



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

"The Future of Ethnic Israel, part IV"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We have been looking at Romans chapter 11 and "The Future of Ethnic Israel." One of the reasons that the apostle in Romans chapter 11 takes up the topic is because as I think I've mentioned several times in the unfolding on the plan of salvation in the Epistle to the Romans in the earlier chapters it appeared as if Israel had been left out. And anyone who was acquainted with the plan of God as found in the Old Testament would know that at the heart of the plan and purpose of God is the nation Israel, through the promises that were given to Abraham, confirmed to Isaac, and to Jacob.

And so the apostle in Romans 9, 10, and 11 seeks to answer some natural questions that would present themselves to someone who had listened to Paul expound the truths of salvation. He pointed out in the opening part of this section that if one had truly read the Old Testament properly, he would not be quite so surprised because God even in the midst of Israel had an Israel within Israel. That is, he had an elect Israelite within the whole company of the Israelites and the elect Israelites are not coterminous with all of Israel. Not all who are of Israel are Israel. There are some who are elect in Israel and some who are not elect.

But coming to the answer to the question regarding the present and the future the apostle in chapter 11 after saying that the difficulty with Israel was that they did not

believe, he says as a matter of fact the future of Israel is guaranteed by virtue of the promises of the Old Testament. We are not to think that Israel has been cast aside fully. There is a remnant in the present day according to the election of grace. And then, in the last part of the chapter he will seek to show that Israel's rejection is not final.

Now we've looked at Romans 11:1 through 10, and we've looked at the section that immediately followed it in which the apostle argues that Gentile salvation has as its aim Jewish salvation, because he asks the question, "Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery," in verse 11. "Not at all! Rather because of their transgressions salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious." And so what is happening today according to Paul is that the gospel has gone out to Gentiles, but not gone out to Gentiles as if Israel has no future at all, but rather gone out to Gentiles in order that the Gentiles might provoke Israel to jealousy and thus, return Israel to their place within the plan and program of God as set forth in the promises to Abraham.

Now let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for Thy word and for the comfort and the assurance that it gives us as we reckon upon the One who has inspired the apostles and prophets in the writing of it. We thank Thee for the blessings that are ours through the Lord Jesus Christ who is the fulfillment of all of the promises of God for in him they are all yea and amen. We pray, oh God, that our minds might be opened to the truth. We also pray that we may understand something of the great plan and purpose that Thou dost have for the creation and especially for the redeemed. Direct our thoughts in the path of Thy will as we study in Romans chapter 11. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

[Message] It's rather humbling for Gentiles to realize that their salvation is a means to an end, but nevertheless, that is what the apostle affirms here. Our salvation today is a means to an end. And the end is the conversion of the nation Israel and the glorious

world-wide experience of the blessing of salvation that shall follow Israel's return to the center of the will of God. The key to world history is the nation Israel, and so when Israel finally comes to its Savior, and Redeemer, and Messiah, and believes in him, then there will be world-wide blessing, but not until Israel is brought by the grace of God back to the center of the plan of God. It's very much like bowling, to use a very worldly illustration. If you want to knock down all of the pins, you have to put the ball at one certain spot, maybe two. I'm not a bowler, but I've noticed that they always try to put that ball somewhere between the number one and is it the number three pin? But anyway, it's right there and if it's right there then all the pins go down.

Now Israel is the key to the blessing of God, and when Israel returns to the Savior, the Messiah, then we shall have world-wide blessing, but not until then. Well, the apostle is great at illustrations. Some of his illustrations are athletic illustrations. Some of them are of other types, but here is one of his illustrations from horticulture, and it's clear that he knows something about horticulture. So will you listen now as I read this illustration that the apostle uses in order to show that it is reasonable to expect, in fact, it is probable that Israel shall return to the center of the plan and purpose of God.

Now we read in verse 16 of Romans 11,

"If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you." (Notice that he's speaking to the Gentiles.) "You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.' Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to

those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!"

At the conclusion of the hour last week, I made reference to the fact that the apostle in verse 16 referring to the dough offered as firstfruits, when he did this he was referring to a passage in Numbers chapter 15, verses 17 through 21 which we read. And I simply made reference to the fact that the Israelites were to offer to God a cake from the dough of the first ground flour as it came from the threshing floor, and the presentation of the cake was in the ceremonial law of Israel that which made holy or hallowed, and of course, we're speaking about ceremonial hallowing, made ritually hallowed all of the dough. So the apostle refers to that when he says, "If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy." Then using another figure he says, "If the root is holy so are the branches."

Now we ask the question, what does Paul mean in his illustration when he says firstfruits, because this is an illustration and we are required to match the parts of his illustration with the spiritual reality that he has in mind? So when he says that the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy, we need to understand what firstfruits signifies as well as what the whole batch signifies. We talked about that, I think, at the end of the hour, and I made reference to the fact that some have attempted to make the reference to the firstfruits here refer to Jesus Christ himself. And I asked the question, how could the natural branches be broken off from him? They never did belong to him.

So we cannot believe that the firstfruits is a reference to Jesus Christ here. Now the term firstfruits is used illustriously of the Lord Jesus in other places such as 1 Corinthians 15, but in this case the illustration itself is taken from the Old Testament in a different place. So we are not required to interpret it in the same way.

Now since the branches as the rest of the figure is unfolded by the apostle clearly refers to the nation Israel or the Jewish people, then since the second of the statements in verse 16 is evidentially parallel with the first, he says, "If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy. If the root is holy so are the branches." Well, we are probably to understand by the root the same thing that we understand by firstfruits and the whole batch and the branches.

Now since the branches in what follows is clearly a reference to the Jews, then the whole batch must be a reference to the Jews, and since also, the root of the Jewish people is the patriarch Abraham, then we probably are to understand by the firstfruits, Abraham and the patriarchs. This is confirmed by verse 28 where the apostle states, "As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs." And so the blessing that is Israel's is theirs by virtue of the promises made to Abraham, confirmed to Isaac, and to Jacob on account of the patriarchs.

So we understand then the reference to firstfruits here to be a reference to the nation Israel, or rather, the firstfruits a reference to the patriarchs and then the whole batch a reference to the nation as a whole. Then coming to the second figure, "if the root is holy, so are the branches," we understand by the root, the patriarchs and the branches, the members of the nation Israel.

Now we don't have time to look into the Old Testament and show you that these figures are used of Israel. As a matter of fact, the olive tree itself is used of Israel in the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul did not really invent the application of the term olive tree to the nation Israel. He derived that from the Old Testament; from Jeremiah chapter

11 and verse 16 and Hosea chapter 14 and verse 6, because he was a person who read through the Bible constantly, like reading through the Old Testament. So the Scriptures to him were very familiar to him and most of his illustrations are illustrations built on things that he learnt from the Bible itself. It is, incidentally, it should be an incentive to us in understanding Scripture. The best way to understand Scripture and the Bible is to keep reading it. And so the apostle out of his reading discovered that this illustration fits the situation perfectly.

Well, the point of this verse then is and what follows simply the initial consecration to God of the patriarchs by the choice of Abraham is the basis of his expectation of the restoration of the Nation Israel. In other words, God chose Abraham, gave him certain distinguishing promises that were unconditional as we shall see. They were confirmed to Isaac. They were confirmed to Jacob, and because of the character of God and the character of these promises that is the basis of the Pauline expectation of the restoration of the nation.

So he says, "If the root is holy, so are the branches." Now let's read on from this. You can see that the apostle develops this second figure, not the first about the firstfruits and the whole batch for a definite reason. He uses the second figure of the root and the branches because it admits of a distinction between one branch and another where as in the case of the whole batch there is no admission of a distinction between parts. So the root and the branches is very suitable for what he is going to talk about, and therefore, he uses the second figure in verse 16 as the basis for the verses that follow.

Now there is a warning to the Gentiles in verses 17 through 22, and then a fresh argument for Jewish restoration in verses 23 and 24. Now I should also say this. What does the figure of the olive tree represent then? Well, it represents the Abrahamic Covenant in its origin, in its development, and in its fulfillment at the end of the present age or the times of the Gentiles. So when we think about the olive tree, let's think about the Abrahamic Covenant in its origin, in the choice of Abraham and the promises given to

him, its development down through the ages, and then finally, in its fulfillment in the consummation of the promises to those who are in that covenant at the time of the second advent of the Lord Jesus.

Now it will be also helpful for us to recall the terms and the sacrifice which so beautifully indicate the nature of the Abrahamic Covenant. I do wish it were possible to spend a whole time on this, because it is important. Some of you have heard me on this before. Some of you have not, but it is extremely important. I think it would be well for us to turn back to the Old Testament and read a few of the passages that are important, and of course, Genesis chapter 12, verse 1 through verse 3 is the beginning of the story as far as we are concerned.

So let's read Genesis 12:1-3. Beginning with verse 1,

"The Lord had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you.'" (Notice all of these "I wills". These are themselves evidence of the unconditional nature of these promises.) "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Now Abraham received that promise and he believed that promise, but of course, he had problems just like the rest of us have with the promises of God. He was told that all of the nations of the earth would be blessed in him. So he understood that to mean that he was to have an offspring, and that his family would be preserved, and that through them he would be blessed. Well, in Genesis 13 and 14 various details take place in the story of Abraham and there is a great victory that he wins in chapter 14, but still there is no seed to whom the promises are suppose to pertain. And so in chapter 15 of

Genesis we read, "After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Do not be afraid, Abram.'" Evidentially, these kings that he had attacked and defeated in the preceding chapter may have been think or at least Abraham thought they were thinking they might have returned to attack him because he did not slaughter them or completely exterminate them. So perhaps a little bit afraid God spoke to him and said Abram, I'm your shield. Don't worry they come back with their swords but they will find it very difficult to do anything since you're wearing the shield of God. And Abram, if you're thinking about reward, I am your very great reward.

Now Abram complains. Isn't it interesting and isn't it good that these complaints are found in the Bible because after all Abram is the illustration of the man of faith and even he complains. I'm so glad heaven's going to be filled with complainers, because I may qualify just for that reason. Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless?" You gave me the promise, but I don't have any children, and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus. He's not one of my children. And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir. Then the word of the Lord came to him." And I needn't read all of this because I'm sure you are familiar with it. You know that God took him out, had him look up at the sky, and number the stars. And then he added if you can count them and after he had said that he said Abram, "So shall your offspring be." Don't worry Abram the promise still holds in spite of the fact that you don't have a child. And we read,

"Abram believed in the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness. He also said to him, 'I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.' But Abram said, 'O Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?'"

Now that is almost a statement of unbelief, "how can I know?" But God in spite of that reassured the patriarch. We read, "So the Lord said to him, 'Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.'" And then some details are given with regard to the sacrifice. Now the striking thing about this is that this custom of sacrifice is of dividing animals is something that is referred to in the Old Testament. I think just for the sake of time, I will only mention this but in Jeremiah chapter 34, verses 17 through 20, you will see there reference made to the custom that Abraham was introduced to here in Genesis chapter 15. A sacrifice was often made by the cutting of animals and the placing of one part of the animal over here and the other part over here and then the parties to the covenant would pass between the pieces of the animal in token of their desire to fulfill the terms of the covenant. And I guess I'm not certain of this, because I didn't bother to look up my notes, but I think that the reason that this was done was to signify that they would be true to death to the terms of the covenant that they were taking up as their responsibility.

Now Jeremiah refers to that custom. We do know that in Hebrew to make a covenant is to cut a covenant. *Karat bryth*, is used in the Hebrew. And in fact, in Greek as well is to cut a covenant or to cut oaths. So the idea that cutting is fundamental to the history of the idea of the covenant. So here is a covenant that is going to be made by the Lord.

Now this is not simply a biblical thing because we know that something very similar to this occurred in extra-biblical history. For example, when Alexander died at the age of about thirty-three, remember in Babylon, and his empire was divided into four parts, there arose some difficulty between the infantry and the cavalry of Alexander's army. The cavalry was under the leadership of Perdicus, and the infantry was under the leadership of Malingar and these two parts of his army almost came to warfare, but finally they came to an agreement and what they did was to take a dog. Are there dog lovers in the audience tonight? This will be disheartening to you. [Laughter] But they took a dog

and they cut the dog in half, and they put half of the dog over here and half over here and then the two armies passed between the pieces of the animal in token of their agreement that they would hold to the terms of the covenant that they had made.

Now Abram is told here in verse 5 of Genesis chapter 15, "So shall your offspring be." Now this promise that was made to Abraham was a promise that was made at night, because the Lord took him out, remember, and asked him to look at the stars and number the stars. So it was a promise that was made at night time.

Now we go on and read about the directions of the Lord, but there is a lengthy period of time in which nothing happens. For we read finally in verse 12, "As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep." He had, you see, taken the heifer, the goat, and the ram, and he had cut them in pieces and he had put the pieces over against one another and the turtle dove or the dove and the young pigeon, evidentially, they were not divided but one was put on one side and one on the other. And then Abram sat down and waited for what the Lord would do, and he waited for a lengthy period of time. I can just imagine long about the middle of the day that he was saying, well, what in the world is the Lord going to do? I've been waiting out here for hours now. Then on into the afternoon and he still waits. He's followed the directions of the Lord, but nothing has happened.

Well, we read, "As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep." He got a little tired and fell asleep "and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him." It must have been something like a nightmare. And so the nightmare came over the patriarch and the Lord spoke to him in this deep sleep and said,

"Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth

generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

In other words, it's not time yet to begin the next step in the program because the sin of the Amorites is not yet full. "When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces." This is evidentially, symbolic of the presence of the Lord. That is, this was representative of the presence of the Lord. It reminds us of the pillar of cloud in the day and the pillar of fire at night. And so here, the smoking furnace and the burning lamp pass between the pieces. So we read here that they passed this blazing torch and smoking firepot passed between the pieces and then God spoke. "On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, 'To your descendants I give this land.'"

Now the striking thing about this covenant is not all of these details that I've been talking about, although they do express aspects of it that are important. The striking thing about it is that only God passed between the pieces of the animals.

Now in the case of Alexander's army, both of the armies passed through because that covenant or agreement was a conditional agreement. Each one had certain responsibilities that they were to fulfill. But there are both conditional and unconditional covenants, and this one is clearly designed by God to be an unconditional covenant. It is he who takes the responsibility upon himself to fulfill this covenant in accordance with the promises that he has made. So in effect, he is saying, Abram, I do not invite you to pass between the pieces because I am going to fulfill this covenant.

Now people are puzzled by this because they read later on of Abram's faith and his response in belief and they tend to think that Abram had a responsibility in this covenant as an ultimate responsibility, and consequently, when later Abram's descendant's fell into sin and unbelief, well then the covenant therefore was broken and destroyed because the responsibilities were not met on the part of Abram's seed. But that is to

misunderstand the nature of this covenant, and right here in the beginning you could see that. It is God who determines to fulfill the covenant.

Now it is true that those who outwardly belong to Israel and were part of Abraham's natural seed had these promises given to them as a body, and it's true that they did turn away in apostasy and as far as they were concerned, those that died in apostasy the blessings are not theirs. But you see in the Abrahamic Covenant, God not only gives the promises and unconditionally guarantees them, but he guarantees them by guaranteeing that the elect individuals that he has in mind will come to faith. In other words, it is an unconditional covenant because the conditions ultimately are fulfilled by God, even the faith given to those who shall ultimately come and enter into the full blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant. It is an unconditional covenant. God swore, but man did not swear in this covenant because man's word is worthless. God passed between the pieces and he determined that he would fulfill it.

Now at the present time Israel as a nation is in unbelief largely. There are believing Israelites, but the nation is largely in unbelief. The branches have been broken off according to our illustration, but God's word still stands, and he also, in Scripture, has set forth how he is going to fulfill that Abrahamic Covenant. I've often referred to this, but I think one of the most beautiful expressions is the one in Zechariah chapter 12 and verse 10, because it expresses exactly what I was speaking about a moment ago when I spoke about God fulfilling the covenant. In Zechariah chapter 12 and verse 10 the prophet writes, "And I," giving the words of God, "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and mourn for him as one mourns for an only son." So Israel shall come to faith in the Messiah at his second advent, but they will do it because God preveniently pours upon them the spirit of grace and supplication. In other words, he acts in infallible grace, in effectual grace, irresistible grace, and brings them to faith. That's why the covenant is unconditional and will be carried out because he has

given the promise and he is determined to bring those who are part of his elect people to the knowledge of the Messiah who is to come. Isn't that great? That is the grace of God in salvation.

Now let's look at our figure, and I'm just going to read through it and make a few comments in the remaining ten or twelve minutes that we have. Romans chapter 11 now, and we'll begin with verse 17. I want you to notice just exactly what he is doing here. He's warning the Gentiles because they are in the experience of the blessing of God at the present time, but he's also through his argument making a strong case for the restoration of the nation to the center of the blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant. He says in verse 17, "If some of the branches have been broken off," notice he does not say all the branches have been broken off. Just as we read in the first part of the chapter, there is at the present time a remnant according to the election of grace. So it is some of the branches, some of the nation Israel that have been broken off. Do not ever get the impression that today is the day when Gentiles are being saved and no Jews are being saved. As I said last time, the Christian church began as a Jewish church, and only as the apostles directed by the Holy Spirit went to the Gentiles in stages, did the church become a predominately Gentile church.

So he says, "If some of the branches have been broken off," that word means what he meant previously when he said that they have fallen over here in verse 11. "Again I say: Did they stumble so as to fall?" Now they have fallen. That's a direct statement. Figuratively, they were broken off as branches. "If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others," now the apostle was an apostle and consequently he was not a horticulturalist, primarily. He has been accused of not knowing anything about horticulture at all because anybody who knows anything about horticulture knows that you do not graft a wild shoot onto a cultivated stock or plant. It's the reverse. You take a wild plant and you graft into it a cultivated scion. You didn't think I knew that word, did you? A cultivated scion.

Now later on in verse 24, the apostle speaks to all who criticize his horticulture, because in verse 24 he says, "After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree," you see, he knows horticulture. He knows what kind of graft goes into what kind of stock, but he's using an illustration in order to set forth a truth spiritually, so he does it contrary to nature in order to make the point, of course, later that Israel being the cultivated scion will that much more readily be grafted back into their own olive tree.

Now some of the students of the Epistle to the Romans have discovered that it was the custom in ancient times, perhaps it's still the custom in the culture of olive trees to occasionally take a wild shoot and graft it into an old olive tree in order to give it new life, to reinvigorate it. That's been pretty well demonstrated as true, by Sir William Ramsey from his architectural discoveries, and in some other places. But it's clear that is not Paul's meaning here. Some scholars like to have something different and new and so they've discovered that and tried to make sense out of this passage having that in mind, but Paul has already told us in verse 24 what he is doing is contrary to nature.

So let's leave it at that. I think they're wrong in bringing in that rather unique and different kind of custom rarely used in the light of this. Let's stick to what is the normal horticultural thing. "If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches." There are two things I want you to notice. Did you notice here that when the Gentiles were cut out and grafted into the cultivated olive tree as wild olive shoots, it is said that they have been grafted in among the others.

Now what does that say to you? There are those who tell us that we have the nation Israel and we have the church of Jesus Christ, and they are to be kept totally distinct. That we have two elections, I don't disagree with that. But that they share different blessings, and even in eternity, they share different blessings. Do you see what

Paul's illustration says? He says the Gentiles have been grafted in among those other branches, those natural branches. So it is evident from this that the apostle understands that the Gentiles who are saved today share in the blessings that the nation Israel possesses. That's what he's saying. Don't you see it? You have been grafted in among the others. Further he stresses that. He says, "And now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root." The Greek word is *sugkoinonos*, which means a fellow partaker.

So it is clear then that the Gentile believers of today do not have a different set of blessings. Israel has been cut off, the majority, but grafted in have been Gentiles and they share in what he calls the "nourishing sap from the olive root." That's why Paul in Galatians 3 says that true believers are the sons of Abraham. That's right. I am a son of Abraham. Not a member of ethnic Israel, but a son of Abraham. I'm not a son of Jacob either, but a son of Abraham. That distinction is important too. We don't have time to talk about that. But notice next, he says, "Don't boast over those branches." You Gentiles because you today have experienced the blessing of God, what do you say? You say, well, Israel apostatized. They've been cut off, and I've been grafted in. And we all know the extremes to which some of the Christians down through the centuries have gone in their maledictions which they pronounced upon the nation Israel, because of their part in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, not realizing that the Gentiles also had a part in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus.

Now I don't want to be like liberal theologians today who say, "It wasn't Israel that crucified Christ." They are trying to make friends with Israel. "It wasn't Israel who crucified Christ, it was really the Gentiles." No. It was Israel who crucified Christ. It was also the Gentiles that crucified Christ. In fact, human nature crucified Christ. So we're all guilty and the Jews are guilty too, just as we.

Now he says if you do, "If you're boasting consider this: You don't support the root, the root supports you." A branch is not self-sustaining. A branch cannot say I think I'll live apart from my connection with the plant. By the way, this is quite a blow to anti-

Semitism too. "Don't boast against the branches. You don't support the root, the root supports you. You will say then," the apostle uses all kinds of arguments and this is in the form of a diatribe, and so he knew from his encounters with people what they say. I've had enough encounters to anticipate a lot of things that people say too, and I can almost wait and just even before they say it, I can say, but this, because I know what they are going to say. Well, Paul knew it even better. "You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I,'" that is emphatic in the Greek text, "so that I could be grafted in. Granted. Granted," he says. That's true. Those branches were broken off in order that you might be grafted in, "but they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith." And where does faith come from? Faith is a gift from God.

So how can you expect to boast over faith when it's a gift of God? "Granted," he said, that's really what happened, but you stand on the basis of faith given by God. What's he trying to do? Why he's trying to get these Gentiles to fear, to have godly fear before God. Not the kind of fear that makes one a slave and a servant, a spirit of bondage, but godly fear; above all, an appreciation of grace. "Do not be arrogant, be afraid," he says. You thought I made that up, didn't you? No. He says, "Be afraid." It's alright for Christians to be afraid, filled with awe. We have a great sovereign God. Who are we to question him?

"For," he says, "if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either." If he permitted Israel to go into unbelief and apostasy as a nation, he will not prevent the Gentiles if they turn from him from going into apostasy and ultimate loss. "Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God." Yes, kindness and sternness. The member of the jury that refused to enter a guilty vote because the congressman was too old had more compassion than God. That was a wicked thing, a very wicked thing. It was a denial of the righteousness and justice of a moral God. We're not allowed to do something like that. God does not do that. That's wrong. "Consider therefore the

kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness."

Oh, there are a lot of people who don't like that. That's the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. The children of God are warned against apostasy as one of the means of preventing apostasy. Why do you think we have in the Bible these conditional clauses, these warnings, and admonitions? Well, they're a means by which God keeps us in the relationship to him that we have. Just like a parent that constantly warns a child against the dangers and perils of life, but would not for one moment desert that child. I can imagine you taking a little child and walking along the parapet of a skyscraper, warning the child, don't take a step over there. Holding his hand as firm as you possibly could, don't take a step over there, instructing them, teaching them, admonishing them, just because there is the relationship between us.

So he warns as a means of preventing that apostasy. Jeremiah puts it this way, "I will put my fear in their hearts in order that they may not depart from me." That's why he warns us. He admonishes us because he loves us and will not let us go. It's a great passage. He says, "Otherwise you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again." In other words, the only thing that prevents Israel from entering into their blessings today from the human side is faith in the Messiah. From the divine standpoint we know that there are certain things that are going to transpire. We know some of the events of the seventieth week of Israel and they lie in the future. From the divine standpoint there is a program, but from Israel's standpoint God stands before them in the person of the Messiah holding out hands to a wicked and gainsaying people and inviting them to come at the present time. We know that they will not come until that day we refer to.

"After all," he says in verse 24. "After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!"

What an argument for restoration. In other words, the nation's restoration is an easier process than the call of the Gentiles. The restoration of the Nation Israel is a more probable event than the salvation of the Gentiles that has already taken place, because what God will be doing is taking the natural branches and grafting them back in to their own olive tree. You now, if you could read that in the Greek text you'd be impressed with it too because those last words, *idios elaiā*, their own olive tree is in the emphatic position. In other words, the olive tree, the blessings that come from Abraham are Israel's. It's their olive tree. It belongs to them not to us. We are grafted in only because they have fallen, have been cut off for a time, and God is seeking through the salvation of Gentiles to stir them to jealousy so that they will return in order that his blessings for the whole world may transpire. Does ethnic Israel have a future? Well, of course, the illustration itself makes it certain they will have, but the apostle is not finished with that. He'll talk about prophecy next time, and say it even plainer than it has already been said if such is possible. Let's close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these wonderful sections from the word of God, and how wonderful it is to know that we have a God who is able to carry out all of his plans, those that affect the nations and those that affect us. We worship Thee and we praise Thee. May we glorify Thy name and may we fear Thee as the sovereign Lord. For Jesus' sake. Amen.