22**

**And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.**

Some short time later Adam and Eve's first two sons disagreed on how to worship God. Abel brought a bloody sacrifice and Cain brought some of his fruit and vegetables; blood was too messy for a sophisticated worshipper of God like Cain.

That event gives us the story of the first murder and the first man to go to heaven. Abel's way of worship is called righteous and Jude refers to what the other son of Adam did as "the way of Cain." [Cf. Genesis 4:1-15; Jude 11]

**Hebrews 11:4**

**By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.**

Of course there is Abraham. Everybody knows about Abraham. But not everyone knows who the children of Abraham are or even what it means to be a "child of the promise"; i.e. the promise made to Abraham. Certainly not the man we quoted above. Hold that thought about the children of the promise in suspension because the Bible does not leave us to be ignorant in this matter as to whom the promises made to Abraham were intended.

**Genesis 15:1-6**

**After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."**

**2 But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"**

**4 And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." 5 Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."**

**6 And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.**

Now Paul in Galatians and in Romans could not be clearer as to who are the children of Abraham; the children of the promise.

**Galatians 3:6-9**

**6 just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."**

**7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.**

**Romans 9:6-9**

**But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, 7 nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." 8 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. 9 For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son."**

The Church and Israel after the flesh are clearly described in Galatians 4:21-31.

**Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, 24 which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar — 25 for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children — 26 but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. 27 For it is written:**

**"Rejoice, O barren,  
You who do not bear!  
Break forth and shout,  
You who are not in labor!  
For the desolate has many more children  
Than she who has a husband."**

**28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. 29 But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. 30 Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.**

This is an allegory of two women, two sons, two covenants, and two Jerusalem's. Study it carefully and ask what sense can be made of this passage if the allegory does not mean that the '**Jerusalem which now is**' is Jewry and the '**Jerusalem above**' is the offspring of the son of the promise and is the Church?

Does not Paul spiritualize the promises made to Abraham and apply them to the Church? Is Paul guilty of "spiritual robbery?"

Galatians 4:21-31 is the doctrine of the Church and it is rooted in the OT, is it not?

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The message of the OT prophets was about Christ and His church. There are many references in the NT to the message of the OT prophets and we will consider only four of them.

**Luke 10:23-24**

**23 Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; 24 for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it."**

**Luke 18:31-33**

**Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. 32 For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. 33 They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."**

**Luke 24:25-27**

**25 Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.**

**John 1:45**

**45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."**

It is my strong conviction that everything that Jesus of Nazareth did and said was to fulfill the words of the prophets. There is one rather obscure fulfillment of prophecy that I had not discovered until I read it in the works of Mr. Charles D. Alexander [CDA].

We all know that Jesus walked upon the sea and that He told the raging storm to "shut up"! But do you know where that is foretold in the OT? Look at Job 9:8.

Job, who was a prophet, said about God:

**He alone spreads out the heavens,  
And treads on the waves of the sea;**

**"Jesus walks among the prophets." CDA.**

One of the **greatest errors of interpretation** promulgated in our day, by some of the most respected expositors, is that we must understand the OT prophets in exactly the same way that the Jews understood the prophets.

But the Jews misunderstood the prophets and when Jesus of Nazareth who is Messiah came and because He did not fit their preconceived notions of the words of the prophets and the nature of the Kingdom of God, they nailed Him to a tree. So much for how the Jews understood the prophets!

Inclusion in the Church Gathered begins by grace through faith while still on this earth; often in local assemblies, and those included in that number are the children of the promise, Abraham's children, who live out a life of obedience to the Scriptures, worshipping in spirit and in truth and when they pass from this earthly existence they go to be with the Lord Jesus Christ, which is far better.

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Let's look at a few examples of how the Jews understood prophecy and how the inspired writers of the NT interpreted the prophecy.

A cardinal rule of interpretation is that the NT interprets the OT and not the other way around. Overruling the NT with the OT is a fundamental error and it is that error which leads to a view of a future restoration of Israel after the flesh.

What has the view of a future restoration of national Israel to do with the church gathered? It has everything to do with the definition of the church. The church in this view is separate and distinct from the church forever and the NT says true Israel is the church!

When James or Peter or Paul makes a NT application of an OT prophecy that should satisfy us. But there are those that deny this principle of interpretation and insist that the OT prophecies about national Israel are yet to be fulfilled and that they must be fulfilled literally and that the OT prophecies do not have any spiritual application in the OT to Christ or to the Church. That is exactly the position of the man quoted above.

“To take the promises God gave to Abraham and apply them to the Church is nothing short of spiritual robbery. To spiritualize Israel and teach that the Church has taken the place of God's chosen people is to wrongly divide the Word of Truth.”

Can we refute his claim from the Scriptures?

**The prophets did not speak for themselves**

Cf. Isaiah 8:18 with Hebrews 2:13b

**Isaiah 8:18**

**18 Here am I and the children whom the LORD has given me!**

**We are for signs and wonders in Israel**

**From the LORD of hosts,**

**Who dwells in Mount Zion.**

Without going into the historical context of Isaiah chapter 8, Isaiah is presenting his two sons to King Ahaz:

**Here am I and the children whom the LORD has given me!**

But the writer of Hebrews, who I take to be Paul, because I am not sophisticated enough to believe otherwise, interpreted what Isaiah said in the OT to have reference to Christ and His Church.

Turn to Hebrews 2:10-13 and see that the context is Christ speaking of the redeemed of the Lord, the Church.

**Hebrews 2:10-13**

**For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying:**

**"I will declare Your name to My brethren;  
In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You."**

**13 And again:**

**"I will put My trust in Him."**

**And again:**

**"Here am I and the children whom God has given Me."**

And we could go to Ezekiel 11:15 to see that what Hebrews 11:12 calls "brethren," Ezekiel calls the "whole house of Israel."

But for our purpose this morning see that Paul takes a statement made by Isaiah about his two literal sons and applies that statement to what Christ calls His spiritual children; **all of the children of God; the church gathered!**

Isaiah did not understand it that way and neither did the Jews interpret Isaiah that way, but Paul says that is what the statement about Isaiah's "children" meant.

The Church Gathered are **"... the children whom God has given Me."**

**John 17:1-3**

**Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, 2 as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.**

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Take another example. Cf. Acts 15:13-18 where James quotes Amos 9:11-12.

Turn to Amos 9 and hold your place and then find Acts 15.

The context of Acts 15 is the Jerusalem Council where the issue is whether or not a Gentile man had to become a Jew before he could become a Christian. The Judaizers insisted that a man must be circumcised in the flesh before he could become a Christian.

**Acts 15:1-2**

**And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.**

Before we get to James' exposition of Amos 9 there is this marvelous statement made by Peter in Acts 15:11. Consider carefully the order of Peter's words.

**"But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we [we Jews] shall be saved in the same manner as they [the Gentiles]"**

Do you see what Peter learned? The Jews are saved just like the Gentiles and not that the Gentiles are saved like the Jews! Justification is by grace through faith and it is always **individuals** and God's calling and justification spans all of human history. There is only one Savior and everyone who is saved, has been saved or will be saved, is justified in the same way: by grace through faith in the sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ. There is no Jewish salvation and another Gentile salvation but that is exactly the import of what many of the popular preachers teach.

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Now for James' exposition of Amos, read Amos 9:11-15.

**"On that day I will raise up  
The tabernacle of David, which has fallen down,  
And repair its damages;  
I will raise up its ruins,  
And rebuild it as in the days of old;  
12 That they may possess the remnant of Edom,  
And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,"  
Says the LORD who does this thing.  
13 "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD,  
"When the plowman shall overtake the reaper,  
And the treader of grapes him who sows seed;  
The mountains shall drip with sweet wine,  
And all the hills shall flow with it.  
14 I will bring back the captives of My people Israel;  
They shall build the waste cities and inhabit them;  
They shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them;  
They shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them.  
15 I will plant them in their land,  
And no longer shall they be pulled up  
From the land I have given them,"  
Says the LORD your God.**

But what is this business of the “tabernacle of David” and all the “Gentiles who are called by My name”. What is the “tabernacle of David?” David’s tabernacle is not a physical tent.

Now listen carefully. If you did not have the NT to interpret the prophet Amos you could only conclude that Amos is prophesying about the restoration of national Israel. And that may well be what Amos thought it meant and that is surely what the Jews thought it meant.

But when James under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit interprets Amos as referring to the Gentiles being in the Church along with the Jews then that is what it means. It does not matter what you think it means; if you disagree with the inspired apostle you are wrong!

It is most likely that James understood Amos to mean the restoration of Israel after the flesh UNTIL the Holy Spirit spoke through him. It is also important to see that James does not try to explain what Amos thought it meant because now that does not matter at all. But that principle is what the popular preachers insist upon.

Listen to James:

**Acts 15:12 Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. 13 And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: 14 Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. 15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:**

**16'After! this I will return  
And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down;  
I will rebuild its ruins,  
And I will set it up;  
17 So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD,  
Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name,  
Says the LORD who does all these things.'**

**18 "Known to God from eternity are all His works.**

Here is the Church prophesied in the OT; Gentiles and Jews gathered together in the same body; both local and universal.

The root of the error comes from confusing justification of individual Gentiles and Jews with the purpose of God is establishing Israel after the flesh.

Paul answers this matter in Romans 3:1-2

**What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? 2 Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.**

Israel after the flesh was given the privilege of preserving the OT and being set apart from the other nations by circumcision, dietary laws, and sabbath keeping. Most importantly they were to be missionaries to the Gentiles, a duty at which they utterly failed. So we must not confuse the purpose of Israel after the flesh with anyone being justified before God.

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Paul writes in Romans 11.

**Romans 11:11-27**

**12 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. 12 Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!**

**13 For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. 15 For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?**

**16 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. 17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, 18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.**

**19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." 20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. 22 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness.**

**Otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.**

**24 For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?**

**25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.**

**26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:**

**"The Deliverer will come out of Zion,  
And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;  
27 For this is My covenant with them,  
When I take away their sins."**

Brothers and sisters the "mystery" was not that there would be a local church but that the make-up of the local church would be Gentiles and Jews together in the same body.

Romans 11 is about a **single** olive tree, not a Gentile olive tree and a Jewish olive tree, but Gentiles and Jews together in the same body.

Verses 25-26 are not a chronology of events, i.e. first the Gentiles and **then** the Jews. No! It is the **manner** in which “all Israel” will be saved. Individual Gentiles together with individual Jews [a remnant] are “all Israel”.

Take a look at Romans 9:22-29.

**22** What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, **23** and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, **24** even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

**25** As He says also in Hosea:

"I will call them My people, who were not My people,  
And her beloved, who was not beloved."

**26** "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them,  
' You are not My people,'

There they shall be called sons of the living God."

**27** Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel:

"Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea,  
The remnant will be saved.

**28** For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness,  
Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth."

**29** And as Isaiah said before:

"Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed,  
We would have become like Sodom,  
And we would have been made like Gomorrah."

Before you will ever correctly understand Romans 11:26, you must study the context of chapters 9, 10, and 11. Paul clearly defines “all Israel” of 11:26 as individual believing Gentiles and the remnant of individual believing Jews.

The verses above show that Paul interprets the prophecy of Hosea to refer to the Gentiles and that of Isaiah to mean a remnant of the Jews.

It is noteworthy that Isaiah “cries out” i.e. Isaiah was shocked to have to say that it is only a remnant of the Jews that will be saved.

Now your preconceived notion will interpret who “all Israel” is in verse 26.

The only way to make “all Israel” refer only to the ethnic Jews and a future restoration to the land is to bring that preconceived notion to the text because that is not what the verse in its context says.

*“Never underestimate the power of a preconceived notion.”* Charles Alexander

\* \* \*

One of the most significant things that I learned about OT prophecy is from John L. Bray. Writing about prophecies of the restoration of national Israel:

“As to the Old Testament, I have already pointed out how that any promises made as to a restoration to the Land, were fulfilled when they returned from Babylon, etc., as recorded in the Bible, and that after that no more such promises were ever made. All the prophecies used by the Bible teachers today to try to prove a future or present restoration of Israel to Palestine, are prophecies made prior to their restoration as God promised in the past. And many of the prophecies included future fulfillment in the sense of spiritual blessing found in Christianity, couched in highly symbolical language that are best understood as God intended them to be.”

John L. Bray, “Israel in Bible Prophecy” [Page 54]

After I read that claim I was stunned at the **simplicity** of his point. I took the time and read through the prophets before and after the return of the Jews from Babylon and learned for myself that Mr. Bray was exactly correct.

There are no prophecies of restoration **after** the return from Babylon. And there is not a word in the NT about a restoration of national Israel. Be careful with your prooftexts because you have to impose your preconceived notions on the NT text in order to make it say what you think it does.

Prophets before the return to Jerusalem from Babylon from 870 to 540 B.C.: The Babylonian Captivity was 586-539 B.C.

Obadiah, Joel [Elijah & Elisha], Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Nahum, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel and Ezekiel.

Prophets after the return to Jerusalem from Babylon from 540 to 500 B.C.:

Zechariah, Haggai and Malachi make no prophecies of restoration.

**And there is absolutely nothing in the NT about a restoration of national Israel!**

Look again at Romans 11 and see that the context is the single olive tree made up of Gentiles and Jews in one local body and that it says nothing at all about a restoration to the land. If that is your interpretation I say as kindly as I can you brought that preconceived notion to the passage because that is not what the passage is about.

\* \* \*

God entered into a covenant with Abraham whereby He promised to do certain things for him and for his posterity. He renewed His covenant to Isaac, Jacob, and Israel [Exodus 2:23-25; 6:1-9; Psalm 105:7-10]

**Exodus 2:23-25**

**23 Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. 24 So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. 25 And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them.**

**Exodus 6:5**

**5 And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant.**

**Psalm 105:7-12**

**7 He is the LORD our God;  
His judgments are in all the earth.  
8 He remembers His covenant forever,  
The word which He commanded, for a thousand generations,  
9 The covenant which He made with Abraham,  
And His oath to Isaac,  
10 And confirmed it to Jacob for a statute,  
To Israel as an everlasting covenant,  
11 Saying, To you I will give the land of Canaan  
As the allotment of your inheritance,"  
12 When they were few in number,  
Indeed very few, and strangers in it.**

God promised to make His people great. He promised them wisdom. He promised them victory over their foes. He promised them peace. He promised them all sorts of blessings [Deuteronomy 28:1-14].

#### **Deuteronomy 28:1-14**

**"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. 2 And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God:**

**3 "Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country.**

**4 "Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks.**

**5 "Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.**

**6 "Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.**

**7 "The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways.**

**8 "The LORD will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you.**

**9 "The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways.**

**10 Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. 11 And the LORD will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. 12**

**The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many**

**nations, but you shall not borrow. 13 And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the**

**commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and are**

**careful to observe them. 14 So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right or the left, to go after other gods to serve them.**

It is a continuing puzzle to me how those scholars who can find all the promises made to Israel after the flesh and insist on their future fulfillment cannot also find that every such promise as to its carnal fulfillment was contingent on obedience.

\* \* \*

## Listen to this

Sometime around 50 A.D. a little group of Jews were huddled together on the Sabbath in a strange city. They were still waiting for God to fulfill His promise [or promises] which He had made to their fathers. They were not a great people. They had not had victory over their foes, for the heel of Rome was heavy upon them. They had no peace. They had no king or kingdom. They had none of the things that the Scriptures promised God would do for them.

There were a couple of visitors in the synagogue that day, apparently visitors from the home country who might bring them some encouraging news.

When invited to speak, Paul stood up and said.... [Pay attention to this! The news that Paul brought to these people must have been the most astounding thing any congregation had ever heard. Listen!]

### **Acts 13:26-33**

**26 "Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. 27 For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him. 28 And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. 29 Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. 30 But God raised Him from the dead. 31 He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. 32 And we declare to you glad tidings — that promise which was made to the fathers. 33 God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus....**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was declared to be the fulfillment of what God had promised to Abraham, Israel, and David. Here we have these people still waiting for the fulfillment of what God had promised Israel, and the apostle came and told them the absolutely startling news that it had already been fulfilled.

Did God promise Israel victory over all her foes? The good news is that Jesus had obtained the victory for them. Did God promise He would give them peace...and wisdom? Jesus was their peace [Ephesians 2:15] and their wisdom [1 Cor 1:30]. Did God promise to make Israel great? All power in heaven had been given to the King of the Jews, Jesus Christ [Matt 28:18]. Did God promise them land – an inheritance? Christ had been resurrected and on their behalf had become “heir of the world” and “heir of all things.” [Romans 4:13; Hebrews 1:2]

God who fulfills His word in surprising ways, had fulfilled what He had promised to the fathers far abundantly above what any Jew had ever asked or thought.

If those Jews are to be considered backward for not realizing this about twenty years after Calvary, what might be said of Christians today who are still waiting for God to fulfill His promises to Israel two thousand years later?

Yes, Christians who say they meet once a week in honor of the resurrection are denying what God really did when He raised Jesus from the dead – namely He fulfilled what He had promised to Israel.

It took the Holy Spirit's illumination to see it when Paul preached to the gathering at Antioch; it takes the Holy Spirit's illumination to see it now! The gift of Jesus and His resurrection from the dead was a finished work. In it God fulfilled what He had promised to the fathers. More than that, Christ was heaven's gift to the Gentiles – to the whole human race.

In Christ, God answered every prayer, every worthy aspiration of every heart, as it is written, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ...."  
[Ephesians 1:3]

### **Fulfillment Only in Christ**

The blessings which God had promised to Israel were all given on condition – the condition of obedience:

**Exodus 19:5**

**Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.**

From Present Truth, October – December 2004 [Author Unknown]

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## **Let me summarize the doctrine of the Church Gathered.**

The focus of the Bible, OT and NT, is the Christ and His Church and not on national Israel or the Jews.

God deals with **individuals** and not nations in the matter of salvation [justification]. There has never been a nation in which everyone was a believer.

There are two Israel's in Scripture; Israel after the flesh and the Israel of God who are the church.

God has always included elect Gentiles and the elect remnant of the Jews in His church.

The covenant promises to Israel after the flesh in the OT have all been fulfilled in history, or forfeited due to unbelief, or they were meant for Christ and His Church.

The New Testament interprets the Old Testament.

### **John 10:15-16**

**15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.**

### **John 11:45-52**

**Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. 46 But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. 47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. 48 If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."**

**49 And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, 50 nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." 51 Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, 52 and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.**

\* \* \*

If you have any theory of prophecy that does not lead to personal sanctification and that glorifies Christ and His Church discard it. Prophecy is not a calendar. All prophecy has to do with Christ and His kingdom and His Church.

One more scene of the Church Gathered:

#### **Revelation 14:1-5**

**Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. 2 And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. 3 They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. 4 These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. 5 And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.**

The 144,000 are the completed number of the redeemed Church as seen in Revelation Chapter 7. The number is a sacred perfection, a multiplication of the number 12, which is the number of the church of OT and NT, the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles [the 24 elders of chapters 4 & 5] – 12 x 12 x 1000 equals one unified company of the redeemed from all ages, from the beginning to the end of time, a number not to be broken, but which is complete in the holy purpose of God. It is a number which can be neither increased nor diminished and thus shows the perfection of the divine wisdom which always achieves its goal and can never be thwarted.

#### **That is the doctrine of the Church Gathered**

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