

I. The Importance of Romans and God's Viewpoint

We have been dealing with the third aspect of the Book of Romans, specifically the doctrinal or prophetic section. We know that the Book of Romans is broken down into four different sections. We have been looking at it and really trying to put the Book of Romans into a good, healthy perspective for you so you can get it into your Bible and understand it. Probably, as far as a practical aspect as a Christian, there is no greater book that you need to learn than the Book of Romans.

I think when I was in high school, and even in junior high school, there was a great emphasis put on learning about our government. I remember having to memorize the Declaration of Independence. I didn't, but I remember being required to do that. We had what we called back then a civics class. It basically broke down and explained to you what the government was all about.

Every time we have an election or whatever, you can actually see the confusion. People don't understand what electoral votes are, or how the Constitution breaks down. One of the great issues today that we face is what they call the separation of church and state. You are led to believe that the separation of church and state is basically based on the aspect that the Constitution or Bill of Rights says that there should be nothing between church and state, and that there should be a separation. Of course, that means that you can't pray in school and all these things.

Of course, it has nothing to do with that. Once a person understands where the church and state concept came in, it came in with a group called the Danbury Baptists out of Connecticut. They had heard that John Adams was president at that time, and they had heard that the United States was going to bring in another church-state setup like they had in Europe. The Danbury Baptists wrote a letter to the president saying, "What is this? We thought we had religious freedom."

He wrote a letter back to them which basically stated that the church and the state would always be separate from the church as far as setting up a church-state religion. Do you know what a church-state religion is? It is when the country says you have to be Baptist, you have to be Methodist, you have to be Catholic, you have to be whatever. That's what they had in Europe, and that's why they came to America, and not to have that. The Danbury Baptists were concerned about that. He wrote them a letter back. One time in one letter he talked about that the church and the state would be separate in that context.

We get from that today the fact that it has destroyed itself to the place where now we think that we can't pray in school, we can't do this, we can't do that because of a separation of church and state. There's a great value in learning about your own country. It's a great value in learning about your system, your civil system, the executive branch, and all of the things that make up the Congress and the Senate. I know it's boring stuff, but all of it basically goes back to a fundamental concept that's taught throughout the whole Bible.

I said all that to say this: just as you and I as citizens of the United States don't know how our country operates, most of God's people don't know how God operates. The Book of Romans is to the Christian what the Declaration of Independence is to Americans. It's the Constitution of Christianity. It's the book that really details out everything that God is revealing to us, the church. In every aspect, it shows us how God views the New Testament church and how He contrasts it to the things in the Old Testament.

He has broken it down into those four sections for you:

1. A historical section.
2. A doctrinal section, doctrinal in the sense of specific teaching for the church compared to the Old Testament.
3. The prophetic section. That's the section we're in right now. You have to deal with the future.
4. Probably for me, the greatest aspect in the Book of Romans is the last section, which is the practical section. It basically gives you God's viewpoint of how you and I survive on planet Earth. It's an incredible, incredible concept.

You have heard me say many, many times, and I say it all the time and I try to keep it before you as much as I can: the job of every Christian, if you're saved here this morning, you really have one job. I know God's going to do a lot of different things with you, but as far as you're concerned in your relationship with God, you should have one goal. That goal is to come to the point in your life where you become Christ-like.

How do you become Christ-like?

- The Bible says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."
- The Bible says that we have the mind of Christ.
- The Bible talks about the fact that every day of our lives we ought to be more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

But how do we do that? How do you and I come to the point where, I mean, do I wear cleaner clothes every day? Do I wear nicer clothes every day? How do I become this Christ-like concept? Of course, the only way that we become like Christ is to think like Christ. When we think like Christ, then you'll never have to worry about doing things that Christ would not do.

I told you from day one when we started our church, and all through my life I taught the concept that your job and my job as a Christian has one goal. That goal is for you and I to take everything in the Bible and see it as God's viewpoint and everything in life, and then make that viewpoint our viewpoint. That's really what the Book of Romans is, and that's a great example of that.

Romans 9, 10, and 11 is God's viewpoint on the nation of Israel. You and I as a Christian need to, whatever you've been taught about Israel, whatever you've thought about Israel, whatever you've read, whatever you've heard, you need to put that aside and you need to make God's viewpoint, Romans 9, 10, and 11, God's viewpoint on the nation of Israel your viewpoint. You can take that same little example and make it for the whole Book of Romans. The whole Book of Romans is God's viewpoint on what the church now is compared to what God was doing in the Old Testament. I can't overemphasize that enough.

II. Misconceptions About Israel and God's Plan

You have a lot of people today, a lot of groups out there that have a problem with the nation of Israel. First and foremost that everybody's familiar with, going all the way back to the end of the Civil War, is the Ku Klux Klan. Most people think the Ku Klux Klan would be a non-Christian organization. But you talk to them and they talk about them being Christians. They believe in God. They believe in the Bible. Probably many of them believe in the Bible more than some of you believe in the Bible. The Ku Klux Klan is an organization that doesn't claim to be atheist and hate God. They claim to love God, love the Bible, but they also claim that they are the superior race and not the nation of Israel. That's where the problem comes in.

They take the position that blacks, Jews, anybody who's not what they call the Aryan, the white race, they believe that God gave up on the Jew and God gave up on all the other nations and made the white Caucasian, the Gentiles, His chosen people. They live their whole lives and it's filled with violence and it's filled with murder and it's filled with all of the ungodly things that a real Christian would never have any part of. How did they get so off track? They never made God's viewpoint of the nation of Israel their viewpoint.

We take from that, the more modern version of that would be the Aryan Brotherhood. Aryan from Europe or the Aryan race is the white race, the Caucasian race. Much of it is based on Adolf Hitler's Third Reich and his superiority of the Aryan race. It has survived today in another form and it comes out today as the Aryan race, the white race, is the supreme race and all other races are subject to it. How do they get to that position? They get to that position because they don't understand how God views the nation of Israel.

A while back we had a shootout back in Montana or someplace out there with Randy Weaver. Randy Weaver was a part of a white supremacist group, same kind of concept. You find it not only in the radical groups like that who are willing to shoot it out with the government because of their views. Then you find the churches that aren't that radical in what they do but they're all messed up in what they do and what they believe.

A while back, I think he's dead now, there was a guy on the radio named Ted Garner Armstrong. Ted Garner Armstrong was a great Bible teacher on the radio. He taught basically that God was all finished with the nation of Israel and that the white Gentile race had taken over the nation of Israel. He had hundreds and thousands of followers in his lifetime. He since then has died, and I might add, he's got his theology straightened out now, but at that particular point in time, that's what he did.

You find it in the Protestant churches today. You find that the Methodists and the Presbyterians and the Lutherans and the Catholics, they all take the stand that God is finished with the nation of Israel. Now they have taken the place of the nation of Israel. How do people get to that point? They get to that point the same way other people get to the point that they can get saved and do whatever they want to do and they think God's okay with it. When we stop making God's viewpoint about everything in life, when we stop making that our viewpoint, then we're headed for trouble.

That's why it's so important not only with just the Book of Romans, but in everything in the Bible, in your own personal life, to come to the point that the number one goal. The number one goal for you should not be to read the Bible. The number one goal of you should not even be to know the Bible. The number one goal you should have in your life and I should have in my life is to let the Bible change me into the image of Christ that I might be Christ-like. It does no good to know the Bible if it doesn't have an effect on you that changes you.

For years and years and years I heard preachers say that reading the Bible will change your life. I've watched people all my life. I've watched people through all of my ministry who read the Bible and yet the Bible never really changed anything about them. The answer to that is that reading the Bible doesn't change your life. What changes your life is what you do with what you read in the Bible. When you apply the Bible that you read to your life, and in other words, make that your mindset, that's what changes you. That's what makes you Christ-like.

That's why your job and my job ought to make the viewpoint of everything that God does. In this case, the nation of Israel here we're talking about, but whatever your viewpoint is, it ought to be lined up with God's viewpoint. God's not going to change His, by the way, it's up to us to change ours.

III. Israel's Stumbling and the Church Age

Now let's look at Romans chapter 11 here, and now that we've said that, let's come on down through some more verses here in another section.

Romans 11:11

I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

Romans 11:12

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

Romans 11:13

For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:

Romans 11:14

If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.

Romans 11:15

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

Romans 11:16

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

Now Father, we thank You and praise You today for the Lord and we come to You Father thanking You for all Your goodness to us. Thank You for those that are here today. May we continue to open up the scriptures and to learn from them and help us Lord in all that we do today, quiet our hearts. Let us come to the Word of God in this moment today Father to be here to learn from You and we'll thank You and praise You for what You have for us now in Jesus' name for His sake we ask it. Amen.

In this passage again, we see some tremendous truths. If you notice that as we've been coming through these, I've been breaking Romans down into small sections. It doesn't do any good. You plow into Romans like a snowplow into a winter storm. All you do is throw snow everywhere. What we've got to do is we've got to break this book down section by section, verse by verse if we need to, because if there's any book that I want you to be able to put into your Bible and have a handle on, it's going to be Romans. Let me tell you something, you'll wind up being a Christian just like most of the young people that you will talk to today who know nothing about their government, and you'll grow up as a Christian knowing nothing about how God looks at things and how God views things, and that's what we've got to try to deal with here today.

Now look at verse 11. He says, "And I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall?" We've talked about this stumbling and we've talked about this fall. We've talked about how that when Christ came the first time to the nation of Israel, and we talked about this last week, how that they rejected Him. The Bible says that He was the rock that God sent them. He was the chief cornerstone by which God was going to make up the nation of Israel. What happens is they reject Him, and the rock that God sent them to be their strength turns into their rock of offense.

What does that mean? It means that they took offense to what God did. We talked about the practical applications, how that in your life and my life we can come to the point where at one time in our life we can love God, love the Word of God, love the things of God, love to see people saved, love to witness to people, and then something transpires in our life that the same gospel, the same Bible, the same principles, the same things we once loved, now become offensive to us. That's what happened to the Jew, and that is just a good practical way to understand it.

The Jews were called out of Egypt in Exodus 12. God flourished them and protected them and took care of them and did everything for them. But there came a time in their life where the rock that God gave them, their heart changed, their attitude changed, and now the same Jesus that they once loved, the same God that they once followed, the same Old Testament law that they once held to, now becomes offensive to them. When that happened, the Bible says they stumbled. They stumbled, and that stumbling is a picture of Israel falling.

Now this fall is not a permanent fall. There are different falls in the Bible. We have the fall of Adam. Remember that one in Genesis 3 where God put Adam and Eve down in the garden in a perfect estate and told them to be everything, do everything, gave them everything, and what happened? The devil showed up to Eve and got her to sin. She got Adam to sin, and all mankind fell into sin. That is called the fall in the Bible. But that was a permanent fall. There wasn't

nothing that Adam could do to get it back, to get that image restored. It wasn't until Christ came down the line that there's a way to get that thing fixed. But that was a permanent fall. From that point on, all mankind is destitute and without God. The only way he can get back to God is to do what God said.

But in this particular case here, this is not a permanent fall. This fall here takes place from, we know from our studying in our Bible basics and from our time on Saturday and Sunday morning, it starts about 606 B.C. with what the Bible calls the time of the Gentiles. If you're familiar with our chart back there, it runs up to the rapture of the church and then the end of the tribulation period. At that particular point, God is going to restore them and is going to establish them, and God is going to bring them back from that fall.

We've talked about it in the last couple of months as we come through this, how that God has scattered His people. But then the Bible says He's going to call them back. We looked and saw how that He began to call them back in 1918 under the Balfour Declaration. How He brought them back in 1948, put them into the land, and all the events you're seeing unfolding around you today is the preliminary of God bringing back the nation of Israel and restoring them. But they have stumbled that they should fall, and during this temporary fall, God, we know from our past studies, He turns His attention to you and me, the Gentiles, and He brings in the church age, and salvation goes to the Gentiles.

Now I don't want to miss this point from what we've talked about before, especially in the Bible Basics class. We've also talked about it on Thursday night, and you heard me say it many, many times. I told you that fundamentally, if you want to learn what the Bible is about, real simple, if you get this term in your head and get this format in your head, and you guys in the Bible Basics are going to say, "Oh no, not again, here we go, I've heard it so many times, I'm sick of it," but the price of learning is repetition. If you get this one concept in your brain about the Bible, if you want a complete overview of the Bible, of what it is in its simplest, basic, lowest common denominator form, here it is: God has a plan and God is going to fulfill that plan.

Everything in your Bible as it goes down from Genesis to Revelation is God fulfilling and moving through history. The Bible tells you the direction that He's going to go. The Bible tells you about the people that He's going to take with Him. We told about that the most basic simple concept of the Bible is that God has a plan. He enacts that plan, and that plan is to give every man and woman and child on planet Earth the chance to accept Him or reject Him, whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament. In the Old Testament, we know that God's plan is built around a nation. In the New Testament, we know that plan is built around a spiritual body called the church.

But the basic fundamental concept of the Bible is this: God has a plan and moves in a direction to accomplish that plan. The devil moves in opposition to God to stop that plan. That's all the Bible is. The Bible is God puts Adam and Eve down in the garden and says, "This is great. You're going to have a great time. We're going to have great fellowship. My plan's in force." And bang, what happened? The devil steps in, brings Adam to a fall. He puts Cain and Abel down the line

and they come out there and He says, "Oh, it's going to be fine again. We got all it happens." What happened? The devil steps in and has Cain kill Abel.

He goes a little bit farther and He has Noah. Noah is a great guy. What does the devil do? The devil shows up, the sons of God come down, throws the whole world into discord, and God again has to wipe it out with a flood. He calls Abraham out and He says, "Abraham, I got a plan. We're going to go out here and we're going to do great things. I got a land for you over here. Come on out. Let's go. Out of your loins, I'm going to bring a great nation." Abraham says, "Oh boy, that's great." The devil says, "Watch this." He brings in Hagar because Sarah can't have a child. He gets Ishmael, and the devil stops it again.

Every place through your Bible, God gets them into the land and God sets them up with David and Solomon, and what happens? The devil steps in and says, "Wow, you really got a great thing going. Watch this," and brings in Baal worship. The whole Bible is built around that concept. Your life and my life is that way. It goes that way. Every time something good happens, you just got to cringe because you know something bad is going to happen. God wants to give you the victory in everything you do. The devil wants to take that victory from you. It's just that simple. Life's not complicated.

The problem with God's people is they don't understand that you get the victory with God even when the devil's knocking on your door. Because we think that every good thing is from God and every bad thing from the devil. So something good happens, we're all high, and then something bad happens and we're all low. You should never live your life that way. Let me tell you something, God's power is supreme, and things like I'm about to show you are absolutely crucial. Not only in understanding God's plight down through history, but realizing also that in everything in your life, if He said in Romans 8, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose," did He mean all things or just almost all things? He meant all things.

Now, when that old thing, there can be some terrible things. But it's still the old things. We're circumstantial human beings. We are all of us. We think happy. The word happy comes from the word happenings. When the happenings are good, we're happy. When the happenings are bad, we're sad. Our lives, just as Israel and history of the Bible, we see that you cannot take the principles of God out of your life at any time because they work just like they work here. God has a plan. The devil has a plan. God's plan is to get this thing going, and the devil's plan is to get this thing stopped. Every time I've watched in your life, in people's lives, all down through, once they start to get plugged into the Bible, once they start to get something going, the devil comes in and takes it right out or tries to.

Now, I'm convinced that there are some things that the devil doesn't know. I know the Bible says in the book of Ezekiel that he was great in wisdom. There was probably nobody on planet Earth that knows the Bible outside the Godhead better than he does. I believe with all of my heart what the Bible says when it says that he was wiser than Daniel and wiser than anybody and probably understands the Bible better than anybody. But he doesn't understand it all. I'll tell you another problem that he has. Who can raise their hand and tell me another problem that he has that no

matter how wise he is, is going to mess him up? Pride. That's a good word. What's another word? Arrogance. That's right. He's arrogant. He's prideful and he's arrogant. You can have all the truth in the world, but if you have a pride problem and you're arrogant, it's going to blind you. That's what happens.

I have a little list in the back of my Bible and I never publicize it because I'm never too sure about it. But I just think that my own little way of doing things, I don't think the devil understood the concept of the second birth. Now he might now, because he's got the New Testament, but I don't think he ever thought about the second. I don't think he knew about that. Do you know why I base that on? Because he keeps making the same mistake in the Old Testament of trying to mess up the first one, when if he was smart and he knew there was a second birth, he'd go after the second one. I don't think he knew about the first birth or the second birth. I don't think that concept was relevant to him.

There are some things the Bible says over there in 1 Peter 1:12, and I can only guess at this, but the Bible says there's some things in the Bible that the angels desire to look into. There's some things about the Bible and God that the angels don't know. I believe that there's some things that the devil hasn't got figured out. God doesn't let him see it. I don't think he understands the concept of imputed righteousness. I don't think he understands the concept of unconditional grace. I don't think the devil understood the concept of the resurrection. The reason for that is he only put two guys watching that tomb. If he really would have thought God was who He said He was, he'd have the whole Roman army and every army on planet Earth around that place. He had two guys. Do you know why? He didn't understand about the resurrection.

I'll tell you something else he didn't know about. He didn't understand about the church. This is where God, this is what you've got to see. God, I've never played cards. I mean real cards. I don't know how to play poker. I don't know how to play all the card games. I don't. But just take this. Let's put the devil as the greatest card player in the world. He's the best card player in the world. He wins every hand. His card playing is based on his ability to know the game of cards better than anybody on the planet. The devil is playing a card game across the table from God. The devil knows that he's the best card player in the history of the universe. He even thinks he's a better card player than God.

On an even plane, maybe he's as good as a card player as God, but God's got one advantage the devil doesn't have. One, God steps over here and keeps His cards real close to His chest. At the same time, God has the ability that the devil doesn't have, that God can not only read His cards, but He can supernaturally read the devil's cards. My point is this: it doesn't matter how good you are at playing cards. It doesn't matter if you're the world's best stud poker player, the best card player, whatever the case may be. If the guy you're playing across the table from can not only read his cards, but he can read yours, you're going to lose every time. But you're going to think you're going to win right up to the point where you lose.

There's some things that the devil didn't know. The devil says, "I'm going to stop Israel. I'm going to stop Israel in her tracks. I'm going to make Israel fall." That's what he's saying in Romans 11. That's what he's talking about. "Have they stumbled that they should fall?"

Absolutely. What the devil did was take God's chosen people and get them to fall and then say, "Boy, look at that. I just put a major monkey wrench in God's plan." Do you know what God did? God just said, "Watch this card. It's called the church age." Play it. He didn't get anything. He didn't stop anything. The devil never stops God. He doesn't have the ability to stop God.

May I just say this to you? He doesn't have the ability to stop you either. He doesn't have the ability to stop you. "Greater is he that's in you than he that's in the world." He can't stop you and me. We always want to blame this and that on everybody in the whole wide world and say, "Well, you know, so and so this and so. But you know my job situation." But do you know who our worst enemy is? You don't want to know who your worst enemy is and who my worst enemy is. It's me. It's you. It's me. Because you've got everything that God has. You got the same spirit by which God did everything down through history. The devil can't stop you any more than he can stop the nation of Israel. But he stops us just like he stopped Israel.

When the devil throws a roadblock to you, when you have a great day and God is doing some great things in your life, and the devil throws a roadblock to take your legs out from under you, that's when the principles of the Word of God kick in. That's where God just takes it another avenue that He had planned all along. Because there's some things in the Bible the devil does not understand. We look at this thing here, and that's why I said, "Should they fall?" He put a question mark on it. Yes, they did. The devil said, "Wow, I fixed the whole plan. Just put the major monkey wrench in God's plan." God said, "No, you didn't. You missed the church card. All I'm going to do is bring out a bride for My Son." "I didn't know that." "I know you didn't know that." "Was that not in the Bible?" "Yeah, it is in the Bible." "How come I didn't see it?" "Because you're too proud and you're too arrogant. That's why you couldn't see it."

Your own, do you know how you learn from the Bible? The Holy Spirit of God is a light. That light illuminates and teaches you. Do you know why people stop getting things out of the Bible? Because their own personal light gets brighter than the light of the Holy Spirit that God wants to show them something. That's how it happens. It's exactly how it happens. The devil didn't know about the church age. That's why in the Bible it's called a mystery. He thought he stopped Israel, and God says, "No problem. Watch this."

Look at the last part of verse 11. He says, "And God also uses it to provoke the nation of Israel." He says, "But rather through their fall, salvation is come unto the Gentiles for to provoke them to jealousy." Now we're going to talk about this provoking more to jealousy here in just a moment. We'll come back to that because it's another reference down here in another verse, and I want to put them together.

IV. The Riches of the World and the Fullness of Israel

Let's look down here in verse 12. It says this: "Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fullness?" There are three things here. What I'm about to tell you here, maybe you can't grasp it right now, but down the line, hopefully you will as you grow. But the bottom line is this: there are some places in the Bible that have dual applications.

The greatest example I can think about other than this one here is like in Ezekiel 38. When you read Ezekiel 38, you've got a picture of what looks like the second coming of Christ and the battle of Armageddon. But the more you read it, the more it looks like there's something else there. Then when you start to read on, it looks like, "Well, this part looks like it's the second coming of Christ battle of Armageddon. This one looks like it's the battle of Armageddon or the fight at the end of the thousand-year reign in the millennium." It looks like it's confusing together.

The answer to it is that there are some places in the Bible, not a lot, but there are some places in the Bible where they have a double application. It's an application not only to the second coming of Christ battle of Armageddon, but the battle that takes place at the end of the thousand-year reign. They're so similar that they're in the same context of that passage. Frankly, when it comes to the Bible, those are the areas that really separate the men from the boys. When you get to that level that you can see those and understand those, you know, you're in the Bible and getting some things out of it you should get.

Great Bible truths are built on simple Bible concepts. That's why around here, everything we do is to get you to a point. We don't start. We start you with discipleship. Then we work you through other things, maybe the seven things that changed about you today you got saved. We had our Bible Basic class. It works up to the point where you've got to learn some basic concepts to understand the Bible because every great doctrinal truth in the Bible has its foundation in basic Bible principles that kind of go together like little building blocks.

Remember when we were kids growing up, you had them little Lincoln Log sets, or those little red things with bumps on them, Lego. I guess they still make those. You used to get those things and used to make things and build out of it. It's the same way when I was growing up, they don't have them anymore because they're too complicated for most kids today, but we had what we call Erector Sets. Our Erector Set came in a big steel box and all kinds of pieces of steel girders. You can just make about anything. You take your little Legos and snap them all together. You can make a horse. You can make a cow. You make a house. You can make a car. You can make whatever you want. The little Lincoln Logs are a little more limited. You can only make log cabins with them.

The point is this: everything you created started with just little pieces you had to put together. When you put the pieces together in the right order, it brought about a truck, a car, or a house. I love this commercial. It shows you where we're at. This commercial where this guy has, and I love the commercials because I love to watch the little kids' faces. Remember the one about the two little girls and a guy says, "Would you like a pony?" And then one girl gets the real pony and she says, "Well, you didn't tell me it was a real pony." And he says, "Well, you didn't ask." And then the look on her face. My favorite one is about the truck. He brings in that beautiful red truck. He says, "Here, you want to play with this?" The kids say, "Yeah." The kid, he looks at his watch and he picks it up and he takes it back and the kid says, "Hey, what'd you do that for?" And he pulls out of his coat pocket a paper truck that he made and he said, "Here, take that. I made that." "That's a nice one." What does the kid say? "It's a piece of junk."

When I grew up, we had paper trucks. We didn't have those big trucks like that. I used to play army and I didn't have a helicopter. I got a big old cardboard box a washing machine came in, and that was my helicopter. We made things happen. We didn't have the things that you got today. You could go probably buy a helicopter today. You could get in and get out of. We didn't have trucks that had radio control. We had a wagon with a string on it because the handle was broke off of it. We've come a long way.

What he says down here in verse 12, he says, "Now, if the fall of them be the riches of the world and the diminishing of them, the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fullness." Now, there are three things in here, and this is one of these double application verses. There are three things in here.

5. "Now that the fall of them be the riches of the world." The fall that winds up being the riches of the world is the salvation that you and I get through the Lord Jesus Christ. When Israel stumbled and fell temporarily, when the devil thought he had done a great deal by knocking them out, all God did was use that to bring about the salvation for you and for me. The riches of the world. Of course, we know that Christ's salvation comes through Christ. Christ was a Jew from the tribe of Judah. We know that we have a Bible in your lap today. Every writer in that Bible is a Jew. It's a Jewish book. It goes so much that John 4:22 says that salvation is of the Jews. So again, where the devil thought he was stopping God, like he always does. I could go back and take every case in the Bible where the devil tries to stop the plan of God and show you that it's just the thing that God moves on and has a plan that the devil didn't know about. I cannot emphasize that enough in your own life and my own life because there's going to be things that try to knock you down and knock you out.
6. "And the diminishing of them, the riches of the Gentiles." That's something else. That's the Gentiles in the millennium. In the millennium, the Gentiles are going to get into the Jew as they come out of the tribulation period. What did He say over there in Genesis 12:3 when God talked to Abraham? What did He say in Genesis 18:18 when God talked to Abraham?
7. "How much more their fullness." Here's what he's saying: if the fall of them, Jews, be the riches of the world for you and me, salvation, and the diminishing of them, the Jews, the riches of the Gentiles, there's your millennial reign of Christ. The nations get in. How much more their fullness? That fullness is the fullness of the nation of Israel. In Ephesians 1:10, this is called the dispensation of the fullness of times. It's a time when Israel and everything that God does comes full circle. That deals with eternity. It shows you that God's plan with the nation of Israel not only was in the Old Testament, but God had a plan for the Jew in the New Testament. That plan was that even though they've fallen temporarily, that through them, even though they're fallen through them, you and I get in. In the millennium, they're going to be restored and all the nations are going to get in. When the whole thing comes full circle and the fullness of Israel, here goes back in everything the way she should be. In everything. The Bible says at that point, it's going to be the end of the dispensation of the fullness of times and God's going to move on and God's going to accomplish everything now in His plan that He originally started out to do. Incredible content.

V. The Apostle Paul's Unique Ministry

Look at verse 13. "For I speak to you Gentiles in as much as I am the apostle of the Gentiles. I magnify my office." This is another great concept. There's so much in here. I'll talk to you a moment about the apostle Paul. Let me put him in a context for you. Let me give you an insight into Paul and who he was in his ministry. The apostle Paul, without a doubt, in my mind, is one of the most unique men in all of the New Testament, but not all of the Bible. I've studied his life to a great extent and looked at every aspect of his life. There are so many things about his life that you and I can glean from and learn from.

I began to, the format of your Bible, and you know how that we've talked about how that the nation of Israel, God came to them at the first coming of Christ. We know now how they rejected God. Then we know now how that they, that God, they fell. They stumbled at the rock of offense and they fell. From that point on, God begins to go to the nation of Israel. You see it in the book of Acts, and those of you that were in Institute or we've talked about it on Thursday night, many, many times, how the book of Acts lays itself out in Acts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. You have God coming to the nation of Israel for the last time. They make their official rejection in Acts 7. In Acts 8, things start to change. By the time you get to Acts 9, guess who gets saved? The apostle Paul.

Now, the apostle Paul is a unique individual because Paul was somebody who was persecuting the church. Paul is somebody who had no love for God or the things of God in his whole life, and his whole job was the fact that he would find people who believed in this Christ and persecute him, put him in jail, and kill him. In fact, when he meets Christ on the road to Damascus, he's going to Damascus for the purpose of arresting more Christians. God stopped him on the road to Damascus in Acts 9, and it's where the apostle Paul gets saved.

In Acts 9:15, you get your first little glimmer of who Paul is and what he's all about because he goes to a man, he's blind, and he goes to a man by the name of Ananias. In Acts 9:15, Ananias is worried because Ananias has Paul, who's called Saul then. He's got this guy in his house who everybody that he finds as a Christian, he puts him in jail and persecutes him or kills him. He's a Christian, and Ananias says, "Hey, I think you got the wrong address here. What am I doing with him?" God says, "It's okay, Ananias. He's a chosen vessel to Me to bear My name to the Gentiles." You begin to see in Acts 9 that Paul is going to be somebody special.

In every church in this city today, and certainly every Bible college you're ever going to go to, here's what they teach about Paul. They teach that Paul, you remember when Judas went out and hung himself and now the apostles are short one guy? Well, they had to have 12 total because in Matthew 19:28, we're told that when Christ comes back, they have to have 12 apostles because those 12 apostles are going to sit on 12 thrones judging Israel. They're one short. So what they do in the early part of Acts 1, 2, and 3, what do they do? They get around and they pick another guy and they get in Matthew.

Here's what you're taught in every church probably today in this city and certainly in every Bible college. They're telling you that the apostles were out of fellowship with God and they never should have took Matthias because Matthias was not the one that God wanted. Yet if you go back and look at the passage, you'll find that they're doing exactly what God said. Matthias was the

one they were supposed to have because the truth of the matter is, when you understand who Paul was, Paul was never part of the original 12. The original 12th ministry was to the nation of Israel. Paul's ministry is going to be to the Gentiles. He's not one of the 12. He's the 13th apostle. He's the one that goes specifically to the Gentiles, and you're told that over and over again.

Then what happens? From Acts 9 to Acts 13, you don't find Saul anywhere. He's nowhere to be found. What happened? You can't get an exact reckoning on it, but I'd say it's probably somewhere between nine and twelve, maybe fourteen years. He's missing. He gets saved in Acts 9. I know, you're in your Bible, you read there in Acts 9 where he gets saved and two chapters over, here he is going down here doing all this great stuff. You think, "What's the big deal?" Well, between those two chapters is about fourteen years of the big deal, maybe nine.

What happened to him? We have an absentee of Paul. He's AWOL. God called him to the Gentiles and then he's gone for a number of years. Of course, the Bible fills that in for that. In Galatians 1:17-19, we can account for about three and a half years of the time because the Bible says that immediately after he got saved or sometime thereafter, he goes up to Mount, he goes into Arabia. Do you know what's in Arabia? Mount Sinai. In other words, once Paul got saved, God took him to the exact same spot where Moses met with God.

What did Moses get from God when he went on Mount Sinai? He got the Ten Commandments. He got more than that, didn't he? He got everything he needed to build a tabernacle. He got, when he came down, he had a U-Haul behind his camel. He had everything that God gave him to do what he had to do to build God's program. I guarantee you, the Bible doesn't say it. Yeah, it doesn't say it, but I guarantee you this is what happened. When God took Paul to Arabia, took him on Mount Sinai, he got everything he needed to know how to build the church.

Do you know what he does after he comes back from Arabia? He goes down in Jerusalem. Do you know what he does down in Jerusalem? He looks up the Lord's brothers, literal brothers. He looks to find the literal brothers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he spends some time with them. I don't know how much time. Why did he do that? Because he just got the revelation from God about building the church and being the apostle to the Gentiles for the church. But Paul's got one deficiency yet. He never knew the Lord Jesus Christ in an intimate way when he was on this earth because he was always arresting the people who believed in Him.

So for a period of time, he goes down into Jerusalem. He looks up the brothers of the Lord Jesus Christ, literal brothers. He sits down and he says, "Tell me everything you did. Tell me everything about Him. Tell me what He thought about this. Tell me what He did. Tell me how He did that. Tell me about this. Tell me about that." He finds everything he can, everything he can about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then at some point, the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 12, God gives him his graduation, his final exercise. He takes him up to the third heaven in person. The Bible says in that passage in 2 Corinthians 12 that Paul didn't know if he had died and he had went to heaven or that he was in a trance and just saw what God wanted him to see. He didn't know himself. I certainly don't know. All I know is his life was never the same once he came back. Once he came back, once he saw,

and once God gave him what He wanted him to do. Then God showed him the context of all he was in, and he found out who the Lord was. There was no stopping him.

Paul never looked back the rest of his life. Paul put himself in the most perilous scenarios you could ever find on planet Earth because he believed in what he was doing. Paul was unique. In the book of Galatians, the Church of Galatia is a church that Paul started. What happened is once he got it started and they got going, like so many churches, somebody came in and said, "Hey look, this is really not what the Bible is teaching. Paul is wrong here. You got to believe this. You got to do this." They are confused. Paul wrote the whole book of Galatians back to that church saying, "Look, I am the one that you need to listen to." He said, "I didn't get my gospel from some other man. I got my gospel from God." Then he talks about the other gospels.

Why Paul was so sure that what he had was from God and it was given to him, he made a statement that would be an arrogant statement if you didn't have the context that I'm laying for you. When Paul looked at the gospel of the grace of God, the same gospel that you and I heard that got us saved, the same very gospel that reached out and touched everybody on planet Earth, that same very gospel. Do you know what he calls it? We call it the gospel of the grace of God. We call it the gospel of the church, the gospel of the good news. Do you know what he called it? He called it "my gospel." Kind of arrogant, isn't it? When it really wasn't his gospel, but it was his gospel from the aspect that he's the only one that God gave it through. He got the gospel from God. I got it from a man. You got it from a man. Paul was the only man on this planet that got the gospel from God Himself because he is the apostle to the Gentile church. He said, "I magnify my office." He talks about the fact that he is the apostle to the Gentiles. I love it.

The church at Galatia has a problem. The Judaizers have come in, and the Judaizers were basically a group that came in and said, "Oh, you've got to believe in Christ, but you've also got to keep the law." Paul takes him to task. That's where he says, "I'm, this is my gospel." God gave it to me. I didn't get what I've got from some other man. I got it directly from God. You want the source? I am he.

Then over in the church at Corinth, he's got another situation. I love these things. We read Paul and we think of Paul and we think about how great Paul was. He's probably the topic of, I'd say, at least 50 percent, maybe 75 percent of the sermons across the country today, if not the world, are going to have some reference to Paul, if not more. Everybody thinks Paul is a good guy. Do you realize in his own day, a lot of people didn't like Paul? Do you realize that even some of the churches Paul started, the people in the churches didn't care for him?

When the church at Corinth got so far out of whack and so far out of touch with reality, and he tries to help them, and then in 2 Corinthians, the church, for the most part, wants to do what's right. There's still an element in that church that don't want to do what's right. When Paul writes them a letter, and I just find it hard to believe, when Paul, after all that Paul had done, after God, they had seen the hand of God in his life and everything that Paul had done, and he had started that church. The element in that church that didn't like Paul, didn't want Paul, and obviously had their own agenda and wanted to do their own thing, they say in 2 Corinthians, they say, "If you're really who you say you are, like we don't know you are, if you are really who you say you are,

before we accept what you say, could you send us a letter of commendation, somebody that would speak for you that you are who you say you are?"

Do you know what Paul said? "You want a letter of commendation? Go look in the mirror." He says, "You be my letter of commendation." Do you know what he's saying? He's saying, "It's your turn." What do you mean? "You want proof of I'm who I am preaching the word of God? Well, you wouldn't even be here if it wasn't for me. You wouldn't even have a Bible if I didn't tell you where it was." Paul was a special guy. We don't think of Paul today as being somebody who had opposition from his own people, but he did. He did. He did. He did. It's one of those great things that you're going to find that Paul, all of his life, he had an incredible, incredible ministry because God called him for a specific task.

VI. Provoking Israel to Emulation

Look at verse 14. "If by any means I may provoke you to emulation, then which are my flesh," talking to the Jews, you see. Now the word emulation is a word that means to make somebody, it's got a couple of different meanings to it. We're going to look at the primary one, then we're going to look at the secondary. The word emulation primarily means to make somebody jealous, to provoke somebody. That's what he was saying up there in verse 11. Remember when I said we come back to this a little bit later on? He says, "If by any means I provoke you to emulation, then which are my flesh." He's trying to provoke the Jews. He's trying to provoke the Jews to emulation.

What does that mean? What's he mean? What's he trying to do here? Well, he's saying, "I'm trying to make them jealous and provoke them so that they'll get into the Bible and find out why God went to the Gentiles and dumped them and then maybe they'll get saved." Let me give you an example of it. I thought about this this week as I was putting this together.

Back in the 16th century, there was a man by the name of Menno Simons. In church history, he's a famous Dutch man from a place called Friesland in Holland. He winds up being one of the greatest Anabaptists of his day. Before Menno Simons was saved, he was a Roman Catholic priest. One day in his hometown, a Bible-believing Christian, if I remember right, it was a guy who was a tailor, a Bible-believing Christian was taken and executed for his heresy that the Roman Catholic Church had pronounced him a heretic. Menno Simons is standing there watching this guy being executed. They actually beheaded him and then they tied his headless body on a wheel of a cart and then drove him around town so everybody would get the word that you don't stand up against the Roman Catholic Church.

You can imagine what happened in that scenario. They cut his head off, they tied him to a cartwheel and then drove him around town, and as the wheel turned, the blood splattered and everything, and everybody got the message, "Don't mess with the big RCC." And I'm not talking about Royal Crown Cola. Menno Simons saw the cart go by and heard the story. He asked what this man was killed for. Somebody said, "Well, he was killed because he was re-baptizing adults." Menno Simons says, "Re-baptizing adults? You mean baptizing them a second time?"

The guy said, "Yeah." Menno Simons said, "Well, I don't know of any two baptisms in the Bible. The man must be a heretic."

Do you know what he did? That thing bothered him so bad he went home and he got into his Bible and tried to find where there were two baptisms in the Bible. He couldn't find two baptisms in the Bible. What he did find or what he came up against was the fact that the baptism that he was told was the real baptism was not the true baptism because he ran into baptism in Ephesians 4 that was a spiritual baptism. That thing bothered him so bad that he had traveled over the next couple of months, the next six or seven months. In the course of time, he talked to three great reformers and he said, "Can you tell me about two baptisms in the Bible?" He talked to a guy by the name of Bucer, a guy by the name of Bullinger, and a guy by the name of Martin Luther. All three of them said, "Well, there ain't two baptisms in the Bible. There's only one baptism in the Bible."

He said, "Well, I saw a guy killed. He was a heretic and he was killed by our church because of the fact that he was baptizing a second time." They said, "He wasn't baptizing a second time. There are not two baptisms in the Bible. There's only one baptism in the Bible. He was re-baptizing those people because they got baptized under the Roman Catholic Church, which is heresy. They got saved and then they got scripturally baptized like the Bible says." He said, "Oh, wow. So there isn't two baptisms. There's only one baptism. And the baptism I've been believing in is the wrong baptism."

Do you know what he did? He went home. He got saved. He went home. He renounced the priesthood, dumped the Roman Catholic Church. He became part of the Anabaptist movement and started churches all over Europe. The Mennonites. The Mennonites come from Menno Simons. I know the Mennonites are a weird group today, but in church history, they were part of the Anabaptists. They didn't go screwy until about 60, 70, 80 years ago. They were very fundamental and very basic in their approach to the Bible. They were part of the Anabaptists. Do you know what happened? Somebody provoked him to study. Him being provoked made him get into the Bible, made him ask questions. When he got provoked to get into the Bible, God put the people in his world to give him the right answers.

Do you know Martin Luther got saved the same way? Martin Luther was a Roman Catholic priest. Martin Luther was a priest and he comes to the place where he did everything in the world the Catholic Church told him to do. Yet he felt empty with God because he wasn't saved. Martin Luther used to whip himself because somebody told him that that's how you feel a relationship with God when you do penance. So he whipped himself. Somebody said that he wasn't suffering enough and that's why he didn't have a relationship with God. Do you know what Martin Luther did? He crawled up the cathedral stairs, something like 300 steps on his knees, till his knees were bloody, trying to get a repentance to God because he wanted to have something with God. He wanted to have something with God, and everything he did, every penance he did, everything he did to his own body, he just could not find the peace. Do you know what it did? It provoked him. One day he got in the book of Romans and he read a great verse that said that, "The just shall live by faith." You know the story of Martin Luther. He got saved and he became the great reformer during that period of time of the Reformation. That's exactly what you have.

I don't know if you know this or not. I didn't get to talk to our Church of Christ people last week because I had two funerals I had to be part of and it threw my week off and I had the institute to get ready for and a couple other things I had to deal with. That was not a top priority on my list to have lunch with a candlelight. But I'm going to try to get with them this week. Jack worked with one of the guys and Jack is telling me that the guy is coming up to him, pulling people out of the air of who they can find in their history. He tried to tell him that the, who was it, the Anabaptists or was it? The Lollards. Oh yeah, the Lollards were, they believed what you believe. They all had big Lollard pops and they went around and they, I remember that group. Yeah, right. The Lollards and the Lollard pops, so that was a good one.

See, some people don't understand what you do in a scenario like we created a couple of Thursday nights ago. I may be mad, crazy. I may be the crazy scientist in the belfry. I'm like the guy that created Frankenstein, maybe out of my mind, maybe nuts, but there's always a method to my madness. Do you know what we did that night? We provoked them to jealousy. Do you know what they're doing right now? They're running all over the place trying to find where they're at in history. They never would have done that if we wouldn't have set them up that night and nailed them. The guy, I didn't call the guy last week and he came to Zach and almost with a sigh of relief like we backed down. We weren't going to have them back like, "I don't have to find out where I'm at because I'm not here anymore" type thing. No, we're going to have them back. We're going to continue to provoke.

You may not get them all, but what if just one person, after the story of Menno Simons, after understanding what God did with the Jews, why He did what He did, to provoke them to jealousy, that they would get into the Bible and say, "Hey, why did God do this to me?" Sometimes bad things happen in our lives. Do you realize that? Do you realize sometimes God puts bad situations in our life because we're out of touch with God? We're out of reality with God. We're out of the Bible. The only way God can get us back in the Bible is to provoke us to jealousy, provoke us to say, "Hey, why did this happen?" God said, "Well, I don't know. Why don't you look right in here? Maybe you'll find out."

"If by any means I may provoke you to emulation, then which are my flesh," and he wants to provoke them. Look at the last part of verse 14, "and might save some of them." That's the goal. The goal of provoking them to emulation or provoking them is not to show how smart you are, how dumb they are. It's not to give them a rough time. It's to provoke them to the place that through the process, some of them might get saved.

Do you know what? That's what really what preaching is. When I preached that funeral yesterday, I preached my favorite passage out of Ecclesiastes 7. In very few cases, I'll never go anywhere else because it's everything that you need. I basically, it's the verse that says, Ecclesiastes 7:1, "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart." What I do in a funeral and what many times I do on Sunday morning, it's part of the ability to be able to communicate the word of God, provoke people yesterday in a very nice way. You don't always have to be mean and nasty to provoke people, though that's one of the ways you can do it if you get in that mode and that mindset.

But yesterday, it was nothing nasty. Yesterday, it was a thing where I provoked them. I had everything I needed. I had a funeral. But I made the point that nobody wants to be here. I said, "You know what, folks, if we were all smart, you know what we'd do on our way out? We'd grab one of the cards of this funeral home and we'd all go home and seriously think about a prepaid funeral where you pick everything out, get to pick your casket, pay for it." Now, what will cost you? I had a person that when he dies, his funeral is going to cost him \$400. Everything you want a funeral costs today, about six, seven, \$8,000. I mean, they charge it for everything. They charge it for the pennies in your eyes. They charge you a dollar for the pennies in your eyes. I just say, "Here, here, take those. Save me the money."

Anyway, they charge you for everything. You want to use the room. That's why you're going to be cremated and you want to be in a casket so people can see you. They charge you by the hour for the casket. It's a rental casket. They charge you for everything. That's how they make their money. The bottom line is that when yesterday, I had everything I needed. I told them, I said, "If we were smart folks, what we would do is we'd all go out and we'd make our prepaid funeral arrangements so it wouldn't have to be a burden." It's a great thing. Your wife doesn't have to run through everything. You pick out the songs you want to hear. They don't have to sit around and say, "Well, what are we going to do?" Those are tough times. Those are hard times. You don't have to say, "Well, what was his favorite song?" And you say, "Well, it was this." And then somebody else said, "No, it was this." Then you get in a fistfight over the famous song. You don't have to do that.

But you know what? Nobody will do that. Not many people will do that. Do you know why? Of course, we want death and dying as far away from our mindset as we can put it, don't we? Is anybody here today who really woke up this morning and said, "Boy, I hope I die today. It'll be a fun day." You get up and you said, "Oh, I hope the Chiefs win." You probably didn't say that. You say, "I hope this, I hope that. I hope I get my raise at work. I hope I get that." But probably nobody said, "Boy, I'm just looking forward to dying today." We don't think about it. We don't want to think about it.

I had everything I needed yesterday. I had a situation, a funeral. I had a verse and had an object lesson. I said, "The greatest thing about this, the Bible says it's better for us to be here than at your friend's house having a party." Why? Because that is the end of all men. Every day somebody in here is going to die if Jesus doesn't come. Today, the reason why it's better to be here than someplace else is because we, the living, will lay it to our heart. I don't like being here. I don't like funeral homes. You could blindfold me and take me into any store, any place in the world. You take me and blindfold me and take me to a funeral home and I'll say, "I'm in a funeral home." There's a smell about it. You all know that. I mean, I hate them. I mean, you know, I mean, I don't hate them, but I mean, I hate them. I mean, terrible. Why? Because it reminds me. Of course, back then that happens. You won't smell anything. So I guess it won't make any difference.

I provoked them. I provoked them out of the loop nicely, but I provoked them out of their nice little cushiony world because I took a circumstance that I was invited into, took the circumstance, used it to emulate them, to provoke them, to think. Come out of your little world.

Come out of your little cushion. Come out of your little, "What are you going to do tonight?" "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." And "what is thy life but a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." I provoked them. That's what Paul is doing. That's what God is doing to the nation of Israel. This is an incredible thing.

Now, in reality, let's take a closer look at this word, emulation, just for a second. The word emulate also, here's the second meaning of it, also carries the meaning of to imitate or to be like. But the difference between imitate and emulate is imitate is to be like, but emulate is to be like, but be a little bit better. In a good way. I mean, I guess it could be used in a bad way, but I'm talking about in a good way. Paul's the example. Paul was a Jew. Paul was a Pharisee. Paul was a doctor of the law. Paul was probably a member of the Sanhedrin. Paul was also a Roman citizen. Paul was a Jew. He was emulating to the Jews, but he was better than the Jews in the sense that he understood all of the things that the Jews didn't. Therefore, he was one of them, but he was better than them. Not better in the sense of better than they are, but better in the sense of understanding what God is doing with them.

In reality, that's what in my mind, my ministry is all about. I know I'm hard on you. I know I hold you to standards that maybe, especially if you're in a leadership role, that maybe you could get away with at other churches and all of those things. I put a lot of emphasis on the Bible and learning the Bible, and I don't cut you a lot of slack sometimes. I don't cut myself any slack. But at the end of the day, it all comes down to this: I want you to be better than the average Christian. I want you young men to be better with the Bible than I am. I want you at the end of the day to be better than the average Christian. I want you to, everything in your life, to have God use you because someday if Jesus doesn't come, someday the very ministry of this church may rest on your shoulders. It may rest with you, with the person sitting next to you, because right now today in a broader sense, the success of this ministry rests on you. Of course, that's what it all comes down to, being Christ-like, being like Christ in everything that you do. Next week we'll look at the lump of the, we'll look at the olive, look at the tree and the vine and the branches, and we'll put that all together and again we'll learn another great concept about the nation of Israel.

Ephesians 3:17-19:

Ephesians 3:17

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

Ephesians 3:18

May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

Ephesians 3:19

And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

My favorite example of this back in the book of Daniel. In the book of Daniel, you know that the three Hebrew children were taken out of their homeland and they were thrust into Babylon. I know the doctrinal significance of all of that, how that they are, again, they are, the Bible tells you, they're children of the King's seed. They're all in a line of Christ. So here again, the devil is going to put his little monkey wrench in. He's going to take the children, the line of Christ, and amalgamate him into the Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, thinking he's going to destroy the seed.

He brings them in there and you know the story. Nebuchadnezzar wants to give them his food, his music, his everything. He doesn't want them to eat the diet that they had in the Promised Land. They're now in Babylon. The Bible says that he prepares a daily portion of his meat, and obviously that meat, that food was dedicated to all the gods. He has Nebuchadnezzar's ragtime jazz band that he wants them to listen to and all the hard rock stuff that they have in their worship service, much like their churches today. Oh yeah, at the sound of the music and the cornet and harps and the sackbut and all of these things, they all bow down and worship the image. That's where it comes from. That's Nebuchadnezzar.

Of course he has all those things and Daniel says this, "Look, I'll make you a deal. You let us keep eating the diet that we have, i.e. the Word of God. You let your astrologers and your musicians eat all of the stuff of Babylon. At the end of a period of time, let's come together and let's find out if all the stuff that they ate or all the stuff that we ate, who's better?" I love these little tests in the Bible. So at the end of a period of time, Nebuchadnezzar said okay. So all his astrologers and his magicians, they ate and did all that he had. Daniel and the boys out of the king's seed, they stayed with the Word of God and ate the pulse, all types of the Bible if you go through and break them down, and the vegetables.

At the end of the period of time, they brought them together and the Bible says that Daniel and his friends were ten times better than all the magicians and the astrologers of Babylon. Ten times better. It always was significant to me that it was the magicians and the astrologers. Do you know why? Because magicians work with an illusion. People actually think that David Copperfield can make a 747 disappear, or he can make a lady disappear. Well, if that was true, he wouldn't have to do a magical act ever again. There'd be more rich men in this world that want to give him money. He can't do it. It's all an illusion. It looks like the 747 isn't there. It looks like she's not there anymore. She's still there. It's an illusion. It's the hand is quicker than the eye type of deal. It's all, "Draw your attention over here while I do something over here," and then you don't see it and you think, "Oh, it's magic." It's not magic. It's diversion of your attention and your focus. That's how they do it.

That's why in the world we live today, you have astrologers and you have magicians, all people who bring the illusion that life is good, the illusion that you'll be happy without a relationship with God and the Word of God, the illusion that you can profit in your life without doing what the Word of God says. It's nothing more than an illusion. Daniel's Boys were 10 times better. That's what I want for you. That's why I want to provoke you to study. That's why I want to provoke you to jealousy. That's why I want to provoke you to the place that you emulate and you be better than the average Christian. You learn things. You understand more. You grasp it more.

You get and experience the fullness of God, the Word of God in your life and everything that you do.

VII. Israel's Future Restoration: Life from the Dead

Look at verse 15. "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?" Now here's two more great concepts, another double application. "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world." That's you getting saved in Christ Jesus. 2 Corinthians 5:18 says:

2 Corinthians 5:18

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

A church can be a lot of things. A church can teach the Bible great. A church can have great singing, have all of this. But it's not really a ministry until it understands that the number one ministry of this church, any church, is the number one ministry we got from Jesus Christ Himself. That is the ministry of reconciliation. Reconciling, that's what God did when He got saved, when I got saved. Christ on the cross reconciled me to God through Jesus Christ and then gives me the same ministry. In other words, do for others what God did for me. Forgive them. Move on in life. Don't hold the bitterness and the anger and all the things that takes away the things of God in your life. Understand the reconciliation, the basis for forgiveness is recognizing what Christ did for you and then you having the ability through your relationship with Christ to do it to others. In the process of time, make that reconciliation.

Now look at the second part. "For if casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?" Here's the second aspect. The casting away and the reconciling of the world, that's salvation to you and me. That's Christ reconciling us through Him to God, through the Word of God. But the second thing is the recovery of them, life from the dead. That'll be Israel coming back from the dead at the second coming of Christ.

As far as God's concerned right now, and most people don't understand this, God didn't, in the Old Testament, God did not deal with individuals like He deals with individuals today. God dealt with certain individuals but His whole basis of dealing with Israel was through a nation and a literal priesthood that orchestrated and operated through the principles of God to that nation. God didn't come down when the law got into effect, God didn't come down and other than the few cases you have in the Bible, you don't find everybody in the Bible having a relationship like you and I do. He couldn't because the Holy Spirit of God was not here. God called out a nation, but that nation is likened to God's Son. There are some great parallels. Just as you and me before we were saved as individuals, we're dead in trespasses of sin, Israel today as a nation is dead to God. But there's coming a time that God is going to bring her back alive again. This is what He's talking about here in this great passage. "The casting away for the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead."

Ezekiel 37 is the reference that you want to go to in this particular passage. We know it as the old song that we've heard many, many times down through the years. Maybe some of you younger kids haven't heard it, but certainly us older folk have that old song that says, "Them bones, them bones, them dry bones. The hip bone connected to the ankle bone, the ankle bone connected to the..." And what's the thing that? "And hear the word of the Lord. Them bones, them bones, them dry bones. Them bones, them bones, them dry bones. Them bones, them bones, hear the word of the Lord." Somebody said, "Well, that's a cute little song." Oh, that's a song based on Ezekiel 37.

Ezekiel 37:1

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones,

Ezekiel 37:2

And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry.

Ezekiel 37:3

And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest.

Ezekiel 37:4

Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.

Ezekiel 37:5

Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live:

Ezekiel 37:6

And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

Ezekiel 37:7

So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone.

Ezekiel 37:8

And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.

Ezekiel 37:9

Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.

Ezekiel 37:10

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

Ezekiel 37:11

Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.

Ezekiel 37:12

Therefore prophecy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.

Ezekiel 37:13

And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves,

Ezekiel 37:14

And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: and ye shall know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD.

There it is. That's what he's talking about coming back from the dead. That's exactly the reference you want. Right now Israel is dead, but God is bringing him back into the land.

VIII. Firstfruits and the Harvest

Look at verse 16. We'll be finished here. "For if the firstfruits be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches." Now we're not going to get into the root and the branches today because we're going to get into that next week, but I want you to see the concept here of the firstfruits being holy. I don't know if you understand or not, but the firstfruits in the Bible will always be the nation of Israel. They will always be the nation of Israel, and the reason why that is is because that was the first nation that God called out that was to bear fruit to God. So they're called the firstfruits.

You'll ever notice reading through the Old Testament that Israel is told that whatever they have, whether it be sheep, whether it be grain, whether it be corn, whether it be wheat, whatever it is, whatever they have, the firstfruit, the fruits of whatever they have is holy. He said in Exodus 23:19, "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God." Deuteronomy 18:4 says, "The firstfruit also of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and

the first of the fleece of thy sheep, shalt thou give him." All this is to remind that all this is set in play that Israel will never forget that they are the firstfruits of God in the Old Testament.

When they brought the grain in and the wheat in the Old Testament, the priest took that firstfruit, took the first of that grain. Do you know what they did with it? They made it and sanctified it as holy, and then they took the firstfruits of that grain and they fashioned it into flour and made it into whatever, and that's where they made the bread. Remember the bread on the showbread table? That bread was made from the firstfruits of the grain that came in because it was holy, and it's a picture of the nation of Israel. Do you know how many loaves of bread they put on that table? There were 12. Why? It was based off the firstfruit, which is the picture of the nation of Israel. Everything in the Old Testament is based on that concept, and it's to remind them that they were the first nation that God called out, really the only nation, but they are the firstfruits of God.

We talk about the rapture, and I've told you before, that there's basically three raptures in the Bible. That can be confusing for some people. A better way to look at it is that there's only one rapture, but there's three parts of that rapture. You'll find that three times in your Bible you find the phrase "come up hither." You'll find that in Proverbs 25, Revelation 4, and Revelation 11. You'll find that the rapture we talk about is us going up, but there's two other people groups that go up.

Anybody who's ever done any farming, anybody who's ever done any gardening knows that there's three parts to a harvest.

8. You have the stuff that gets ripe early, that's called the firstfruits. If you're doing tomatoes, you're going to have some tomatoes that get ripe before the rest of the tomatoes, and they're going to be the firstfruits. So you're going to go out, you got maybe a hundred, five hundred, you got five hundred tomatoes on your stocks out there, and ten of them are ripe way before the others, so what do you do? You pick them. That's the firstfruit.
9. As the stocks progress and they get to the point, you're going to get your main harvest. That main harvest will be out of 500 tomatoes, you got ten over here, now you're going to get 400 and 420. So there's your main bulk, and you go in there and you're picking tomatoes off the thing and you get some beautiful tomatoes.
10. As you pick those tomatoes in the main harvest, you see there's some that aren't ripe yet. They're not ready to be picked. They're still green. So you let them go on and then you go back and get those later, and those are called gleanings.

When you come through your Bible, you find the rapture, it breaks down just like that. You'll find that the firstfruits are the Old Testament saints because they're connected with the nation of Israel being the firstfruits of God. You'll find that the main harvest is the church, you and me, going to go any second. Then you'll find at the end of the tribulation period, God comes back and cleans out the nation of Israel.

In 1 Corinthians 15:22-24, it talks about that progression.

1 Corinthians 15:22

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

1 Corinthians 15:23

But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

1 Corinthians 15:24

Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.

So the concept of him saying, "For if the firstfruits be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches," the whole concept is based on Israel is the firstfruit of God.

IX. Summary and Application

Quick summary and then we're done. Here's what we learned today. We learned today the fact that God has cast off them and they have fallen, but it's only a temporary deal. The greatest things that we have learned today that we need to take home to ourselves is simply this: we need to understand today that God provoked them, and God provoked them to jealousy so they would get into the Bible. Many times God does that in our lives. God will put something in our life, do something to us that provokes us because we're not where we need to be.

We also saw the fact that when he comes down through there in the early part, he talked about how that God is never foiled in His plan. The greatest thing you take out of this today is to understand the fact that when you go through life, just as Israel goes through life, the devil wants to stop Israel just like the devil wants to stop you. Nobody can stop you because "greater is he that's in you than he that's in the world." The only one that is in charge of your future is you. The only one. The devil can't stop you. Your person sitting next to you can't stop you. Your husband can't stop you. Your wife can't stop you. Your boyfriend, your girlfriend can't stop you. Your best friend can't stop you. The only one who can stop you is you yourself because you have the ability to understand it. Just like with Israel, God accomplishes what He's going to do, and the circumstances never enter into it.

The greatest thing is that you ought to aspire to be better than you are. You ought to aspire to be one of those ones in Daniel 1 that are 10 times better. You don't do that in a prideful way or an arrogant way. You don't do that to show them what you know versus what they don't know. You do that because of the fact that that's just a natural process when you love the things of God and the Word of God and make God number one in your life. When you come to the point that you make God's viewpoint about everything in life your viewpoint, you can stay on that course and you can balance yourself on that.

Let me tell you something, it wouldn't matter if they bring in 20 Church of Christ people. It didn't matter if a hundred Jehovah Witnesses show up. You are up to the task if it's just you and them one on one or one on 10 or one on 20. Why? Because the Word of God gives you that ability to make you better. It emulates you. I want you to be better than me. I want you to be better than the average Christian. I want you to, everything in your life, to have God use you because someday if Jesus doesn't come, someday the very ministry of this church may rest on

your shoulders. It may rest with you, with the person sitting next to you, because right now today in a broader sense, the success of this ministry rests on you. Of course, that's what it all comes down to, being Christ-like, being like Christ in everything that you do. Next week we'll look at the lump of the, we'll look at the olive, look at the tree and the vine and the branches, and we'll put that all together and again we'll learn another great concept about the nation of Israel.

Let's pray. Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. Thank You for today. Thank You for all that You've given us and thank You for the good people that are here today. We continue Lord to ask Your blessings upon it all. We love You. We thank You Father for everything that You do for us and we thank You Lord for Your hand in this church and for Lord the people we've seen saved. And the people who are actively Lord just wanting to learn the Word of God. Lord, You know we have a lot of teachers in here Lord that teach, and Lord a teacher would probably tell us today that the best students they have are the students who have a desire to learn. The best Christians Lord will always be those who have a desire to learn. Help us to be good students. Help us never to become Bible scholars or Bible theologians, but always allow us and keep us to be continuing to be Bible students, a student of the Word of God, learning all of the concepts about You and applying to our lives. We love You. We thank You. Pray for those that are sick today that You continue to work in their life and help them feel better and comfort them. We thank You Lord for the funerals we had, we saw this week Lord, and how good You were in all of those Lord, and continue to minister to those families and bless them and get out of those Lord everything that You need. Lord, we'll thank You and praise in Jesus' name for His sake we ask it. Amen.