

97-01-19a

As we prepare to worship the Lord this morning, let's take a moment to concentrate on the message that God has communicated to us as far as His presence, His essence, His plan, and the status that we enjoy as believers in Jesus Christ, as members of the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, with a great opportunity in the present and a wonderful hope for the future. And as we gather and concentrate our full attention on God this morning, let's go to the Lord in prayer and seek the ministry of God the Holy Spirit as we worship, shall we pray? Father, we thank you as always for the many expressions of your grace that we enjoy. Some of them we are not even aware of as you protect us from danger and guide us and smooth our path through life.

We thank you for the circumstances that you bring our way that put pressure on us and place stress on us, the difficulties and the sufferings that we experience because we know that these are carefully planned and implemented as a part of your purpose for us to teach us, to give us the occasion to exercise faith and to grow in grace and the knowledge of our Savior Jesus Christ. We pray this morning as we focus our attention on your word that God the Holy Spirit will minister these things to our hearts, will give us perception and understanding, help us to integrate these truths with the things that we have stored up as treasures in our soul and that as a result, we will be thoroughly equipped for every good work. We will have perception and understanding as we make our decisions and set our priorities in the days to come and that both in our worship now and in our lives in these days that follow, we will walk the worthy walk and lead a life that glorifies our Savior Jesus Christ.

We ask it in his name, amen. We have many of our number who are away for various reasons today and so we will move directly to our scripture reading for this morning which comes from the book of Micah, Micah chapter three. Our subject this morning, we're continuing a study we began last week and the title of our study this morning might be if I wanted to do some nice seminary style alliteration, blinded eyes and broken branches and with that in mind, let's look at what God communicates to Israel through the prophet Micah in chapter three of that prophetic book.

Micah three begins, and I said, hear now, O heads of Jacob and you rulers of the house of Israel, is it not for you to know justice? You who hate good and love evil, who strip the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones, who also eat the flesh of my people, flay their skin from them, break their bones and chop them in pieces like meat for the pot or flesh for the cauldron, then they will cry to the Lord, but he will not hear them. He will even hide his face from them at that time because they have been evil in their deeds. Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who make my people stray, who chant peace while they chew with their teeth and who prepare war against him, who puts nothing into their mouths.

Therefore you shall have night without vision and you shall have darkness without divination. The sun shall go down on the prophets and the day shall be dark for them. So the seers shall be ashamed and the diviners abashed.

Indeed, they shall all cover their lips for there is no answer from God. The first portion of this chapter details the discipline, a portion of the discipline that comes upon the nation of Israel, which represents believers as a result of their repeated disobedience, their repeated and ongoing lack of faith, who love evil and hate the good, who disregard the commandments of the Lord, who disregard the prophetic message and the prophetic word. And it's interesting specifically that one part of this discipline, in addition to economic disaster and captivity and all of the other things that befell Israel, one of the specific parts of this discipline is that God cuts off revelation.

He cuts off the communication of the word and he disables the ability of the people of Israel to understand the word. They are blinded. The eyes of their hearts are darkened.

Their hearts are hardened. It's very important for us, as we saw last week and will continue to see this morning, what the sequence of cause and effect is in this process. Does scripture teach us that God comes down and in his sovereign, inscrutable, divine will marks certain individuals for perception and understanding and gives them the ability to express faith and to have perception into the things of God? And is it true that he comes down in his sovereign, inscrutable, divine will and hardens and blinds others in the human race so that they cannot exercise faith, they cannot understand the word of God and have no ability to respond or turn or please God through their decision to place their faith in him? Is that the sequence that scripture presents? As we saw last time in looking at Deuteronomy chapter 29, the repeated pattern in Israel as they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years of failing to trust God, failing to appreciate what God had done, failing to appreciate his daily provisions of manna and water and instruction in his plan and so forth, that as a result of those things, Moses tells them that God had not given them a heart to understand, eyes to see or ears to hear right down to the present day.

And he places before them the word which is near them in their hearts and in their mouth. And he says, if you respond to this, God will give you perception. And we're summarizing two chapters there of Deuteronomy 29 and 30.

But he says, he tells them, it's up to you. If you respond to this word that I have placed before you, God is going to give you spiritual and material prosperity. But if you continue in the pattern that you have exhibited up to this point, you will continue to have a hardened heart, blinded eyes and deaf ears to these things.

The principle in the New Testament is summed up in a single phrase that Jesus uttered in his teaching. Do not cast your pearls before swine. And those pearls represent the valuable treasure of the truth of God.

And in the same way that Jesus instructed his disciples not to put the truth in the path of those that had no appreciation for it, God himself follows that principle in not placing the clear, unrestricted view of his plan and his person and his truth before people that disregard and have no appreciation for it. God does not cast pearls before swine. And even as believers, if we exhibit

or perpetuate a pattern of disobedience, faithlessness, apathy, disregard for the things of God, our ability to comprehend those things can go away.

And specifically in our case, this is related to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which we have begun studying on Friday nights. And we began this past Friday with the study of the Holy Spirit's ministries in the age of Israel. And we're going to see that those same ministries continue in the age of the church with slightly different qualifications, slightly different parameters, but those functions continue in this age.

And one of those functions is enabling perception of spiritual things. The carnal mind cannot understand the things of the spirit. They require the spirit to be discerned.

And who was it that enabled the prophets and the seers and the diviners in Israel? Who was it that gave them the ability to know, to understand and to communicate the word of God? It's the same power that enables that process in our age. It's God, the Holy Spirit. No prophet in Israel functioned apart from the ministry of the spirit.

We saw some passages on Friday night where the prophets would speak and say, in fact, David himself, who had a prophetic function in Israel, said, the spirit was upon me when I uttered these words over in Psalm, I believe it was 125. And so here in Micah chapter three, what do we see? Because of these who are required to know justice and who do not, who love evil and hate the good, who abuse the people they are supposed to be ministering to, who take advantage of them, who strip their skin and their flesh and chew them up like meat in the pot, who aggrandize themselves at the expense of the people that they are supposed to be building up and edifying, God says, because of this attitude in Israel, I am going to put night and darkness on you. You will not have access to the word.

You will not be able to perceive the sun will go down on your prophets. The day will be dark. The seers shall be embarrassed and the diviners abashed.

They will have to cover their lips because there's no communication from God. The word of God, we tend to take for granted. We think there are millions of Bibles in print.

It's an open book. We all have the ministry of the spirit. We have the presence of the spirit as a result of our salvation.

Therefore, at any time that I feel like it, I can turn and be nourished up and built up in the word. But when you look at Israel, a hard heart, a negative attitude, disobedience, apathy, faithlessness, God would not only put circumstantial discipline and discipline in time and in circumstance on Israel, but he removed his word and removed the communication of his word in the land and would specify a period of time when there would be no communication from God, nor would God listen and hear prayer from those people. Now, why is that? Why would God turn a deaf ear to prayer? He says in verse four here, they will cry to the Lord.

He will not hear them. He will hide his face from them at that time. It's the same thing that we do as parents, isn't it? If we instruct our children to obey in a certain area and they disregard and disobey and repeat that and establish a pattern of that, we may send them, a lot of parents have a thing they call quiet time or the corner or whatever it is.

You send the child off and you say, you sit there for an hour and that child may turn around and say, but mom, I'm thirstier, but mom, I'll do better next time. I won't do this again. I'd really like to go outside and play or I'd like to watch a movie or something now.

And we say, no, I'm not going to listen to you until this hour of discipline is up and you're not going to get up and get a drink and you're not going to go play and you're not going to do any of the things that you want to do. I'm not going to restore you to normal function and normal privilege in the household until this period of discipline is up. Communicating with God and receiving communication from God is a privilege, not a right.

And in times of discipline, God will withdraw those privileges and he will not communicate to us and he will not hear us. We have no right to the ear of God. It is a grace privilege that comes to us because God has granted it.

And if we disregard it and ignore it and assign no importance to it, God will remove it and God will remove it for a period of time. And we may decide, well, now I want that privilege and I would like to hear from God and I would like to speak to God. But because of the pattern we have established, part of that discipline is that discipline has to run its course and we cannot simply turn at the first signs of pain.

When parents who understand child training realize that it's time for a spanking, the child has already gone into great repentance and a desire to please and to obey long before the first swat is ever delivered. But we don't say, well, now I see that you've had a change of mind and that you're very sorry. And so, well, we'll just forego the spanking.

Even though their mind has already changed, we still implement the spanking and we don't stop until the specified number of spanks have been delivered. And why is that? It is not enough in some cases to see the signs of remorse and regret that a spanking is coming. The spanking has to be delivered so that the next time an occasion for disobedience arises, the person isn't going to say, oh, well, if I get caught at this and my parents come after me, I'll just express remorse and regret it and there will be no consequence.

There must be a consequence to reinforce the motivation to obey and to not disregard and rebel against the authority of the parents. And so God does this and it's a pattern we see time and again in Israel and especially in the prophets, the books of the prophets. God says, I am going to put this discipline on you.

I will not hear your prayers. I will not listen to you, nor will I speak to you until this period of

discipline, which you have earned and brought upon yourself by your continued apathy and continued disobedience after months and years of warnings and rebukes and exhortations to turn and repent from the prophets. In the face of all of this, for years and years, Israel disregarded.

All day long, God says, I have held up my hands to a disobedient and stiff-necked people. And after all of those warnings and all of those rebukes, there's been no turning. So now God is going to put the pain on, the discipline.

And he says, during this period of pain, don't even waste your time. I'm darkening the light. The seers will not know the answers.

The diviners and the prophets are going to have nothing to say. They're going to be embarrassed and cover their lips, for there is no answer from God. He's not going to listen and he's not going to speak.

Now, that's important, and I've emphasized it in this scripture reading this morning, because that is what is in view in Romans chapter 9, 10, and 11, when Paul addresses the question, what about Israel? Has God cast off his people whom he foreknew? Is this a permanent period of discipline and God will never again turn his ear to Israel, never again communicate to Israel, never again fulfill the promises and the covenants that he made to Israel? What is their status? What is going on with Israel? We're happy that the Gentiles have been granted access to the plan of God and the purpose of God and have the ability to be declared righteous by faith, and that's a wonderful thing. But what about the previous program? What about Israel? That's what he's answering in Romans 9, 10, and 11. And these principles, these Old Testament teachings still hold true.

The principle is still there. And so as we resume in chapter 11, I say then, has God cast away his people? Certainly not. I also am an Israelite of the seed of Abraham of the tribe of Benjamin.

God has not cast away his people whom he foreknew. Now, we have covered this concept of foreknowledge back in Romans chapter 8, haven't we? Starting in Romans 8, 27, he who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

For whom he foreknew, he predestinated to be conformed to the image of his son so that he, Christ, might be the firstborn among many brethren. And we saw at this time that in the context of Romans, which is being addressed to believers, that is contrasting righteousness by faith versus the vain search for righteousness by works, that in this age, God designated those who come to faith in Christ and those who pursue righteousness by faith after their salvation, God predestinated them to conformity to the image of Christ. There were many believers in the Old Testament, but none of them were predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ.

They have a different destiny. They have a different predestinated plan. The Old Testament talks about God choosing Israel out from among all the nations in eternity past to be a peculiar people, to be a kingdom of priests to him and to fulfill specific functions.

But one part of our destiny that is unique is conformity to the image of Christ. That's not a part of the Old Testament saint package. But in the same way that God foreknew Israelites, he foreknew, foreknows or foreknew those of us who would come to faith in Christ and specifically those who would pursue the plan of God after salvation.

And this category is designated as those who love God, those who are the called according to his purpose. Everyone is called, but few are chosen, the New Testament tells us. And why is that? Because those who are the called are those who respond to the call, those who are sons indeed, those who love God and recognize their calling and pursue it.

And they are indeed the called. And we've gone through this on our study of Romans 9. And in verse 29 of, I'm sorry, of Romans 8. And in Romans 8, 29, it tells us whom he foreknew he predestinated to be conformed to the image of his son. That he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

There are many people who come to Christ and accept the offer of salvation that God has made through his redeeming work on the cross. How many of those believers are conformed to the image of Christ? Certainly in this life, the majority of us are not. The majority of us as believers are on the wide road going through the broad gate that leads to ruin.

There is a remnant or a subset of the believing world in this age that is in this category of being foreknown and conformed to the image of Christ in the same way that in the Old Testament days you had the nation of Israel, which represented believers, and you have a subset which constitutes the remnant. The obedient, the faithful, the 7,000 that have not bowed the knee to Baal. And it's interesting, I think in an upcoming study, we're going to take a look at Old Testament Israel.

I've come across a rather significant principle about the nation of Israel that we will explore. And I will tell you what it is now and substantiate it from Scripture in the future. But in the same way, we know that God is omniscient.

We know that he has foreknowledge. And we also know, especially from our studies in Romans, that the fact that God knows something ahead of time doesn't mean that he is determining it ahead of time or that he bears any responsibility for it. God knew that Satan would fall, but God did not cause Satan to fall.

And the fact that God knew that Satan was going to fall, that knowledge was not a cause for his fall. But God being omniscient knows all things. He knows the end from the beginning.

And God knows what any free agent in the universe is going to choose ahead of time. And God can make his plans and weave his plan together based on those free will decisions without himself bearing any responsibility or having any causative part in those decisions. And that's a fact of Scripture.

For example, God knew the nature of the apostle Paul's mind and heart. He knew that he would be extremely positive, extremely receptive, and have an aggressive pursuing attitude toward the things of God. God did not cause that.

God did not bring it about, but God knew it ahead of time. And God positioned the apostle Paul, he could have had him be born anywhere at any time in human history, but he positioned him to be born in Tarsus near the time of the birth of Christ and had him grow up with the opportunities to become a Pharisee and the opportunities that he had to live his life and to go forward and be at the right place at the right time with his attitude to be an apostle, specifically the apostle to the Gentiles and perhaps the greatest of the apostles. God did not cause him to be positive, but God took advantage or wove his positive volition into his plan and used it to accomplish his purpose.

God also uses the negative volition of people without causing it or bearing a responsibility. Our great example is the Pharaoh in Egypt. God knew he would be negative and be a rejecter and would, in the face of supernatural manifestations of God's presence and power, still hate him and reject him.

So God positioned him in history to be in the royal line of Egypt and to be the Pharaoh at the time of God's deliverance of Israel to demonstrate his power and to make his name known. God played against the negative volition of Pharaoh and by extension, the entire nation of Egypt that oppressed the Israelites. God used that as an occasion to demonstrate his power and his deliverance of Israel.

Now, I say all of that to say that God knows each of us. God knows every member of the human race and in eternity past knew as he planned the creation and the imputation of life to our souls what we would choose. And God is free to position us in history anywhere that he wants.

I will submit to you now and will demonstrate from scripture to you in the future that God in the Old Testament age organized those who were going to be positive to him and had them all be born in the nation of Israel. God, if you notice, there is a singular lack of exhortation to evangelism in the Old Testament. What if there was a Hittite or an Amorite or an Egyptian somewhere down in the south of Egypt near the source of the Nile that had a curiosity about God and would be positive and come to a saving faith? How would he get the word? God alleviated that problem by organizing all of those that he knew ahead of time would be positive and simply arranging so that their birth and their life would take place within the confines of the nation of Israel.

And the reason the nation of Israel represents believers in the Old Testament is that's where nearly all of the believers were. And there were occasionally exceptions such as Rahab and Naaman the Syrian and Balaam the prophet and so forth. But even those came into some contact with the nation of Israel at some point because God's provision for believers was in the physical sense directed to the nation of Israel.

That was the source of the word. That was the source of provision and protection. That was the place of worship.

That was the place of function. That was the place of the expression of the believing life. Believers in Old Testament days from Moses forward came under the Mosaic law and that was the provision that God made.

And so God simply positioned those people who were expressors of saving faith in that nation. And that nation of Israel is almost exclusively believers. And that enabled God to use the nation as an example.

They are believers. If you will notice, all of the calls of the prophets, all of the exhortations in the law, the writings and the prophets never exhort them to come to saving faith in God. It never talks about the fact that they will go to Sheol never to return or that they will go to the lake of fire if they don't believe in God.

We should find that extraordinary. That should be singular and exceptional in our minds that there's no call to saving faith in the Old Testament. Now, there are lots of calls to repent and to turn and to seek God and so forth.

But if you look at the context, every single one of them that I have examined thus far always is surrounded by calls for obedience, calls for a return to God and the things of God. It never says, recognize God for who he is and express faith in him so that you will be delivered from the lake of fire. I find that extraordinary.

Why is that? Why is it that evangelism seems to be so different in this age than it was in the previous age? The reason is, people that God foreknew as expressors of saving faith in God and having the faith that's talked about in Hebrews 11, 6, who come to God believing that he is and that he rewards those who seek him, were in the nation. And at an early age in their households, understood God, accepted God, expressed that saving faith. It was part of being an Israelite.

And in one sense, it's true what the apostle Paul says that all Israel will be saved. All Israel is saved. That's the definition of Israel.

They are the saved. And God organized those positive souls into a nation and dealt with them as a nation. He had them conveniently all located in one place, gave them their provision, their word, and we'll see the scriptures that support this.

It's amazing. You can go back and read scriptures we've read dozens of times and suddenly it sticks out that God foreknew and called Israel his son and put the positive people of the Old Testament days in the nation of Israel, in the godly line. I say all of that to say this.

The call that the prophets issued to Israel is not a call to salvation. It is a call to change of mind for obedience. It is a call to change of mind for faith, to be declared righteous by faith, to not engage in empty works.

There is no issue of salvation in the eternal sense of salvation, deliverance from the lake of fire. There is a call to deliverance from discipline, deliverance from powerlessness, deliverance from uselessness, deliverance from the negative aspects of being faithless and disobedient and apathetic. There needs to be deliverance out of that.

Israel needs to be delivered out of the false belief that righteousness comes by works. It's a useless, pointless life that results in nothing but misery and discipline from God because they are the saved and they have been called to that. They've been called to it by the law and the prophets and the writings.

And when they disregard that, they go straight to ruin, to apolia as we studied it. Why is that important? Because when Paul comes back to the subject of Israel here in Romans 9, 10 and 11, and he says that he grieves over Israel, to them pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, the promises. They are sprung from the patriarchs and from them springs the Messiah.

And he grieves over them. And he says, it is not as though the word of God has taken no effect for they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham. But in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

And what he's talking about here is not salvation and that well, you've got big Israel but only a portion of them are saved. What he's saying is, you've got the nation of Israel who are the saved but only a portion of them are the heirs. Only a portion of them are children indeed.

Only a portion of them, a remnant of them, a fraction of them are fulfilling their calling to exhibit the righteousness that comes from faith, to be declared righteous by faith, to receive those things that God has for those who respond to the call after their salvation. And that's what he has been talking about all along. And when he comes down to chapter 10 and says, brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be delivered.

This is not salvation from the lake of fire deliverance. This is deliverance from the present evil age, deliverance from the false belief that righteousness comes by works, that righteousness comes by keeping the feasts and being circumcised. And that simply being an Israelite and being saved is enough.

That was the rampant belief in Israel. And isn't it interesting, that is the rampant belief today in Christianity. Why is it that we focus almost exclusively on evangelism and very little on true discipleship and righteousness by faith? We have things called discipleship, but it's basically trying to train people up to be evangelists so that they can go and recruit others and in some sense to be moral.

But in Christianity today, it is widely assumed that coming to Christ and accepting Christ as Savior, that qualifies us for the inheritance of the saints in light. That qualifies us to rule and reign with Christ. It qualifies us for a mansion.

It qualifies us for the white robe and the white stone and the name that only the individual and the Lord knows. And all of the things mentioned as the heritage of the overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3, we think, well, once you're saved, all these things are ours. When Christ returns, we'll all be sitting around.

He'll serve us with manner all around and so on. Why do we assume that? We're making the same mistake in Christianity today that the Israelites made in the Old Testament. I'm an Israelite.

I'm seed of Abraham. What more do I need? Of course, I should obey. I should be moral.

And that'll just make me even more righteous. And the element of faith as a believer, living faith, operational faith, by which we are declared righteous in time by God is overlooked. And we jump straight to the behavior rather than to the source of it in the soul.

That was the rampant problem in Israel. And Paul says, my heart's desire and prayer to Israel is that they may be delivered. Delivered from what? He says in chapter 10, verse 2 and 3, I bear them witness.

They have a zeal for God, but it's not according to knowledge. They know who God is. He's talking about Israel, that they be saved.

And he says, Israel, the nation has a knowledge of God. They have a zeal for God, but it's not according to knowledge. They are ignorant of God's righteousness, and they seek to establish their own, and they have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

It's not a matter of believing in God. It's a matter of submitting to God and his plan that is the problem that they need to be delivered from. Otherwise, this makes no sense.

If he's talking about salvation, then salvation must come by submission, which is a work rather than faith, which is grace. So when we get back to chapter 11, I say then, has God cast away his people? Certainly not. I also am an Israelite.

God has not cast away his people whom he foreknew. Or do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed your

prophets. They have torn down your altars.

I alone am left, and they seek my life. Here's Israel, and believers in the sense of not being consigned to the lake of fire, but look what they've done. They've killed the prophets, torn down the altars, and they're trying to stamp out the last of the faithful prophets, Elijah.

What does the divine response say to him? I have reserved for myself 7,000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. In the realm of believers, you have the disobedient, the faithless, the apathetic, the rebellious, and you have the remnant, the 7,000 that have not bowed the knee to Baal. Then Paul says now in 11.5, even so then at this present time, there is a remnant according to the choosing of grace.

And that's literal out of the Greek, and some of the English translations mess this up. As I mentioned before, the new RSV says that there is a remnant chosen by grace, implying that God has arbitrarily marked some out and chosen them by grace. But this is the Greek preposition kata, which means according to, according to the standard of.

Let's think about that a minute. There is a remnant according to the election of grace. According to the standard of the choosing of grace.

What is God's standard of choosing? Reformed theology would have us believe that there is no standard, that God, that it's nothing more than an expression of the sovereignty of God, that he just chooses certain people and says, you're going to be positive. You're going to be responsive. You're going to be obedient.

You're going to be on the upward path. And of course, they apply this primarily to the salvation from the lake of fire type of faith. But first of all, we see in the context that we're talking about believers who are obedient.

In the second place, this is choosing according to the standard. And this is the same standard we saw in Romans 8. Those who love God, those who recognize that they have a calling and who respond to that call. It's not enough to hear the call or to be in the category of the call.

You have to respond and take advantage of that calling to truly be the called. This is a choosing according to the standard of faith versus no faith, response versus no response, love for God versus apathy toward God. That is the election of grace.

And there is a remnant in each generation of Israel according to that standard. The 7,000, it doesn't say the 7,000 who have expressed faith in God. It says they have not bowed the knee to Baal.

They have been obedient the way Daniel and his three friends were obedient. And this isn't a matter, you know, someone could be a believer in God, but bow the knee to Baal for expediency. Well, I don't want to be killed.

I don't want to be persecuted. I don't want to be a social outcast and be ostracized. I'll just conform.

I'll go along. I'll blend. Bowing the knee to Baal is not talking about salvation from the lake of fire versus making choices that result in the lake of fire.

It's talking about obedience, a lifestyle of conformity to the plan of God. Verse 6 of chapter 11, if it is by grace, then it is no longer of works. Otherwise, grace is no longer grace.

This standard by which God chooses isn't based on what people do. It's based on what they believe, what they trust, what they love. Works are an outflow from that.

And if you have, as I have in the New King James, the second part of this verse saying, if it is of works, it is no longer grace. Otherwise, work is no longer work. You can cross that out.

That is a marginal note that somebody put in an early copy of the scripture and subsequent copyists thought it was a correction and incorporated it into the text. But when you do your text analysis here, you discover that this is not a part of Paul's thinking. I shudder to think what would happen if someone took my study Bible where I've got my notes all in and between and around the margins and the verses and tried to make a fresh copy of the Bible from it.

They wouldn't know where I had made a legitimate correction of the translation or where I had just put my own thoughts. And that's what happened here. So the point here is that this choosing that God does is based on what people love, what they trust.

And that's grace. It's not earned. It doesn't come by works.

That's the theme of the book, right? You don't be declared righteous as a believer by what you do, it's by what you think. And this falls right in line with that. What then in verse 7? Israel has not obtained what it seeks, but the election has obtained it.

Those that fall in this category have obtained it by definition. They're in that category because they think that way. But the rest were blinded just as it is written.

God has given them the spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear to this very day. This is a quote from Deuteronomy 29. These are believers that came out of the bondage of Egypt under the blood of the Passover lamb in Deuteronomy.

And Moses tells them, look, you believers with whom God is making a covenant this day. They're not unbelievers. He doesn't say you've been pagan, degenerate, faithless, godless, lake of fire types for these 40 years.

He's talking to believers in Deuteronomy 29. He says, God hasn't given you eyes to see and ears

to hear and a heart to perceive these things because of your disobedience. It's not a matter of salvation in the lake of fire sense.

It's a matter of the gift of understanding the deeper things of God. What is the basis for receiving that gift as a believer? It's being responsive, loving God, recognizing yourself and putting yourself in the position of being the call according to his purpose. That's what qualifies one for these things.

And Israel, believing Israel in the sense of being saved, they're going to be in the eternal future. They're not going to be in the lake of fire, but they did not obtain what they sought. What were they seeking? Righteousness by works.

And they didn't obtain it. But those that fall in God's category, the choosing according to grace, according to the standard of choosing of grace, they have obtained it. The approval of God, the righteousness that God imputes to those who trust him, they have obtained it.

If you disregard that standard, if you go against that standard and fail to measure up to that standard, what's going to happen? Discipline. What's a part of discipline? Blinding, hardening. It is a result of failure to seek, failure to respond, failure to exercise faith.

And so what has happened to Israel? These believers who disregard the things of God, just as we've seen in the Old Testament, they are blinded. God gives them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see, ears that they should not hear to this very day. Why is that? Because even when they have the eyes and the ears, they don't listen and they don't respond.

And during this period, when God blinds and deafens and hardens, what kind of a period is that? It's a period of discipline. It has a set time in which it's going to run. And when that time is up, God will again listen and God will again give them the ability to hear and to understand.

When they turn their hearts toward him, God will restore their perceptive abilities. But God takes that ability to perceive away. And we know in our age, and we'll be documenting this in the next couple of Friday nights, that the same is true for us as believers.

If we go off the track of God's plan and God's purpose and get into disobedience and apathy and faithlessness as believers, we lose our ability to comprehend the scriptures. We can't sit down in a deep Bible study and understand those things. Our ability to perceive is not there.

Why? Because God, the Holy Spirit who is with us, is not ministering those things to us. We can be blind, we can be deaf, we can be hard of heart as believers and be unable to comprehend the truth of scripture. Why? Because our heart is not pointed in the right direction as a believer.

We don't love God. We are not called according to his purpose as a believer because we disregard those things. We care nothing about them.

And to us, everything is a parable. Everything is a story with some kind of a moral, but we can't really understand the point. We don't get it.

Why? Because something has to come before that understanding, which is the desire to please God, the desire to put him first and have no other God before him. And when our heart is turned toward the Lord, God will give us the perception to make something of that motivation and to bear fruit as a result of it. David says in verse nine, let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them.

What is a table? What does a table represent? Remember Psalm 23, that prepares the table before me in the presence of my enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runs over. The table is the place of provision, isn't it? The place of nourishment, the place of blessing.

The head is anointed with oil, your cup overflows with bounty. The capacity for life and love and happiness is there at the table. What happens to their table? Now they have a table, right? They have these things that God provides.

They start out with a table, but their table turns into something other than what it's supposed to be. It's supposed to be the place of nourishment and blessing and anointing. And what is it? It's a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them.

They have a table because they are believers, but the provision and the attention of God becomes discipline instead of blessing, becomes withdrawing of things rather than granting of things, becomes a lack rather than a plus. Instead of having the provision of God, one of the ways we know that we're in serious trouble with God is when our, what has been called logistical grace, our provision from God suddenly doesn't seem to be there anymore. And it becomes apparent to us that God is not supplying our needs.

That's a wake-up call. If the table is not there, full of bounty and the overflowing cup, we ought to recognize something is wrong because as believers, the table should be our place of provision and blessing. Their table has become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense.

Let their eyes be darkened so that they do not see and bow down their back always. We're going to pause here and take our break. And when we come back, we're going to explore a little more fully this element of cause and effect in the blindness and the withdrawing of provision and sustenance from the people of God.

But let's pause here and take a break.