

The Faithfulness Of God (Part 1)

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For those of you familiar with the organization of Spokesman's Club and Graduate Club, I am going to give you my SPS (Specific Purpose Statement) right at the very beginning of this.

Ordinarily a sermon given on this first day of the Feast of Tabernacles would touch more directly on the Millennium. But my sermons this year are primarily drawn from Roman 9, 10 and 11, and Ephesians 1. They focus on the why's of us having the opportunity both to be here, and to participate in the Millennium.

Many times I went to the Feast of Tabernacles and heard Herbert Armstrong speak. Usually at the very beginning, he would begin virtually every opening day message with, "Why are you here?" That is one of those questions that can be altered somewhat simply by emphasizing one word or the other. "**Why** are you here?" "Why are you **here**?" "Why are **you** here?" Well, this whole series is going to be aimed, hopefully very clearly, in a way that will build confidence and trust in God and your understanding of the faithfulness of God, at answering "Why are you here?"

The series actually began last evening ["The Handwriting is on the Wall: Conspiracies"], with a brief spotlighting of a major factor in why our Western world events are occurring as they are. This movement toward globalism, and the breaking of Israel's pride in its power, motivates very much of the urgency of the time period that we find ourselves living in.

Today, we will briefly touch on the time element, but will move on to a snapshot that is important to our confidence of how God perceives us. I do not know whether you realize it, but that is important to you. Sometimes, we do not have a very good opinion of ourselves, and sometimes that is good that we do not. Then there are other people who have vain thoughts about themselves. But what I would like us to understand is how God looks at us. How does He perceive us? If we understand how He perceives us, I think that it is entirely possible that we can look at ourselves in a different light altogether, knowing that He is going to be faithful regardless, because that is what He is. He is the faithful God.

We are going to extensively address why we know and believe as we do, to the end that we can take advantage of what God is working out. We will take a look into the clearly

stated fact in Romans 9, that God does not treat everybody equally. Boy, this gets some people irritated. You know yourself, from your own experience, that you have known people in the church that seem to be going through a living hell all of the time. Then there are others who do not have that kind of situation, and it almost seems as though they breeze through things. That has a way of irritating. Why do they not have the kind of trouble that I have? Then finally, in the last sermon we are going to touch on the Last Great Day, because it fits in with this as well.

We will begin in Ecclesiastes 1. I am going to be speaking to you more in the mode of a Bible study, rather than some exhaustive sermon. My idea here, entirely, is to help us understand what we are going to talk about. Richard mentioned it in his message this morning, just ever so briefly ["Portrait of a King"], but I am going to spend almost three sermons on what took him about two minutes to say. The scripture that he used in that two minutes is so familiar that we take it for granted, not understanding the depth and breadth of what there is behind what Jesus said so simply.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-14 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun? One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever. The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it arose. The wind goes toward the south, and turns around to the north; the wind whirls about continually, and comes again on its circuit. All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again. All things are full of labor; man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which it may be said, "See, this is new"? It has already been in ancient times before us. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who will come after. I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

Ecclesiastes was anciently assigned by the Jews to be read, studied, and preached during the Feast of Tabernacles. I think this is an appropriate place to begin. I want to

pick up on Solomon's opening statement to pave the way for my sermons which follow.

There is here, in what Solomon said, a measure of frustration with not fully understanding what was going on during the past, and during his lifetime, and I feel that that is somewhat evident. To his keen mind, life was rather chaotic, even though he could perceive a progression of events that happened repeatedly at any time in history. But where were they headed?

I once read a simple illustration in which the author explained the basic difference between the way the Hebrews and the Greeks perceived time. The Greeks, who pretty much represented the ancient world, viewed the movement of time and its events as circular. That is that the same things happened repeatedly through time, but in the overall picture, time and events were not moving toward any specific conclusion. From that description I got the picture of a carnival barker spinning a wheel and saying, "Round and round it goes and where it stops nobody knows."

The Hebrew people perceived this similarly except for one major difference. The Hebrews viewed time as lineal, just the opposite of the Greeks. That is, that even though the same general events repeatedly occurred along the timeline of history they are headed toward a definite planned conclusion. But that still leaves us with a problem. And it left Solomon, who was a Hebrew, and this was the way that he viewed time, with a problem too. Because, he states in the book of Ecclesiastes, "Where is all of this headed?"

Ecclesiastes 3:10-11 I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

Solomon did not know.

Ecclesiastes 8:16-17 When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night, then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it.

If Solomon included himself among the wise men, there he is saying a second time, "I wonder where this is all headed?"

The problem is that very few people, from generation to generation, actually knew what the definite planned conclusion was. Solomon, even with David as his father, apparently did not know. It is entirely possible that David did know, and David told Solomon. I think as we all realize, as Solomon aged, something happened to him. Maybe Solomon came to the place where he forgot, or he no longer believed it as something that is true, and something that could be relied upon. If he did know, he certainly had no confidence in it. Because we have to believe that he was telling the truth about what was in his heart, and he did not know where life—God's creation and purpose—was headed.

Now Solomon did not leave us alone; there was in him some element of belief in God, knowing that God was good. He was kind, and He was merciful, and that everything that He did had that kind of a purpose behind it. So, Solomon was not completely blank. And in Ecclesiastes 3, right after he said that God has put eternity in our hearts, but we do not know what in the world He is doing, Solomon says in verse 12:

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God.

So there was the retention of something there, but that is not all. By the time we reach the end of the book, He gives us even better advice. These are his last thoughts as he wrote this book. I understand that the commentators feel that he wrote this late in life, and that he wrote Proverbs early in life.

Ecclesiastes 12:12-14 And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

So Solomon was not completely destitute of understanding, and God inspired him, I am sure, to write down these thoughts so that we could see that. The instruction this wise man left is clear enough even to carnal people—that if you do not know where things are headed, at least make sure that you keep the commandments, because this is the whole duty of man.

We might reshape that question more precisely by asking, "What is God doing in world history?" Better still, and more specific, is: "What is God doing with me? Why are you here? Why do you understand what you understand? Why did you make the effort? Why do you believe as you do? Where have I come from? Why am I here? What will happen after I die?"

Because of the events now happening in the world and because God has since Solomon's time revealed so much more widely and precisely the conclusion of all things, I believe that there has never been a more important moment in our time to ask these questions.

Even though we live at a time knowing so much more, at least generally, than those people did in Solomon's time, and perhaps even more than the wise Solomon, we still do not know the specific time that God is going to unleash the events that He has revealed to us. So we still find ourselves in somewhat of a quandary, and because of this the Bible always urges us to push on. That is a common theme that runs through the epistles of Paul. He had a great deal of understanding of God's purpose, and he spent a great deal of time exhorting people to understand what this purpose is and to put it into practice in their lives. But even he did not know the time when Jesus Christ would return. He acted and wrote, as though he believed that it could be at any moment, and I think that we have to adopt this in our lives in order to push on.

The instructions in Ephesians 5 fit the kind of time in which we live.

Ephesians 5:15-17 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

If there was ever a time in the history of mankind where these verses applied with more urgency than they do now, I have no idea what that time was! The theme of these verses is our attitude toward our Christian living duties, with time pressing in on us.

Ephesians 5:15 has the sense of "Be careful how you conduct your life." It is an exhortation to pay scrupulous attention to personal behavior. It is saying, "Let your light shine;" show others that you have repudiated this world and its works of darkness and vigorously embraced a new way of life.

The statement, "redeeming the time" has the general sense, in this context, as an exhortation to make the most of every opportunity to submit yourself to God. But for the

purpose of this series of sermons given in this period of time, it is the counsel that is in the next verse that is of the most critical importance.

The conjunction "therefore" begins a concluding statement. "Do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." This warning indicates that our opportunity is so awesomely valuable that anything less than unwavering zeal and earnest effort is absurd. Paul is saying, "Let God's will be your guide in life". But how can you do that unless you know God's will?

Paul is implying in the way that he wrote this, that the people to whom he wrote did understand, and that we also should understand. The structure of that, and the imperative that is within it, implies that because the danger is so great, the wickedness so appalling, the opportunity so precious, that constant watchfulness and earnest effort with God's wisdom must be made in haste. It is almost as if he is saying, "Do not let a moment slip by to submit yourself to God's will."

Perhaps this illustration will help you grasp the prevailing public attitude about now—the time that we live in—and perhaps also give a glimpse into the future. This little illustration that I am going to give you was not a recent one, but actually began decades ago and has continued through the years. And I am sure that you will recognize it.

There was an art historian by the name of Erwin Panofsky who made an interesting observation that involves a change in the way that we moderns now look at our times, and most specifically at each year's end. In his book, *Studies in Iconology*, Panofsky pointed out how the figure of *Father Time*, which is pictured on or near New Year's Eve, has changed through the centuries. Panofsky said that anciently this time of the year and the calendar art at the end of the year, was depicted with symbols of power, speed and balance, as though we are eager to move forward to the next year because it is going to be better than the one that we just went through. But in our time, *Father Time* is now depicted as a more or less aged, weary of life, doddering old man. He is usually accompanied by a scythe and an hourglass, picturing death and time running out. Even the New Year is now pictured as a babe, usually with little or no clothes on, and the impression that you get from that is that this babe is not prepared at all to face the New Year. That is quite a change that has happened through the centuries. From a year ending with energy, strength, and zeal to go forward, we are almost dead as the year ends, and unprepared for the future.

I hope that does not fit us, but rather, like Paul was saying, we must make use of the time, charge forward and make use of every opportunity. We must do it with zeal and with energy, because time is running out, and we need to prepare for what is lying

ahead. I am not in any way suggesting that we should be in a last lap, a gun lap mode, but I am talking here about steadily going forward. We must not allow ourselves to slip back, but rather take advantage of the time that we are in and the knowledge that we have been given, and to go forward with that, knowing the will of God.

Let us go back into the Old Testament again. Psalm 10:4 has impressed me for quite a long period of time, and it suddenly dawned on me what David was describing here. I am pretty sure it was a psalm of David.

Psalm 10:4 The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.

Some of the meaning of this has dawned on me, and I was attracted with special emphasis to that word "*all*" in the King James Version, or the word "*none*" in the New King James Version. One has a negative approach, and I think that the other one has a more or less positive approach.

David is in a sense saying, "This is what separates the converted from the unconverted; the carnal from the spiritual; the godly from the ungodly." It raises the question: How can a person who gives God few or no thoughts be saved?

He cannot, because there is no relationship between him and God, and therefore there is no reason for the person to give God any thought. Do you give serious thought to people you do not know? That person who lives down the street, you know his face, you know how he dresses, you know kind of what he does, but you have no relationship and there is no basis for you to talk to one another, unless somebody breaks the ice. But God has already broken the ice with us, and He has established for us, through Jesus Christ, a relationship with Him, and we should have plenty to talk to Him about.

Now you realize what this opens up to you and me? God by His own standard can give salvation only to those who live by faith. That is, not merely accepting His Word, not merely being in agreement with His word, but literally demonstrating that acceptance by trusting Him and His Word in daily life. In other words there is a relationship between the two of you, He knows you, and you know Him. With people whom you share common knowledge, you have plenty to talk about. Are you beginning to see why those who have nothing to talk to God about cannot possibly have faith in Him, because they do not know Him? We have to know the will of God. It is that on which we expend our time and energy, and it is that which continues the relationship and keeps it going between us and Him. It is that which enables us to trust Him, and He to trust us.

There is no doubt that we are past concerns about God's existence. In a good way—a very good way—we take His existence for granted. What I mean by that is that we accept Him as an absolute. God is an absolute reality.

We must deal with this truth as an ever present part of life, especially so if He is going to be in all of our thoughts. We want to be found faithful by Him, and this too is very good. But do we fully accept the reality of God's faithfulness toward us personally and individually? I think here is where we begin to get in trouble. How could God, how could a Being that great, that powerful, that wise, how could He possibly have interest in me? I want to establish before you that He is keenly interested in each and every one of us.

He is every bit as interested in you, as an individual, as He is in the entire church as a body. His interest is not just in the whole, but His interest is in all the details of the parts, and that is what we are—we are the details of the parts. He is not just interested in the body as a whole, but He is interested in every detail in the life of every part of the body of Jesus Christ. If we compare it to a human body—and the Bible does do this—then you and I are really nothing more than one cell in the body, but the human body has a trillion or more cells. That one cell does not escape His gaze. It says in the Psalms that God's eyelids test the sons of men.

We are dealing with somebody who has a mind that is so awesome that our minds cannot contain, cannot comprehend anybody who can do something like that. But we have to begin to grasp a little bit about the fact that He is very, very, very interested in **YOU** as an individual and His concern is not to tear you up, tear you down, make you feel terrible. It is to build in you confidence and trust that He does care, and that He is there. In Hebrews He says He will never, never leave you.

Hebrews 13:5 Be ye free from the love of money; content with such things as ye have: for himself hath said, I will in no wise fail you, neither will I in any wise forsake you.

But, we also need to strongly believe, and rightly use, the fact that He is faithful to us individually, just as He is faithful to the church as a whole. Let us begin to explore now how God views you and me.

Deuteronomy 7:6-11 For you are a holy people to the LOORD your God; the LOORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. "The LOORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any

other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LOORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LOORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the LOORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them.

His faithfulness to Israel and to the church as a body is fairly easily accepted. But it can subtly become a mere generality that is not a practical everyday workable reality to us as an individual.

His faithfulness to us, as an individual, is difficult to get a handle on for the very reason that the limited contact we have had with Him to this point has tended to make us feel insignificant. Our contact with Him has been primarily through the body, and it is up to us as individuals to take steps to make sure that our contact with Him is personal, as well as through the body. Remember, eternal life is to know Him, intimately, and it takes individual effort within the body, within the church, for the individual to make sure that He knows God and that God knows him.

This requires a lot of conversations with God, and a lot of meditating about God, but it is effort that we have to expend to make sure that we are establishing this relationship and that our thoughts are on Him. Do you not think an awful lot of people that you love? You do, and you want to help those people that you love. Do you think that God is any different? He wants to help those that He loves, and He loves those who submit to Him, who talk to Him, who think about Him, and are coming to know Him. There is a responsibility on our part to strengthen this relationship that we have going on.

So, just thinking of ourselves as only being part of the church has a tendency to make us feel meaningless and not worth the effort of being faithful. In fact, in some ways, we sometimes feel as if we are not even noticed. This has to change, and be rightly controlled, if real growth is going to take place, and we are going to have a strong sense of peaceful security. It means that we are going to have to make better efforts to get to know Him.

Does He really mean what it says here in Deuteronomy 7:6? Does He mean what He

says to you and me as a tiny, insignificant individual, and not solely as merely a part of a much larger body? Are we merely an unknown cog within the mechanism of a vast piece of machinery? First notice that the word that is translated "people" is used figuratively as flock, in other parts of the Bible.

I think that as we move along you are going to see this.

John 10:3-4 "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.

This is the chapter that our motto on our plaque was taken from.

Your name is not unknown to Him. He called you by name, or you would not be here. When He called, you were the one that responded. It was personal and directed to the sheep that He wanted to pull out of the corral.

John 10:14 "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.

So we might be part of a big flock, but I can guarantee you that a real shepherd, who has a herd of sheep, knows every sheep in his flock personally and individually. I think that I can guarantee you that he has every single one of them named. The biggest flock I ever had was five lambs, and I was so dumb we had no names for them. It did not really matter, as all I had to do was ring the dinner bell and boy, they came running. But God is not like that; He is dealing with us as individuals as well as a body. Christ has individual knowledge of His sheep that is not casual, but it is particular and personal.

Back to Deuteronomy 7:6, and I want you to take note of the term "treasure" which is an object held to be valuable. Treasure is set apart from that which is ordinary. We are treasures to God, and He has set us apart from that which is ordinary. That term usually indicates that we, as a group, are perceived by Him as people of special value. Treasure is something given particular attention and care. If there is something that you treasure, you usually pay particular attention and care to it, and make sure that it is always in a safe place where a thief cannot get at it. You do not treat it carelessly, do you? God is showing what He thinks of you. You are treasure, and He is not treating you carelessly. You are getting His attention, and He is going to do something to make

sure that that attention is given.

It is not only treasure, but He also says "special treasure." This is treasure above treasure, and this is something that is special. A little bit of research in this will show you that the word "special" here adds an emotional quality to the word "treasure." It is something that has particular emotional quality to it. It is not cold, it is not calculating, it is something, brethren, that He loves you. You are a special treasure, and that treasure is not only costly, but it has love involved within it.

I can already see that I am not even going to get through the first sermon. But this is exciting to me.

Here is the New Testament equivalent of what we just read in Deuteronomy 7:6.

I Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

The term "a peculiar people" which appears in the King James, is better translated as, "A special people." So even in the New Testament we are known as a special people. This term is the complement of "treasure" in Deuteronomy 7:6. But I have to admit that it is still somewhat in the sense of a generality referring more to the body, than it does to the individual parts. But, we are going to correct that, in just a minute, by turning to another scripture familiar to you in Malachi 3:17.

Malachi 3:17 "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him."

This description here brings together the sense of treasure, special and individual "jewels" of great value. Notice that "jewels" is plural indicating many, not one huge one. And that He treasures them to the extent that He will spare them as His own son. If He does not think of us highly, I do not know what else He could add to show how much He feels toward us. So now we see here, in Malachi 3:17, not one jewel as if in a body of the church, but individual jewels that make up a whole treasure. Each jewel is perceived with a sense of warm caring.

Thus, we are clearly seeing the sense of individuals within a body, each of which is the

focus of His attention.

That was pretty much a foundation for what we are beginning to get into here. Romans 9, 10, and 11 are considered by many commentators to be among the most difficult in the entire Bible to grasp, to get a feel for and understanding. There are some shattering statements that are made here, that the world of Christianity have difficulty arguing around, because of what they believe about the afterlife, the immortality of the soul, and their feelings of fairness and equality before God. We are not going to go too much into these, but we are going to touch on something that is important to the theme of this sermon.

Romans 9:6-13 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son." And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

Remember I mentioned to you that God does not deal with everybody equally?

What we see here, is the beginning of a many faceted and highly controversial three chapter subject. I am only going to focus on two of those subjects.

Romans 9:1-5 opens with expressions of sorrow regarding the mass of Paul's fellow countrymen, the Israelites. He wished that they were better, and that there were more of them that were in the church. When we get to verse 6, Paul begins to shift the focus of his subject to a smaller group within the much larger mass of the Israelite population. In verse 7, the focus is a specific family within the much greater body of Israelites which he names as being descendants of Abraham's son Isaac. In verse 8, Paul further increases the magnification of the smaller group by naming this separated family group the "children of promise." In verse 9, this promise is clearly stated as, "*At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.*"

The first thing that we are going to do is to go back to Genesis 12:1-3, and establish the

promise, because it is what sets up virtually all that Paul is writing about here to this point.

Genesis 12:1-3 Now the LOORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This is where the promise begins. It does not end here, and we will look at a couple more verses to make this more specific.

Genesis 15:1-6 After these things the word of the LOORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." But Abram said, "Lord GOOD, what will you give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" And behold, the word of the LOORD came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed in the LOORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Then, that is still not the end of the promise. In chapter 16, we have kind of a tragic inset here where Abraham and Sarah's faith broke, and their carnal plan to have a child resulted in Ishmael's birth.

Genesis 17:1-7 when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LOORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. "And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant,

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to be God to you and your descendants after you."

Years have passed since Genesis 12, Abram already has a son but that is it, that son is not the one that God promised him. So he does not really have a descendant yet, but here is God promising as many descendants as all of those stars that he can see and not see up there. After this sequence of events they entered into a covenant, and the circumcision was begun.

Genesis 17:15-17 Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. "And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her." Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"

Genesis 17:19 Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him

Genesis 17:21 But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year."

Now there you have it, there is the promise that produces the body of people who, in Romans 9, are in a physical sense within the mass of Israelites, and even as Ishmael, Abraham's son, engendered by natural means, was physically with Abraham's family.

Paul's point in referring to the "promise" is that Isaac's birth was wholly God's work. Get that, it was wholly God's work. Sarah could not bear a child, and the child produced by Abraham through Hagar was disqualified as not being the "child of promise." God was showing that any child produced in the way that Abraham produced Ishmael was not going to be the "child of promise." This is why Paul, in Romans 9, calls these people as being named after Isaac the "children of promise."

Point number one is this: You are here entirely, completely, totally because God did what He did. I hope that you will understand this, because this is the only thing that opens up the door to the future for you and me, and this is the only thing that ensures that we are going to understand the will of God. It is the only thing that ensures that we

will be empowered and enabled to carry out whatever it takes to submit to God. It is what God does, and He starts the entire ball rolling in the same miraculous way as it were that gave birth to Isaac. Sarah would never have produced a child except God did what He did. And there would never be a church—there would never be individuals within the church—unless God brought about your birth as He did. Of course with that birth comes understanding.

So what Paul is talking about in Romans 9 is a separated group, a family named by God after Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah one year after God made the promise. Therefore, some individuals who begin life as part of the mass of Israelites are separated by God to be part of something else that is also called Israel. Thus we begin to perceive the beginning of a Biblical truth regarding how God sees us in this picture.

As God sees it, there are two nations called Israel. The one Israel is the physical nation of Israel, who are the natural descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Just like Ishmael was a natural descendant of Abraham. This Israel consists of those who made the Old Covenant with God, and those that God never called to salvation in the first place. They made the Old Covenant, but God never called them to salvation. They were not part of that group that you and I are a part of, except for a few like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Joshua, Moses, Samuel. They were separated away from the other Israel. Did God know them personally? Was He aware of what was going on in their lives? The only thing that has happened that is different from them is that the group that God has separated, named after Isaac, has become a great deal larger. What happened to that other Israel? It was tragic, but you know that they could not, would not, keep the covenant with God. They broke the covenant repeatedly.

Hosea 1:6-9 And she conceived again and bore a daughter. Then God said to him: "Call her name Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, but I will utterly take them away. Yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah, Will save them by the **LOORD** their God, and will not save them by bow, Nor by sword or battle, by horses or horsemen." Now when she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. Then God said: "Call his name Lo-Ammi, for you are not My people, and I will not be your God.

Now let us connect this with Jeremiah 3:

Jeremiah 3:6-9 The **LOORD** said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: "Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on

every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. "And I said, after she had done all these things, 'Return to Me.' But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. "Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also. "So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees.

This in no way means that God is completely and totally done with that other Israel, because even as Paul was writing Romans 9, he was speaking of the Israelites who were out there. So what Paul is doing here is showing us very clearly that there are two Israels that still exist. Even to this day, there is the Israel descended naturally from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who made the Old Covenant with God, then proceeded not to keep it, and God divorced them, but they still exist as nations on the face of this earth. But, within that body, there is another small group that God has hand picked and called by name, and said these are the descendants of Isaac, the son of promise. I think that you understand that this is the Israel of God, so named by Paul.

Galatians 6:16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

The "Israel of God," that preposition indicates possession. This is an Israel that belongs to God in a way that the other Israel no longer belongs to God. He makes that very clear. There are two Israels walking on the face of the earth, one is converted and the other is not converted. *The converted group is hand picked.* Let that sink in, do not let it just roll off you as though it means nothing. The Great God, who made everything, hand picked you and me, and we are jewels in His treasure house, and He loves us like He loves His own Son. What more could we ask, if He loves us like He loves His own Son? That should be very encouraging, and that is why you are here, and you can have confidence in this, and know that He is not overlooking you and me. So, we have been called into the church, and have made the New Covenant with God. This is spiritual Israel. In God's eyes they are identified as being distinct from the children of the flesh, even though they are amongst the children of the flesh.

Let us carry this one step further. Back in Romans 9, again:

Romans 9:9-13 For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and

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Sarah shall have a son." And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls) it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

It is right here that the term "election" appears as part of the context. Normally election means the formal choice of a person for any position of dignity, and is usually accomplished by ballot. However, in the Bible, the teaching regarding salvation is something that only God does, and it involves predestination to salvation.

In verses 12-13, God has made a choice between the twin sons, still in the womb, and neither had done anything, and God elected Jacob. He did that personally, so that there would be a witness for all time to every person who was ever called by God. They would know, and be confident in the fact, that God called them personally and individually. He made a choice on the basis of His own thinking. You and I did not sway Him even one nanosecond to make the choice that He made. Swallow that one hard. We did nothing, absolutely nothing, any more than Jacob in the womb did anything to be elected by God. It was strictly His choice. That really narrows it down. So, why are **you** here? Because God elected **you** to this opportunity, to this challenge, to learn to submit to Him, and with it goes everything that we could possibly think of that is good for what lies ahead.

We will stop there, but there are some exciting things coming down the road. This only breaks the surface of what has come as a result of what God has done to this point.