

**Romans (3):  
Paul's affection for the church at Rome (1:8-15)**

**Introduction:**

Today is the third occasion that we have opened this Epistle to the Romans together. We have considered Paul's initial greeting, commonly referred to as the salutation to the epistle. It is an unusually long greeting, taking up the first 7 verses of the epistle.

Beginning with verse 8 we arrive at a new paragraph which continues through verse 15. One cannot say that it is a formal introduction to the epistle; it provides no statement of purpose for writing or introductory comments to the subject of his epistle. Actually these verses are a continuation of Paul's initial remarks. In Greek letters of the day, it was common to include in the greeting a word of thanksgiving as well as an expression of prayer.<sup>1</sup> This is what we have before us. And so, the initial "greeting" of the apostle to this church encompasses the first 15 verses of the epistle.

The words that Paul penned were personal in nature. Paul expressed his appreciation and affection for these Christians at Rome, although he had never personally met them. He stated his concern for them, even to the degree of continuously praying for them. He had long desired to be among them and minister the gospel to them. He knew that he could be of help to them, but also he acknowledged that he could be helped by them. But in addition, he felt obligated to them due to his apostolic office.

Let us read **Romans 1:8-15**.

<sup>8</sup>First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. <sup>9</sup>For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you <sup>10</sup>always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. <sup>11</sup>For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you-- <sup>12</sup>that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. <sup>13</sup>I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. <sup>14</sup>I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. <sup>15</sup>So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

**I. Paul's appreciation for the church at Rome (1:8-15)**

Paul begins to endear himself to this church at Rome, which he had never visited, by expressing his appreciation of their wide recognition as Christians. **Verse 8** reads, "*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.*" Paul thanked God for them. Why? For Paul recognized their faith was a result of the grace and power of God working among them. "From this we learn that faith is a gift of God" (John Calvin).<sup>2</sup> Their faith was due to God's grace, and so Paul thanked God for them. All persons of faith are of faith because of God's sovereign purpose and His work has been accomplished in them.

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<sup>1</sup> This was also true for letters drafted by pagans; the writers would express their prayers to their pagan gods and goddesses in the introduction of their letters.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 49.

God's work of grace in bringing salvation is *through Jesus Christ*. As God created all things through Jesus Christ, He also creates all faith through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Mediator of God's salvation to people in this fallen world, so Paul thanked God through Jesus Christ.

Paul thanked God "through Jesus Christ" in that he saw in the conversion of the people in Rome and the establishment of the church in Rome that the purposes of Jesus Christ were being realized. Moreover, he also insinuated that the church at Rome was a realization of his own apostolic desire and longing to see the gospel taken to the Gentile world.

Thus the thanksgiving expressed is not merely private praise for the spread of the gospel to Rome. Rather, it is as the apostle to the Gentiles that Paul utters thanks (Jervis 1991: 107). This is suggested by the prepositional phrase "through Jesus Christ"... The inclusion of "Jesus Christ" suggests that the apostolic authority of Paul is insinuated, for he gives thanks as an emissary of Jesus the Messiah.<sup>3</sup>

The faith of these Christians in this church in Rome was known in "*all the world*." We do not know with certainty who founded the church in the capital city of the Romans Empire. It is most likely that some of the Jews who were converted to Christ in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost included Jews from Rome. We read in Acts 2:1ff

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup>And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. <sup>5</sup>Now *there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven*. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup>And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, *and visitors from Rome*, <sup>11</sup>both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians--we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God. (Acts 2:1-11)

These Jews from Rome were probably converted to Christ and then returned to their home in Rome and then began a church. No apostle had visited the church, nevertheless, the faith of this church was known through the known world.

Paul seems to speak in terms of hyperbole, for indeed, did "all the world" hear of the Christian faith of the Christians at Rome? But perhaps Paul was signaling that when the gospel had reached and born fruit in Rome that the promises of God regarding the expansion of the kingdom had achieved a great milestone. Our Lord Jesus told His disciples in His Olivet Discourse that the fall of Jerusalem would take place when this event occurred:

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matt. 24:14)

As far as Paul was concerned, this had taken place, the faith was established in the seat of the empire and news of their faith had been spread to all the world.<sup>4</sup> He stated this elsewhere. In Colossians 1:3-6 we read:

<sup>3</sup>We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, <sup>4</sup>since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; <sup>5</sup>because of the hope which is laid

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The Lord Jesus and Paul used two different words for "world." Jesus spoke of the world using τῆ οἰκουμένη, that is, "the inhabited world", but Paul used the word, τῷ κόσμῳ, the *cosmos*, "the world."

up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, <sup>6</sup>which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth...”

Paul regarded the rapid and widely spread gospel of Jesus Christ and the establishment of churches throughout the Roman world to be the realization of the Scriptural promises to Israel. For example, we read in Isaiah 11 this prophecy of the establishment and expansion of the Messiah’s kingdom:

<sup>1</sup>There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,  
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.

This speaks of the coming royal descendant of David—Jesus Christ]

<sup>2</sup>The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,

This occurred at Jesus’ baptism, when the Holy Spirit came upon Him, empowering Him for His messianic mission.

The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The Spirit of counsel and might,  
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

<sup>3</sup>His delight is in the fear of the LORD,  
And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes,  
Nor decide by the hearing of His ears;  
<sup>4</sup>But with righteousness He shall judge the poor,  
And decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,  
And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.  
<sup>5</sup>Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins,  
And faithfulness the belt of His waist.

These next verses describe poetically that the curse of God is removed from those within the Messiah’s kingdom.

<sup>6</sup>“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,  
The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,  
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together;  
And a little child shall lead them.  
<sup>7</sup>The cow and the bear shall graze;  
Their young ones shall lie down together;  
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
<sup>8</sup>The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole,  
And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den.  
<sup>9</sup>***They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,  
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
As the waters cover the sea.***

In verse 9 “My holy mountain” refers to the kingdom of the Messiah. Its expansion is world-wide. And then in the following verse 10 of Isaiah 11 we read a prophesy of the inclusion of the Gentiles as citizens of the Messiah’s kingdom.

<sup>10</sup>“And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,  
Who shall stand as a banner to the people;  
For the Gentiles shall seek Him,  
And His resting place shall be glorious.”

And so, Paul saw that in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Son of David, who was crucified and raised and then enthroned as Lord in heaven, that the Old Testament promises of the glorious world-wide expansion of the revived Davidic Kingdom of Israel was being fulfilled in the days of the gospel church. Paul saw himself as an apostle to bring about the realization of God’s promises to Israel.

Now, we would be accused by most evangelicals of spiritualizing the promises of God to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, that we were not taking the prophecies of Isaiah literally, but rather that we were “spiritualizing” the passage, wrongly applying the promises of Israel to the New Testament church. But to show clearly that this is exactly how Paul viewed the Scriptures and the work of God in his world, we might turn over quickly to Romans 15. Here the apostle is exhorting the church to drop any divisions between Jewish believers and Gentile believers, a theme that he has advanced throughout his epistle in subtle and overt ways. But in his exhortation, Paul argues they should receive one another in Christ because God was fulfilling His purposes in them and through them, that they were citizens in the promised restored kingdom of the Messiah, the Son of David, whose kingdom now encompasses the world with the inclusion of the Gentiles.

<sup>7</sup>Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us,<sup>[b]</sup> to the glory of God. <sup>8</sup>Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* to the fathers, <sup>9</sup>and that the Gentiles might glorify God for *His* mercy, as it is written:

“For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles,  
And sing to Your name.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>10</sup>And again he says:

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>11</sup>And again:

“Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles!  
Laud Him, all you peoples!”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>12</sup>And again, Isaiah says:

***“There shall be a root of Jesse;  
And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles,  
In Him the Gentiles shall hope.”***<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> From Psalm 18:49

<sup>6</sup> From Deut. 32:43

<sup>7</sup> From Psalm 117:1

<sup>8</sup> Paul’s application of the prophecies of Isaiah and other Old Testament prophecies to this church age negates the commonly held belief in a future earthly, Jewish 1000 year millennium, and it substantiates the amillennial interpretation of prophecy that views this church age as the realization of the prophecies of the of the future kingdom of the Messiah. Paul’s use of Isaiah 11 shows that he understood that the kingdom of Jesus Christ in this church age is the realization of these Old Testament prophecies. Paul would have been agreement with Peter in what he had declared: “Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days” (Acts 3:24).

<sup>13</sup>Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

You can see that Paul used Isaiah 11:10 in Romans 15:12. Paul was convinced that the Kingdom of David had been reinstated and was being realized in the world-wide expansion of the gospel that brought Gentiles to faith. Paul saw the church at Rome and the fact that their faith was known “in all the world” as the fulfillment of what the prophets had foretold.

The next sentence in Romans 1, **verses 9 and 10**, begins with the word, “For.” Paul is further explaining further the nature of his Prayer on their behalf.

<sup>9</sup>For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you <sup>10</sup>always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

Paul calls upon God as his witness that he was speaking the truth of his heart to them. This is an example of a legitimate form of oath that a Christian may make before others. Our Confession of Faith describes what the Bible teaches regarding this:

1. A lawful oath is a part of religious worship, wherein the person swearing in truth, righteousness, and judgment, solemnly calleth God to witness what he sweareth, and to judge him according to the truth or falseness thereof.
2. The name of God only is that by which men ought to swear; and therein it is to be used, with all holy fear and reverence; therefore to swear vainly or rashly by that glorious and dreadful name, or to swear at all by any other thing, is sinful, and to be abhorred; yet as in matter of weight and moment, for confirmation of truth, and ending all strife, an oath is warranted by the word of God; so a lawful oath being imposed by lawful authority in such matters, ought to be taken.
3. Whosoever taketh an oath warranted by the Word of God, ought duly to consider the weightiness of so solemn an act, and therein to avouch nothing but what he knoweth to be truth; for that by rash, false, and vain oaths, the Lord is provoked, and for them this land mourns.

We see that Paul in calling forth God as his witness was a very serious matter for the apostle. He desired that his readers in Rome understand his sincerity, his honesty, and his compassion regarding them.

Paul wrote of his commitment to His God and His case. Paul declared that He *served* God. Paul saw his labor as unto His God. The word used for “serve” indicates this vertical aspect or emphasis in Paul’s thinking. Even as he was serving the churches, he saw himself as rendering spiritual service to his God.

His service was sincere and heart-felt. When he wrote, “For God is my witness, whom I serve *with my spirit*”, he was describing his total commitment to his ministerial work.

The sphere of his service was the gospel. “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit *in the gospel*...” Paul’s use of the word, gospel, shows that it should not be viewed in a reductionist way as referring only to an initial presentation of the way of salvation to sinners. The word, “gospel”, describes the entire work of the ministry. Paul made it clear that the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ.

Paul declared that he prayed regularly and faithfully for the church at Rome. He wrote, “without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers.” The ministry of the gospel requires great attention and effort to the matter of prayer. “without ceasing” does not mean that he prayed for the church at Rome continuously and without interruption. Rather, Paul declared that he prayed for them “at frequent and regular intervals.”<sup>9</sup>

Paul prayed repeatedly that God would enable him to visit the church at Rome in his service as an apostle. This is stated in **verse 10**: “*asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.*” Paul had prayed much that he would be able to travel to Rome; now he was praying that

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<sup>9</sup> O’Brien quoted in Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1996), p. 59.

God would “at last” enable him to succeed in his desires and efforts. God does not always answer our prayers as we have offered them, although we have offered them frequently and over an extended period of time. But that is no reason to lay off praying toward that end. We are to be fervent and persevering in our praying, and not be discouraged with God’s previous refusal to grant our requests.

The apostle then tells the church why he desired to minister among them. **Verses 11 and 12** reads, **“For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you-- <sup>12</sup>that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.”** Actually Paul had several motivations for wanting to travel to Rome. He desired first to bring them benefit by imparting to them a spiritual gift (v. 11), second, to encourage them through his faith (v. 12), third, to gain fruit among them in Rome (v. 13), and fourth, to preach the gospel at Rome (v. 15).

What did Paul mean by imparting “some spiritual gift”? There are a number of proposals by commentators. But perhaps the best understanding is that Paul desired to be able to bring some spiritual benefit, an insight or ability, to the church at Rome through his apostolic ministry among them. Some believe that the “gift” that Paul wanted to impart to the church was the knowledge of the one body comprised of both Jews and Gentiles who believe on Jesus Christ.

..the gift mentioned here relates directly to the purpose of the Roman letter. The Roman Christians needed to understand the Pauline gospel, which proclaims the unity of the Jews and Gentiles in Christ. By grasping the union of Jews and Gentiles in Christ the Roman community would dissolve the divisions plaguing them. Paul hopes that by imparting his understanding of the gospel to them they will be strengthened for the cause of gospel and support him in his mission to Spain. The spiritual gift to be imparted, therefore, must be understood as an apostolic gift. As the apostle to the Gentiles Paul desires the Romans to comprehend his gospel to the Gentiles and to be strengthened by it.<sup>10</sup>

But after Paul expressed his desire to impart benefit to the church at Rome, he seems to pull back a bit and express his desire for mutual benefit for him and them in his coming to minister the gospel among them. Again, we read in **verses 11 and 12**, **“For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you-- <sup>12</sup>that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.”** This may be a display of Paul’s “diplomatic” side in the manner that he commends himself to this church. For although Paul could have simply asserted his apostolic authority over the church at Rome, he sought to gain influence with them by humble assertions of his desire to help them. But he was not to proud to see that he could receive benefit from them also.

Paul expressed to them that he had desired before to travel to see them and he had made efforts to do so, but had been hindered. **Verse 13a** reads, **“I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented)...”** Perhaps it was due to the work load of his apostolic ministry in the east that he could not travel to Rome beforehand. Or perhaps Paul was alluding to God preventing him from traveling to Rome through His providence.

Paul then expressed the purpose for which he had attempted to come to them. He wanted to come to among them **“in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles”** (v. 13b). The “harvest” is Paul’s desire to have positive results due to his apostolic ministry among them. He desired that he might bring forth new believers through preaching the gospel in Rome. He also desired to strengthen the faith of the church at Rome through his instruction to them.

When Paul wrote of the church at Rome in these terms: **“among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles”**, he was suggesting that he saw the church at Rome as comprised mostly of Gentiles. He was also suggesting that he viewed the church at Rome to be the realization of God’s purposes to bring forth His kingdom to the nations.

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<sup>10</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, p. 54.

In **verse 14** Paul described his sense of God’s calling upon his life to serve the Gentiles for Jesus Christ. **“I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.”** “Greeks” is a reference to Gentiles who spoke Greek and whose culture was largely Hellenistic (Greek). “Barbarians” would refer to those Gentiles who did not speak Greek and did not have the Empire-wide Greek culture. The word, “barbarians”, is what is called a **onomatopoeic** word, which is a word that sounds like what it means. The sound of the word, βαρβάρους, which is mimicking the incomprehensible gibberish of the barbarians. Perhaps the reference to “wise and unwise” is another way of saying “Greek and barbarian.”

And then **verse 15** concludes this section of Paul’s opening greeting. Paul wrote, **“So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome”** (1:15). The gospel is not simply an introductory message to the Christian faith, and effort to evangelize the lost. The gospel is to be preached to the church in order to see it built up in the faith. The gospel is the good news of salvation and new life in Jesus Christ. “The gospel in Paul includes not simply an initial preaching mission but the full sequence of activities resulting in settled churches.”<sup>11</sup>

Many have mistakenly reduced the content of the gospel more narrowly than it is described in the Scriptures. Some have reduced the gospel to the message of justification by God’s grace through faith alone. Now that is a glorious truth and is foundational to the gospel, but it is not the entire gospel. The gospel is the good news message that God is bringing to pass His promise of salvation to the world through His Son Jesus Christ. The gospel includes the promise of forgiveness of sins and exoneration on the Day of Judgment (justification). But the gospel also speaks of salvation from the alienating and defiling effects of sin in the believer’s life (sanctification). And furthermore, the gospel looks forward to its full realization when all of God’s people are delivered from the presence of sin (glorification). But in addition, the gospel message also includes the announcement of the realization of God’s promises in Jesus Christ of a world-wide kingdom, which was promised in the Old Testament Scriptures; in other words, the gospel of the kingdom.

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Excursus

## **Isaiah 11, 12: Future or Fulfilled?**

by Pastor Lars Larson, Ph.D.

When working through the prophecy of Isaiah, one must deal with the nature of Old Testament prophecy and how it is to be understood. Isaiah 11 and 12 is only one example that brings into relief this issue of hermeneutics--the science of interpretation. When reading various commentaries and notes in the margins of study Bibles, we are faced with various opinions as to how this passage should be understood. Was it fulfilled in Isaiah’s day when the destruction of Assyria occurred? Was it fulfilled in the first century when Christ came to bring salvation? Or, will it yet be fulfilled prior or subsequent to the second coming of Christ; i.e. is Isaiah 11 prophetic of a regathering and salvation of national Israel at the end of the age?

After having worked through the passage on several occasions and having read the arguments of the various positions, I have been persuaded of the following: the prophecy of Isaiah 11 and 12 when first given by Isaiah was perceived as a promise of restoration of the kingdom of Israel which would occur upon the fall of Assyria, that on that occasion, God would bring a remnant of His dispersed people back to the land under the kingship of a Son of David, who would restore the kingdom to its former glory as experienced in the days of David and Solomon. This was anticipated to occur immediately under Hezekiah’s reign who was preserved as king through Jerusalem’s siege by Assyria; however, when the glory of Hezekiah’s kingdom failed to assume the character and proportions which the prophecy set forth, the passage came to be viewed

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<sup>11</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 63.

increasingly as a prophesy of the coming Messiah's reign. This is how the Apostle Paul viewed the passage and interpreted it in Romans 15:12. The Lord Jesus came and established His reign of peace, bringing salvation to a remnant of Jews, afterwards "the nations" (Gentiles) also "resorted to the root of Jesse," and have found "His resting place to be glorious" (Isa. 11:10).

But what of those who hold that this passage was not fulfilled in history but is being realized even now by the present gathering of Jews to Palestine who will yet come to faith in Christ? One commentary that takes this position is the Wycliffe Bible Commentary (1962 ed.) edited by Charles Pfeiffer and Everett Harrison. These editors are a good example of commentators who view this passage of Isaiah exclusively as prophetic of a yet future condition (or of the situation currently underway of Jews returning to the land); that is, it speaks of the conditions just prior and subsequent to the second coming of Christ. There are some major problems with this position (as there seem to be problems with every position). As I see it, these problems are four in number:

1. To speak of Isaiah 11 as referring only to the time prior to, and subsequent to, the establishment of the future Messianic kingdom, renders the literary context of Isaiah 10-12 muddled. Isaiah had been prophesying of God's judgment on Judah because of its reliance on Assyria rather than placing faith in God in dealing with the intimidation of the Israel-Syrian alliance that threatened its existence. Because of their sin, God was bringing Assyria down to defeat the alliance, but further, to punish Judah for having forsaken God. Yet Isaiah was making it clear to Judah that Assyria was but an instrument in the hands of God to purge His people, not to annihilate them. Therefore, they need not fear Assyria, for after God finished using it as an instrument, He would destroy it. Then, God would gather again His people who had been scattered by this foe and bring them into the land at which time they would encounter the salvation of the Messiah, Who would usher in His Kingdom, a kingdom characterized by justice and peace and populated by a holy and purified people.

2. Akin to this, to speak of Isaiah 11 as referring only to the time prior to, and subsequent to, the establishment of the future Messianic kingdom, renders the historical context indistinguishable. If this is speaking about a yet future occurrence, then what word was Isaiah giving to this people who were about to encounter the wrath of Assyria? And yet that this is the historical situation seems clear from the preceding sections, particularly Isaiah 10:5-19,24-34. Jews returning from captivity under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah upon reading this word could only have gleaned false assurance of their condition and a false hope of a soon appearing salvation, for this salvation was only for Jews of a "second" return 2600 plus years later.

But that Isaiah was speaking of a basis of "hope" for the Jews of that day seems to fit the context. The surviving Jews of Assyria's onslaught could be assured that Assyria would not bring them to a complete end (10:12,20-23). It would seem in chapter 11 he is speaking in detail of the Messiah, who would emerge from what appeared to be a destroyed nation after Assyria's invasion, to effect salvation for His people--in the desolate scene of a clear cut forest in which there appears to be no life and no hope, a shoot emerges, a descendant of David, who would bring restoration to the remnant that clings to Him.

Furthermore, note that the "highway" which is made for the return of the remnant is "from Assyria" (11:16); although the return of the remnant would come from many nations (11:11), they principally come from Assyria (or its environs). Those who hold that this is a future return have to explain not only why the "first" return is not mentioned in this context when it would be fitting to do so, but how it is that in the yet future return it seems that a majority of Jews will be returning from Assyria (Iraq and Iran?). Although there are some Jews living in this area today, if they did return, do they comprise a sufficient number of returning Jews to reflect the emphasis of this verse?

3. To speak of Isaiah 11 as referring only to the time prior to, and subsequent to, the establishment of the future Messianic kingdom, ignores Paul's understanding and use of this passage. Isaiah 11:10 speaks of Gentiles coming to participate in the kingdom of the "root of Jesse." The editors of the Wycliffe commentary describe a "Jewish-Gentile church" who will "rally to the standard of the cross" "even in the latter days." But Paul used this verse in the context of Romans 15:7-13 to show that the Scriptures had prophesied of Gentile conversions in this church age. Why the editors of Wycliffe commentary did not



mention Paul's use of the verse and its implications for interpretation of the passage is puzzling. I can only assume that it would have posed a discrepancy to their interpretation of the passage.

4. This brings us to the final major problem with this interpretation. To speak of Isaiah 11 (and passages like this) as referring only to the time prior to, and subsequent to, the establishment of the future messianic kingdom, reflects the tendency (1) to suggest this present age was not the subject of much prophecy in the OT and (2) to present the concept of the messianic kingdom of Christ only in future terms, ignoring or discounting the great emphasis of the NT that Christ established His kingdom, that it is spiritual in nature, and that Christians, both Jew and Gentile, are currently citizens of that kingdom. But that the OT did prophesy of this age is attested clearly in the NT. In Acts 3:18-24, the words of Peter are recorded:

“But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of **all the prophets**, that His Christ should suffer, **He has thus fulfilled**. Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away . . . And likewise, **all the prophets** who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also **announced these days.**”

We see, therefore, that when speaking in terms of Christ's kingdom, there seems to always be the tension between that which has been realized and that which is yet to be revealed. His kingdom has been established--He is enthroned; He is reigning--and yet, His kingdom will yet be revealed. The tendency of some is to speak only in terms of the kingdom's present existence (realized eschatology), while others speak only in terms of a future kingdom (future eschatology).

Now concerning the issue of the “second time” in which the Lord will recover Israel (Isa. 11:11). The Wycliffe editors wrote that this restoration “clearly excludes reference to the return under Zerubbabel in 537 B.C.” I assume they wrote this because the occasion of this “second” gathering would come from many nations, not just the region of Assyria. I still believe that the prophecy is not of an end time gathering, but rather a gathering of the Jewish survivors of God's chastening work, which occurred at that time in history. If Isaiah is speaking about a “second” gathering at the end of this age, where is the description of the “first” gathering after Assyria's destruction? Again, as mentioned above, the context calls for an explanation and a basis of hope for these Jewish people who were about to experience Assyria's wrath? Would they have understood the “second” gathering as off in the distant future? Would it have given them much cause for hope? No, the context seems to dictate that God was going to gather them and restore them to Himself in a manner as grand as when He first gathered them from Egypt and brought them into the land. That this is the context seems clear from 11:16, “There will be a highway from Assyria. . . just as there was for Israel in the day that they came up out of the land of Egypt.” This language was used to engender hope and faith in a new start, or a new beginning in their relationship with God after God purged them of their sin and rebellion. The first gathering was from Egypt; the second gathering from Assyria will be like it in power and glory. And, yes, it will entail even a greater salvation, salvation from sin and enjoyment of a kingdom characterized by peace and righteousness.

Granted, Zerubbabel did not lead a return of Jews from all lands, but is that what the text is saying? The editors set up a straw man and then shot him down. The text says that a remnant of Jews would be brought to experience the salvation that the Messiah would bring. It is not a gathering to the land directly as much as it is a gathering to HIM that is in view (cf. Isa. 11:10). And I would suggest that this is exactly what occurred historically. By the time of Christ, Jews were “living in Jerusalem” who were from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). The Jews in Isaiah's day who were under the threat of Assyria could not have envisioned this. Isaiah 11:11 speaks of people from “Assyria.” Luke identifies “men of Mesopotamia” as present. Isaiah describes men of “Egypt”, as does Luke. Isaiah mentions “Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.” Luke identifies corresponding places of “Parthians, Elamites, Pontus, and Asia, etc.” Although I have not checked out completely how the two lists correspond, they both seem to be inclusive of Jews from everywhere. And did they come to HIM? Yes, 5,000 of these Jews came to Christ on that day and thousands “returned” to Him at a later occasion. Is this spiritualizing? I don't think so; rather, it is taking Isaiah literally. Furthermore, Isaiah spoke about “the nations” (i.e. Gentiles) resorting

to “the root of Jesse” (Isaiah 11:10,12). This, too, began to occur in the early days of the church age, again, to which Paul attested and argued that Isaiah prophesied would come to pass (Rom. 15:12).

Admittedly, Isaiah 11:14 is a difficult verse (as I mentioned, all positions seem to have their problems). Yet even the editors of the Wycliffe Commentary render this in somewhat “spiritual” terms: “God’s people, moreover, will triumph over all the not-yet-converted nations surrounding them.” I see the language of vs. 14,15 as Isaiah’s description in terms understandable to his people that depict the triumph of the messianic kingdom, which did occur, and yet will occur.

In conclusion, does the Bible speak about a yet future gathering of Jews to Christ? I believe it does in a number of places--e.g. Luke 21, Romans 11. But I believe much of what is relegated as yet future by many commentators has already been fulfilled and failure to recognize this has resulted in much fanciful speculation about end-time events and in a stripping of much faith-instilling lessons from God’s Word.