

The Covenants, Grace and Law (Part 11)

New Covenant Israel

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 06-May-95; Tape #181

What we are going to begin here involves another aspect of the Covenants that I believe is very little understood and much overlooked by the world. It might be considered a technicality. In fact, they might really just brush it aside. And yet it is something that appears both in Jeremiah 31 as well as Hebrews 8, the New Testament repetition of the announcement in Jeremiah 31.

Hebrews 8:8 For finding fault with them, He said, "Behold, the days come," says the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."

The New Covenant will be made with Israel and with Judah. There is no mention of the Gentiles. And yet, there is much mentioned in other areas of the Bible with regard to the Gentiles—so much so, that Jesus Himself said that we were entering into the "times of the Gentiles." It's very obvious from the writings of Paul, because the Bible emphasizes the things that he wrote; and his ministry was to the Gentiles. So there is very much about the Gentiles being a part of the New Covenant. But in the information that directly concerns the New Covenant here in Hebrews 8 it says that the Covenant is going to be made with Israel and with Judah.

Contrary to what many seem to believe, the New Covenant will NOT be made with Gentiles. It is this that we are going to chase out, so that we get a good understanding of this technicality. Even though it is a technicality, it is very important to understand it.

Romans 9:4-5 [Paul says:] Who are Israelites; to whom pertains the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

I think it interesting that The Interpreter's Bible, in making a comment on this series of verses called chapters 9-11 of Romans "*the most ignored part of Paul's writings.*" They go on to say that this is so because "*it appears to have no modern relevance.*" And so moderns—that means the Protestants and Catholics—just overlook it. They may read it from time to time, but they simply cannot relate to it. It has no relevance to them. I mean, after all, who is Israel? Who is Judah?

Well, it has no relevance to them because they ignore who Israel is; and thus they don't look for any historic continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament, because they refuse to believe God's clear instruction regarding the Millennium and the Second Resurrection.

Notice first that Paul said "*Amen*" at the end of this little section, in verse 5. If any of you have ever gone to Pentecostal churches, where people are accustomed to speaking out, you will every once in a while hear somebody say, "*Amen, brother.*" or "*Hallelujah!*" Well, Paul said "*Amen.*" What it is, really, is Paul's wholehearted affirmation and enthusiastic approval of what God has done. What is he saying "*Amen*" to? He is talking about the first five verses here. Paul was saying, "*Yeah! It is good that it was done that way!*"

He can say that, and we should say it, too, because if God did it, it is the wisest way that it could be done. We don't want to be out of step, we don't want to be in disagreement, with God. If He chose to do it that way, that's the way it should be done. And so Paul says, "*Amen.*" He draws attention to this, and he wants us to stop and seriously consider what he just wrote in that first paragraph. It is much, much more meaningful than this world believes! Of course, they say that it has no modern relevance. (I'll interject this right now: the way the Worldwide Church of God is going, it will have no modern relevance for them for very long either.)

The book of Romans was probably written to a group that consisted of both Jews and Gentiles—with Jews being a large majority. After giving the wealth of foundation doctrines that appears in chapters 1-8, the question arises "Where does Israel fit in all of this?" Remember that, in Paul's day, as far as they were concerned it was still there. They could see it. It was a political entity in the presence of Judah. Because this question has to be answered, Paul takes three chapters to explain about Israel. If God spends three chapters on any one subject, it is pretty important—especially three chapters in the book that, as far as we can say, dominates the Bible in terms of the foundational doctrines of the Church of God.

So what we are looking at here in Romans 9-11 is a *foundational doctrine* of the Church of God. It ranks right up there (maybe on the second level) with faith, baptism, repentance, the receiving of God's Spirit, etc.—those things that appear in the first eight chapters. This is a major thing that appears to others to be merely a technicality.

Let me tell you, in brief, what Paul said there in the first five verses. EVERYTHING in God's purpose for mankind is related to God's relationship with Israel. Did you hear that? Everything is related to God's purpose—or God's relationship—with Israel. Because of what God did in choosing that nation, it came to be in a unique position among all the nations on earth. Why, Paul says that even the Savior was an Israelite. That's pretty important!

He mentions "covenants"—plural. You might wonder why I seem to be putting so much emphasis on this, and that's because of something that is attached to this, that is important to faith; and therefore it is important to salvation, since salvation is by grace through faith. That is this principle that God does NOT deviate from His patterns. He is God. He changes not. How can one trust an inconstant, inconsistent, God? If God began His work through Israel, He's going to finish it through Israel. Even though He makes a New Covenant, Israel is involved in that New Covenant.

God continues *patterns* that He establishes early in the Bible. This does not mean that there are no changes at all, but that the overall direction and the fundamental principles of His operations do not change. For example, a person may make a broad statement that there are no sacrifices required under the New Covenant. That appears to be a radical change; and I would say true,

but only to a limited—a narrow—extent. More specifically, there is a change. There are no animal sacrifices. BUT they have been replaced, and therefore changed by, (1) the far more significant sacrifice of the God/Man, Jesus Christ and, (2) each of us is required to become a living sacrifice that was symbolized by the animal sacrifices.

Do you know what Romans 12:1 begins with? Right after this section on Israel, we are to be living sacrifices! So, indeed, there was a radical change (but not in the way that they assert). However, the pattern—the principle of sacrifice—that was introduced in the Old Covenant is continued on in the New Covenant at an incredibly higher level, moving from mere animals to man in the image of God.

Let's continue chasing this in regard to the Gentiles and the Covenant. But remember this principle: God does NOT alter the patterns that He establishes. If He began the Old Covenant through Israel, you can be sure that Israel is also going to have something to do with the New Covenant as well. This next set of scriptures is a summary introduced by the word "Wherefore."

Ephesians 2:11-12 Wherefore remember, that you being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands [In other words, the Gentiles were called that by the Hebrew people who were circumcised.]; that at that time you were without Christ [i.e., before conversion.], being [Notice the first thing that he mentions.] aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, [Do you see what Paul is beginning to say here?] and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are made near by the blood of Christ.

This makes this principle regarding Gentiles very specific. Not only were they "without Christ" before conversion, they were also *aliens from Israel*. If you tie that together with Romans 9:4-5, they were also separated from the Covenant, were they not? Now, because of their conversion, they were near to the additional blessings that would come from being near to Israel. The inference is that they were no longer aliens.

Gentiles must become a part of Israel, because that is where the New Covenant is being made! And so conversion, having access to God, having Christ, entering into the Covenant, having promises and hope, and being part of Israel, all go together in one package. God does NOT disrupt the patterns that He Himself established.

I'll show you even more. Let's go to Romans 11 and we'll pick out a number of verses between verses 11 and 25. This is coming at the end of this three-chapter section on Israel.

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.

We are going to begin to see a major reason why God chose to do it this way. And, in short, the

reason He chose to do it this way is that He feels that more can be produced in relation to His purpose by doing it this way than by Him entering into another covenant with another group of people.

Romans 11:12 Now if the fall of them [the Israelites] be the riches of the world [That's pretty good reason to continue on in that direction.], and the diminishing of them [if God just cut them off completely] the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness?

Can you see Paul's reasoning? God continues to do His work through the Israelitish people, even though He is calling Gentiles into His church—God is saying here that the reason that He is doing it is that there are going to be more conversions. He's going to have more children in His Kingdom than if He would do it some other way. It is wiser NOT to disrupt the patterns that have been established.

Romans 11:13-15 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office. If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them. 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 11:17-18 And if some of the branches be broken off, and you being in amongst them, and with them partake of the root [The root is Christ, by the way.], and fatness of the olive tree; boast not against the branches. But if you boast, you bear not the root, but the root you.

That "Root" is working through Israel. So he is saying, *"Don't despise the fact that God has done it this way."* And those of you who are Gentiles—and that may include me, I don't know. My ancestry is all German, except a little bit of English in there; and the name is German. I don't know what I am! I may be Gentile. I may be Israelite. Dr. Hoeh thinks I am an Israelite. I don't know. But the family came through Germany, so I am not excluding myself out of this. But, if I am a Gentile, I have beengrafted in. And Paul said, *"Don't despise that."* He is saying, in effect, *"It is your salvation, that it be that way."*

Romans 11:20-22 Well; because of unbelief they [the Israelites] were broken off, and you stand by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear. For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not you. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God. On them which fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also shall be cut off.

There is a note in the margin of my Bible here: "Once saved, always saved?" That's NOT what the verse said. "If you continue in His goodness."

Romans 11:23-26 And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in. For God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? For I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved.

The majority of what God is producing is going to be accomplished during the Millennium and the Last Great Day; but, nonetheless, the pattern continues.

Galatians 3:26-29 For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you be Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

This is a pivotal verse in regard to this doctrine, because it ties together all of these things from a somewhat different angle than we have been approaching it up until this point. Why it is pivotal will become clear when a few more verses are added. From this, though, we know that all Christians are part of one spiritual Body. Within that Body, there really is in effect NO national difference. Please catch that. There is neither Jew nor Greek. Now, am I contradicting myself? No, because we are not done with this explanation yet.

Romans 2:26-28 Therefore if the uncircumcision [Gentiles, the *ethnos* as its called in Greek; those of a different ethnic background] keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? [As if he were an Israelite, and part of the Covenant.] And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfill the law, judge you, who by the letter and circumcision do transgress the law? [That is, the Jew or the Israelite.] For [Here comes a concluding statement.] he is not a Jew [Israelite], which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which in one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

What has happened here, in the explanation of this, is that it is carrying *the pattern* that God established through Israel to what is clearly a higher level than it had been on before. The real Jew—Israelite—is what one is *inwardly*. What is he talking about? He's talking about spiritual conversion. And this very neatly ties with Galatians 3: 26-29.

With a couple more scriptures I think this will all begin to tie together this point, and we'll see it clearly. Back to Romans 9 again; and we are going to being to hop, skip and jump through here, so that we get the sense of the argument that Paul is making here. I don't mean argument in term of anger or anything, but he is presenting a side of a case.

Romans 9:6 Not as though the word of God has taken none effect.

This has to be understood in the light of why he is writing this. *"What about Israel?"* Israel seems to be being set aside. But we are seeing that, no, Israel is NOT being set aside. And so it seems as though God has been a failure in His dealings with Israel. Here He gave them the Covenant, but people don't want to keep it. Paul's argument is this: *"No, you don't really understand what's going on."* That's what he's telling these people. It's NOT as though the word of God has none effect.

Romans 9:6 For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.

Who is a Jew? Who is really a part of Israel? Only those who have been circumcised in the heart! Now we are beginning to see that IF a Gentile is circumcised in the heart, THEN in God's eyes he is an Israelite!

Romans 9:7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children; but "In Isaac shall your seed be called."

Remember John the Baptist in Matthew 3 and Luke 3? He told those people not to think that because they were sons of Abraham that they had it made. God is able to raise children up out of the very stones. In John 8, Jesus ran into the same argument coming from the Jews; and He said, *"Don't think because you are the children of Abraham that you are Abraham's seed. He never did the things that you're doing. You want to kill me. Your father is Satan the devil, not Abraham."*

We are following, brethren, a much clearer explanation of *the same pattern*—only we are seeing it in bold clarity. That is, what God has been doing all this time and why He is going to continue to work through Israel. It is NOT the physical nation that He is concerned about. Yes, to some degree—because within the physical nation that He established through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is who? **THE REAL ISRAEL!**

Romans 9:7-13 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, "In Isaac shall your seed be called." That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are *not* the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. [That is, Abraham's seed.] For this is the word of promise, "At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son." And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children [Esau and Jacob] being not yet born, neither having done any

good or evil, that the promise of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calls;) It was said unto her, "The elder [Esau] shall serve the younger [Jacob]." As it is written, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

Jacob was *chosen by God*. He was *elected by God*. But Esau was not. So whom was God going to work through? He's going to work through Jacob, who on the surface was the weaker of the two—in character maybe, and certainly bodily. The question immediately arises, "Is this fair of God to do this?"

Romans 9:14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

Paul says, "*How can we even think such a thing?*"

Romans 9:15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

God is SOVEREIGN in His Creation. He can do anything He good and well pleases! And who's going to call Him into question? Who's going to say, "*God, I want you to account to me for this?*"

Romans 9:16 So then it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy.

Then he gives the historical example of Pharaoh.

Romans 9:18 Therefore has He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardens.

Brethren, can we take what he says there by faith? Well, we'd better! We have no other choice, when it comes right down to it. We must accept the fact that God is running His Creation, and that God is love, and that God is holy, and that everything He does is in love. Everything He does is in the greatest of wisdom. Everything is done for the benefit of His purpose. Everything that He does is done so that the most will be produced in every person, and His Kingdom will be most greatly expanded because of the way that He does it.

We are like little kids sometimes. You know teenagers—they judge their parents; but they judge them on the basis of their 13, or 14, or 15 years of experience. But their parents are 35 or 40 years old, and they've seen a great deal more water go over the dam. They know a great deal more. They are wiser in every respect. But the kid calls them into account. That's what we do with God. We judge Him, and we don't know what in the world we are doing.

Romans 9:20 Nay but, O man, who are you that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, "Why have You made me thus?"

Let's go on with this, because there's an interesting statement here in just a minute.

Romans 9:22-27 What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory, even us [the church], whom He has called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As He says also in Hosea, "I will call them My people, which were not My people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, 'You are not My people;' there shall they be called the children of the living God." Isaiah also cried concerning Israel, [Please understand this. Israel!] "Though the number of the children of Israel [the physical nation] be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved."

Do you understand what he's saying? Today there are between four to five hundred million Israelites on earth. That includes all of the Gentiles that are within the land as well. And out of all of those nations—Britain, Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and the democracies of northwestern Europe—out of all those hundreds of millions of people (all Israelites, let's say), only a very tiny remnant is *really Israel!* That's what he is saying.

Romans 9:28 For He will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth.

In this section we—the church—are called "the children of promise." We are the "election." We are the "vessels of mercy." We are "the remnant." We are those that He has "called." Now, in what Body (or group) are we?

Galatians 6:15-16 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision [Remember Romans 2.], but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule [That is, understanding this principle.], peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

That's very interesting. What we find has occurred is this: After Jacob's name was changed to Israel, Israel through the centuries gradually became a *code name* for the called and chosen of God who had made a covenant with Him. Here in Galatians 6, that code name is transferred very openly and clearly to the church, by attaching the prepositional phrase "of God" to show possession—in order to differentiate it from the physical nation also named "Israel." What God

is doing is creating a new nation—a New Covenant people—whose citizenship is in heaven and who owe loyalty to the Kingdom of God, its laws, and its governments.

This Israel—the remnant, the elect, the vessels of mercy, and the children of promise—is a *spiritual Body*, the Body of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 3) In one sense, there is NO nationality. We are being transformed into a *new nationality*—GOD! There is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female. A new thing God is doing!

Isaiah 66:7-8 Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion [the church] travailed, she brought forth her children.

What the New Testament shows is that God has NOT broken His pattern. A *new Israel* is being formed—a people from all ethnic backgrounds. The Kingdom of God is expanding through the Israel of God! This ties directly into Revelation 19 and the Marriage of the Lamb, because it is this Israel—the *Israel of God*—the spiritual organism consisting of people of all nations, which is going to marry Christ, the Lamb.

We can see a progression. First there is one man—Jacob. His name was changed to Israel. He was chosen of God, even though his brother was firstborn. Then the descendants of Israel (Jacob) were chosen from the nations of the world, even though there were other nations that were larger, and greater, and stronger. Then, as God's plan really gets in earnest with the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the giving of the Holy Spirit, God first chooses among the Israelites and then begins to go worldwide to all ethnic groups choosing and putting them—though He says they are foolish, though He says that they are weak and base—into the Body of Christ. That is, the church. And the Israel of God begins to be formed so that it can marry Jesus Christ. That's why Gentiles have to become Israelites. In fact, all of us have to become Israelites—even though we may be "of Israel."

Let's go to another aspect that is directly tied to this, and essential to all of it. Last week we also saw that there is a difference between a *covenant* and a *testament*. The New Testament writers clearly used a Greek word that in normal Greek usage does NOT mean "covenant." Rather, it means testament or will. The Greek language has a word for covenant—*suntheke*, which means a bilateral agreement. That is, an agreement between at least two, or more.

But, instead, the biblical writers used the Greek word *diatheke*, which is a unilateral declaration of one's intention (which equates to what a will is). When a person gets to that place where he feels moved that maybe he might die, and he wants to make sure that his property is disposed properly—that is, the way that he wants it to be disposed; to whom, when, and how—he makes out a will.

Now, I speculated that the reason the Bible's writers used *diatheke* rather than *suntheke* is because they very much wanted to draw attention to the fact that the foundation of the New Covenant is that it is a document—it is an agreement—that is entirely the work of God for the

benefit of those who make the New Covenant with Him. That is, that He took it upon Himself to make a *new agreement* in order to remove the fault in the people who entered into the Covenant with Him. The fault was in the people. More specifically, *the fault was in the people's heart*.

It's very evident from what is recorded in the Old Testament that it is not possible for mankind to keep the terms of an agreement with God in preparation for the Kingdom of God with the nature he has whenever making the Covenant. So a major question has to be, "Why?" Why cannot man keep his agreement with God? Again, the Bible is consistent from beginning to end as to why.

Deuteronomy 29:4 Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.

Here's a statement that might even be considered to be a lamentation—that things would be different. But God knew this before He entered into the Old Covenant. So He wasn't surprised that Israel did not keep it. If anything may have grieved Him, it would have been possibly that it was worse than He even expected it would be.

To get a clear picture, one only has to turn back in his mind's eye and meditate on the creation of Adam and Eve and the subsequent events in the Garden. God did not create Adam and Eve with an evil heart. Every biblical writer that I have ever seen recognized an innocence in the natures of Adam and Eve. They hid themselves from God AFTER they sinned. "Who told you that you were naked?" God said.

They were confronted with choices, and they chose the evil way. They chose to sin, and something happened to their minds after they sinned; and that is very instructive. Their nature at creation was made impressionable, so that as they made choices it (the mind, the nature) became—or was conformed to—the nature of the choices that they made. A conscience, and a perspective, and a character began to be formed.

I Corinthians 2 shows that our natural mind is *strong* towards gathering, understanding, and using material knowledge but *weak* in gathering, understanding, and using spiritual knowledge. In the same manner, babies are not born evil; but they become evil as a result of the influences of life in their environments. I mentioned earlier that the Bible is consistent in what it reveals concerning this process.

Isaiah 6:9-10 And He said, "Go, and tell this people, 'Hear you indeed, but understand not; and see you indeed, but perceive not.' Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."

God is saying that. He'd just, you might say, anointed Isaiah to be His representative. Isaiah was to go to the people with this understanding. At first reading, it might seem as though the eyes and the ears were blinded and plugged by God so that they could not see or hear; but that

is NOT God's way. Do you remember God's lament back in Deuteronomy 5: 29 that He made through Moses? "O that there were such an heart in them." In another place, He made another lament. He said, "Why will you die, O Israel?" "*Why do you keep making those choices—to die? Can you not remember what was written in the law?*" I'm interjecting this.

"See this day I have set before you life on the one hand and death on the other. Therefore choose life!" (Deuteronomy 30: 19) *Why are you choosing to die, O Israel?"* It is NOT God's will that people suffer in agony. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Let's look at another prophecy that God made in regard to Israel.

Deuteronomy 32:15-21 But Jeshurun [a code name for Israel] waxed fat, and kicked: you are waxen fat, you are grown thick, you are covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked Him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they Him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils [demons], not to God; to gods whom they knew not [that is, had no experience in their background], to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. Of the Rock that begat you, you are unmindful [haven't paid attention to Him], and have forgotten God that formed you. And when the LORD saw it, He abhorred them, because of the provoking of His sons, and of His daughters. And He said, "I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith. They have moved Me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked Me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation."

What we are seeing here, of course, is a prophecy; but it is *a typical human reaction to God*. This is not only an Israelite peculiarity or weakness. God reveals Himself; and mankind loves it, at first. Then the relationship begins to deteriorate—for a variety of reasons. Some get bored. The curiosity of some new thing attracts their attention. Some grow impatient. They want things to move faster. Some refuse to conform, because they didn't realize that the relationship was going to demand so much of them. Some lose interest, because other things gradually become more important to them. Some become frustrated, because they expected a free ride from an indulgent "sugar daddy." Some lose sight of how much more wonderful, and powerful, and brilliant the relationship is going to be in the future. Others forget their obligation to Him for what He has done for them.

But whatever the reason, it is mankind that finds a reason to choose to *destroy the relationship* because it is NOT in his nature to have a relationship of the quality that God desires! Human nature will not remain constant in its affections for God. From the time of birth until God finally calls, the impressionable mind develops an enmity that a person cannot completely control. The history of God's contact with people shows that—even converted people.

Let's go back to Matthew 13. What we are going to look at here is what God said to Isaiah in Isaiah 6 in a New Testament setting—with Jesus being the One who is speaking. Jesus expounds on it just a very little.

Matthew 13:10-16 And the disciples came, and said unto Him, "Why do You speak unto them in parables?" He answered and said unto them, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance. But whosoever has not, from him shall be taken away even that he has. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, 'By hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand: and seeing you shall see, and shall not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed [grown] gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.' But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear."

He clearly says, in verse 15, that the Israelites have closed their own eyes and ears. It indicates a *conscious decision* to do so. That conscious decision could easily be done by simply choosing to ignore what God says. Or to neglect what has been given to them. To ignore the works of His hands—the Creation—by which it is clearly shown (according to God's testimony) that He is! Because the carnal mind has an enmity in it, and it does not want to be tied down to a relationship with God—it prefers to do something else.

Look at this section in Romans 1. This apparently was written to the Gentiles, or about them.

Romans 1:18-19 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold [or, suppress] the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them [or, to them]; for God has showed it unto them.

That's pretty clear.

Romans 1:21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations [reasonings], and their foolish heart was darkened.

It became that way! Even though God may not have given a specific calling to these people, evidence of God's existence is clearly available; and the possibility of a relationship with Him is rejected. That's the way God feels about it. I'm going to show you something very interesting

in John 12. Did you realize that this very subject was the subject of Jesus' last sermon to the Jews?

John 12:37-42 But though He had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not in Him. That the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke, "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Therefore they could not believe, because that Isaiah said again, "He has blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." [That's Isaiah 6.] These things said Isaiah, when he saw His glory, and spoke of Him. Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.

Here we see the principle beginning to work. The carnal mind will NOT sustain a relationship with God. Even though He reveals Himself, and they love what they hear, yet they can't keep their affections with God on a sustainable level; and that enmity begins to assert itself. It begins to find reasons—as we would say in modern parlance—to ditch God (as if He was a boyfriend or a girlfriend). "*I've got to find a way to ditch Him!*" Verse 43 tells why in this case.

John 12:43-50 For they love the praise of men more than the praise of God. Jesus cried and said, "He that believes on Me, believes not on Me, but on Him that sent Me. And he that sees Me sees Him that sent Me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believes on Me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear My words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejects Me, and receives not My words, has one that judges him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak."

We bring judgment upon ourselves, if we allow to arise within ourselves the effort to reject God. Let's go back to Jeremiah 5; and again, let's think of this in terms of its apparent chronological order in reference to Jeremiah 31. Ostensibly later in Jeremiah's life, Jeremiah 31 contains the proposal of the New Covenant. So what we have here appeared before that.

Jeremiah 5:19-26 And it shall come to pass, when you shall say, "Wherefore does the LORD our God all these things unto us?" Then shall you answer them, "Like as you have forsaken Me [going away from the

relationship, ditching God], and served strange gods in your land, so shall you serve strangers in a land that is not yours." Declare this in the house of Jacob, and publish it in Judah, saying, "Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not. Fear you not Me?" says the LORD. "Will you not tremble at My presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?" But this people have a revolting and a rebellious heart [We're bringing 'heart' back into this.]; they are revolted and gone. Neither say they in their heart, "Let us now fear the LORD our God, that gives rain, both the former and the latter, in His season: He reserves unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest." Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withheld good things from you. For among My people are found wicked men: they lay wait, as he that sets snares; they set a trap, they catch men.

In that context, he is showing that they were choosing to forsake the relationship established through the Old Covenant. Why? Because this people has a defiant and a rebellious heart! "Revolting" and "departing" indicates a conscious choosing.

Now, how is the fault going to be overcome? By changing the nature of the party making the New Covenant, so that the flaw is removed. Recall Hebrews 8:10. The reason for making the New Covenant is so God's law can be written in the heart. How is this accomplished? Again, like everything else, it was prophesied in the Old Testament—while the Old Covenant was still going on. I'll show you a principle.

Amos 3:7 Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but He reveals His secret unto His servants the prophets.

Here we see a principle—a pattern. God does not give every detail, but His pattern is to let His people know (at least in generalities) what He is going to do. He gives enough, but not so much that we don't have to live by faith.

Ezekiel 36:25-26 Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart...

Now, remember Jeremiah preceded Ezekiel's prophecies. So we see an unfolding of how this is going to be accomplished. In Jeremiah 5, we find people set their wills—they choose to forsake God. They can't sustain the relationship. In Jeremiah 31, God says He's going to propose a New Covenant; and we find that this flaw is going to be taken away. Ezekiel 36 takes it one step

further by beginning to tell us how this is going to be done.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My judgments, and do them.

The keeping of the law is directly connected to this new Spirit—His Spirit! In II Corinthians 3, He clarifies that even further. It couldn't get any clearer than this:

II Corinthians 3:3 Forasmuch as you are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

Here it is specifically stated that the law is going to be written in the fleshy tables of our heart by the Spirit of the living God! But, as I showed you in an earlier sermon on circumcision, the circumcision of the heart is a *co-operative effort*. God does His part; and we do ours, by submitting to Him. Both parts are involved within this process by which God is enabling us to have the power to sustain a relationship with Him. And that power that enables this to be done is made ONLY with the children of promise, the children of God, the remnant, the church, those who are in Christ, those who have received the Spirit of God.

God willing, in the next sermon we will begin by showing you the progression (carried a little bit further) that enables us who have made the New Covenant with God, to sustain that relationship with Him so that we can be in His Kingdom. And I will tie this together with *the will* that Jesus Christ left.