

What to Make of Israel & the Church?

What is the relationship between ancient Israel and the Church? More importantly, what are we to make of the Jewish people today? If you're like most Christians then you probably rely on dispensationalism to solve these questions. Formulated by John Nelson Darby in 1827, dispensationalism divides the Bible into multiple dispensations or time periods marked by God's covenants. It also maintains a strict dichotomy between Israel and the Church and forces God to deal with them separately in terms of prophecy.

But not all Christians are predisposed to follow Darby's beliefs regarding God's covenants or the assumption that the Church is altogether distinct from Israel. In fact, for 1800 years prior, the vast majority of Believers have held to a very different interpretation. Yet due to its popular adherence and widespread influence, dispensationalism continues to shape Christian theology and many have simply forgotten the original view of orthodoxy.

This writing, then, is an attempt to reflect the sentiments of earlier Christians and the discipline of interpretation they would have advocated. I hope to provide an accurate explanation for how they would have defined the prophecies relating to Israel and the Church. And will also endeavor to introduce certain principles that best explain how the two fuse together perfectly without setting aside one or the other from God's prophetic timeline. What we may soon discover is an **uninterrupted continuum** between Israel and the Church which joins the two into one Body and best fulfills God's prevailing purpose.

The Church and Israel

When reading the Old Testament, it is evident that most of it concerns the story of Israel. From Jacob, the patriarch, to the Jewish exiles, the people of Israel take center stage throughout its pages. Despite the constant sin of her kings and the judgments leading to her multiple dispersions, the prophets look beyond this judgment with hope to a time of restoration. Clearly, God's primary concern was invested in His people's current and future wellbeing. This leads us to ask, what about the Church? Where does she appear in Israel's history and did the prophets predict her future existence?

While it appears as though God completely overlooked the Church and focused entirely on Israel, such disregard does not agree well with the rest of Scripture. For instance,

God has promised to do nothing without first revealing it to His servants the prophets (Amos 3:7). So could it be that God truly failed to disclose this significant detail to His prophets? I think not! Moreover, we are told the very opposite by the apostle Peter. Notice: *Unto whom it was revealed, **that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you** by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into* (1 Peter 1:12).

We are left then with one alternative. Perhaps our definition of Israel is flawed and involves strictly a literalist interpretation. Not surprising, as this is exactly how dispensationalism has trained us to think. To fix this mindset, we should begin by examining the original covenant made with Abraham concerning his descendants, the Israelites. This is known as the Abrahamic covenant: *That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply **thy seed** as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and **thy seed** shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in **thy seed** shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice* (Gen 22:17-18).

Based on Genesis 22, Abraham's "seed" was to inherit special promises or blessings. Without due research, we may assume the "seed" here strictly refers to his physical descendants. However, there is more to it than that. Paul's New Testament commentary sheds more light into how we should interpret these covenantal promises. Notice: *Now to Abraham and his **seed** were the promises made. He saith not, And **to seeds**, as of many; but as of one, And to thy **seed, which is Christ*** (Gal 3:16).

According to Paul, God's promises to Abraham applied to a single "Seed" in particular, not the whole nation that was to descend from him. This Seed is said to be Jesus Christ. If truly all the promises and blessings apply to Christ, then we are no longer as far removed from Israel as we may expect:

*That the Gentiles should be **fellowheirs**, and of the same body, and **partakers of his promise in Christ** by the gospel* (Eph 3:6).

For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of

faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect (Rom 4:13-14).

This alone disproves the popular notion that Israel is the sole recipient of all of God's promises, further closing the gap between Israel and the Church. But more can be said about this. For instance, very few realize that the Church has always existed. That's right. The Church has even existed in the Old Testament period. The Old Testament Church or Congregation was first revealed in Exodus. It was initially comprised of the **faithful few** who through faith and perseverance inherited the **physical** promises. They entered Canon—the land of promise—while the vast majority failed to seize these promises and perished in the wilderness (Heb 3:17). Who were these faithful few? They were the second generation to come out of Egypt, including Joshua and Caleb (Num 14:21-24). Later on, they would come to be known as the “remnant” (Romans 11:14). God would preserve for Himself a **faithful remnant** from every subsequent generation of Israel.

I hope it was successfully demonstrated that the Abrahamic blessings and promises pertain to Christ. That as the heir of these, Christ has enrolled the Church to inherit them with Him. Lastly, that the Church has always existed in the form of a faithful remnant, even in the Old Testament. As mentioned before, this is the orthodox view that existed long before dispensationalism. Sadly, in more recent times, it has been rejected as an anti-Semitic teaching and given the pejorative name of “replacement theology.” Replacement theology is the idea that the church has **completely replaced** Israel. Such a label is incorrect and does not accurately represent our belief. Instead, we view the Church as a continuum of Israel and developing out of it akin to new growth on a tree. Much the same way Paul would have described it. For this reason, we reject the false notion that God maintains two programs side by side (Israel and the Church) and affirm that His Old Testament dealings have always shown otherwise.

R.C. Sproul does a good job of defining the relationship between Israel and the Church. I've attached his short teaching on the issue to help us better connect the dots. Notice:

In Romans 11, Paul uses a highly instructive analogy of the olive tree.

The tree represents Israel—the covenant people of God. Paul compares the unbelieving Israelites to branches that have been broken off from the olive tree (v. 17a). Believing Gentiles are compared to branches from a wild olive tree that have been grafted in to the cultivated olive

tree (cf. 17b–19). The important point to notice is that God does not cut the old tree down and plant a new one (replacement theology). Neither does God plant a second new tree alongside the old tree and then graft branches from the old tree into the new tree (traditional dispensationalism). Instead, the same tree exists across the divide between Old and New Testaments. That which remains after the dead branches are removed is the true Israel. Gentile believers are now grafted into this already existing old tree (true Israel/the true church). There is only one good olive tree, and the same olive tree exists across the covenantal divide.

During most of the Old Testament era, there were essentially three groups of people: the Gentile nations, national Israel, and true Israel (the faithful remnant). Although the nation of Israel was often involved in idolatry, apostasy, and rebellion, God always kept for Himself a faithful remnant—those who trusted in Him and would not bow the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). This remnant, this true Israel, included men such as David, Joash, Isaiah, and Daniel, as well as women such as Sarah, Deborah, and Hannah. There were those who were circumcised in the flesh and a smaller number who had their hearts circumcised as well. **So, even in the Old Testament, not all were Israel who were descended from Israel (Rom. 9:6).**

At the time of Jesus' birth, the faithful remnant (true Israel) included believers such as Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25–38). During Jesus' adult ministry, true Israel was most visible in those Jewish disciples who believed that Jesus was the Messiah. Those who rejected Jesus were not true Israel, regardless of their race. This included many of the scribes and Pharisees. Though they were physically Jews, they were not true Israel (Rom. 2:28–29). **True Israel became defined by union with the true Israelite—Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16, 29).**

On the day of Pentecost, the true Israel, Jewish believers in Jesus, was taken by the Holy Spirit and formed into the nucleus of the New Testament church (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit was poured out on the true Israel, and the same men and women who were part of this true Israel were now the true new covenant church. Soon after, Gentiles began to become a part of this small group.

This is an extremely important point to grasp because it explains why there is so much confusion regarding the relationship between the church and Israel. The answer depends on whether we are talking about national Israel or true Israel. The church is distinct from national Israel, just as the true Israel in the Old Testament was distinct from national Israel even while being part of national Israel. The remnant group was part of the whole but could also be distinguished from the whole by its faith.

*However, if we are talking about true Israel, there really is no distinction. The true Israel of the Old Testament became the nucleus of the true church on the day of Pentecost. What does this mean for our understanding of the relationship between the church and Israel? It means that when true Israel was baptized by the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, true Israel became the New Testament church. Thus, there is continuity between true Israel and the church. This is why the **Reformed confessions** can speak of the church as existing from the beginning of the world (for example, *Belgic Confession*, Art. 27). **Yet there is discontinuity between the church and national Israel as well, just as there was discontinuity between the faithful remnant and apostate Israel in the Old Testament.***

Romans 11 and the Future of Israel

So is God finished with Israel in a covenantal sense? In order to answer this question, we must turn to Paul's argument in Romans 9–11. Remember that in Romans 1–8, Paul denied that Jews were guaranteed salvation on the basis of their distinctive privileges as Jews. Faith was the key, not ethnicity or any kind of works. Paul argued that all who believe in Jesus are children of Abraham. He also argued that none of God's promises would fail. All of this would raise serious questions in the minds of his readers. What about Israel? What has become of God's promises to her in light of her rejection of the Messiah? Has the faithlessness of Israel negated God's promises? Has Israel been disinherited? Has the plan of God revealed throughout the Old Testament been derailed or set aside? Paul answers these questions in Romans 9–11.

Paul begins Romans 9 with a lament for Israel—his “kinsmen according to the flesh” (v. 3). He then recounts all the privileges that still belong to Israel—including the adoption, the covenants, and the promises (vv. 4–5). In verses 6–29, Paul defends the proposition he states in verse 6a, namely, that the promise of God has not failed. In verses 6–13, he explains that the corporate election of Israel never meant the salvation of every biological descendant of Abraham: “not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (v. 6b). In verses 14–23, Paul expands on this, explaining that salvation was never a birthright based on biological descent. It has always been a gift based on God's sovereign election.

In Romans 9:30–10:21, Paul elaborates on the turn that redemptive history has taken, namely, that while Israel has stumbled over Jesus, Gentiles are now streaming into the kingdom. It is important to observe that in Romans 10:1, Paul writes, “Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.” He's talking about Israel. The very fact that Paul can continue to pray for the salvation of unbelieving Israel indicates that he believes salvation is possible for them.

What Paul has said thus far raises the big question, which he now states: “I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!” (11:1a). This is the basic theme of chapter 11. In verses 1–10, Paul demonstrates that God has not rejected Israel by distinguishing between the “remnant” and the “hardened.” Building on what he has already said in 9:6–13 and 9:27, Paul indicates that just as in the days of Elijah, there is also now a believing remnant (11:2–5). In contrast with the remnant, chosen by grace (v. 5), is “the rest,” the **nation of Israel as a whole**, which has been “hardened” (v. 7). God has dulled the spiritual senses of Israel (v. 8), and they have stumbled (vv. 9–10).

Paul then asks, “Did they stumble in order that they might fall?” (11:11a). What is his answer? “By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous” (v. 11b). What is the present significance of Israel’s stumbling? Paul explains that it has happened as a means to bring a multitude of Gentiles into the kingdom. The hardening of Israel is serving God’s purpose. Their trespass has served as the occasion for the granting of salvation to the Gentiles. Paul states, “Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!” (v. 12, emphasis mine).

In verses 11–12, Paul mentions three events: the trespass (or “failure”) of Israel, the salvation of the Gentiles, and the full inclusion of Israel. The first of these leads to the second, and the second leads to the third. Israel’s trespass, in other words, started a process that will ultimately lead back to Israel’s restoration, a remnant being saved even out of the national whole earlier rejected. This is the first of five places in this short passage where Paul explains the purpose and future of Israel in terms of three stages. Douglas Moo provides a helpful summary:

- vv. 11–12: “trespass of Israel”— “salvation for the Gentiles”— “their fullness”
- v. 15: “their rejection”— “reconciliation of the world”— “their acceptance”
- vv. 17–23: “natural branches broken off”— “wild shoots grafted in”— “natural branches” grafted back in
- vv. 25–26: “hardening of Israel”— “fullness of Gentiles”— “all Israel will be saved”
- vv. 30–31: disobedience of Israel—mercy for Gentiles— mercy to Israel

The repeated occurrence of this “three-stage” process reinforces the idea that Paul is looking forward to a future restoration of Israel. Israel’s present condition is described as “failure” and as “rejection.” Paul characterizes the future condition of Israel in terms of “full inclusion” and as “acceptance.” Israel is not simultaneously in the condition of “failure” and “full inclusion,” of “rejection” and “acceptance.” The “full inclusion” will follow the “failure.” The “acceptance” will follow the “rejection.”

Paul anticipates a potential problem in verses 13–24. Gentile believers who had been taught that they were now God’s people could be easily misled into thinking that this was cause for boasting against the Jews. In these verses, Paul warns against such arrogance. In 11:16–24, Paul explains the development of redemptive history and the place of Israel within it by using the olive tree analogy that we discussed above. Here again, Paul points to three stages in redemptive history: “natural branches broken off”—“wild shoots grafted in”—“natural branches” grafted back in.

Paul’s teaching in verses 25–27 has been at the center of the debate concerning the proper interpretation of chapter 11. Paul writes in verse 25: “Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” Here Paul is still speaking directly to the Gentiles (see v. 13). He wants them to understand a “mystery.” In this context, the mystery involves the reversal of Jewish expectations concerning the sequence of end-time events. The “mystery” is that the restoration of Israel follows the salvation of the Gentiles.

In verse 26, Paul continues the sentence begun in verse 25: “And in this way all Israel will be saved.” The biggest debate here is the meaning of “all Israel.” Charles Cranfield lists the four main views that have been suggested: (1) all the elect, both Jews and Gentiles; (2) all the elect of the nation Israel; (3) the whole nation Israel, including every individual member; and (4) the nation Israel as a whole, but not necessarily including every individual member. Since Paul repeatedly denies the salvation of every single Israelite, we can set aside option (3).

John Calvin understood “all Israel” in verse 26 to mean all the elect (remnant), both Jews and Gentiles. Paul does use this language in other places in his writings. The problem with understanding “all Israel” in 11:26 in this sense is the context. Throughout verses 11–25, Paul has consistently distinguished between Jews and Gentiles. We also have to remember that Paul’s concern in these chapters is for his kinsmen according to the flesh (9:1–5). His prayer in this

context is for the salvation of unbelieving Israel (10:1). In Romans 11:26, Paul is revealing that the prayer of 10:1 will be answered once the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

Other Reformed theologians, such as O. Palmer Robertson and Herman Ridderbos, have argued that “all Israel” refers to all the elect of the nation of Israel throughout the present age. As with the view that understands “all Israel” to be the church, there is truth in this interpretation. The Jews who are being saved in the present age are not any different from the Jews who are to be saved in the future. The problem with this interpretation, as with the previous one, is that it conflicts with the immediate context. As John Murray observes, “While it is true that all the elect of Israel, the true Israel, will be saved, this is so necessary and patent a truth that to assert the same here would have no particular relevance to what is the apostle’s governing interest in this section of the epistle.” Paul is not in anguish over the salvation of the remnant. They are already saved. He is in anguish over unbelieving Israel. It is this “Israel” for whose salvation he prays (10:1), and it is this Israel that he says will be saved in verse 26.

The interpretation of “all Israel” that best fits the immediate context is that which understands “all Israel” as the nation of Israel as a whole, but not necessarily including every individual member of ethnic Israel. Paul consistently contrasts Gentiles and Israel throughout this chapter, and he continues to do so in the first half of the sentence we are examining (v. 25). There is no contextual reason to assume that Paul changes the meaning of the term Israel in mid-sentence here. The “Israel” that will be saved (v. 26) is the “Israel” that has been partially hardened (v. 25). This partially hardened Israel is distinct from the Gentiles (v. 25) and is also distinct from the present remnant of believing Jews, who are not hardened (v. 7).

Conclusion

The relationship between Israel and the church in the New Testament is not always easy to discern, but it can be understood if we remember the differences between national Israel and true Israel in both the Old Testament and the New, and if we keep in mind what Paul teaches in Romans 11. Israel’s present hardening has a purpose in God’s plan, but this hardening is not permanent. The future restoration of the nation of Israel will involve their re-grafting into the olive tree, the one people of God. The restoration of Israel will mean their becoming part of the “true Israel” by faith in Jesus Christ the Messiah.

In short, I find this view to be biblically sound and fully agree with it. It pinpoints the exact error adopted by many teachers today regarding Israel and the Church. While some have pendulum swung completely anti-Israel (replacement theology), others have

become so inclusive as to embrace even those Jews who have rebelled against God and qualify them as true Israel merely on account of ethnicity when Paul clearly distinguished spiritual (true) Israel from physical Israel. Notice: **For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God** (Rom 2:28-29).

It is obvious, then, that not everyone in national or physical Israel comprises spiritual Israel, God's elect. But God's desire is to include as many members of physical Israel within His spiritual remnant. Therefore He will continue chastening national Israel until even more of their "hardened" portion is drawn into covenant with Him, so that "all Israel" (elect and hardened) might be saved. Perhaps a greater fulfillment of this promise will occur sometime in the near future. How this will happen may be explained in Ezekiel 20. According to this prophecy, God will one day plead with Israel face to face in the wilderness to which He has brought them. This "wilderness", I take it, is the final regrouping of Israel and the return to the land that occurred in 1948. It is here on their own turf that God will deal with them in such a way as to save the final part: *And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people* (remember that Jerusalem is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt—Rev 11:8), *and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord GOD. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant* (Ezekiel 20:35-37).

But while we attest that God is still saving Jewish members of **national** Israel and will continue to convert many more, we must be clear on the fact that their rebellion has led to an irreversible consequence. Due to their unrepentant condition, **they have permanently forfeited their national and political status**. What exactly does this mean? It simply indicates that God has revoked their **physical** role as crown of nations—a beacon of light and hope to the world. They are not the ones who will carry the torchlight of salvation to the nations. Rather it is Israel the Elect (spiritual Israel), the Church and Bride of Christ, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, who are charged with this task. Can I prove this scripturally? Notice these verses: *when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever. And presently the fig tree withered away..... Therefore say I unto you, **The kingdom of God shall be***

taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof
(Matthew 21:19; 43).

But how exactly did Christ terminate the original role of national (physical) Israel? According to His own words, Jesus **replaced the political component with a Spiritual one**: *Jesus answered, **My kingdom is not of this world**: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: **but now is my kingdom not from hence*** (John 18:36). It is important to recognize that either God continues to maintain a kingdom in this world known as national Israel, or He does not. Of course, only the latter is true, since Jesus Himself affirmed it. No earthly kingdom would exist till His future reign. Therefore as a **theocracy**, national Israel has ceased to exist and holds little relevance in God's eyes. It does not enjoy His blessings, approval, or divine protection because those who have rejected their Messiah are still under a curse (Deut 3:19; Mat 21:19; 43). Instead, it has been succeeded by Israel the Elect, the **eternal Church** comprised of God's faithful remnant. And this is the very Kingdom Christ spoke of in John 18. For this reason, I raise great caution with those who strive to support national Israel or wave its flag in their midst. Christ has clearly detached His followers from any political affinity, including that with national Israel. To remain supportive of national Israel in this respect is in direct conflict with Christ's non-political teachings and continues to propagate **the false two kingdom program of dispensationalism**.

Erroneous "Two Kingdom" Teachings

So far we've covered plenty of ground relating to Israel and the Church. We also dissected in great detail the teachings of Paul regarding the present and future condition of Israel. I hope by now we understand the common errors espoused by dispensationalism and the false two kingdom dichotomy. It is important, however, that we do not miss the primary arguments associated with the "two kingdom model". This will ensure our understanding of Scripture is not skewed as we attempt to study prophecy regarding Israel's future in the millennium period. To aid in this objective, I have provided the following list of core arguments key to dispensational thinking:

(i.) Ethnic Israel may participate in the Church, but remains subject to the Mosaic Law, i.e. circumcision, dietary precepts, as well as the civic and ceremonial portions once the new temple is erected.

(ii.) Ethnic Jews, Christian or otherwise, belong in the land of Israel and are encouraged to preserve their Jewish identity.

(iii.) Political support of the nation of Israel is to be engendered by the Church.

(iv.) National Israel has an unconditional right to their homeland.

My objections to these claims are as follows:

(i.) The idea that ethnic Israel is somehow obliged to observe the Mosaic Law while the Gentile Church is exempt is a repugnant concept to many Believing Jews. No doubt it comes from an incorrect interpretation of Acts 15:20. If we examine the context and teaching of Acts 15, we might understand verse 20 well enough to appreciate the error of this argument:

Acts 15

*5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful **to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.** 7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them....8 ...God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; 9 **And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.** 10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, **which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?** 11 **But we believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.**....20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. 21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.... 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, **to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things....***

Starting in verse 5, certain Jewish Believers were making it their mission to teach Gentile converts salvation through circumcision and observation of the Law. This produced a disagreement between the Apostles and this particular sect. To settle the dispute, the first council of Jerusalem convened resulting in the following conclusions. It was determined that Gentiles were saved **exactly the same way** as Jews. They were

saved through faith in Jesus Christ and by grace (v. 9-11). No distinctions existed when it came to the salvation of Jews and Gentiles, ***And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.... But we believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we (Jews) shall be saved, even as they (Gentiles)***. Verse 10 amplifies this fact when stating that neither the Jewish Apostles nor their forefathers were able to bear the *yoke of the Law*. What does this mean? Simply that now they considered themselves free from its bondage. They understood that the Law (contained in ceremonial commandments) was fulfilled through the ministry of Christ and no longer applied to them. Finally, verse 20 concludes with **four primary laws** required of the believing Gentiles. They were to abstain from idolatry, fornication, strangled meats, and blood. It was not that these were the only regulations relevant to Gentile converts, but rather that they were considered **most essential and basic to the Christian faith**. The rest of God's Law could be learned through the synagogue system as they matured in spiritual understanding: ***For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day***. Remember, not everyone owned a copy of the Bible in those days.

(ii.) The belief that Jews need to remain in the land of Israel and maintain their Jewish identity is strictly Old Testament theology. It cannot be found anywhere in the New Testament. Yet many Christians are deceived in this area. As a result, they encourage Jewish people to return to their homeland and reestablish their Jewish roots. I don't want to come down too hard on those who believe this way, but truth be told such theology is baseless and unscriptural. What we find instead are scriptures that teach the exact opposite:

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us (Eph 2:11-14).

*where **there is neither Greek nor Jew**, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all (Colossians 3:11).*

*Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, **when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.** But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. (John 4:21;23).*

Paul is clear that Gentiles and Jews are no longer to be differentiated one from another. Christ has forever removed the *middle wall of partition* (division) separating the two. This means that the Church, with all of its ethnic diversity, is a single living organism symbolized by the olive tree (Israel), while the “grafted wild shoots” represent the gentile converts. The Gentiles who have been redeemed are no longer heathen. They are to be regarded as the *Israel of God* (Gal 6:16), eligible participants in the **commonwealth of Israel** and all of the covenantal promises.

There is a very real sense in which the Church has also inherited **Israel’s national character**, i.e. government, priesthood, temple, etc, or at least a highly spiritualized form:

*But **ye (the Church)** are a **chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people**; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9).*

Notice that the Church is called to demonstrate God’s praise throughout all the earth. This is exactly what God had intended for ancient Israel, but since they failed, God has turned to the Church, Israel the Elect, to fulfill this calling. And only because of the blood of Christ and the advent of the Holy Spirit, will we succeed.

But we have yet to address the physical geography of Israel. Obviously, there are many Christians who believe that it continues to remain sacred. To their understanding, Israel and Jerusalem are exceedingly special in the eyes of God. The problem with this mentality, however, is that we cannot find any support for it in the New Testament. In fact, the New Testament clearly shows otherwise. It tells us that God does not continue to regard the land of Israel as a special piece of property. What we read instead is that God’s heavenly abode will soon replace all of the existing real estate (Rev 21-22).

Because of this, Jesus told the Samaritan woman that the time had come when neither Jerusalem nor Mt. Gerizim (where Samaria worshipped) should be considered sacred any longer. For God’s people *would worship Him in Spirit and in truth wherever they were* (John 4: 23-24).

Lastly, consider the fact that if Jews truly belong in their homeland of origin, then so do Gentile converts grafted in with them. We say this because the Gentiles have become co-heirs of the commonwealth of Israel and are entitled to all the covenant promises, including the physical real-estate (see Eph 2:11-14). But you might ask, then, how do we reconcile all of the prophecies that speak of a future re-gathering of God's people back to their own homeland? Or what do we do with the political Israel that exists?

While the current state of Israel was established in 1948, I fail to believe it has the blessing and protection of God upon it. In fact, it **cannot be legitimately claimed** that God brought them back to their homeland in order to bless them and reestablish His covenant with them. The genuine fulfillment of those prophecies are set to take place in the **future** when Jesus returns and God establishes the new heavens and the new earth and brings down the New Jerusalem. If we read the prophecies concerning the future restoration of the land, it is *not* set to happen until the Second Coming. At the return of Christ, God will provide His people, the elect Church of Israel, a permanent piece of real-estate with solid foundations, *who's builder and maker is God*. I hope to clearly demonstrate this truth from God's Word further down in our study.

(iii.) Concerning the claim that Churches today should support national Israel, allow me to point out the following. In all of their travels among the dispersed Jews, do we ever find the apostles attempting to summon support for a mass exodus of Jews back to their homeland? Do we find them encouraging any political affinity to the Land of Israel or garnering funds for its government? Not really. These practices are all very recent and are occurring quite frequently in many evangelical Churches today. I do not raise these objections out of some hidden bias or resentment. It matters less to me whether people give their money to Afghanistan or Israel. I simply find it contrary to what the Bible teaches and for this reason point it out.

(iv.) The last claim we want to examine also relates to the geography of Israel. It has to do with the popular belief that Jews have an unconditional right to their homeland. Prior to laying out my understanding of this issue, let it be understood that I'm in no way advocating anti-Semitism or encouraging dislike toward Jewish people. This would be absurd, as I am a natural born Jew and a citizen of Israel. Once again, I raise these objections purely from a desire to remain a faithful Berean of Scripture. It is also my desire to demonstrate how easy it is to inherit lies when we are not aware of the entire truth presented in God's Word. Having said this, we should look no further than Deuteronomy 28:1-68. In these verses, Moses pronounces a blessing on Israel's twelve

tribes as long as they are faithful to the law and its commandments. Part of this blessing is that they would possess the Promised Land and be kept prosperous and secure within its borders. However, he also pronounces a curse on them if they do not remain faithful and are lead astray with idolatry. In this curse, he promises that they will be pushed out of their land by their enemies and experience every manner of torment and ill until they are destroyed. So we see that the promise to possess the land of Israel and to prosper within its borders is **entirely conditional**. It is very much contingent upon their performance in the area of obedience. So the question remains, since when has national Israel reformed her ways and turned back to God? Since when have they accepted their Messiah whom they have crucified? Individually, yes, there have been many converts, but on a national scope, no! We do not see a nation dedicated to God. As a result, they are still under the curse. Numerous scriptures point this to our attention. For instance, after Christ cursed the fig tree (symbolic for Israel) and promised that it would never bear fruit again, He gave the parable of the husbandmen and allowed the Pharisees to pronounce the same curse upon themselves (Matthew 21:33-46). Several chapters later, they would pronounce the same curse upon themselves and their children by accepting the responsibility for crucifixion of the Son of God (Matthew 27:25). Furthermore, the very emblem the modern state of Israel has adopted as its ensign or flag is the satanic hexagram. It is this hexagram from whence we derive the saying, “you are under a hex”. This is not coincidental. Sadly, many evangelicals who support political Israel unwittingly fly this emblem in their assemblies. I’ve been part of church services where it was waved during worship almost routinely. Please take the time to research the “star of David”. It was never a God given symbol. Only the Menorah, pomegranate, olive branch, and Lion of Judah, are biblical representations of Israel.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to revive the centrality of the Church in God’s prophetic timetable. To give Her the primary focus of preeminence She enjoyed throughout the ages. Too often Christians regard the Church as a parenthesis in God’s program rather than a principal player. For too long the devil has managed to dupe God’s children into setting aside Israel the Elect, chosen and beloved of God (Col 3:12), in exchange for a political entity called national Israel. But I do not say these things to insult or bring further rebuke on the Jewish people. My prayer, like Paul’s is that all of Israel would be saved. Like he, our attitude toward them must be one of love and compassion, as we hope for their future redemption. Furthermore, what we read of the Jewish history and God’s fulfillment of His warnings and promises toward them should provoke us to Godly

fear lest we consider ourselves any better or more capable than them (Rom 11). If God severed the *natural* branches because of disobedience, we should be even more vigilant not to disregard His covenant ratified by the precious blood of Christ. If they were unable to inherit the Promised Land because of their unbelief, let us make every effort not to follow the same pattern and lose out on our eternal inheritance. May we walk faithfully toward God in light of this teaching.

In Christ,
John A.