

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

## Video Lecture Series

by Rev. William Macleod

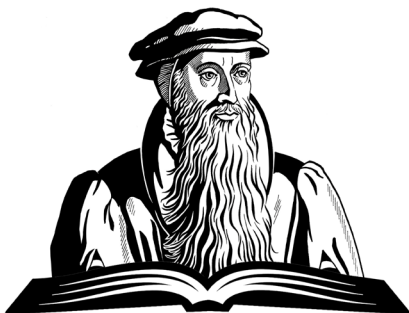
*Module 7:*

**ESCHATOLOGY—**

**THE DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS**

*Lecture 5*

**THE JEWS**



**The John Knox Institute**  
of Higher Education

**John Knox Institute of Higher Education**

*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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### *Module 7 ~ The Doctrine of Last Things*

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## *Module 7 ~ Lecture 5*

### **The Jews**

Today we come to our fifth lecture on Eschatology, and our subject will be the Jews. There is one matter which is very important for us to consider when thinking of the events which must occur before Christ can return. Many Christians believe that the Jews, as a people, will one day be converted to believe in Jesus as their Messiah. There is one special New Testament passage which is very important to understand when thinking of the future, and that is, Romans, chapter 11. We believe that God there makes great promises concerning the Jews, which are yet to be fulfilled. Paul's epistle to the Romans is the most theological of all his epistles, and sets out clearly many of the great truths of the Christian faith, commonly regarded as a summary of the Christian faith. In Romans, chapter 1, Paul makes a great statement, which, in a way, sets out the theme of the epistle, and declares what it's all about. He says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith"—that's Romans 1, verses 16 and 17.

It's worth noticing in passing, how we are told here that the gospel is to the Jew first. Many Christians today believe in what is called "replacement theology." This is the idea that all the promises of the Old Testament, with regard to the Jews, belong now to the church. For them, the church has replaced Israel, and is the new Israel. They believe that with the crucifixion of Christ, the Jews lost the special position they once had. While this is largely the case, it's not the full story, and we must be careful, lest we oversimplify the teaching of Scripture. We see here, in Romans 1, that in writing to the church at Rome, Paul asserts that the Jews still have a special priority. The gospel is to the Jew first. Wherever Paul went on his missionary journeys, he went to the Jews, and to the synagogue with the good news, and only when they rejected the message did he turned to the Gentiles.

For example, when he was brought as a prisoner to Rome, he explained the gospel first to the Jews, and only when the majority of them rejected the gospel, did he turn to the Gentiles, warning the Jews, "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it"—Acts 28, verse 28. Paul proceeds, in the rest of Romans 1 to show the sin and the need of the Gentiles who did not have the Old Testament. Although they didn't have the written law, yet, they were lawbreakers. In chapter 2, he demonstrates the sinfulness of the Jews who did have the written law. In chapter 3, he concludes that both Jews and Gentiles are sinners—are guilty before God, and in need of salvation. In the second part of chapter 3, he presents Jesus Christ as the needed Savior, the One who atones for our sins—our propitiation. In chapters 4 and 5, he declares that justification is by faith alone in Christ alone. In chapters 6 to 8, he deals with

sanctification and assurance. And then, in Romans 9 to 11, he explains election, and God's sovereignty in salvation. And this is the section in which we must especially focus.

In Romans 9, Paul writes of his great love to his fellow Jews, and his sadness at the way they have generally rejected Christ. He could wish himself lost, if only the Jews were saved. He speaks of their privileges: "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises"—Romans 9, verse 4—all the good things the Jews had. But not all Jews are lost. Election is very important. God chose Isaac, but not Ishmael. Rebecca had twins, but God's election was shown, in that even before they were born, or had done good or evil, "It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger"—Romans 9:12. "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated"—verse 13. The potter has power over the clay to make whatever type of vessel he wishes. God could show mercy to all, or show mercy to none, but he chose to save some: "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth"—verse 18. Though Israel were largely a rebellious people, God always had his elect among them: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved"—verse 27. In chapter 10, Paul continues to speak of his love for 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"—Romans 10, verses 1–2. Israel here cannot possibly mean the church. He is referring to his kinsmen, the Jews, who were zealous in seeking to save themselves, but it was by their own works. He explains the way of salvation is by faith alone. He notes that Israel are still rejecting the gospel, just as Isaiah had prophesied they would: "But to Israel, he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people"—Romans 10:21.

Turning now to Romans 11, Paul begins chapter 11 by asking if God had completely rejected the Jews, and notes that that cannot be the case, because he himself is a Jew and is saved. He asserts that God did not cast away his people whom he foreknew and fore-loved. Israel had and have a special place in God's election. He is aware that there is a godly remnant, just as was the case in the days of Elijah: "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace"—Romans 11, verse 5. Being a mere Israelite will save no one. It never did, and never will. But election saves "and the rest were blinded"—verse 7. The Apostle then asks a critical question in verse 11: Have the Jews stumbled so that they will totally fall away? He answers in a strong negative, that proceeds to make an important point: "Rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them"—the Jews—"to jealousy"—verse 11. In a strange way, the Jews' rejection of the gospel meant that God turned from them to the despised Gentiles in order to provoke the Jews to jealousy for their souls' salvation. Then a most important statement is made: "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?"—verse 12. If, as was the case, the falling away of the Jews was a blessing to the Gentiles, how much more will their fulness and restoration be a blessing? Right through this section of the epistle, Paul is obviously using the term "Israel" and the term "Jews" of the ethnic Israel, and not of the church. Paul proceeds to make a great promise: "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?"—verse 15. Paul's argument runs as follows. If the rejecting of Jesus by the Jews brought salvation to many Gentiles, surely then, the salvation of the Jews will bring massive revival—life from the dead—to the Gentile church.

The Apostle next describes the church as being like an olive tree. The root grew in Old Testament times. The root is holy, and so the branches, originally pagan Gentiles, are also holy. The



Gentiles are like a wild olive tree, and branches were cut from it, and grafted into the good olive tree. Indeed, Jewish branches were broken off the good olive tree so as to allow this to happen. The Gentiles, however, are warned against pride: “But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. 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”—that’s verses 18 to 21. The Gentiles have nothing to be proud of, and they are warned that they too can be broken off and rejected. Paul encourages the unbelieving Jews that they should not despair, but repent and believe, and they will be saved: “And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again. 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?”—verses 23 and 24.

The next verse, that is, verse 25, is very important in the argument of the Apostle: “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”—verse 25. A mystery in the New Testament is a secret hid from past generations, and now revealed. In Old Testament times, salvation was largely restricted to the Jews. But now, something wonderful has happened. Blindness in part has happened to the Jews. God, in his sovereignty and justice, has blinded them, so that they cannot see that Jesus is the Messiah. Thankfully, it has only been in part, and there have been Jews like Peter and Paul who have been saved. And indeed, down through the centuries, since the time of the apostles, there has always been a few Jewish converts. The Jews as a whole rejected Jesus, and God has instead filled his church with Gentiles. However, there is here that very important word—“until”. The blindness which has come upon the Jews is only “until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.” So the Apostle envisages a day coming when this will change, when the fulness of the Gentiles will have been saved, a large number of them being converted, then something new will happen: “And so all Israel shall be saved”—verse 26.

At this point, many commentators suddenly and inexplicably take “Israel” to mean “the church” composed of Gentiles and a few Jews. When in all the other references in Romans 9 through 11, “Israel” clearly refers to ethnic Israel. Surely this is bad exegesis, though it’s very common. Unless there is an overwhelming reason for it, Israel should be taken mean what it means in the rest of the chapter. Here there is a clear prophecy that so many of the Jews will be saved that it can be said that all Israel shall be saved, just as it was previously said that they, Israel, had been cast away—verse 1. Although a remnant were saved, so now it is said that all Israel shall be saved. That does not, of course, imply that every individual Israelite will be saved, but rather, Israel as a whole.

It is also important to emphasize that they can only be saved by exercising faith in Christ. They will not continue in unbelief. There’s only one way of salvation, for Jew and Gentile. As the Scripture says, “There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob”—verse 26. This Deliverer is the Lord Jesus, who by his Spirit, turns sinners from their ungodliness, granting repentance now to Jews, indeed, the majority of Jews, as well as to Gentiles, and so all of Israel shall be saved.

The same thing is continued in the next verse, verse 27. And the “them” referred to in that verse, as well as the “enemies” of the following verse can obviously refer to none but the ethnic Jews: “For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes”—verses 27 and 28. Why give “Israel” in verse 26 a different meaning from the “them”

and “enemies” in verses 27 and 28. God made his covenant with Abraham, and is a covenant of grace—all of grace, and therefore, an eternal covenant. Similarly, God’s covenant with Moses and with Israel was a covenant of grace. Yes, the Jews were cast away for a time, but then God returns to them. They still have a place in God’s plan of election. The Jews became enemies in order that the gospel might reach the Gentiles. But God’s election remains. Israel is beloved for the Father’s sake—verse 28. God still has a purpose of mercy for the Jews. Verse 29 is wonderfully reassuring: “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” God bestowed his gifts and calling upon the Israelites, and they are still special in his eyes. He hardened them for a time because of their unbelief, but they are still special to him. Here, he is promising the restoration of Israel to a central place in his church.

A future day. Paul explains that the Gentiles in Rome were enemies in the past because of their unbelief in God, but now they have obtained mercy through the Jews’ unbelief: “Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy”—verse 31. We are to have a special concern and love in our hearts for the Jews, and particularly to seek their salvation. Thinking of these things, and looking forward to the day when his kinsmen according to the flesh will be grafted in again to the olive tree of the church, Paul breaks out into a doxology: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his Counsellor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen”—verses 33–36. God is working out his plan of salvation, and God still has a great purpose for the Jews. Although the Apostle grieves that for the time being the Jews are unbelievers, it fills his heart with joy to think of that future day when the Jews, as a people, will be converted and accept the true Messiah.

Now, not all Reformed theologians would agree with this interpretation of Romans 11. For example, Stuart Olyott, in his commentary on Romans, entitled, *The Gospel as it Really Is*, argues that there are no special promises for the Jews. In his classic *Systematic Theology*, Louis Berkhof writes of Christ, “He does not hint at any prospective restoration and conversion of the Jewish people” (page 699 in Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology*). He does not hint, Christ, at any restoration or conversion of the Jews—is that really true? Actually, there are several passages where Jesus indicates that there will be a blessed day ahead for the Jews. For example, our Lord does say, “Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled”—Luke 21:24. The “until” clearly implies that there is a time coming when the Jews will no longer be trodden underfoot by the Gentiles. It implies that there is a time of blessing coming for Jerusalem and the Jews. Another important statement of Jesus also implies the conversion of the Jews. Jesus mourns over the Jews and weeps over the judgment that is coming upon them for rejecting him as the Messiah. But he also speaks of a coming day when their attitude will be totally different: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord”—Matthew 23:37–39. Here, Jesus is looking forward to the conversion of the Jews. He says, he will not return again, they shall not see him again, until the majority of the Jews will repent and believe, and rejoice in his coming, saying “blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

While it is true that at the present, “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto

life, and few there be that find it,”—Matthew 7:14, many of Jesus’ parables speak of better days ahead. In the parable of the leaven, Christ speaks of the kingdom spreading till the whole world is leavened, or Christianized. The parable of the mustard seed implies that the church will not remain a tiny minority, but will become a great tree, so that the birds of the air come and dwell in its branches. Jesus compares the Jews to a fig tree planted in a vineyard. The owner comes to the gardener, saying, “Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?”—Luke 13, verse 7. For three years, Christ labored among the Jews, but there was little fruit. “And he answering said unto him Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about I, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down”—verses 8 and 9. Christ, the Mediator, intercedes for the Jewish fig tree, the barren fig tree. It was spared another year, yes, it was spared until AD 70, and many Jews meantime were saved. But the general rejection of the Messiah continued until eventually the fig tree was cut down, AD 70. However, the stump remained in the ground, like Nebuchadnezzar’s stump in Daniel 4. Jesus makes reference again to the fig tree, when talking about the events immediately preceding his second coming: “Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors”—Matthew 24, verses 32–33. When God’s fig tree begins to sprout again and puts forth leaves, the return of Christ is approaching. Again, the implication here is that the Jews will yet be saved and become a fruitful fig tree in the vineyard of the Lord.

Looking then at other passages of Scripture, there are many Old Testament passages which can be seen to teach the restoration of Israel. One of the clearest examples is Ezekiel 37—the vision of the valley of dead bones. Here, Ezekiel the prophet is given an amazing vision and insight. He is taken by the Spirit of the Lord into a valley which was full of bones. He had to walk among them to get convicted of the dire reality of the situation. There were many bones, and they were very dry. It was a horrible sight—all these skeletons around. Then he’s asked a question: “Can these bones live?” Surely the answer is obvious. Common sense says, No. The prophet, however, wisely replies, “O Lord GOD, thou knowest”—Ezekiel 37, verse 3. God says to him, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts”—verse 11. Israel is in captivity in Babylon, Jerusalem is destroyed, the temple is burnt with fire, and the promised land of Canaan is empty. Israel is cut off, and our hope for the future is lost.

Ezekiel then is given a strange command: “Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD”—verses 4–6. The prophet is to proclaim God’s word to the heaps of bones. As Ezekiel was prophesying, we are told, “There was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them”—verses 7–8. What a remarkable, indeed, hair-raising sight that must have been. All around the valley, bones were moving, finding other bones, sinews and flesh were growing, and skin covering the bones on the bodies. So that now there was a valley full of dead bodies. So many, and yet still so dead.

The prophet is now commanded, “Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live”—verse 9. Remember, the word for “breath,” and “wind,” and “spirit,” in



Hebrew, is the same—“ruah”. Now Ezekiel tells us, “So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath”—or spirit—“came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army”—verse 10. God’s Spirit came down upon them, causing a wonderful resurrection. What a sight! Thousands of soldiers ready for battle. The vision is then explained to the prophet: “Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD”—verses 12–14. No, at that specific point in time, the situation seemed hopeless, yet God was going to do great things. Israel was to be spiritually resurrected, returning to their own land, and become a mighty army for God. After seventy years, the Jews did return. The temple was built on a more modest scale, and eventually the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt. But it was only a few Jews that returned. Their enemies said of them, “What do these feeble Jews?”—Nehemiah 4, verse 2. God helped them, but there was no sign of the mighty army. They struggled on, dominated by the great powers around them, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans.

So how will this passage be fulfilled? There has, since the days of Ezekiel, been no mighty resurrection of the Jews, or a great army standing up for God. Replacement theologians spiritualize it and say it refers to the Christian church, and yet there is a specific reference here to the Jewish people—their captivity, and their land. God says, “Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land”—verse 21. Surely no one can consider the history of the Jews over the last two thousand years, and fail to see the special hand and purpose of God in that people. Pilate was reluctant to execute Jesus, knowing that he was innocent, and that the charges brought against him by the Jews were out of envy, and that the Jews wanted to get rid of him: “Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on all our children”—Matthew 27, verse 25. In AD 70, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and massacred millions of Jews, and sold the rest of them as slaves. For the next two thousand years, they were hounded from country to country. They were horribly persecuted by the Roman Catholic Inquisition, subjected to pogroms by the Russians, six million of them were killed by the Nazis, and everywhere, to this day, subjected to anti-Semitism. Yet, they have survived, and they’ve kept their identity.

Furthermore, contrary to all historical precedent, they have been settled again in their own land, and already eight million of them—more than half the Jews in the world—have returned to the land of Israel. There, they have been surrounded by numerous and powerful hostile armies—Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, etc., which, from the day of their independence in 1948, have repeatedly attacked them. Yet they’ve survived. And not only have the Jews survived, but now they have become the superpower of the Middle East. How could this happen, apart from the hand of God upon them for good? But we are still awaiting the conversion of the Jews to Christ as a people. In 1948, there were some thirty Christian Jews in Israel. Today it’s reckoned that there are some thirty thousand, and this number is increasing exponentially. We are looking for God to do even more. We await the Lord, as it were, raising them up from the dead, and converting them into a mighty army for him, a great force in evangelizing the world.

But is this idea of the conversion of the Jews an odd view held by just a few strange people? Actually, it was by far the commonest view of orthodox theologians from the time of the Reformation till the twentieth century. *The Westminster Standards* are the great standards of the Presbyte-

rian Church across the world. They were produced by the Westminster Assembly of Divines in the seventeenth century. The answer to question #191 of *The Larger Catechism* is very informative. In dealing with the Lord's Prayer, the question is asked, "What do we pray for in the second petition?" The answer is given as follows: "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"—that is, effectually 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 forever: 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." On this it is plain that the Presbyterian *Standards* envisage the conversion of the Jews and the fullness of the Gentiles, which means the conversion of many Gentiles as a result flowing from the Jews' conversion. We should pray for, work for, and expect the conversion of the majority of Jews to Christ before the second coming.

It is foretold in many Old Testament passages. Zechariah, for example, wrote what God told him: "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn"—Zechariah 12:10. Here again, we have a prophecy of the Jews being converted to Christ. Amen.