

ISRAEL

The Man - The Nation - The People of God -

This study was difficult to write because so many have strong feelings concerning the present nation of Israel. I will try to share my views, and they are just that - Rachel's opinion.

The promises and prophecies concerning the coming Messianic kingdom were addressed to Israel. To understand the coming Kingdom of Messiah, we must define the "Israel" of prophecy - the *future* Israel. **Who then is an Israelite?**

Israel - the name means many things, to many different people. It meant one thing on the day that Moses lead the Hebrew slaves to the Mount of God. It meant something else to the prophet Amos - called to warn the ten Northern tribes. It meant something else again, to the captives returning from Babylon. **We want to define "Israel" - as used in the prophecies - especially those of the coming Kingdom of Messiah.** Our interpretation of those prophecies is effected profoundly by this understanding.

Let's review the most prevalent views.

REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY

Biological descendants of Jacob (Israel) were the chosen people of God, but after they rejected their Messiah, God left them to their fate. He has now appointed "the church" as his chosen vehicle - to carry forward His plan to preach the gospel, and to baptize those won to His kingdom. Israel (and Jews specifically) are no longer the "chosen people" according to this teaching. **The church has replaced Israel as the "chosen."**

DISPENSATIONALISM:

Israel and The Church are two distinct and absolutely separate peoples of God. Individuals of these two groups are "**saved**" by **different means** - Israelites by works of the law, and Church members by grace.

Biological descendants of Jacob, were the chosen people of God, but when they rejected Messiah they were set aside - for awhile. Right now - we are living in the "Age of the Gentiles" or "the Church age" which will end with "the rapture," when all the "heavenly people" (the Church) will suddenly be caught up to Heaven. They will just disappear. This will happen 7 (or 3.5) years before the appearing of Christ in glory.

“Seventy weeks” were determined for Daniel’s people (*the Israelites*) but they did not complete the last week (7 years) of that prophecy (*Daniel Chapter 9*). At the rapture, biological descendants of Jacob (*Israelites*) will be left on the earth to complete the 70th week of their probation. They will be tested by the Antichrist, and **will be saved - once again - by law keeping**. Law keeping requires a Temple, and animal sacrifices.

During the first half of the “week” - the Jews (*biological descendants of Jacob*) will restore the Temple sacrificial system, and return to “keeping the law.” The Antichrist will deceive the Jewish people during the first half of the last “week” but “in the midst of the week” (*Dan. 9:27*) he will show his true character, and “will bring an end to sacrifice and offering.” He will then become a dictator who demands worship of himself, during the last 3.5 years - called the “tribulation,” or the “time of Jacob’s Trouble.” (Do you see a counterfeit Antichrist here?) God will punish those who persecute his people with great plagues. Finally, at the end of the 7 years, Christ will return to set up His earthly kingdom, when He will reign in peace for 1000 years. All of the raptured will come back with Him at His glorious return.

The doctrine of dispensationalism was taught by John Nelson Darby - a gifted Evangelical in Great Britain, a member of The Plymouth Brethren around 1830. Later C.I. Scofield, an American follower of Darby, published the “Scofield Reference Bible” which contained the dispensational views. Scofield’s commentary was printed on the lower half of each page of that Bible. Many accepted these views without question. Scofield’s views were widely accepted, and to this day are deeply held belief by many evangelical denominations. (Resource: *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming* by Timothy P. Weber, 1979)

NOTE: The “Left Behind” fictional series is based on dispensationalism.

NOTE: Dispensationalism takes many forms. I have tried to summarize in a general way.

THIS AUTHOR’S VIEW:

First: I believe that **God’s “method” of saving individuals from sin**, and Satan’s domination, **has always been the same** -Yeshua Messiah, the “lamb of God” who became our High Priest before God’s throne. He makes atonement for us. Those living before the death of Christ looked forward to His death when they offered an animal sacrifice for sin, thru the Aaronic priesthood. Those living since His death, look back - when they partake of the bread and the wine - symbols of His body and blood which were offered for us. The reconciliation and salvation are effected by the same means - and in the same way - by the grace of God, through the death of His Son Jesus Christ. **No one ever has - or ever will - be saved through “law keeping”** (*Gal. 2:16*). We cannot “keep” the commandments, unless Christ first fills us with His own sweet spirit - which is given to us by grace.

Second: All of those who enter into covenant with God through Christ ARE Israelites. (They may or may not - be Jewish.) Gentiles who come to faith in Jesus as Messiah, are grafted into Israel. **True Israel and the Church (meaning “congregation”) are one and the same body of believers.**

Third: The majority of biological descendants of Jacob did not continue in faith. They became “branches” “**broken off because of unbelief**” (*Rom. 11:17-20*). In this condition, they are **NO LONGER Israelites**. But notice - Paul says that “God is able to graft them in again” if they do not continue in unbelief (*Rom. 11:23*). Many of the biological descendants of Jacob are not knowingly persistent in rebellion against God. They are simply ignorant. They do not see. They do not understand. Their sin can be forgiven. Paul himself had to be “grafted in again” after he met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus.

“ADOPTED” AND “GRAFTED IN”

Romans 11:13-24 “For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I [Paul] am an apostle to the Gentiles . . .” “And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, . . . You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.’ Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith.”

NOTE: The “root” of the tree “is holy” and “nourishes you.” That “root” is Christ. “We are rooted and grounded in Him” (Colossians 2:6-7; Isaiah 11:10).

NOTE: Paul makes it clear that Gentiles who have come to faith in Jesus as Messiah, are grafted into the olive tree. They have been made Israelites by God - not because of race, but through faith.

Jeremiah 11:16-17 “The LORD called your name, Green Olive Tree, Lovely and of Good Fruit, with the noise of a great tumult He has kindled fire on it, and its branches are broken.” (See also, *Jeremiah 5:10-11.*)

COMMENT: In referring to Israel as the Olive Tree, Paul is pointing his readers to this passage written by Jeremiah the prophet, just before the Babylonian destruction of Judah.

Ephesians 2:11-22 [Paul - writing to Gentile believers] “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh [meaning uncircumcised] . . . that at that time you 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 you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who **has made both one**, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God **in one body** through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity . . . For through Him we both [*Jew and Gentile*] have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.”

*Christ has “broken down the wall of division, having abolished in His flesh the enmity (the hatred), that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances” (Eph. 2:15). The law which excluded Gentiles from association with Israelites **is** “the enmity.” It literally became a dividing “wall” - forbidding Gentiles entrance into the Temple courtyard (something never commanded by the LORD). Paul is NOT saying that Christ abolished The Ten Commandments. In this passage Paul is only speaking of the “commandments” (contained in the ordinances of Moses) which forbade association with uncircumcised Gentiles (Exo. 23:32, 34:12; Ezra 9:12; Neh. 13:25; John 4:9, 18:28).*

In the time of Christ, there were only two kinds of people, so far as the Jews were concerned - circumcised law keepers, and uncircumcised Gentiles (also called aliens, strangers, or the nations). Jews regarded themselves as Israelites and everyone else as Gentiles. (See Lev. 17:8,10,13; Deut. 24:14; 2Chron. 2:17; Joel 3:17; Jer. 9:16, 10:2, 10:25.) In Christ, the "strangers and foreigners" are made "fellow citizens" of "the commonwealth of Israel." They become adopted Israelites - "grafted in" !

John 10:16 [Yeshua speaking] "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold [*Israel*]; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd."

The "one flock" will be Israel, and the "One Shepherd" - Yeshua Messiah.

Ephesians 3:6 ". . . that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel . . ."

Christ has abolished "the law contained in ordinances" which commanded the separation of Israelites (the circumcised) from Gentiles (the uncircumcised). This was the message to Peter in the vision of Acts Chapter 10. Just as the Spirit said, "What God has cleansed you must not call common (unclean)" - the servants of Cornelius (a Gentile) knocked at the door. Later when he was criticized for eating with "uncircumcised men" (Gentiles), Peter told them of the vision and of how the Holy Spirit had been poured upon these Gentiles also. Believers of any blood, or nationality may now become "partakers of the covenants of promise."

TWO MEANINGS

The confusion stems from the use of the term "Israel" in two ways: 1. as physically circumcised members of the community, AND 2. as those who have entered into faith covenant - who are circumcised in heart. A prophecy written to ancient physical Israel, may apply with equal force to the Israel of faith, which includes believers of "every nation, kindred, tongue and people." Such a prophecy would be a "dual prophecy" with application on at least two levels.

The covenant began with Abraham. Jacob, inherited that covenant (symbolized by circumcision). His name was changed to Israel - hence his descendants were called Israelites, or "children of Israel," or simply "Israel."

NOTE: A Gentile who was physically circumcised, and agreed to abide by all the laws of Moses, could become an Israelite. Conflict arose in the infant church over this requirement for physical circumcision, and law keeping. According to Paul, and the writer of Hebrews, physical circumcision and the offering of animals for sacrifice was no longer necessary.

Paul wrote, "They are NOT all Israel, who are of (descended from) Israel" (*Rom. 9:6*). According to Paul's definition, only those of faith WERE IN FACT Israelites, all along. Those true to God in heart - they are Israel. The rest are "broken off."

So we have two definitions: a physical one (circumcised in flesh), and a spiritual one (circumcised in heart). **And we have ancient prophecies with meaning or fulfillment on at least two levels. They are dual prophecies.** They were fulfilled anciently upon physical Israel, and they will be fulfilled for greater faith Israel (which includes grafted in Gentiles).

The "Israel" of the coming Messianic Kingdom is simply the redeemed people of God (circumcised in heart), and her citizens are from every nation, kindred, tongue and people!

Just as “Israel” has more than one definition, the term “Gentile” is used in at least two ways. It may refer simply to one who is NOT circumcised OR it may refer to a non-believing pagan. (I personally am English, German and Scott. I am a Gentile - according to the first definition.)

NOTE: Christ did not abolish the separation of Israelite from non-Israelite (believers from non-believers) - especially when it comes to marriage.

The 24 elders of Revelation 5:8-10, praise God who has redeemed them “out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” to be “kings and priests” to God. Under the Old Covenant, priests were direct descendants of Jacob thru his son Levi, and his great, great, grandson Aaron. Yet here are priests of every biological descent. Something has definitely changed!

NOTE: Citizens of the present nation of Israel do not call themselves Israelites - but Israelis.

THE PROMISES

Romans 9:4 [Paul speaking] “. . . Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises . . .”

COMMENT: The promises, and the covenants pertain only to Israel. It might be well to point out that “the covenants” - each and every covenant promise in Scripture - including the “new covenant,” is made with Abraham or with his chosen descendants.

Romans 4:13-16 “For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. . .”

“Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law [*Old Testament era sacrificial law keepers*], but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all [*New Testament era believers in the “sacrifice” of Christ*].”

NOTE: Only Christ fulfilled the terms of the covenant - perfect faith, and perfect obedience. He did this by faith. He was filled with the Spirit of His Father. He is the only one who can rightfully receive the inheritance and the promises. Christ is THE Seed of Abraham. He will be Heir of the world. We will share in that inheritance if we belong to HIM (Psalm 37:9, Matthew 5:5).

When we study the prophecies, especially those by Old Testament writers, we must consider the context carefully. The term “Israel” may refer simply to circumcised biological descendants of Jacob OR it may refer to true believers who walk by faith. As used in the Revelation to John, the term “Israel” refers to God’s remnant of the faithful. In the prophecies, the term “Gentiles” may refer simply to the uncircumcised OR it may refer to non-believers, the “nations” who know not God.

NOTE: Many prophecies have dual meaning. The term “Israel” may have a physical meaning on one level, and a spiritual meaning on another.

THOSE WHO WERE NOT - NOW ARE!

Hosea 1:10 “Yet the number of the sons of Israel [*Israelites*] will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered; And it will come about that, in the place where it is said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ it will be said to them, ‘You are the sons of the living God.’” NAS

NOTICE how Paul uses the words of Hosea in our next passage. Paul applies the words of Hosea to those Jews AND Gentiles, who have come to faith in Christ Jesus as Savior.

Romans 9:24-27 “. . . even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. As He says also in Hosea (1:10 & 2:19), ‘I will call those who were not My people, My people, and her who was not beloved, Beloved. And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are Not My people,’ ‘there they shall be called sons of the living God.’”

THOSE WHO WERE NOT - WILL BE - THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

Revelation 21:9-10 “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” . . . “And he . . . showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.”

Hosea 2:16 [Spoken to Israel] “And it shall be, in that day, says the Lord, That you will call Me ‘My husband.’ . . . (v.19) “I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in loving kindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD” (v.23). “. . . Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy. **Then I will say to those who were not My people, ‘You are My people!’** And they shall say, ‘You are my God!’”

ISRAEL was betrothed to the LORD.
THE NEW JERUSALEM is the bride of Christ.

The gates are named for THE 12 TRIBES OF ISRAEL.
There is NO 13th gate labeled “NON-ISRAELITE.”

Yeshua Messiah is now our High Priest who represents us in Heaven. How many stones are in His breastplate? Twelve! There is no 13th stone - representing non-Israelites. If we are represented as being carried on the heart of Christ in heaven, then we must be included in the twelve tribes of Israel.

On the table of shewbread in the Sanctuary, were twelve loaves - one for each tribe. If we are to partake of Christ as our “bread,” we must be included in the twelve tribes. There was no 13th loaf - for Gentiles.

THE CHURCH vs ISRAEL

Two different peoples ? No!

The word translated “church” in the New Testament portion of our Bible is “ekklesia” (strong’s # 1577). It means “assembly” or “congregation.” Ancient **Israel WAS “the congregation” of Yahweh** (*Acts 7:38*). We cannot teach that the Old Testament congregation and the New Testament congregation are two different peoples. BOTH are Israel.

New Testament believers love to quote Christ’s words, “I am the vine. You are the branches.” We must not forget that “the vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel” (*John 15:5, Isa. 5:7*).

CLAIMING THE COVENANT PROMISES

I have a little book called “Promises,” which contains all of the promises of the Bible. Many are quoted from The Psalms, Jeremiah, Isaiah and other Old Testament books. If I were to look back at the context of those promises, I would find that they were spoken to Israel, and were based upon covenant, yet they are presented in my little book, so that I may claim these promises for myself. How can this be? Praise Him! I am in covenant - an Israelite “grafted in.” “Psalm 37” is such a promise passage. It is full of hope, and it belongs to every Israelite of faith!

ISRAEL: DEFINITIONS

1. The man Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel (*Gen. 32:28*).
2. Biological descendants of Israel - the Twelve Tribes.
3. The ten Northern tribes who split off, under Rehoboam after the death of Solomon.

Though these tribes were destroyed or carried away by Assyria, those within the North who remained faithful to Yahweh, will someday be resurrected and will be returned to their land. The rest are “broken off.” (The Southern nation was called Judah.)

4. The remnant of Judah, who returned from Babylon, and their descendants.
Paul called himself an Israelite - though he was of the tribe of Benjamin (Rom. 11:1).
5. Those physical descendants of Jacob who had a heart toward God.
Jesus called Nathanael an “Israelite indeed” (John 1:47).
6. **All who have entered into covenant with God thru Christ** (*Ephesians 2*).
7. Christ Himself - the One who prevails with God (*Hosea 11:1 & Matt. 2:15*).
The name Israel means “one who prevails with God.”

*Each one of the above definitions can be correctly applied.
The context determines which definition is correct within a particular passage.*

Most especially remember that in ancient prophecy, the LORD may be speaking on two levels - a physical level (to the nation) and a faith spiritual level (to faithful believers). BOTH apply.

THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL

Romans 11:26 “And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob, For this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.”

If “Israel” (here in Paul’s letter) includes every person of faith - and only persons of faith - who have entered into covenant with God thru Christ, who are humble at heart and strive to obey God, then I would wholeheartedly agree with Paul.

NOTE: Some teach that all physical descendants of Jacob will eventually be saved, but I cannot agree. Those who worshiped the golden calf (Exo. Chpt 32), Nadab and Abihu who offered “strange fire” and died in the “fire” of God Himself (Lev. Chpt 10), Korah, Dathan, and Abiram who led a rebellion against Moses with 250 princes (Num. Chpt 16) - these are just a few of those who rebelled against God, and were “cut off” from the people.

*NOTE: Others teach that biological descendants of Jacob will receive special place and honor in Messiah’s coming kingdom on earth. They will be the teachers of the law. They will be the priests, and the judges. I can NOT agree with this teaching either. **God rewards faith - not biological descent.** Paul wrote, “There is neither Jew nor Greek [Gentile] . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29).*

Romans 9:27 “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved.”

The “remnant” is what’s left - a small portion of the whole.

Revelation 5:8-10 [The twenty four elders sing to the Lamb.] “For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.”

NOTE: These priests are NOT all biological descendants of Jacob, much less of Aaron.

A NEW COVENANT WITH ISRAEL & JUDAH

Hebrews 8:8-10 “. . . when I make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah . . . for this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (*Hebrews 10:15-17, Jeremiah 31:31-33, Ezekiel 36:22-29, Ezekiel 11:16-20*).

MOST IMPORTANT: The “house of Israel” will include ALL of the redeemed. The context of Ezekiel 36 makes it very clear that the New Covenant will not be fully realized until the Israel of God has been gathered, and settled “in their own land” - and this doesn’t happen UNTIL The 8th Day.

CONCLUSION

New Covenant Israel - the Israel of prophetic promise - represents and includes all of those faithful to

God and to His Son - irrespective of race, kindred or genetic descent.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Grafted In, "Israel, Gentiles, and the Mystery of the Gospel, Second Edition,"
by Thomas Lancaster, First Fruits of Zion, 2009

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