

“Should the Church seek to rebuild the physical wall, temple, and city of Jerusalem?”

(Or, How to properly read the OT)

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Grace Reformed Church of Jersey City

Based on Acts 15:14-18 and 1 Peter 2:9-10

You can find the audio of this sermon [here](#).

In the early chapters of his book, Nehemiah is stirred up to pray to God, pleading the promise of God to restore Israel and rebuild the ruined walls of Jerusalem. There are many such promises of God all throughout the OT (many of them will be listed in the third section). We want to ask the question: How should we read those passages in the OT where God promises Israel’s restoration? Just so you know, what follows has nothing to do with geopolitics and everything to do with hermeneutics, that is, how you interpret Scripture.

As a way of framing the Bible’s answer, consider an example. A father gives his son a bike. He tells his son, “See this bike and enjoy this bike, but see in this bike my love for you.” A father gives his daughter a dollhouse to play with. And he says to his daughter, “My daughter, do you see this dollhouse? I want you to not merely see this gift I’m giving you to play with. I want you to see in and through this dollhouse my love for you.” The bike and the dollhouse are real gifts that can be truly enjoyed and played with by the son and the daughter. But fundamentally, they are an expression of the father’s love for his children that point back to the father. They are to see that gift and, through the enjoyment of that gift, see their father’s love.

For the last 130 years or so, there has been an erroneous teaching on the OT swirling around in the Church, called Dispensationalism. Dispensationalism says that the gifts of a rebuilt temple in Ezra and wall in Nehemiah merely point back to themselves. According to Dispensationalism, these gifts are about the gifts not Giver of the gifts. The truth of the matter, rather, is that the OT is tied not to itself, but to Christ as its center. The OT is pointing to the saving love of the Father to His people given them in Christ. So, here’s the question before us: Should the church seek to rebuild the physical wall, the physical temple, and the physical city of Jerusalem as a fulfillment of Nehemiah’s desire.

Dispensationalism saw the establishment of the country of Israel in 1948 as the fulfillment of the OT prophecies which God promised regarding the restoration of Israel. So many in the church at the

time said, “Look at Israel! It got its own country back! God is returning his people to the land in a kind of political, national, ethnic fulfillment.” Even now, Christian brothers and sisters who believe the error of Dispensationalism will look at Nehemiah and say, “Yes, we need to be about the work of rebuilding the physical wall and city of Jerusalem.” And the reason why Christians might say that is because they believe the OT applies only or mostly to ethnic Jews, while the New Testament applies only or mostly to the church and to the Gentiles. Dispensationalism erroneously teaches, in other words, that God has two separate peoples, two separate programs of salvation, two ways to Father: either through the Law of Moses or through grace in Jesus Christ.

Now, if you’re sitting there, thinking, “No, that sounds wrong to me,” you are correct. Dispensationalism is a wrong interpretation of the OT. I want you to see from three simple points how Scripture wants to be read and understood on its own terms.

I. OT Israel

First of all, let’s talk about OT Israel. Dispensationalism ignores this simple fact: everything in the OT ultimately points away from itself and points towards Jesus.

In Luke 24, two of Jesus’ disciples were on their way to Emmaus, and they didn’t understand that Jesus was supposed to die and be raised again from the dead. The resurrected Lord joins them on their walk to Emmaus and explains to them that the Messiah did everything the OT said He would do. In verse 27: “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Jesus is going from Genesis all the way to the last book of the OT and is explaining to them that every part of the OT, the then-known scriptures, is about Jesus. Again, Luke 24:44 tells us, “He said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the

Psalms must be fulfilled.’ ” Jesus has more than a mild rebuke for His disciples for neglecting what had been so clear not only from His own ministry but also from the OT.

In John 5:39, Jesus is not speaking to his disciples but to a hostile audience of unbelieving Jewish Pharisees: “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” It’s not just that there are some things in the OT that are about Jesus. It’s that all of the OT is about Jesus. And this is the problem of the Pharisees and of the unbelieving Jew in our day and at the time of Jesus. They were devoted to an OT without Jesus. And what Jesus says is that all their devotion to the pages of the OT means nothing if you miss Jesus. If you read the entire OT, but you miss Jesus, you have missed the entire point of the OT—every person, every place, every thing, every sacrifice, every event, every ritual reveals who Jesus is and what is His saving work. You cannot understand the OT without Christ Jesus as its center.

So, coming back to Nehemiah and the walls and the temple and the city. What are the walls in Nehemiah about? Fundamentally, not about the walls. What is the holy city of Jerusalem in the OT about? Fundamentally, not about the holy city. What are the temple and its sacrifices about? Fundamentally, not about the temple and sacrifices. They are all about the One who would be sent by the Father to be the propitiation for His people’s sins.

I want you to see the union of the OT to Jesus from one more verse. In Hebrews 10:1, God again reveals to us how to read the OT: “For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.” God gives us an image that explains how to understand the OT. The OT is a “shadow” (or a “type,” to use a more theological term) of Christ. Your shadow is meaningless without you. You cannot have a shadow without you being present. It’s impossible. Your shadow does not exist without you, because you are the substance that casts the shadow.

The shadow of Jesus is strewn all over the pages of the OT, but Jesus Christ is the substance of our salvation. On its own, the sacrifices and the law are shadows that cannot perfect anyone. If you were to go to the temple and think that in that animal sacrifice in itself you have forgiveness of sins, you would be highly mistaken. That sacrifice, and that temple, and that

holy mountain, and that holy city are a shadow of Jesus, and Jesus is the true form of those realities. God establishes this relationship between the OT— and everything in it— and Jesus.

As the faithful Israelite brought his animal sacrifice to be slaughtered at the temple, he was to see in that bloody sacrifice God placing his sins on that animal and that animal’s innocence on him, God forgiving him his sins, and God’s promise to provide a better salvation with a better Savior with a better blood. In other words, the faith-filled Israelite was to see the shadow of Jesus in the sacrifices which which God had revealed and established. In fact, the faithful Israelite could see Jesus in everything God had revealed in the OT—in the Passover, in the Temple, in circumcision, in the manna in the wilderness, in the rock of water that followed Israel (which 1 Cor. 10:4 explicitly tells us was Jesus!), in the high priests and kings of Israel, in the dietary laws, in all the feasts, in the Sabbath, in the land itself, in Moses and Joshua and Gideon and all persons in the OT— and trust, not the shadows and types, but God who had appointed those shadows and types to reveal His past and future salvation in Jesus. But the OT shadows have no ultimate significance in themselves unless they are the shadows of Jesus, unless they are revealing Him.

In this sense, we could say that the entire OT was “sacramental,” in the historic Reformed theology sense of that term. That is to say, every part of OT was a sign and seal of salvation, but only Jesus was the reality of salvation. To trust Jesus through the signs and seals He had established was to be faithful to God, but to trust only the signs and seals was to reject Him and was condemned by God. We would say the same about the water of baptism, and the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper.

Addendum One: What about faithless Israel?

Here lays the problem of the faithless Israelite. The long history of Israel is the history of God’s mercy upon Israel, calling her to repentance, and of Israel’s faithlessness and continual rejection of God. As a result, God says all throughout the OT that for Israel to reject Him while trusting in mere sacrifices and religious rituals will only bring God’s displeasure and condemnation upon Israel. God says to Israel in so many passages, “What to me are all these sacrifices you’re bringing? I loathe them!”

In Psalm 50:8-13, God upbraids His people for piling on sacrifices without actually loving Him, thinking that God is like a pagan deity who is hungry or in some material need. “Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me. I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds. [...] If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?”

In Psalm 51:16-17, David repents of his adultery and understands that true religion consists of a heart that loves God. It is then, and only then, that God will accept whatever sacrifices we bring Him. “For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

In Isaiah 1:12-15, God rebukes Israel for bringing their religiosity into the holy courts of His temple, yet with no accompanying faith in Him, obedience to His Law, and love from their heart: “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations — I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.”

In Amos 5:21-22, God declares to Israel that because they have neglected justice and righteousness and true love for God, all their external and outward sacrifices mean nothing to God. They’re worse than nothing. They have become abominable objects of His hatred: “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them.”

In Joel 2:12-13, God commands Israel to tear not their garments in some showy

religious ritual but to rend their heart with sincere, whole-hearted repentance. They would find God to be merciful and gracious and forgiving: “ ‘Yet even now,’ declares the Lord, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.’ Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.’ ”

Ironically, it is God who had established all these sacrifices. How can God then turn around and say that He despises the sacrifices that He’s established? It’s because the faithless Israelite who offers them is trusting not in God but despising Him. The faithless Jew self-deceptively believes that mere sacrificing, merely going to temple, merely offering the Passover lamb year after year will in itself save him. Do you now see that the problem was not the sacrificial offering but the heartless and loveless and faithless and unrepentant disobedient Israelite who offered it? Yet God says that they have misunderstood what these sacrifices, what this shadow of the OT, is all about— it’s about your need for a salvation that only God can bring. It’s about trusting that God will save you. No animal sacrifice nor blood can ever wash away your sin or cleanse your conscience.

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This how the Bible teaches us to understand OT Israel.

II. Jesus

Second of all, how are we to understand Jesus? In other words, who is Jesus? Mark 1:15 tells us of Jesus’ announcement at the start of His ministry: “The time is fulfilled. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel.” The expression, “The time is fulfilled” means that everything the OT pointed to has arrived. Why? Because Jesus has arrived. Jesus is not a type of something to come. Rather, Jesus is the anti-type, that is, the fulfillment of every promise God made in the OT. Jesus is declaring of Himself that He is no forerunner of the high priest yet to arrive. He is the Great High Priest. He is no symbol of the sacrifice to come; He is the Lamb of God who takes away the

sins of the world. He is no mere prophet in a long line of prophets yet to appear; He is the last and the greatest prophet of God who reveals the Father to the world (John 1:18: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known”). He is the promised son of David who will sit on David’s throne as the king of the Jews, yes, but also as the ruler of the nations.

The coming of Jesus to Israel in His earthly ministry is the Day of the Lord for Israel, a day of salvation and a day of judgment, a day that will expose Israel’s heart and will expose all of mankind, as well. What Jesus declares, what the Gospel writers are saying, and what the New Testament is telling you is this—you cannot delay your repentance. You cannot procrastinate your coming to the King. You cannot be neutral to the King. There is no more sand in the hourglass that’s falling. It’s all been completed. The time is fulfilled. And Jesus, as the King, comes with salvation in His right hand and judgment in His left. He comes to pardon Israel and all rebels of their sin and their treason against Him. In the words of Isaiah 61 (fulfilled in Luke 4:16-21), Jesus has come to lift up the downcast, to comfort the weary-hearted because of their guilt, to bring about that foretold new creation of glory and peace with God and with man, to liberate all who are weighed down by man-made religion, which only adds to their burden and guilt. Here is the King who comes to his own people. And if Israel repents and turns to her King, here at the end of history, she will enjoy God himself as her King and Savior, and be included in the kingdom of God.

But what happens if Israel rejects Jesus Christ the king? I trust we know something about the New Testament to know the answer. But look at Matthew 21:33-45 to see the answer given to us in a gruesome parable. If Israel rejects Jesus Christ as her King, she will be cast out and condemned, and have no part in the kingdom of God. “There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress.” He sent his servants to the tenants, to the workers he had hired, and he sent his servants to get the tenants to bring the harvest to the master. What happens? “The tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.” Here, the master of the house has come to his vineyard through his servants. God has come to Israel through the prophets. He sent one prophet after another in the OT to bring Israel to the point of producing and bearing the fruits of the vineyard. And what did OT Israel do? It killed one prophet. It stoned another. It beat yet a third.

How merciful is the master of the house! Verse 36: “Again he sent other servants, more than the first.” And what did they do? Did they say, you know what? We better change our ways. We better repent. How merciful is the master, but how cruel were those tenants! “They did the same to them.” And then, in verse 37: “Finally, he sent his son to them, saying, they will respect my son.” You have to wonder at this point, is there something wrong with the master? We know he’s compassionate. We know he’s merciful. But we want to cry out to him, Master of the house, don’t you know what they are going to do to your son?! You know how the story ends. God the Father sends his only Son, his only begotten Son, to His own people and His own people received Him not, John tells us.

What is the insanity of these tenants? Read the rest of the text: “When they saw the son coming to the vineyard, they said to themselves, This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance. And they took him, and they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? They said to him, he will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons. And Jesus said to them, have you never read in the scriptures, The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.” You need to feel the impact of these words of judgment that Jesus pronounces. “Therefore, I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces. And when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” And notice verse 45—“they perceived that he was speaking about them.”

What will happen to ethnic Israel, to the Jews, if they refuse Jesus? God explains to them: This Messiah Whom you hold as unworthy, Whom you despise, Whom you spit upon, Whom you want to crucify—you think so lightly of Him—but He is the Son of God. He is the cornerstone. He’s the most important architectural piece of the structure God has been building and is now revealing in redemptive history. Jesus is the centerpiece of God’s salvation. He is the Savior, the One who, like a cornerstone, gives meaning and direction to everything else in this structure. What will happen to the Jews if they reject God who has come in the flesh to them? God will take away His kingdom from them, a kingdom He had graciously given them and He will give it to another people who will bear its fruit. The Son of God will be

triumphant as the cornerstone, but ethnic Israel will be crushed.

If you look over at so many passages in the New Testament, especially in the Gospel accounts, you realize that almost every parable is about this judgment that is to come, that's racing towards ethnic Israel because, although they had been given so much by God, they are rejecting Jesus as the Messiah even into this final moment of redemptive history.

Luke 14:15-24 records the parable of a man who throws a great banquet, and he sends invitations to so many, and those who are first invited have so many excuses: "The first said to him, I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." Essentially, the invited say to God, I know You have invited me to this feast which is Your salvation, to this feast which is new creation, but I have something better to do. You have invited me to Yourself, but I do not want You.

And so the man says to his servants, Forget them. Rather, go to the highways and byways, go to the poor, the crippled, the lame, and compel them to come in. The guests who had first been invited but refused to attend will be not at the banquet but have been rejected. But those who had not been invited at first will be at this great banquet. Do you see what Jesus is teaching? The kingdom of God was given to the Jews but because of their rejection of God, God is removing this feast beyond ethnic Israel that rejected Him and bringing it to the Gentiles, to all those who believe in Him. Now, it won't matter that you weren't invited at first— your ethnicity, ancestry, biological lineage, whether you're a Jew or a Gentile, an Easterner or a Westerner, none of that matters. What matters is if you believe in Jesus Christ. If you do, then you are a member of the kingdom of God.

The rejection of the Jews represents salvation for the Gentiles but is judgment upon the Jews. The coming destruction of the Jewish nation within the lifetime of the Apostles is the dark prospect that moves Jesus to weep for His people. In Luke 19:41-44, we read: "And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave

one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.' "

Again, in Matthew 23:37-39, Jesus raises up a lament for His people who will be judged, condemned, and cast out because they despised and rejected Him as the Messiah: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' "

One last point that must be mentioned because the Bible is emphatic on this point. With the arrival of God in the flesh, no one may go back to the shadows of the OT and of the Old Covenant. For the Jewish Christian in the early Church (who believed in Jesus Christ and was also an ethnic Jew) and for Christians in all subsequent generations, the teaching of the entire book of Hebrews is clear. If after receiving Jesus, after having known Jesus, after having seen God incarnate— the very sum and substance of your salvation— anyone turns away from Him and goes back to the types and shadows of the law, to blood sacrifices in a temple, to all the ceremonies of the OT that were but a shadow of Jesus, such a one is trampling underfoot the blood of Christ and there remains for them no salvation (Hebrews 10:29). They are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding Him up to contempt (6:6). The point of the OT shadows is not fix your attention on those things that are passing away but on Jesus— to worship, serve, and love Jesus because of His salvation on the cross— and to join in with His Church gathered from the four corners of earth in heartfelt devotion to Jesus.

III. The Church

Third, what about the Church? In light of what God reveals about OT Israel and Jesus, how are we to understand the Church? It's not the case that the Church replaces Israel. Rather, it's that Jesus fulfills everything about OT Israel in His very person and work since He is the sum and substance of our salvation. Jesus then reorganizes Israel now to include all those who believe in him, whether Jew or Gentile (Gal. 3:28). In Christ, we all have equal standing because of His gracious work.

Up until the moment before Christ's Ascension to the right hand of God the Father, however, the disciples were unclear about this. They were confused about the nature of the people of God and the Kingdom which God was bringing in Jesus Christ. Poor disciples!

In Acts 1:6, the disciples ask Jesus, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?" In effect, they're saying, Jesus, we now know you are the Messiah. We know you are the king. We had our doubts about you when you were crucified. We were depressed those three days you were in the grave. But you were raised in power. You are the resurrected king. You are all-powerful. We know now that you are the king of Israel. We know now that you are the ruler of the nations. We know now that nothing can stand before you. So tell us, Jesus, when are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel? When are you going to restore the temple? When are you going to restore the ruined walls and the city gates? When are you going to defeat the Roman oppressor? When are you going to give us our ethnic, political, national kingdom back?

How does Jesus answer? "He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

The disciples are asking a "when" question: what time is the restoration of the Kingdom? But Jesus responds with a "how" answer: the kingdom of God will be restored, not when a temple is physically rebuilt, nor when physical walls and gates are rebuilt from their ruins. The Kingdom of God will be restored as the Apostles, with the power of the Spirit, are made witnesses of Christ, and go into the world and proclaim the forgiveness of sins in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, as a pebble thrown into a pond creates growing concentric circles from an epicenter. The Israel of God will now be gathered from all the nations as the Spirit-empowered Church bears witness of the crucified, risen, and reigning Christ who forgives the sins of both Jews and Gentiles.

Addendum Two: Was God's salvation revealed in the OT only for Israel or for the world?

The answer to this question is, "Yes." God's plan was for Israel and the world. What we can easily miss in the OT is that God's

purposes were always for the world. God did elect and favor a particular people: Abraham and his seed, which became the people of Israel.

That God had favored the Jewish people in ancient times meant that, for the early Church, there was a historical priority in proclaiming the Gospel to the Jews first. In Acts 1:8, Jesus instructs His Church to begin the ministry of witnessing Christ in Jerusalem and Judea first, where ethnic Jews were greatly concentrated. The Jews must hear about the Gospel of Jesus first.

In Acts 2:39, Peter proclaims on the Day of Pentecost to the Jews who gathered to see the spectacle of 120 believers speaking in recognizable foreign tongues that God's "promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." Note the sequence: for the Jew first ("you and your children"), and then the Gentile ("for all who are far off").

Paul teaches in Romans 1:17 that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, then to the Gentile.

The historical priority of the Jewish people was the pattern of Paul's ministry. It was Paul's custom during his missionary journeys, when visiting a new city, to first enter the synagogue, not the marketplace. He went to the Jew first, and then, upon their rejection of the Gospel, to the Gentiles in the public square. Paul's practice is evident in Acts 13:44-47. After entering Antioch of Pisidia, visiting its Jewish synagogue, and being rejected by the Jewish authorities there, Paul and Barnabas confront Jewish unbelief: "The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, 'It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." ' ' This is

one of the key turning points in the book of Acts where the Church continues to make a definite turn to the Gentiles because of the ongoing Jewish rejection of Christ wherever the Gospel is proclaimed in the Roman Empire.

Although the Jewish rejection of Jesus meant that Jesus takes His salvation to the world, we can easily miss that the plan of God from the beginning of time was to expand Israel in order to include His elect from the nations of the world. This worldwide expansion of God's hovers under the surface of the OT.

In Genesis 1:27, God called mankind to multiply and fill the world with worshippers of God who love Him and do His will. The whole world is the domain of God the King and to be subdued for His glory and rendered back to Him as a humble offering.

In Genesis 12:3, God promises to Abraham that in Him all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

At many points in the Law, God makes provision for the stranger to become part of Israel (e.g. Ex. 12:48; Num. 15:14-16).

God includes Rahab the Gentile prostitute from Jericho and Ruth the Gentile from Moab among His people to show in preview form what will be true at the end of this age: God's people will be composed of the nations of the world.

In Psalm 2, the Father promises to give His Messiah the nations of the earth as His inheritance and the ends of the earth as His rightful possession.

In Isaiah 49:6, God appoints Israel to be a light to the nations that God's "salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

In Isaiah 2:2-5 and Zechariah 8:20-23, God promises to bring the nations streaming up into Zion to be instructed as pupils of God Himself and to worship God as a reconciled people.

Isaiah 19:23-25 speaks of a day when God will make Egypt and Assyria (historic foes of Israel) to be His people along with Israel: "In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and

Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.'"

Isaiah 45:22-23 foresees a day when all knees bow before God and all tongues swear allegiance to Him (quoted by Paul in Phil. 2:10-11).

In Psalm 22:27-29, God promises that one result of Messiah's death and resurrection will be that "all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. [...] All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive."

In Psalm 67:4, God commands all the nations to "be glad and sing for joy. [...] Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!" Like Psalm 117, this command is a promise that God will fulfill.

In his writings, the Apostle John draws upon this worldwide salvation God will bring in Jesus Christ. In John 3:16, Jesus declares to the Jewish Pharisee Nicodemus that God has loved the world, not only the Jews. This would have been shocking to Nicodemus but was found all throughout the OT in veiled form. In John 11:49-50, Caiaphas speaks better than he knew about how the death of Jesus would spare the nation from destruction. John explains the import of Caiaphas' statement in John 11:51-52: "He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad." In Christ, God will gather into one people all of His children from the nations. John states this wondrous truth in 1 John 2:2: Jesus "is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." Jesus is not just for us Jews, John is saying, but also for the Gentiles. Jesus is no parochial Messiah; He is the sufficient and promised Savior of the world (1 John 4:14). There can be ethnocentricity in the Christian Faith that despises the Gentile nations. Finally, in Revelation 5:9-10, John sees the eschatological consummation of Christ's work in history at the end of this aeon. The Church, represented by the twenty-four elders (reminiscent of 12 OT tribes and

12 NT apostles), sing a most joyful song (among many others in Revelation): “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

This is the mystery of salvation Paul explains in Ephesians 3:6: “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” The mystery not made known to previous generations but now revealed to the world is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs with Jewish believers of the Promise of God. In Christ, they stand on equal footing with past believers. Paul summarizes God’s promise to send Christ to the world in Romans 15:8-11, when he quotes from the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, three divisions of the OT.

In sum, God’s saving purposes were always for the world. Though God concentrated His blessings upon the ethnic people of Israel after the Fall, this was to demonstrate through Israel what He would do in the world through Christ: save sinners and make them a people consecrated to Him.

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Here’s the Bible’s key to understanding the Church. Every description and blessing God applied to OT Israel is now applied to Jesus and His people, so that every promise of the restoration of Israel is fulfilled in Jesus and His Church. Let’s look at a few examples.

In John 14:1-8, Jesus is true vine of Israel which God planted (see Is. 5:1-7). Now, Jesus makes His people, the Church, ingrafted members of that vine.

Jesus is the true Israel who receives the promised Holy Spirit and is anointed by the Spirit without measure (Jn 3:34; 16:13-15). On the day of Pentecost, in Acts 2:33, Jesus pours out His promised Spirit upon the Church, making them His people, in fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32.

In Revelation 1:5, Jesus is the true and trustworthy witness of God who has shed His blood as God’s Suffering Servant (see Is. 53), to redeem the straying sheep of Israel. Now, Jesus makes His people, the Church, His suffering servants who seal their

testimony of the Lamb with their own blood (see Rev. 6:10; 16:6; 17:10)

Romans 2:28-29 teaches that those who have believed in Jesus— whether Jews or Gentiles— are the true Jews who possess the true circumcision, that is, the circumcision of the heart. In the circumcision of Christ, that is, His body pierced on the cross in death, Christians have been circumcised and cleansed (see Col. 2:12-13).

Romans 4:13 and 16 state that Christians inherit the promise of Abraham and are made heirs of the world through Jesus Christ. That is, it is Christ who inherits the world as the true son and heir of Abraham. But in Christ, the Church is given the world, heaven and earth, and made co-heirs with Christ of all that He possesses (see Rom. 8:17 and Matt. 5:5).

Galatians 3:26 teaches that in Christ, the Church are the sons of God through faith in Him. “Sons of God” is how God described His ancient people (Deut 14:1). Now the blessing of adoption and sonship are bestowed on those who believe in Christ. They are given the Spirit of adoption (see Rom. 8:14-17).

Galatians 3:29 teaches that in Christ, the Church is the heir of the promise and the true children of Abraham. It is not those who have a biological lineage from Abraham and can trace their ancestry back him who are the sons of Abraham and heirs of the promise of God. No, it is those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 2:12-18, Jesus is the faithful Israel who reconciles those who were “far” (Gentiles) and those who were “near” (Jews) and by the power of His blood makes them into “the commonwealth of Israel” and heirs to “the covenants of promise.” United to the King, the Church is made the Kingdom of God, where Christ governs over His loyal subjects and citizens.

Jesus is the temple of God that is raised in three days and makes His Church, the temple of the living God, the dwelling place of God, where we find Jesus and through Him access to the Father. So, who is the temple of God that God is now re-building? Ephesians 2:21-22 tells us that is the people of God, the Church, those forgiven by Christ. God calls you now in Christ now to be a part of this temple and to seek its well-being.

In 1 Peter 1:1, the Church is called the elect exiles, the sojourners in the wilderness of this world, akin to Israel wandering in the desert. Israel’s wandering was a result of their disobedience, but the Church’s sojourning, restlessness, and spiritual homelessness in

this world is a result of our obedience to Christ. In this world of sin, we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come, to enter the Sabbath Day that remains for the people of God (see Heb. 4:8-11; 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14).

In 1 Peter 2:5, the Church is called the house of God, where God dwells, akin to what Israel was called by God to be (see Ex. 25:8; 29:45; Lev. 26:12).

1 Peter 2:9 takes so many of the blessings given to OT Israel and applies them to the Church through Christ: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood [that is, a kingdom of priests], a holy nation, a people for his own possession [that is, God’s treasured possession], that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Every one of these descriptions was applied to Israel, is given to Jesus as their fulfillment, and is now applied to all those who believe in Him. The proclamatory nature of OT Israel’s distinct and divine calling is what Peter says is now true of the Church—the Church was set apart by God, to live set apart for God, to proclaim to the nations the Good News of Christ.

1 Peter 2:10 teaches that in God’s salvation of His Church, the prophecy of Hosea 1:10 is fulfilled. The Church are those outcasts whom the Father has gathered up and brought back to Himself. They were not a people, but now God has made them His people. They had had not received mercy, but now God has had mercy on them. They had been bastards, without God as their Father and without hope in the world (Eph. 2:12). Now, God has made them children of the living God (see Rom. 9:23-26 which also applies Hosea’s prophecy to the salvation of Gentiles in Christ).

Finally, what can we say of Revelation 21? The Church is the New Jerusalem, the holy city of God, the Zion from above (Heb. 12:22; see also Gal. 4:25-26), made perfectly holy and faithful, freed from all sin by God. There is no point in building a terrestrial city like that of Old Jerusalem that will perish and be shaken (Heb. 12:27) when God promises a celestial that will not be shaken (12:28). The Church in Revelation is the bride of YHWH whom the Savior finally marries, having promised her matrimony since the time of His people’s Exodus from Egypt (in fulfillment of Hos. 1-2, Ezek. 16, and many other passages).

In commenting upon the relationship of the Church to Jesus and Israel, Reformed pastor Michael Horton says this: “The promises made to Abraham are fulfilled in Christ and passed along to all those who

belong to Christ by faith. Whether Jew or Gentile, all who are relying on the works of the law are still under a curse and apart from the Messiah there is no promise of anything but judgment.” Reformed professor Iain Duguid puts it this way: “Since Jesus Christ is Himself the new Israel, all those united to Him by faith are also incorporated into the Israel of God.”

Before concluding this Biblical survey (and we could go on for several more texts!), let’s turn to Acts 15:14-18. This text is key to understanding how God’s promise to restore Israel’s walls is fulfilled in Christ and His Church. The Council at Jerusalem asks the question, Should we force upon the Gentiles all the laws of Moses? Here is the answer given by the Apostle James: “Simeon [Simon Peter] has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.’ ”

Addendum Three: God’s promise to restore and rebuild Israel’s ruins

In quoting Amos 9:11-12, James is also quoting all the OT prophecies, similar to Amos 9:11-12, which promise Israel’s restoration. Let me list a few of them here with minimal comment:

Psalm 14:7 (see also 53:6): Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.

Psalm 51:18: Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem; then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Psalm 69:35-36: For God will save Zion and build up the cities of Judah, and people shall dwell there and possess it; the offspring of his servants shall inherit it, and those who love his name shall dwell in it.

Psalm 126:1-6: When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with

laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negeb! Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

Psalm 147:2-3: The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Isaiah 11:11-13 (see also verses 1-11 about the reign of Christ): In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, and those who harass Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim.

Isaiah 44:26: [I am the LORD], who confirms the word of his servant and fulfills the counsel of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, "She shall be inhabited," and of the cities of Judah, "They shall be built, and I will raise up their ruins."

Isaiah 58:12: And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.

Isaiah 61:4 (note verses 1-3 that speak of the Spirit coming upon the Anointed One of God to proclaim liberty): They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

Isaiah 65:17-25: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come

into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain," says the Lord.

Jeremiah 23:3-6: Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

Jeremiah 29:11-14: For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find

me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

Jeremiah 30:3, 17-18: For behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the Lord, and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it. [...] For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, declares the Lord, because they have called you an outcast: "It is Zion, for whom no one cares!" Thus says the Lord: Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob and have compassion on his dwellings; the city shall be rebuilt on its mound, and the palace shall stand where it used to be.

Jeremiah 31:4, 8-10: Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall adorn yourself with tambourines and shall go forth in the dance of the merry-makers. [...] Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock."

Jeremiah 32:42-44: For thus says the Lord: Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good that I promise them. Fields shall be bought in this land of which you are saying, "It is a desolation, without man or beast; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans." Fields shall be bought for money, and deeds shall be

signed and sealed and witnessed, in the land of Benjamin, in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, in the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the Shephelah, and in the cities of the Negeb; for I will restore their fortunes, declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 33:6-11, 23-26: Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security. I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it. Thus says the Lord: In this place of which you say, "It is a waste without man or beast," in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man or inhabitant or beast, there shall be heard again the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord: "Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!" For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the Lord. [...] The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: "Have you not observed that these people are saying, 'The Lord has rejected the two clans that he chose'? Thus they have despised my people so that they are no longer a nation in their sight. Thus says the Lord: If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed order of heaven and earth, then I will reject the offspring of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his offspring to rule over the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them."

Ezekiel 20:40-44: For on my holy mountain, the mountain height of Israel, declares the Lord God, there all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me in the land. There I will accept them, and there I will require your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your sacred offerings. As a pleasing aroma I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered. And I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country that I swore to give to your fathers. And there you shall remember your ways and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves, and you shall loathe yourselves for all the evils that you have committed. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I deal with you for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel, declares the Lord God.

Ezekiel 39:25-29 (note that this is God's last promise to Ezekiel and the people before the next and final nine chapters of Ezekiel's oracle that record his vision of a new, latter-day temple which God will construct): Therefore thus says the Lord God: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel, and I will be jealous for my holy name. They shall forget their shame and all the treachery they have practiced against me, when they dwell securely in their land with none to make them afraid, when I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them from their enemies' lands, and through them have vindicated my holiness in the sight of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the Lord their God, because I sent them into exile among the nations and then assembled them into their own land. I will leave none of them remaining among the nations anymore. And I will not hide my face anymore from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, declares the Lord God.

Amos 9:11-15: "In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name," declares the Lord who does this. "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them," says the Lord your God.

Micah 7:8-12: Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication. Then my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, "Where is the Lord your God?" My eyes will look upon her; now she will be trampled down like the mire of the streets. A day for the building of your walls! In that day the boundary shall be far extended. In that day they will come to you, from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt to the River, from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain.

Zephaniah 3:14-20: Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with

gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes,” says the Lord.

Haggai 2:6-9: For thus says the Lord of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts.

* * *

When was God’s promise to restore Israel fulfilled? It should be said that a kind of restoration, of course, a provisional fulfillment of God’s promise, occurred when God brought back the Jewish exiles from Babylon and Persia to the land He had given their forefathers. Judah was restored from exile and her walls rebuilt— in a sense. This is the promise Nehemiah pleads with God to fulfill in Nehemiah 1:5-11.

In actuality, who could read the account of the post-exilic people of God in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, and think that God had completely fulfilled His promise of restoration? God’s people were still in a spiritual exile, with lukewarm hearts that did not love God wholeheartedly, in a land that did not enjoy perfect peace from their enemies, and still prone to future exile and oppression, as recorded in Ezra-Nehemiah. And the new creation on earth that would bless all the nations and the unbroken and blessed communion between

God and Israel that was to accompany the restoration of Israel had not yet occurred in the time of Ezra-Nehemiah. The return of Judah to the land was supposed to be a kind of new creation, but the reality fell far short of the promise in Ezra-Nehemiah’s time. This is because the OT restoration from exile was a shadow of what was to come, but not the full reality. A better restoration was yet to come. That return from exile would be accomplished in full only in the coming of Jesus Christ.

Back to Acts 15. Notice what James says. The glorious fulfillment of all of those OT prophecies— God would gather in the outcasts and the exiles of Israel, the temple and city would be rebuilt—all of it is now being fulfilled how? In Christ saving Gentiles and Jews through his death on the cross by faith in Him.

In the moment just before Christ’s ascension in Acts 1:6, the Apostles communicated an immature understanding of the Kingdom of God and its restoration. At that time, they were still thinking in ethno-national and political terms. By Acts 15 (about 20 years after Christ’s ascension), the Apostles have learned what the Kingdom of God is and communicate a more mature understanding of its nature.

In other words, James explains that God is restoring Israel not with 12 literal sons and the physical tribes that descend from them, but by Jesus sending out his apostolic church into the world to gather His sheep, not only from one ethnic group, but from the nations. God is returning from exile, not only Israel but all of mankind—that greater exile when mankind fell into death and sin by Adam’s disobedience.

Again, how does God rebuild His temple, His holy city, and His kingdom? With a physical wall or a physical temple in a physical city in a geopolitical country in the Middle East? No, but by saving sinners through the gospel of Jesus Christ. He builds His temple not with a “gospel” of types and shadows (that wouldn’t be good news at all because we would then have to continually offer animal sacrifices since the blood of bulls and goats can never make clean man’s conscience, Hebrews 10:1-4) but with the Gospel of the crucified, risen, and reigning Jesus, the promised Messiah, who is God incarnate, come down to take away our sin— our condemnation and corruption— in His death and resurrection. God builds His kingdom not with a “gospel” of externalities, rules and regulations, and biological lineages and genealogies

(that wouldn't be good news because, if this is how man can be saved, you and I would be excluded from the Kingdom of God because we're not ethnic Jews) but with the Gospel that proclaims the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ and His power to transform a dead heart into a heart that worships and loves God.

So, back to Nehemiah, this is why we can apply Nehemiah in Christ and His saving work to us. What is the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall and city gates except Jesus extending His holiness in this world, revealing His glory, and asserting His universal dominion among the nations in and through the salvation of sinners and their worship of Christ in the Church. All the promises of God find their fulfillment, their "yes" and "amen," in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).

Addendum Four: What is "new" about the New Covenant and New Covenant worship?

Israel worshipping God from a renewed heart as her Savior-God and Lord was always the point of the OT, even amidst the shadows which God established for His people. That which is the true worship of God at all times is made front and center in the New Covenant. Here, then, are some of the main things that make the New Covenant "new" (and they're all inter-related):

1. The substance of salvation has arrived in Jesus; there are no more types and shadows in the NT. Jesus actually gains for us, in His body and blood, the forgiveness of our sins (atonement) and the taking away of the Father's wrath (propitiation). We do not look to another savior, for there can be no other who is both perfect God and perfect Man. Jesus is our only Savior.
2. Because the Messiah has been crucified and raised from the dead, winning for His people their salvation, God the Father has given Him the most supreme gift— His Spirit. Christ, in turn, pours out the gift of His of empowering witness upon the universal Church, in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. No more is the Spirit's work restricted to the only a few of God's people, as in the OT. Now, He is given to all for holy witness.
3. Through the Spirit-empowered witness of the Church, Gentiles are now fully

included in the covenant of grace, and nations are discipled into Zion. In the OT, the holy people of Israel was (mostly) ethnically homogenous and centered upon the holy land of Israel, made holy by God's special presence there.

4. The Spirit of Christ renews man from the inside out. The religion of the heart is fore-fronted in the NT, and the externalities of religious ceremonies are put in the background. There are hardly any religious ceremonies in the NT.
5. To use some technical language, Israel was "a legal administration of the covenant of grace." That is, she reflected in a judicial, legal, and national manner the gracious promise of God that was given in Genesis 3:15 and later on to Abraham. Nevertheless, Israel was theocracy centered upon the cult of the temple and the land of Israel. Other terms for the OT theocracy are the "ceremonial law" and "the Mosaic administration." The OT theocracy— which prominently emphasized laws regarding temple worship and the land— is done away with, never to be refurbished again, because God has not divinely instituted any civil nation as His theocratic kingdom, because Christ is the fulfillment of the holy temple, and because Christ and His worldwide Church are the fulfillment of the holy land.

In many ways, the "new" in New Covenant is not to be understood so much in a chronological sense— as in a set of portraits that depict a Church "before and after" Jesus' arrival— but in a theological sense. The dichotomy that runs through Galatians but begins in 1:4, and runs through Hebrews but is quite evident in 10:13, conceives of the old covenant as that which is temporal, passing away, and perishing, while the new covenant is that salvation which God brings about in Jesus, which lasts forever.

Understood in this Biblical way, there is a real sense in which the New Covenant was found in the OT. For instance, Abraham was a member of the New Covenant before the time of its ratification in Christ's death (Rom.

4:11-12, 16-17, 23-24). All the faithful believers listed in Hebrews 11 were members of the New Covenant in ancient times. They partook of the sum and substance of salvation, which was Jesus Christ, by faith in Him.

There's also a sense in which some of the externalities and provisionality of the Old Covenant are still found in the New Covenant. For instance, not every member of the Church is necessarily regenerate (1 Jn. 2:19). Some members are even cut off by Christ (Jn. 15:1-6). The externalities and provisionality of the New Covenant in this time before the return of Christ necessarily exist and cannot be extirpated before the Consummation of all things.

With these truths in place, we can understand how Jesus' statement to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:20-24 characterizes New Covenant worship. God's true worship is not a matter of membership in a particular ethnic people group or gathering on a particular location or mountain deemed holy. It is a matter of worshipping God "in Spirit and in truth."

That is, you can only worship God the Father when you are united to Jesus Christ and it is the Spirit of the risen and reigning Christ who unites you to the Savior. Without the power and work of the Spirit Spirit, you cannot have a heart inclined towards Christ and the Father, since it is the Spirit who changes us and witnesses of Christ and the Father to us.

And, you must worship in truth, that is, according according to the revelation of His Word of Truth. You cannot worship contrary to what God has revealed, according to the inventions and imaginations of man, since the Spirit will only lead us to serve, love, and obey what God has revealed. "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (John 16:13). In sum, New Covenant worship is worshipping God "in Spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:23, 24), precisely what God had always desired, even in the OT.

* * *

We're out of time, but let me give you three applications among so many we can consider.

First of all, be humble before God. We don't have time to look in detail at Romans 11:17-22, but I include it here for your consideration:

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.

God tells the Gentiles who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ to not be proud, to be humble. Ask yourself: why were you given the privileges of salvation that once had been offered to ethnic Israel millennia ago? It is not because of your righteousness, God says. So, "Do not be arrogant" toward the Jews (11:18). "Do not be proud" (11:20). This is a lesson for us. Do not be puff yourself up against ethnic Jews who have rejected Jesus. Do not be proud and self-righteous, thinking that it is something in you that moved God to save you. This is the problem of the Jews of old, who self-righteously thought it was something in them that compelled God to save them. Do not be ethnocentric like the Jews, thinking it's your bloodline, it's your lineage, it's your earthly citizenship that has saved you or made you great or makes you stand before Christ. Do not presume and say, "We're better because we are us." That's the problem of presumption of OT Israel. "We are good because we're biological sons of Abraham. We don't need to fear. We don't need to have faith in God. We're good." Beware you don't believe the same! "We have our reformed theology. We have our infant baptism. We have our Trinity Psalter Hymnal. We have the basis of our acceptance before God in what we have done or in who we are." God says He cut ethnic Israel off because of her faithlessness and disobedience and proud

presumption, and God will cut you down, too, if you are proud. Do not presume. Do not be proud. Be humble before God and continually and freely and joyfully recognize that God's salvation is all of grace in Christ.

But secondly, be prayerful in pleading for the salvation of unbelieving ethnic Jews. Romans 11 goes on to say that God has reserved a place in His church for ethnic Jewish people (11:12, "full inclusion;" 11:15, "acceptance;" 11:23-24, "natural branches grafted back in;" 11:31, "receive mercy"). At what time God will save them (e.g., during Paul's lifetime, throughout this era of redemptive-history, or at the end of history) and to what degree God will save them (e.g., many Jews, a significant portion of them, or a publicly noticeable mass of ethnic Jews), only God knows. I cannot clear up all the various interpretations of this text, but this much God tells us: we should pray for those who are lost, including ethnic Jews. There are only two kinds of people in the world. There are those who are in Christ, and there are those who reject Christ. There's not a middle category. And without Jesus, Jews are lost pagans. They're blind to Him, perhaps even more blind than most unbelievers. Their entire identity is built off a continual rejection of Christ as the Messiah. Even the the name of the country in the Middle East, "Israel" is a misnomer. That country is not true Israel. God tells us who true Israel is: His Church, His blood-bought people. "Israel" is a secular country that simply has that name. It's as if a bunch of secular unbelievers wanted to start a gathering and called themselves a "church." We would ask, By what standard are you a church? You don't believe in Jesus, you don't believe the Bible, how are you a church? Without Jesus, unbelieving ethnic Jews are lost and dead in their sins, and we ought to pray for them, as so many of our Reformed confessions teach us (see Westminster Larger Catechism Q/A 191).

And thirdly, be eternally grateful to Jesus for His salvation. Do you understand what you have been given in Christ? Do you know what He has made you to inherit? You've been adopted by God. You are children of God, sons and daughters of the Most High. You've been justified. By Christ, by his blood, by his righteousness, you've been made an heir of eternal life. You are now the sons of Abraham. Abraham is your earthly father of faith. God has opened your eyes to rightly read the OT in order to worship Jesus. As we started, so we end our time, from 1 Peter 2:10: Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Once you had not been a people, but

now you have been made the people of God. And so live for God in eternal gratitude to Christ. Amen.

Our Father and our God, would You help us understand Your Word, would You help us understand the glory of Christ who is Father, the fulfillment of all that You promised. We have our "yes" and "amen" in Him. Thank You for our great Savior. And Lord, humble us, keep us from pride and presumption, from going our own way. Father, keep us from a hatred of anyone, including of Jews. Have compassion on those, Father, who claim to have Abraham as their father, but who are blind to Christ and dead in their sins. We pray that You in Your mercy would save unbelieving Jews, ethnic Jews, and add them to Your church, add them to the body of Christ. And that, Father, we, with them, one and all, would come to worship Your holy name here in Mount Zion and on the last day, as well. Forgive me, Father, if I have spoken anything that has been amiss or has deviated from Your word. Guard us from sin and keep us and guide us in Your way, we pray. Father, in Jesus' name. Amen.