

Romans (57)
Election and Predestination (part 5)

In the passage before us, Romans 9:19-29, the apostle Paul declared to the church at Rome that God was accomplishing His sovereign purpose in the history in bringing salvation to His people. This assertion was made even when many could not see how this could be true since the majority of Jewish people had rejected Jesus of Nazareth as their Lord and Savior. Paul explained their failure to believe on Christ was due ultimately to God's will; it was not due to a perceived failure of God's promises or God's ability (cf. 9:6), or the failure of God to execute justice (cf. 9:14). God had not purposed to save all the Jewish people. Never in history had He promised or attempted to save all the Jewish people. God had chosen only some of the Jewish people to receive salvation. But God had also purposed to save many Gentiles through Jesus Christ. God was accomplishing His will in history in order to glorify Himself through His saving His people and through His judgment and condemnation of His enemies. We read of Paul's appeal to the right of God to do what He purposed to do. Verse 22 through 24 read,

²²What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³in order to make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory-- ²⁴even us whom He has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

Then the apostle sought to prove His assertions regarding God's purposes by quoting four verses from the prophets. He gave two references from Hosea and two from Isaiah. They are recorded in Romans 9:25-28.

²⁵As indeed He says in Hosea,

“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’
and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’”

²⁶And in the very place where it was said to them,
‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”

²⁷And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

“Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea,
only a remnant of them will be saved,
²⁸for the Lord will carry out His sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.”

²⁹And as Isaiah predicted,

“If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,
we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.”

The two statements from Hosea (Hos. 2:23; 1:10) provide proof that God had foretold His intention to save Gentiles. The two statements from Isaiah (Isa. 10:22; 1:9) provide proof for that God had intended only to save a remnant of Jews.

Last Lord's Day we addressed **the first prophetic reference**, which is **Hosea 2:23**. It is recorded in Romans 9:25, *“As indeed He says in Hosea, ‘Those who were not my people I will call “my people,” and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’”* We read the entire passage from Hosea in an effort to understand the context within the Book of Hosea. The direct context is God pronouncing and foretelling through His prophet His judgment upon the northern kingdom of Israel. Israel was destroyed in the 8th century BC; God

destroyed its capital city of Samaria in 722 BC. The Assyrians then deported the survivors of Israel to various parts of the empire. The ten tribes of Israel were essentially dispersed into the Gentile world. Whereas they had formerly been God's people, God rejected them, for they had broken their covenant relationship with God. God no longer knew them as His people. Through God's judgment and rejection of them, they had become as Gentiles. Therefore, when the prophet declared in Hosea 2:23, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved'", Paul could apply it as a prophecy of Gentile conversion in this present church age. **James Montgomery Boice** made the point in his exposition of this passage regarding the dispersed 10 tribes:

...they (the Jews of Israel) actually ceased to be God's people when, in fact, they were. Rather it means that they actually ceased to be God's people in a special sense. That is, they became "Gentiles" so far as their relationship to God was concerned. So it is not actually of Jews that the words "I will call them 'My people' who are not My people" are spoken but of those who have become "Gentiles" by their rejection of God. It is from these Gentiles, both ethnic Gentiles and ethnic Jews who have thus actually become "Gentiles," that the new people of God is formed.

Using other words Charles Hodge put it like this: "The ten tribes were in a heathenish state, relapsed into idolatry, and, therefore, what was said of them is, of course, applicable to others in like circumstances or of like character."

Likewise Calvin: "When the Jews were banished from the family of God, they were thereby reduced to a common level with the Gentiles. The distinction between Jew and Gentile has been removed, and the mercy of God now extends indiscriminately to all the Gentiles."¹

Now **the second quotation** that Paul cites in Romans 9, in order to prove that God had always purposed to save Gentiles through the work of the Jewish Messiah, is taken from the first chapter Hosea. We read in **Romans 9:26**, "*And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'*" This is a quotation of **Hosea 1:10**.

This initial message of God through Hosea came through the birth of his three children. Hosea had been married to an unfaithful woman, even a harlot, just as God had been "married" to unfaithful Israel, who had gone whoring after other gods. Hosea and his wife, Gomer, had three children. God named his children, with each child's name conveying a message of God to His people regarding their impending judgment. Let us read this passage, and I will do so from the New King James Version.

The word of the LORD that came to Hosea the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.

²When the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea:

"Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry
And children of harlotry,
For the land has committed great harlotry
By departing from the LORD."

³So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. ⁴Then the LORD said to him:

"Call his name *Jezreel*,
For in a little while
I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu,
And bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.

⁵It shall come to pass in that day
That I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans, Volume 3, God and History, Romans 9-11* (Baker Books, 1993), pp. 1119f.

⁶And she conceived again and bore a daughter. Then God said to him:

“Call her name ***Lo-Ruhamah***,
For I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel,
But I will utterly take them away.

⁷Yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah,
Will save them by the LORD their God,
And will not save them by bow,
Nor by sword or battle,
By horses or horsemen.”

⁸Now when she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. ⁹Then God said:

“Call his name ***Lo-Ammi***,
For you are not My people,
And I will not be your God.

¹⁰“Yet the number of the children of Israel
Shall be as the sand of the sea,
Which cannot be measured or numbered.
And it shall come to pass
In the place where it was said to them,
‘You are not My people,’
There it shall be said to them,
‘You are sons of the living God.’

¹¹Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel
Shall be gathered together,
And appoint for themselves one head;
And they shall come up out of the land,
For great will be the day of Jezreel! (Hos. 1:1-11)

We read in verse 26 that Paul quotes **Hosea 1:10**, “***And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’***” Again, Paul applies these ones that Hosea identified as having become God’s covenant people in salvation to be Gentiles believers in Jesus Christ. They, the Gentiles, had formerly not been God’s people, but had become known as “the sons of God.”

Hosea indicated **where** it would take place that these ones would become the sons of the living God. Verse 10b reads that it would be “***in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’***” This indicates that it would be “the world” in which the former Israelites were scattered. It was there, in Gentile lands, that they would be called “sons of the living God.” “It is in the land of exile, the dispersion, that God will call out a people for himself.”²

I would also suggest that this gives understanding to the opening greeting of the Epistle of James: “James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, ***to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings***” (James 1:1, NKJV); or, as the ESV reads, “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, ***to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.***” Also, Peter describes the gospel going forth among the elect of the dispersion, even though his first epistle was written largely to Gentile Christians. 1 Peter 1:1 reads, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, ***to the pilgrims of the Dispersion*** in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...”; or in the ESV, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those ***who are elect exiles of the dispersion*** in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” The New Testament teaches that all of the elect scattered throughout the world are identified as the ones that God described as the exiles of the ten tribes of Israel, or more broadly, “the 12 tribes of spiritual Israel.”

²Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (William B. Eerdmans, 1996), p. 614.

This idea of New Testament Christians as spiritual Israel, ones whom God scattered throughout the world, is also seen illustrated in our Lord's pronouncement to His apostles shortly before He was arrested.

"You are those who have stayed with Me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to Me, a kingdom,³⁰ that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke 22:29f)

This is why there were twelve apostles, and, by the way, why they felt compelled to replace Judas to retain twelve in number (cf. Acts 1). They were to rule over Israel, that is, spiritual Israel, "judging" not in the sense of passing judgment, but ruling over the Israel of God, as did those rulers in the days of the Judges of Israel..

The rule of the apostles over all of spiritual Israel is reinforced in the Book of Revelation in which we read the description of the New Jerusalem, an emblem for the church, the bride of Christ, the elect of all ages. We read in Revelation

¹²Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel*:¹³ three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. ¹⁴Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of *the twelve apostles of the Lamb*. (Rev. 21:12-14)

Spiritual Israel, the "twelve tribes of Israel", are built upon the foundation of the apostles (cf. Eph. 2:20).

By the way, this description of the people in Hosea 1:10 as "the sons of the living God" is quite unique to the Old Testament Scriptures. God had regarded Israel the nation as a whole to be as His son. Also God had regarded the kings of Israel who were King David's heirs to have been His (adopted) sons. But to speak of individuals who are in covenant relationship with God as a Father to His children, although a common image of the New Testament, may be (nearly) unique to the Old Testament here in Hosea 1:10.³ We see again, Paul applies these verses of Hosea to show that God intended to save the Gentiles through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now here again, Paul's quoting of Hosea 1:10 serves to illustrate the matter regarding the hermeneutics (interpretation) of Old Testament prophecy. If you were to read Hosea 1 in context, you might never recognize that God through His inspired prophet was recording a prophecy of Gentiles coming to faith in Jesus Christ in this church age. But with the apostle Paul's inspired interpretation of Hosea 1:10 (just as his use of Hosea 2:23), we see clearly that God had foretold of the gospel going forth and being embraced by the Gentile world.

This difference in interpretation may be seen when comparing the comments regarding these verses in Hosea 1 and its parallel in Romans 9. For example, **Charles Ryrie**, a classical dispensationalist, records in the **Ryrie Study Bible** these comments on Hosea 1:10 and 11:

Having predicted judgment, Hosea assured the people of their ultimate restoration, numerically and spiritually. Jezreel, a place of judgment in verse 4, is viewed in verse 11 as a place where God will bless Israel during the kingdom age.⁴

What he is saying is that the prophecy is strictly for Israel, that is, ethnic Jews only, and that this prophecy will be fulfilled in a future 1,000 year Jewish millennium. Interestingly, although he included a cross-reference in the margin, not his footnote, to the quotation of verse 10 in Romans 9:28, he makes no mention of Paul's use of the verse. Furthermore, when one examines Ryrie's notes in Romans 9:28 which is a quotation from Hosea 1:10, he includes no comment in his footnotes, although he does list Hosea 1:10 as a cross-reference in the

³ The exception to this is a debated interpretation of the Genesis 6 passage in which it records the "sons of God" intermingling with "the daughters of men." I believe that "the sons of God" are not angelic beings as some have proposed, but are the godly seed of Seth, the people of God. They had become corrupted through intermarrying with the ungodly people of the lineage of Cain, thereby forsaking their former lives of faith and fellowship with God. The result was a corrupt world that would need washed clean by the world-wide flood in Noah's day.

⁴ Charles Ryrie, **Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Version** (Moody Press, 1986, 1994), p. 1328.

margin, but with no comment (just as we pointed out last week that he did with Hosea 2:23). In other words, for Ryrie the meaning of Hosea 1 is not to be determined by the inspired interpretation of that passage by the apostle Paul, but by a literalistic reading that disregards the Bible's own comments on the passage.

Now in contrast to Ryrie's treatment of the passage, the footnote of **The Reformation Study Bible** rightly, in our opinion, brings in the teaching of the apostle Paul on this passage. Its note on Hosea 1:10 reads this way:

You are My people. The promise of restoration to these people was fulfilled at least in part when remnants of the north were joined with the south during the reign of Hezekiah (2 Chr. 30:11, 18) and after the Exile (1 Chr. 9:3; Ezra 8:35). The New Testament applies this promise to the church, the true Israel, comprised both of Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 9:24-26; 1 Pet. 2:9, 10). For the apostles, the remnant of ethnic Israel was evidently a model for the remnant of the nations: what applied to the former applied to the latter.

Sons of the living God. This unique expression suggests the kind of intimate relationship God desires with Israel, in which God gives life (as opposed to the lifeless relationship Israel had with Baal). In Isaiah 40:18-20; 44:9-20; 46:5-11, dead idols are contrasted with the living God. The living relationship is now provided in Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:16; Rom. 9:26).⁵

As we work through these next three chapters of Romans, 9 through 11, we will see many examples of differences of interpretation, because of two different models of interpretation. May our Lord grant us grace to understand rightly these matters as we proceed in this study of God's Word

The **third Old Testament quotation** that Paul calls upon is **Isaiah 10:22**. Romans 9:27 reads, "*And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: 'Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, for the Lord will carry out His sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.'*"

This verse in Isaiah is within a prophecy in which the prophet was foretelling God's judgment upon the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel. God would first cause Israel to be attacked by its nearest neighbors, but then God would bring His big weapon of Assyria to accomplish His defeat and destruction of the nation. This, therefore, is the same judgment of God in history upon the northern kingdom that Hosea had foretold in Hosea 1 and 2.

The oracle begins with Isaiah 9:8 and continues through Isaiah 10:34. First, there is God's declaration that He would judge Israel, which is here called Ephraim, another name for the northern kingdom of the 10 tribes of Israel. He would employ the neighboring nations to fight against His people.

⁸The Lord sent a word against Jacob,
And it has fallen on Israel.

⁹All the people will know—
Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria—
Who say in pride and arrogance of heart:

¹⁰"The bricks have fallen down,
But we will rebuild with hewn stones;
The sycamores are cut down,
But we will replace them with cedars."

¹¹Therefore the LORD shall set up
The adversaries of Rezin against him,
And spur his enemies on,

¹²The Syrians before and the Philistines behind;
And they shall devour Israel with an open mouth.

For all this His anger is not turned away,

⁵ R. C. Sproul, gen. ed., *The Reformation Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 1360.

But His hand is stretched out still.

God had been bringing His temporal judgment upon His people Israel [Here Israel is also called “Jacob” (v. 8) and “Ephraim” (v. 9).] Israel should have been humbled and brought to repentance through God’s judgment, but rather, the people arrogantly presumed that they would recover and rebuild what they had lost. God’s judgment would, therefore, grow more severe. God details what He would further bring upon them in Isaiah 9:13-17.

- ¹³For the people do not turn to Him who strikes them,
Nor do they seek the LORD of hosts.
¹⁴Therefore the LORD will cut off head and tail from Israel,
Palm branch and bulrush in one day.
¹⁵The elder and honorable, he is the head;
The prophet who teaches lies, he is the tail.
¹⁶For the leaders of this people cause them to err,
And those who are led by them are destroyed.
¹⁷Therefore the Lord will have no joy in their young men,
Nor have mercy on their fatherless and widows;
For everyone is a hypocrite and an evildoer,
And every mouth speaks folly.

For all this His anger is not turned away,
But His hand is stretched out still.

We see that God distanced Himself from Israel, referring to them not as “My people”, but rather “the people” (v. 13) and “this people” (v. 16). But still, they did not repent from the increased severity of God’s judgment. The judgments of verses 18 through 21 are quite severe.

- ¹⁸For wickedness burns as the fire;
It shall devour the briars and thorns,
And kindle in the thickets of the forest;
They shall mount up like rising smoke.
¹⁹Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts
The land is burned up,
And the people shall be as fuel for the fire;
No man shall spare his brother.
²⁰And he shall snatch on the right hand
And be hungry;
He shall devour on the left hand
And not be satisfied;
Every man shall eat the flesh of his own arm.
²¹Manasseh shall devour Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh;
Together they shall be against Judah.

For all this His anger is not turned away,
But His hand is stretched out still.

It would seem that civil war is depicted with one tribe fighting against another. Cities suffer siege and are overcome and burned. The people starve because their crops are destroyed. They are even reduced to cannibalism due to the siege of their cities. But they still refused to repent, so God then declared that He would bring His instrument of wrath upon them from the north, even from Assyria. Isaiah 1:1-4 then describes God’s further judicial dealings with Israel. Their day of reckoning will come.

¹“Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees,
Who write misfortune,
Which they have prescribed
²To rob the needy of justice,
And to take what is right from the poor of My people,
That widows may be their prey,
And that they may rob the fatherless.
³What will you do in the day of punishment,
And in the desolation which will come from afar?
To whom will you flee for help?
And where will you leave your glory?
⁴Without Me they shall bow down among the prisoners,
And they shall fall among the slain.”

For all this His anger is not turned away,
But His hand is stretched out still.

God used the King of Assyria as His rod of judgment upon Israel. When God had completed His work of judgment, He had completely destroyed and scattered Israel. But the king of Assyria, although an instrument of God in His sovereign dealings in history, had no understanding he was but an instrument of God. He boasted in his achievements as though it had been through his own wisdom and might that he had successfully conquered the nations that had become subservient to him. God, therefore, pronounces His judgment upon the king of Assyria for His arrogance and His cruelty. This is set before us in **Isaiah 10:5-11**.

⁵“Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger
And the staff in whose hand is My indignation.
⁶I will send him against an ungodly nation,
And against the people of My wrath
I will give him charge,
To seize the spoil, to take the prey,
And to tread them down like the mire of the streets.
⁷Yet he does not mean so,
Nor does his heart think so;
But it is in his heart to destroy,
And cut off not a few nations.
⁸For he says,
‘Are not my princes altogether kings?
⁹Is not Calno like Carchemish?
Is not Hamath like Arpad?
Is not Samaria like Damascus?
¹⁰As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols,
Whose carved images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria,
¹¹As I have done to Samaria and her idols,
Shall I not do also to Jerusalem and her idols?’”

In verse 11 God first references His judgment on the southern kingdom of Judah: “Shall I not do also to Jerusalem and her idols?” God had used Assyria to destroy completely Israel and scatter the ten tribes abroad. But He then used Assyria to judge Judah. God had not intended to annihilate Judah as He did Israel, but rather He would use Assyria to greatly chasten Judah. After the Assyrian king Sennacherib had defeated and destroyed the capital city of Israel, Samaria, he proceeded to march his army to vanquish Judah. He captured and destroyed all of the walled cities of Judah, taking control of the entire country. All that remained was

Judah's capital, Jerusalem. After a siege, God miraculously saved the city, after His people had been thoroughly punished by God. This occurred in the days of King Hezekiah of Judah.⁶ And so, of all the population of the northern kingdom of Israel (10 tribes) and all of the population of the southern kingdom of Judah (two tribes), only a relatively small number of Jews survived. They too, had deserved God's judgment, but God in His mercy and in order to be true to His covenantal promises to the Patriarchs and to King David, God spared this remnant for himself.

In verses 12ff we read of God's intention to judge Assyria.

¹²Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Lord has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, that He will say, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks."

¹³For he says:

"By the strength of my hand I have done it,
And by my wisdom, for I am prudent;
Also I have removed the boundaries of the people,
And have robbed their treasuries;
So I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man.
¹⁴My hand has found like a nest the riches of the people,
And as one gathers eggs that are left,
I have gathered all the earth;
And there was no one who moved his wing,
Nor opened his mouth with even a peep."

¹⁵Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it?
Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it?
As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up,
Or as if a staff could lift up, as if it were not wood!

¹⁶Therefore the Lord, the Lord of hosts,
Will send leanness among his fat ones;
And under his glory
He will kindle a burning
Like the burning of a fire.

¹⁷So the Light of Israel will be for a fire,
And his Holy One for a flame;
It will burn and devour
His thorns and his briars in one day.

¹⁸And it will consume the glory of his forest and of his fruitful field,
Both soul and body;
And they will be as when a sick man wastes away.

¹⁹Then the rest of the trees of his forest
Will be so few in number
That a child may write them.

We then read of the remnant that God had saved through His judgment. They would return to God in faith and cleave to Him as their God. We read in **Isaiah 10:20-23**.

²⁰And it shall come to pass in that day
That the remnant of Israel,
And such as have escaped of the house of Jacob,
Will never again depend on him who defeated them,

⁶ The account is told in detail in both 2 Kings 18 and 19 with the identical account in Isaiah 36 and 37.

But will depend on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.

²¹The remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob,
To the Mighty God.

²²***For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea,
A remnant of them will return;***

The destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness.

²³***For the Lord GOD of hosts
Will make a determined end
In the midst of all the land.***

It was **Isaiah 10:22f** that the apostle Paul chose to cite as scriptural proof in Romans 9:27 and 28. He cited it as scriptural proof that God had intended that only a remnant of Jews would embrace Jesus as their Messiah. God Himself had reserved them for Himself. In other words, God had chosen them, elected them according to His free and sovereign grace that they would be saved through Jesus Christ. That this was the intention of the apostle Paul is clear from his statement in Romans 11

“I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ²God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? ³“Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.” ⁴But what is God’s reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” ⁵***So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.*** ⁶But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.” (Rom. 11:1-6)

This has been God’s dealing through history, to save a remnant of Jews unto Himself.

The **fourth Old Testament quotation** that Paul employs in Romans 9 is **Isaiah 1:9**. Romans 9:29 reads,

²⁹**And as Isaiah predicted,**

**“If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,
we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.”**

This is a quote from Isaiah 1 in which we read of God as both *a divine Legal Prosecutor* and a *divine Warrior*. God had weighed the condition of His people and has found them guilty, and then after having fought against His people and defeated them, He is now giving them one last chance to surrender. If they refuse, they will be destroyed

After Isaiah’s initial word of introduction in verse 1, the prophet launches into the first of a series of divine oracles announcing God’s judgment upon Judah and its capital Jerusalem. The first series of oracles is found in chapter 1:2-31. In this chapter we see...

In verses 2 through 4 we read that the **Divine indictment is declared**. **Verse 2** reads,

***"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth!
For the LORD has spoken:
'I have nourished and brought up children,
And they have rebelled against Me. . . .'***

The opening words of this first oracle must be understood in the light of God’s covenant with Israel as recorded in **Deuteronomy 31:28 - 32:4**. This is a record of a covenant renewal ceremony, in which Moses rehearsed before the people the graciousness of God in having brought them into a relationship with Himself. God had been gracious to this people. He had “created” His people from one man, Abram. He had nurtured them to maturity. And now, His full-grown son, Israel, who had newly come forth from Egypt, was ready to

receive his inheritance, the Promised Land. *Moses called upon the “heavens and earth” to witness the rehearsal of all that God had done for His son, Israel.*

When we read Isaiah 1:2, we are to understand the message in the light of God’s covenant:

*Listen, O heavens, and hear O earth;
For the LORD speaks,*

The prophet began his opening speech in the style of Deuteronomy [Delitzsch, p. 30]. God was declaring through Isaiah that this people had broken their covenant obligations to their God, and therefore they were incurring His wrath. Thus, judgment is now coming, the time of fulfillment of God’s wrath is at hand.

We read God’s words, *“I have nourished and brought up children.”* The analogy of a father and his children is given. God had begotten Israel, its inception occurred with the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:15ff.) God provided nurturing care throughout the years as He brought his son Israel to maturity, eventually seeing His son come to manhood, when he brought him from bondage out of Egypt. God then gave to his son the inheritance that had been prepared for him, that being the Promised Land.

“I have nourished”, the Lord said, which speaks of having raised His children to be great ones in the earth. They were *“brought up”*, speaks of the dignity that He conferred upon Israel. It is as though God had given His son the best of education and culture. Israel was born with a silver spoon in its mouth. And later in Israel’s history, under the reign of kings David and Solomon, Israel lived up to His dignified calling, as one once described, *“ripe manhood, compelling respect from the other nations.”*

But how has Israel repaid her God? How has the child responded to its overseeing, gracious father? *“They have rebelled against me.”* **Here God stands as an Accuser, not speaking directly to Israel but as in a courtroom, the defendant sitting charged with a crime; God, the prosecutor is speaking to the jury and the witnesses, that being the “heavens and the earth”:**

You’ve seen it! You, heavens, were there beholding my graciousness. You have been observing all along, Oh Earth, my patience. But you have also seen their rebellion; I call upon you to say it is so.

The Hebrew word translated as “rebelled” means to break off, to tear away. Israel is shown to have dissolved with violence and self-will the connection of parent and child. And so here in Israel’s sinful condition is displayed the nature of all sin as well as its result-separation from God Himself and His will.

In **verse 3** we see that the people of Israel is depicted as worse than dumb stock animals. *“The ox knows its owner”*; it knows who owns him! to whose will it should yield. *“And the donkey its master’s crib”*; even a donkey knows where his food comes from, who provides for him. *“But Israel does not know.”* Israel doesn’t have that much sense. It seeks its own will. Israel seeks his substance from other gods. And so, **the basic problem is set forth: ingratitude; independence/self-will.** Israel both fell away from Him and rose in opposition to God.

God refers to them as *“My people.”* These were the covenant people of God. They were His possession. Yet they *“do not consider”*, says the Lord. Their sin was great in their refusal and neglect of the privilege that was theirs. *“They had counted the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace.”*

In **verse 4** we see that Jehovah becomes silent (notice the end of quotation marks with v. 3). The prophet speaks in solemn agreement with the charge by giving **a seven-fold lament.**

(1) *“Alas, sinful nation”* -- The Hebrew word for nation is frequently used for the wicked nations; here without the definite article, thereby perhaps stressing Judah’s diminishment to the level of one of the heathen nations. Note, they had been called to be a “holy nation.” But they had not simply failed to achieve that status, they actually became the opposite, a “sinful nation.”

(2) “*A people laden with iniquity*” -- The responsibility was upon them. They were charged with insurrection and rebellion.

(3) “*A brood of evil doers*” -- They were guilty due to the guilt of their ancestors. Elsewhere they are described as the seed of the patriarchs, therefore blessed of God because of the promises they had inherited. Here, they are the seed of evildoers, therefore cursed of God because of the corrupt nature they had inherited.

(4) “*Children who are corrupters!*” They were not simple guilty due to their ancestry, they are guilty in their own right. They were guilty due to their own deeds; they corrupt themselves and others as well

Now, whereas the first four phrases describe *their condition*, the final three speak of their *specific offenses*.

(5) “*They have forsaken the Lord,*” -- The word for “Lord” here is YAWEH or “Jehovah,” the personal name of their covenant God (Exodus 6:2). They did not want to “know” Him.

(6) “*They have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel.*” -- The NIV reads, “They have spurned the Holy One of Israel.” Delitzsch translates it, “They have blasphemed the Holy One of Israel.”

(7) “*They have turned away backward.*” It was a revolt of words, feelings and conduct. The deliberateness of their rebellion is seen; they turned and walked away, wanting no part of Him, and so, the indictment is presented. Judgment must surely come upon them.

The only thing that will save them from utter destruction is if the Lord takes the initiative. He purposes to show mercy so as to be disposed toward them; and He bestows grace so as to dispose them toward Himself. And so, this was the condition of ancient Israel, but it also aptly describes the condition of all mankind apart from a work of the grace of God in and through a Savior!

We then have the **desolate external state of the nation described (1:5-9)**. Next, the analogy is given of a person who has been sorely wounded, a description of Israel due to Jehovah having afflicted him. Israel is shown to be as *a defeated warrior who had been fighting against God on the battlefield*. God through His judgment had beaten Israel down to a hopeless and helpless condition. It is as though God asks the question, “What more will it take to bring you to repentance, to a state of obedience?”

Verse 5 reads, “*Why should you be stricken again?*” There is nothing else remaining that had not already been smitten. What else is there? The purpose of the question seems to be an appeal by God for them to respond. “Why is it you don’t want this affliction to cease?” The Lord does not delight in continuing to afflict them. Yet it is said, “*You will revolt more and more.*” ***The chastising work of God seems to have incited more rebellion rather than repentance.***

Israel’s condition is then graphically described. The prophet recites the extent of the injuries that had been inflicted upon Israel by God. “*The whole head is sick*” (perhaps “every head”). This “sickness” is due to the stroke of a weapon in battle rather than a disease contracted. The description is as one mortally wounded in combat. We read, “*And the whole heart faints.*” The wounded soldier is now near death; a lack of strength now exists. And in **verse 6**, “*From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in it.*” There was no portion of the body that had not been inflicted, God had struck them severely, repeatedly, and in diverse ways. “*But wounds, and bruises and putrefied sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.*” Although these injuries had been inflicted fairly recently, the body had remained untreated; no care had been given to facilitate healing. The wounds had not been squeezed so as to remove the putrefaction, or treated with medicinal oil. So their injured condition was a prolonged one with no relief or comfort.

Next, the *analogy of the wounded body* is explained in **verse 7**:

*Your country is desolate,
Your cities are burned with fire,
Strangers devour your land in your presence;
And it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers.*

These descriptions depict the curses that God had promised would come upon them if they refused to obey His commandments (Lev. 26; Deut. 38). The enemies of Judah are not identified specifically here; they are simply referred to as “strangers.” The “overturning” speaks of total upheaval, as when Sodom was “overturned.” [Cf. Amos 4:11; Isaiah 13:19; Jer. 50:40.].

And **verse 8** reads,

*So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard,
As a hut in a garden of cucumbers,
As a besieged city."*

This is a reference to **Jerusalem**. It alone remains. God had preserved it within ravaged Judah. It was the last stronghold, the last vestige of security, yet unsmitten by the Lord. The imagery is of a field that had been harvested, the guard hut is no longer needed. Jerusalem which once stood as a defense and stronghold for Judah now stands as overlooking a ravaged country; there is nothing left to guard. We read,

*Unless the Lord of hosts
Had left to us a very small remnant,
We would have become like Sodom,
We would have been made like Gomorrah. (1:9)*

Jerusalem is all that is preserved within ravaged Judah. It is a **remnant**. God in His mercy had spared the city for His Own Name’s sake (Deut. 16:16; 26:1,2).

Now, what is a remnant and what is God’s purpose in preserving Himself a **remnant**? **A remnant is a small portion of what had existed formerly, preserved by God in order for a new beginning to occur.** Like a sprout is taken from a vine to be grafted to another, the original vine is afterwards destroyed. But in a sense the former vine lives on in the sprout. The preservation of a remnant provides for the promises of God to be fulfilled. He is able through the remnant to be true to His promises.

Note that the prophet uses the plural pronoun “we” in 1:9. He was also an object of God’s mercy and grace. The apostle Paul used this verse in Romans 9:29. The remnant consisted of those relatively few number of Jews who came to Jesus Christ of which Paul was one.

What may take to heart as we close today? First, let us affirm that though we may seem to be few in number and influence, we are blessed beyond comprehension that our God in His free and sovereign grace to be the recipients of His salvation in Jesus Christ. Second, let us understand that all of the words of God’s assessment and judgment of apostate Israel as well as that of the Assyrians reflects how God views all who are outside of Jesus Christ. God regards them as His enemies, against whom He is fighting. They will all be vanquished one day and rug before His judgment. The only escape for fallen humanity is to flee in repentance from sin to pace faith in God’s only provision for salvation from sin, Jesus Christ the Lord.