

Romans 11 – The Puritan Hope

(The following is the substance of an address given by Rev David Silversides at the Puritan Conference at Whiteabbey Congregational Reformed Church on 11th February 2012.)

The ultimate hope of the Puritans, like all Christians, is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and eternal glory with him. The word ‘hope’ is not used in Scripture and by the Puritans in the same way we use it today. We use the word ‘hope’ about something we are not quite sure will happen but we hope it will. That is not the biblical usage of the term. The idea of ‘hope’ in Scripture is a sure expectation. The Puritans entertained a hope of great Gospel advance in this world beyond that which they had seen or we have seen. So for example, John Howe, rebuking unbelief on this point says, "We expect to see what we have been wont to see, and men are apt to measure their faith by their eyes for the most part in reference to these things. Only that can be done which they have seen done and men are hardly brought to raise their faith and expectation higher than this. Why should it be thought an incredible thing that there should be a resurrection of religion?"

Many of the English Puritans believed and expected that there would be vast Gospel advance, and not in the premillennial sense of happening after Christ has returned, but what may broadly be called the post-millennial approach. That is that Christ's return would be ‘post’ or after great Gospel advance in this world.

Among the Scottish Covenanters also this expectation of glorious days of Gospel blessing in the future was all but uniform and universal. Samuel Rutherford at one point declares that he would even willingly postpone going to heaven for a number of years if he could see the latter-day glory of the church on earth. He believed that there would be great advance of the Gospel.

Likewise, Richard Cameron, the later Covenanter, two months before his death preaching on the verse, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life," (a sermon which was so blessed of God that it was talked of to children and children's children 200 years later,) he stopped in the middle of the sermon and wept and prayed for the restoration of the Jews, for the fall of antichrist, and for the day when the Stuarts would be swept from the throne. The third petition of that prayer has been answered but the rest remains. Three days before his death, Cameron preaching on Psalm 46:10, "Be still, and know that I am God," says, "The church of Christ is to be so exalted that its members shall be made to ride upon the high places of the earth. Let us not be judged to be of the opinion of some men in England called the Fifth-Monarchy men, who say that, before the great day, Christ shall come in person from heaven with all the saints and martyrs and reign a thousand years on earth. But we are of the opinion that the Church shall yet be more high and glorious, as appears from the book of Revelation, and the Church shall have more power than ever she had before."

Cameron's fellow Covenanter, James Renwick said, "There have been great and glorious days of the Gospel

in this land but they have been small in comparison of what shall be." I am acutely aware that this outlook is very different from the standard view here in Northern Ireland amongst evangelical people, and yet it was one that was very much held among the Puritans and especially among the Scottish Covenanters and their successors.

Many passages were appealed to as the basis of this hope. We cannot look at them all but one of them was Romans 11. They held the view that this passage relates to the future ingathering of ethnic Israel, that is, literal, racial Israel, into the church of God, and that this will usher in yet greater Gospel blessing to the nations. We look at this passage now.

Let us look at the context. In Romans 1 through 8, the apostle has given a very comprehensive and systematic statement of the Gospel, that Gospel wherein is revealed the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ. The Gospel makes known to unrighteous sinners God's provided righteousness in Jesus Christ which is imputed to all who believe on his name. So in chapter 1 he shows that the Gentiles are all sinners. In chapter 2, he shows that the Jews are all sinners. In chapter 3, he comes to the conclusion, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God," and that the only way of acceptance is through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Then in chapter 4, he shows that this was the way of salvation for Abraham and for David, and that there has only ever been the one way of salvation. In chapter 5, he shows the certainty of the imputed righteousness of Christ upon the people of God.

It is as sure as the fall of man in Adam, "As by the offence of one ... many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." In chapter 6, he anticipates the objection that if justification is through faith in Christ alone, then does that mean we can go on and sin as we like and trust Christ. He shows that faith in Christ is the result of a renewing of the heart and that the believer is a new creature in Christ, so that he will not simply continue in sin that grace may abound. In chapter 7, he shows the relationship between the believer and the law. As far as acceptance with God is concerned, it is not through his personal endeavours to keep the law of God but through the merits of Jesus Christ. He does not dismiss the law. It remains the standard of right and wrong but Christ is the end of the law for righteousness. Then in chapter 8, he shows the whole scope of salvation in Christ, that it includes justification, sanctification, the resurrection of the body and the renewal of the heavens and the earth as the inheritance of the people of God.

The question then is, if this is the true Gospel, how is it that comparatively few of the Jews believe it? Chapters 9 to 11 give the answer. Chapter 9 shows that God never promised to save all the seed of Abraham; he never promised to save all Israel, the Israelites. God's sovereign election was always evident in distinction, even in the sons of Abraham: Isaac, not Ishmael; in the sons of Isaac: Jacob, not Esau and so on. God never promised to save every Israelite and the fact that many reject the Gospel was no evidence that that Gospel was untrue. In chapter 10, he takes a stark look at Israel's unbelief in all its

dreadful reality. They had heard but they had not believed. He expresses his yearning for the conversion of his fellow Jews, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." He is praying for the Jews, for Israel, not some unknown lost tribes but the Jews in Jerusalem and Judea and elsewhere who were seeking to earn acceptance with God.

But there is a hint of more to come in chapter 10, verse 19, "But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you. But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." At the moment Christ is being found of those who sought him not, the Gentiles, and Israel is in unbelief. "I have stretched forth my hands unto a gainsaying people." That still was the case in the Apostle Paul's day, but there is a hint that this will not always be so. "I will provoke to jealousy by them that are no people." Jealousy in the sense of wanting that which others have, that is, that the Jews would be brought to desire those spiritual blessings which the Gentiles have come to possess. In other words, the present state of affairs will not always continue.

Then in chapter 11, he takes up this question more fully: is it all over then as far as Israel as a people is concerned? Chapter 11 is showing that Israel's rejection is neither total nor final. There always was and there still is in his day and in ours, a remnant according to the election of grace. That was how it was in Elijah's time and so it was in the apostle's time. Even so at this present time, there is a remnant according to the election of grace. Verse 7, "What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded." He is saying Israel's rejection is not total.

Then the question arises: well, alright, Israel's rejection is not total but will it always only be a remnant of ethnic, racial Israel who believe?

1. The Blessing Anticipated.

Verse 11, "I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy." This verse is showing us that their stumbling was not an end in itself in the sense of an isolated event. Have they stumbled so that they should fall and that is the end of it? Is that all there is to it? No, through their fall salvation is come to the Gentiles. So their stumbling and falling is not that rejection by the reprobate in Israel in all generations. It is referring to a stumbling and a falling at a particular point that issues in the ingathering of the Gentiles. It is not talking about simply the fact that all through Israel's history there were always many of them who rejected the truth and who were rejected by God. It is saying there is

a particular time of rejection that was to be the means whereby the Gospel would come to the Gentiles. At a particular point, the height of stumbling and unbelief, which entailed the crucifixion of the Christ of God, resulted in the Gospel going out to the Gentiles. It is talking about that point, that transition from the Old into the New Testament at which the kingdom of God was taken from them and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof, Matthew 21:43. The Lord Jesus in Matthew 8:11-12 speaks of men and women coming from the east and from the west, and sitting down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven whereas the children of the kingdom are cast into outer darkness. The children of the kingdom in its outward form in the Old Testament, unbelieving Jews, are cast into outer darkness while at the same time the Gentiles begin to come into the kingdom of God and they will sit with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the heavenly state of the kingdom.

So the stumbling of Israel in view was contemporary with the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles and was even instrumental in the Gospel coming to the Gentiles. Israel's largescale rejection of the Gospel separated off the continuing church of God from Israel as a whole. The church of God in the New Testament emerges out of the Old Testament professing church, Old Testament Israel, and is a pruned and purified body. The persecution of the Christians by the unbelieving Jews speeded up the evangelization of the Gentiles. Acts 11:19, "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and

Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord." So the rejection of the truth by the bulk of Israel resulted in the ejection of the Christians and the spread of the Gospel among the Gentiles. It also freed up the preachers of the Gospel to go to the Gentiles. In Acts 13:46 in the synagogue of Antioch and Pisidia, the Apostle Paul when the Jews oppose and blaspheme says, "Judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." In Acts 18:6, "And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed," (this is in Corinth,) "he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles." And again in Acts 28:28, "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it."

These passages show that the rejection of the Gospel by Israel, God's passing over Israel with his saving grace, was instrumental in the Gospel going abroad among the Gentiles. But the apostle envisages in Romans 11 that there is something still to come. Romans 11:11, "I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy." Once again, there is this implication, Israel's casting off has resulted in blessing coming to the Gentiles but that blessing upon

the Gentiles will be instrumental in provoking Israel to jealousy to seek those same blessings that the Gentiles have now entered into.

Then we see the 'fall' and the 'fullness' in verse 12, "Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" Literal ethnic Israel is still in view. The argument is quite simple: if their fall brought such blessing to the Gentiles, how much more will their fullness, that is the comparative bulk of them being brought into the kingdom, bring more blessing still? That is the argument and it is an argument that is based on sequence. He is not saying the rejection of the truth by Israel brought blessing to the Gentiles and the receiving of truth brought blessing to them as well at one and the same time. The argument is one of sequence. There was a time when the Jews rejected the Gospel and it brought that Gospel and its blessings to the Gentiles. There will come a time when Israel shall be gathered in and it will bring greater blessing to the Gentiles. They are not parallel events, they are sequential events, one after the other. Israel's fall brought blessing to the Gentiles, Israel's ingathering will bring blessing to the Gentiles, otherwise there is no meaning to the passage and it becomes futile and absurd.

So their 'fall' is referring to a particular time when they were cut off and blessing came to the Gentiles. Their 'fullness' refers to a particular time when they are gathered in and greater blessing is brought to the Gentiles. The 'fullness' is not the complete tally of the

elect but a specific time of ingathering of a comparative bulk of Israel. Just as a comparative bulk fell, so a comparative bulk will be brought in. The one brought the Gospel and its blessing to the Gentiles, how much more will the other? The much more blessing should be taken as the same as the riches spoken of earlier in the verse, "Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" How much more will their fullness bring more of these riches, this blessing spoken of? In other words, more Gospel blessing will come to the Gentiles following from Israel's ingathering.

In verses 13 and 14, the apostle reflects on his own role as an apostle to the Gentiles, that it is entirely compatible with his concern for Israel because this pattern of provoking to jealousy prevails, and that pattern will receive much greater, large-scale fulfilment in the future.

Then we have 'life from the dead.' Verse 15, "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" Here the emphasis is on God's sovereign activity behind the human responses to the truth – the casting away when God hid his face from Israel with his saving mercy, again referring to a specific time block when the Old Testament age moved into the New, when even Israel's outward status as the external form of the kingdom of God was taken from them. If that resulted in the 'reconciling of the world,' (that is the redeeming work of Christ and Gentile multitudes being reconciled to God,) what shall the 'receiving of them' be, (that is when Israel

in comparative bulk is brought to faith in Christ,) but 'life from the dead'?

What is this 'life from the dead'? Is it the bodily resurrection? No, it is not. Verse 12 militates against this. The much more blessing is of the same kind as that which accrued from the casting off of Israel. Although the term 'life' can be used of bodily resurrection life, the expression 'life from the dead' is not normally used to describe the resurrection from the dead. The nearest similar expression is in Romans 6:13 where we read, "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead." This passage is referring to spiritual life so that when we read, "What shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead," we are to understand that as the receiving of the Jews back into the church of God. It is not some special arrangement or separate kingdom or anything like that. When they are received back into the one continuing church of God, then this will bring spiritual life in abundance to the Gentiles.

2. The Build-Up Argument by Illustration of the Olive Tree.

In fact, the apostle uses two illustrations. He uses very briefly the illustration of the firstfruit and the lump in verse 16, "For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy." The idea is taken from Numbers 15:17-21 and the thought is that the first of the dough is given to the Lord and this consecrates the whole lump. Likewise, the

separation of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob indicates a distinctive role for Israel as a whole.

Then we move on to the olive tree, the root and the branches. The root obviously refers to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the branches to Israel as a whole. Israel is devoted to a particular purpose in the plan of God. What is this olive tree? What is it talking about? It is an olive tree that unbelieving Israelite branches were ultimately broken off from and Gentile branches were grafted in, but even they are warned lest they be cut off. That immediately tells us something about one or two wrong suggestions. Some say it refers to true believers in the Old Testament and the New Testament, the full tally of the elect. This is clearly not so. Some of the branches are broken off. We believe in the perseverance of the saints so it does not refer simply to the elect either in Israel or among the Gentiles. Some say it refers to Old Testament Israel and the New Testament elect, but this is also wrong. Firstly, the olive tree is continuous. You cannot introduce such a hiatus of transition from the Old to the New Testament. It is one continuous olive tree. It does not allow for a drastic change from outward Israel to a purely spiritual body. But secondly, this cannot be right because the apostle warns against breaking off of branches in the New Testament, verses 20-21, "Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee."

So even when it is dealing with the New Testament period, it warns against being broken off. If we believe in the perseverance of the saints, then it cannot refer even to the elect in the New Testament simply and solely. Rather it refers to the outward form of the church from the Old into the New Testament age. The church on earth is subject to mixture. Not all who were of Israel were Israel. The Old Testament church was mixed. The New Testament church on earth is still mixed. John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." There are hypocrites, unregenerate people in the New Testament church. There are people like Ananias and Sapphira who appeared to be the real thing but it transpires that they are not. Christ is the vine. There are two kinds of branches: those with a merely external connection who bear no fruit and will ultimately be broken off and burned, and then those who are vitally connected to Christ, the vine, and so bear fruit abundantly. The church on earth is mixed even when church discipline is scripturally administered. Many of the parables indicate this such as the parable of the ten virgins, five wise, five foolish; they were all supposed to be waiting for the bridegroom; five were really ready, five were not. Also the parable of the servants with the talents; they were all supposed to be servants; two of them really served; the other one did not.

So the olive tree refers to the outward form of the church from the Old into the New Testament. That outward form of the church in the Old Testament was Israel. In the New Testament it is international and made up of Jew and Gentile. That is the only view of the olive tree that we find consistent with all the facts stated in this passage. To this olive tree, Israel will be grafted back in again as their own olive tree, verse 24, "For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?" They were cut off from the visible church; they will be grafted back into the visible church, the same visible church from which much earlier they were cut off.

The church is one throughout history both in inner essence and in outward visible expression and form. What God has already done is given in verse 17, "And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee." God has broken off the Jewish unbelieving branches. They rejected the Gospel. The continuing church under apostolic leadership and with the New Testament ordinances continues but the unbelieving branches who rejected the message of the risen Saviour were broken off even from the outward form of the church of God. That has already happened. Gentile professing branches are grafted in in

their place. There is a warning against Gentile pride, a warning against presumption. If they are not genuine, they will be cut off as well. And there is a warning against pride assuming that God had finished with Israel altogether. There is the possibility of a grafting back in, verse 23, "And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again." The apostle is saying it is possible. In any case, it is not only possible but it is very probable, verse 24, "For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?" He is saying God could do it; is it not highly likely he will do it if he grafted in wild branches into the olive tree, how much more the natural branches being grafted back in?

3. The Conclusive Certainty.

Then in verse 25 he is saying not only can God do it, not only is it likely, but it will happen. Verse 25, "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins." He now comes to a climactic certainty, not only could God do it, not only is it likely, but he **will** do it.

"I would not have you ignorant, brethren, of this mystery." What is the mystery? The word 'mystery' in Scripture, especially in the epistles, refers not to something strange or eerie or weird, the term is used of God's unknowable plan of salvation, unknowable, that is, except so far as it is revealed. It takes in the whole of redemption accomplished by Christ and applied by the Spirit.

1 Timothy 3:16, "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh." That is central to the mystery. The term 'mystery' is also used of redemption applied. In Ephesians 3, the apostle uses the term in connection with the interaction between Jew and Gentile in the unfolding of God's saving purpose. Ephesians 3:3, "How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." It is used in 1 Corinthians 15 of the final stage in the application of redemption, the resurrection of the body, "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." So the term is used of God's plan of salvation unknowable except by revelation: redemption accomplished by Christ, applied by the Spirit,

to Jew and Gentile unto resurrection glory. So in Ephesians and in Colossians the term 'mystery' is used of Jew and Gentile, of the fact that the Gentiles are now being gathered in.

Here in Romans 11 the term 'mystery' is used of another facet, namely that the ingathering of the Gentiles will reach such a pitch as to provoke Israel to jealousy so that Israel will be brought back into the church of God. So then what is the 'fullness of the Gentiles'? "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until," (that blindness is in part, it is large scale, but is not going to continue indefinitely,) "until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." What is the fullness of the Gentiles? It is not the whole tally of the elect but in keeping with the use of 'fullness' in verse 12, it is referring to a particular time when a comparative bulk of Gentiles are gathered in. It is still a sequence of events so that there will be a time when a comparative bulk of Gentiles are gathered in to the church and this will provoke Israel to desire what the Gentiles have and then Israel will be gathered in to the church. That great Gentile ingathering will be followed by Israel's large-scale ingathering.

When it says that the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in and so all Israel shall be saved, what does 'all Israel' mean? What does 'Israel' mean when it says "all Israel shall be saved"? Israel must be understood ethnically, racially at this point. The whole purpose of the passage is about ethnic Israel. In chapter 9, the apostle talks about

wishing himself accursed for his kinsmen according to the flesh. In chapter 10, he has continual sorrow and heaviness and his prayer for Israel is that they might be saved. Chapter 10, verse 19, says “for to provoke them to jealousy.” He is talking about ethnic Israel. We are not suddenly to give Israel a different meaning to what it has meant through chapter 9, chapter 10, and all of Chapter 11 up to this point.

That is the wider context. The more immediate context is that the apostle is rebuffing possible Gentile pride. How would it rebuff Gentile pride to say all the elect will be saved? It would not. They are not to be wise in their own conceits. They are not to think, "We have been grafted in; Israel is on the scrapheap." The whole point is to show that they should not be wise in their own conceits because Israel is not on the scrapheap. Gentile pride is rebuked in verse 20, "Be not highminded, but fear," and again in verse 25, "Lest ye should be wise in your own conceits." It would never act as a rebuke to the danger of their being wise in their own conceits if all the apostle was saying is that the elect will be saved. That is a glorious truth but it would not rebuke Gentile pride, nor even to say all the elect of Israel will be saved as that was happening all along. He is talking about something that will happen. To say all the elect will be saved would be to say nothing that has not already been said very fully in chapter 9. The passage becomes meaningless unless Israel means Israel.

The appeal to Galatians 6:16 which is sometimes made is particularly inappropriate. It is the one place where Israel

appears to be used of the church generally, the true Israel of God. Galatians 6:16, "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God." Sometimes this is appealed to and they say, "Well, there you are, the apostle calls the church the Israel of God." It is always wrong to take a meaning in one place and randomly transfer it to another, but it is particularly wrong when the context is not similar but in this case is actually 180 degrees opposite. In Galatians the apostle is warning the Gentiles not to be cowed by the Israelite Judaizers. In Romans 11 he is warning Gentile professing believers not to be proud and look down on Israel. So the context in the two places is totally opposite and therefore to take the meaning of 'Israel' in Galatians 6:16 where the context is the exact opposite and simply pluck it out and put it into Romans 11 is exegetically inexcusable. That is not how to handle the word of God.

Then when we look at the Old Testament passages given to confirm the apostle's teaching, this view of the passage is borne out. Verse 26, "And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins." The first reference is to Isaiah 59:20, "And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's

seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever." The thought here is that the Redeemer is coming to Zion, and he would turn away ungodliness from Jacob. The previous verse, verse 19, talks of the more general effect, the advance among the nations. Verse 21 is specific in referring to Israel. So verse 20 which is quoted is saying that the coming of Christ would ultimately result in the greater positive effect of the truth turning Israel to the Lord. It is saying that in the New Testament Israel will ultimately be turned to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The other passage is Jeremiah 31:33. We could refer to any one of a group of passages but they are all passages teaching largely the same thing. Jeremiah 31:33, "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." This is referring to the greater positive effectiveness of the new covenant. It is quoted in Hebrews 8:8, "For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them

not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel," and so on.

A fundamental question here is what is the old covenant and, therefore, what is the new? The old covenant is not the covenant of works. It is the old administration of the covenant of grace. People were saved the same way in the Old Testament as in the New. Moses endured the reproach of Christ, Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day. Hebrews 11 has no meaning if there was a different way of salvation in the Old Testament to the New. We do not believe in chronological multi-faith. There is one way of salvation and every sinner who will be saved from the fall of Adam to the return of Christ will be saved by Jesus Christ and no one else. Anything less is dishonouring to the Saviour. There are not many paths to heaven, we know that, but there never were different paths to heaven either, one in the dispensation of conscience, one in the dispensation of the kingdom etc. Forget all that. Sinners have only ever been saved by Jesus Christ. The occupants of heaven will all have their robes made white in the blood of the Lamb.

The old covenant was the old administration of the one covenant of grace and that administration taught Israel to trust in the coming Saviour Jesus Christ. The prophecies spoke of Christ; the ordinances of the tabernacle and temple pointed to Christ. They could not take away sin but they pointed to Christ who could take away sin. The sin committed under it by believers was taken away, not by the blood of animals slain within that

administration, but by the blood of Christ yet to come. So Hebrews 9:15, "for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance." The sins committed by Old Testament believers under the old administration were taken away by the blood of Christ which was shed under the new administration. That is why the blood of Christ is called the blood of the new covenant, not because there was a different way of salvation in the Old Testament but because the blood that actually takes away sin was shed under the new administration. Believers under the old were saved by the blood shed under the new. The blood shed under the old administration was never intended to take away sin but to teach them concerning the Lamb who was to come and who would be able to take away sin.

Both administrations of the covenant taught the same Gospel but the blood that actually takes away sin was shed under the new administration of the covenant of grace. That is why Christ's blood is called the blood of the new covenant. The greater abundance of the Spirit given under the New Testament which Pentecost signalled, means that it will be more positively effective: "They shall all know me." Here is the question: all of whom? It is not all of the elect because that was always the case both under the old and under the new. God has always brought all of the elect to know him, so that is not the contrast. Is it simply speaking of a purer church? Is the

church in the New Testament purer than in the Old? Possibly so but that does not really answer the question. It is speaking of all Israel: that the greater efficacy of the covenant in the new administration, that greater communication of the Spirit of God, will include not only advance among the Gentiles, but the turning of the fullness of Israel. Hebrews was written to Hebrews, after all. So the greater abundance of the Spirit's power under the new covenant will be evident in the gathering of the Gentiles but also in the turning of Israel after the flesh.

But then the question remains: does this mean every one of them? No. "They shall no longer say every man to his neighbour, know the Lord." Did nobody know the Lord under the old covenant? Of course they did. What is Hebrews 11 all about? Abraham knew the Lord. So did Isaac. So did Jacob. So did Daniel. So did Gideon. So did David and so on. Just as "they will no longer say every man to his neighbour, know the Lord," must be taken generally, so likewise "they shall all know me," must be taken generally. It is a comparative difference stated in absolute terms and so when we come back to Romans 11, 'all Israel' means a comparative bulk on a scale commensurate with their present casting away. Just as the bulk of Israel are in unbelief, so the day will come when the bulk of Israel are brought to the knowledge of Christ. Our conclusion is, then, the Gospel will advance among the nations, the bulk of Israel will be converted to Christ and then greater riches of Gospel blessing will come to the Gentiles.

Although hopefully you can see the reasoning, I am very much aware that in hearing this, you are probably thinking, "Well, what about this passage? What about that? What about the other? How does it all square up? How does it fit together?" We cannot answer all the questions but I want to give some pointers very briefly.

1. We Have Been in the Last Days Since the Coming of Christ.

We frequently hear people say, "Do you think we are in the last days?" Of course we are in the last days. We have been in the last days for 2,000 years. Hebrews 1:1-2, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." 1 Peter 1:20, "Christ ... was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." 1 Corinthians 10:11, "These things ... are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." The apostle John said in the first century, "Little children, it is the last time," 1 John 2:18. "It **is** the last time." It will help clear a great deal of fog if we understand that the term 'the last days' is generally used in Scripture to cover the whole period of Christ's first coming until he returns in glory.

2. This View is Compatible with Looking unto the Day of God.

One objection that might occur to you is, if Gospel blessing among the Gentiles and then great Gospel ingathering of the Jews, and then greater blessing

among the Gentiles are still to happen, then that means that we cannot say that Christ could come at any time. You are right – we cannot. The Scriptures do not teach that every generation of Christians is obliged to believe that Christ could return at any moment. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." This is referring to the man of sin, the antichrist. Some of us are firmly of the conviction it refers to the papacy and so it already has taken place but that is not the point we are establishing here. The apostle is telling these Thessalonians there are things that have to happen before Christ's return is a possibility.

Then consider John 21:19, "This spake he," (that is Christ,) "signifying by what death he should glorify God." The Lord Jesus Christ told Peter he would die and indicated in what way he would die. The Apostle Peter himself refers to this in 2 Peter 1:12-14, "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me." He knew he was going to die. He knew that Christ would not

return before he died. But in chapter 3, verse 12, he says, "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." Peter knew he would not live to be actually present when Christ returned but he is still looking for the day of God because the ultimate goal of history and the believers' longing for the vindication of Christ is the last day.

So there is nothing in Scripture which indicates that every generation of Christians must believe that Christ may return at any time. We are to certainly watch against that day because when death comes, and that could come anytime, our final state is fixed, but there is nothing in Scripture that prohibits believing that Christ will not return until certain things happen. We believe there are glorious things yet to happen for the church even on earth.

3. Wars and Rumours of Wars are not the Sign of the End.

We have not time to look at this in any detail but in Matthew 24 when Christ speaks that there shall be wars and rumours of wars, and earthquakes and so on, he says the end is not yet. He is telling them what is not a sign of the end, not what is. There have always been wars, rumours of wars and earthquakes. When were there not wars and rumours of wars? How would that be a sign of the end? That is normal. Christ is saying that is not a sign of the end. He is also saying that the destruction of Jerusalem will not even be a sign of the end. When Christ

said that one stone of the temple would not stand against another in the city of Jerusalem and so on, the disciples asked, "When will this be and when will be the end of the world?" They thought they were asking one question but there were two: the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world; two different questions; two different events.

4. This View is Compatible with the Promises of God.

Psalm 60 speaks of the nations flowing to the Lord. Psalm 22, "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD." Psalm 67, "Then shall the earth yield her increase ... all the ends of the earth shall fear him." Psalm 86, "All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee." Psalm 102, "When the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD." Psalm 72, "Men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed ... let the whole earth be filled with his glory." Malachi 1:11, "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place shall be offered unto my name a pure offering."

Richard Cameron and the Covenanters knew they were not going to live to see this. They died in the belief that they would go to heaven but that the cause for which they suffered on earth would one day flourish, and as Renwick puts it, that these despised truths shall be made glorious in the earth and they shall.

Our duty is the same whatever our view of the future, is it not? But we need every encouragement that the word of God can give. Do not get your view of the future from the daily newspaper or the TV channels. They might tell you what is happening now but they will not tell you what is going to happen. Only God can do that and all that we need to know is in his word. This truth does affect the way we pray. The Larger Catechism Question 191, "What do we pray for in the second petition? In the second petition, (which is, *Thy kingdom come,*) acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the Gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with all gospel-officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate; that the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed, and made effectual to the converting of those that are yet in their sins, and the confirming, comforting, and building up of those that are already converted: that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of his second coming, and our reigning with him for ever: and that he would be pleased so to exercise the kingdom of his power in all the world, as may best conduce to these ends."

Let us pray like that. Let us bring great petitions to the living God. What we ask for concerning Christ's cause on earth will be governed by what we believe he has said about its future. If you believe it is downhill all the way,

you will not pray for the advance of the Gospel in all the earth. If you believe, as I think we should believe, that great Gospel blessing is yet promised, then we will pray, "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory." Amen.