



# **Jesus, Israel, and the Church**

The Relationship between  
the Old and New Testaments

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**Eric Adams**







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**Christ Covenant Publishing  
Kansas City, MO  
(816) 468-2121  
[www.christcovenant-pca.org](http://www.christcovenant-pca.org)**

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# Contents

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Preface	7
1. Introduction	9
2. Was Israel the Church?	19
3. Is the Church Israel?	27
4. Jesus and the Nation of Israel	37
5. Jesus and the Temple of Israel	47
6. Jesus and the Land of Israel	61
7. Jesus and the Law of Israel	75
8. Jesus and the Future of Ethnic Israel	85
Scripture Index	97



## Preface

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What is the relationship between Israel and the church? Are they separate peoples with separate destinies? Is the church a continuation of Israel? What role does Jesus play in their relationship?

When I moved my family to Los Angeles in July 1999 to attend the Master's Seminary, I thought I had the answers to these questions.

However, shortly before beginning classes, I met Steve Robertson. Steve humbly challenged my understanding of Israel and the church. At first, I was extremely skeptical, but Steve was always gracious. We scoured the Bible together. I raised objections and Steve answered them. Finally, after a three year struggle, I gladly admitted that Steve had been right all along.

I thank the Lord for Steve and his persistence. As this book is the fruit of our many conversations, it is my pleasure to dedicate *Jesus, Israel, and the Church* to Steve.

You can read more about my wrestling over the relationship between Israel and the church and other issues related to dispensationalism at my blog:

[www.dispensationalist.blogspot.com](http://www.dispensationalist.blogspot.com)



# 1

## Introduction

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The relationships between Jesus, Israel, and the Church are complex and fascinating. As we grapple to understand these relationships, we will need to examine a large number of passages from the entirety of the Scriptures.

In the first three chapters, we will pursue the thorny problem of how the Old Testament and the New Testament are related. The final chapters are dedicated to five specific topics regarding Israel: nation, land, temple, law, and future.

I hope to show that Jesus is at the center of each of these issues. Specifically, I want to demonstrate that the Old Testament is not primarily about ethnic Jews and their nation. The Old Testament is about Jesus.

This truth should effect the way we read the Old Testament. This should also impact how we look at the current political situations in the Middle East, particularly with regard to the nation of Israel. Most importantly, this should stir your heart to greater admiration, appreciation, and allegiance to our King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This study will also help us to understand one of the chief sources of conflict within the twenty-first century Church. Although this issue has plagued the church since day one, it has erupted into a full-scale division in the last two centuries, particularly in America.

## **The Relationship between the Testaments**

With regard to the relationship of the Old and the New Testament, there are two basic positions in the evangelical church: Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology (or Dispensationalism).

Both of these terms are of recent origin. Covenant Theology was largely formulated during the seventeenth century by Johannes Cocceius. Dispensationalism was first articulated in the early nineteenth century by John Nelson Darby.

These terms are frequently misunderstood and notoriously misconstrued. They are far more harmful than helpful. While both are accurate in a generically descriptive sense, neither term gets to the heart of the matter, as we shall see. Nevertheless, we do need to understand what these terms mean.

### **Covenant Theology**

Covenant theologians look at the Bible from the perspective of covenants. They usually see two main covenants:

- 1) The Covenant of Works – God made a covenant with Adam, requiring perfect obedience upon pain of death.
- 2) The Covenant of Grace – When Adam failed to perfectly obey God, Adam was condemned to die. However, God immediately made another covenant with Adam, whereby God graciously saved Adam from his disobedience. The rest of the Bible is the outlaying of this salvation, or this Covenant of Grace.

Is this an accurate picture of the Bible? Sure, this is one way to look at Scripture. There is nothing inherently wrong with this scenario as stated.

### **Dispensational Theology**

Dispensational theologians look at the Bible from the perspective of dispensations. They usually see seven main eras, or dispensations:

- 1) Innocence – Creation to the fall
- 2) Conscience – Adam to Noah
- 3) Government – Noah to Abraham
- 4) Patriarchy – Abraham to Moses
- 5) Law – Moses to Jesus
- 6) Grace – between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> comings of Christ
- 7) Kingdom – after the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ

Is this an accurate picture of the Bible? Sure. God does deal differently with man during each of these seven eras or dispensations.

### **Where's the Beef?**

As these two theological positions are stated, there does not appear to be much conflict. They seem to be two different ways of viewing history. In fact, Dispensationalists believe in covenants and Covenant Theologians speak of different dispensations. So, why are these two groups in such sharp disagreement?

While on the surface these appear to be simply two different ways of looking at the Bible, there are underlying *presuppositions* which make these two groups diametrically opposed to each other.

What is subtly implied by Covenant Theology is that the bulk of the Bible, from Genesis 3:15 through Revelation, is one unit. Specifically there is a *unity* between the Old Testament and the New Testament. While there are certainly differences, God deals with mankind under the same Covenant, the Covenant of Grace; hence, the title, "Covenant Theology."

Dispensationalists argue that the covenant is the wrong way of looking at the Bible. God deals with people differently in different eras, and we need to emphasize these differences, particularly the differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament. While there are certainly similarities, God deals with mankind *differently* in each era, or dispensation, hence the name "Dispensationalism."

### **The Crux**

Thus, the debate between Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology is not really about covenants vs. dispensations. These monikers are an unhelpful way to frame the disagreement, which has only led to confusion and division.

The crux of the matter is the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament:

- Covenant Theologians see a basic unity between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The key word here is **continuity**. The New Testament continues what the Old Testament began.

- Dispensational Theologians see a basic distinction between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The key word here is **discontinuity**. The New Testament begins a new project that is not a continuation of the Old Testament.

So, the crux of the matter is continuity vs. discontinuity. For this reason, I will often refer to Covenant Theology as Continuity Theology (both CT). Likewise, I will often refer to Dispensational Theology as Discontinuity Theology (both DT).

No one argues for strict continuity or strict discontinuity. That is, everyone believes in some continuity (e.g., we believe in one God) and some discontinuity (e.g., we no longer offer animal sacrifices). The difficulty is determining how much stays the same (continuity) and how much is different (discontinuity).

### **One Verse?**

Deciding between continuity and discontinuity is not an easy matter. Some argue for discontinuity from passages like this:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, *rightly dividing* the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

According to this view, “rightly dividing the word of truth” means that the task of the interpreter is to distinguish Old Testament truth from New Testament truth.

However, “rightly dividing” is an archaic expression that actually means “handling accurately” or “using correctly.” The NASB renders this in contemporary language.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, *handling accurately* the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

Others will argue for continuity from passages like this:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

Yet, neither of these passages necessary rules out either continuity or discontinuity. In fact, this debate is not a “one-verse issue.” Some theological issues can be solved by appealing to a single passage, but not this one. Continuity vs. discontinuity is an enormous issue that covers the entire Bible.

## **Presuppositions**

What’s even more difficult is that this is a *presupposition* that we bring to the Scriptures. That is, when we are interpreting the Bible, we *unconsciously* assume either continuity or discontinuity. Naturally, this assumption colors the way we interpret Scripture.

For example, when it comes to the relationship between Israel and the Church, the Bible neither explicitly affirms or denies that the church is Israel. We do not find any verses that say either “the church is Israel” or “the church is not Israel.” This issue is usually decided by our presuppositions.

Discontinuity Theologians say, “The Bible never states that the church **is** Israel; therefore they are different entities with different purposes and different destinies.”

When such a person encounters Scriptures that seem to favor continuity, he falls back upon the lack of a plain statement from Scriptures, urging that without a clear statement, he must presume discontinuity.

Continuity Theologians say, “The Bible never states that the church is **not** Israel, therefore they are the same entity with the same purpose and the same destiny.”

When such a person encounters Scriptures that seem to favor discontinuity, he also falls back upon the lack of a plain statement from Scripture, urging that without a clear statement, he must presume continuity.

The question we must ask is: which presupposition is most consistent with the Scriptures? Discerning presuppositions is not an easy task. Changing a presupposition usually involves a massive paradigm shift.

### **A Copernican Revolution**

For example, consider what it must have been like for Copernicus to change from a geo-centric view of our solar system to a helio-centric view.

Before Copernicus, geo-centrism was the dominant perspective. It seemed to make sense. However, as Copernicus did his calculations, something did not add up. He saw the *same* sun, planets, and stars as the previous astronomers, but he discovered that if the earth was truly the center of our solar system, then the planets should behave differently than they do. His conclusion is that there must be a different center. Copernicus suspected that the sun was the center of our solar system, and his calculations confirmed this. Today, Copernicus is credited with changing astronomy from geo-centrism to

heliocentrism, and we call this the Copernican revolution.

This was not a whimsical decision of little importance. This was a carefully researched decision with epic consequences. It was a revolution because it involved a change in a fundamental presupposition. Changing presuppositions always results in massive change, a revolution.

### **My Copernican Revolution**

I had my own Copernican revolution in my theological journey. When I was first exposed to Dispensationalism, I would go back to the Scriptures to see if these things were so. A lot of things made sense.

However, as I got deeper into the Bible, I began to notice a verse here and there that did not seem to fit in the discontinuity scheme. This troubled me, so I asked my pastor, but he did not have a satisfactory answer. I thought that seminary would explain things better.

Unfortunately, when I got to seminary, the problems compounded. I was finding entire passages that seemed to conflict with Discontinuity Theology. It seemed like everywhere I turned, there was a problem passage. I began to suspect that the problem was not with the Scriptures but with Discontinuity Theology itself. I was reading the same Bible, but the Scriptures behaved in patterns that defied Discontinuity Theology.

Finally, I had this radical thought: what if I presumed continuity? I tried this out and found it to be a much more satisfactory explanation of the Scriptures. The old problem passages now made perfect sense. At every turn,

I found that continuity fit much more solidly with the Scriptures.

Thus, my move to continuity did not involve a rejection of the Bible, but embracing an alternative explanation for the Bible. Much like Copernicus, I was using the same data as my discontinuity friends, but the data forced me to come to a different conclusion.

## **Conclusion**

During this study of *Jesus, Israel, and the Church*, we will be presuming continuity while at the same time, critiquing this presupposition and demonstrating that continuity is what the Scriptures themselves demand. This is the position of Jesus and of the Apostles.

Again, I am not arguing for radical continuity. There have been some changes, but we should presume continuity unless we have an explicit warrant for discontinuity. We should assume that things are the same in the New Testament as they were in the Old Testament unless we have a specific passage to inform us.

This will be tricky, and it may not all come to you at once. Presuppositions take time to detect and change. Examine the Scriptures to see whether these things are so.



## 2

# Was Israel the Church?

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These next two chapters attempt to answer some of the key questions involving the identity of Israel and the church, including:

- Is the Church fundamentally different from Israel?
- Is the Church a continuation of Israel?
- Does the Church replace Israel?
- Is Israel defined ethnically or religiously?

### Examining the Word “Church”

Unfortunately, the whole issue of Israel and the church has been considerably marred by a misunderstanding of the word *church*. In this chapter, we are going to attempt to correct this misunderstanding by exploring a couple of issues surrounding the Greek New Testament.

#### Translation

When translating from one language to another, it is most desirable to translate the idea or the concept. For instance, in the Greek New Testament, here are a couple of translations of concepts:

*Basilean* = Kingdom

*Uios* = Son

*Theos* = God

Notice that in each of these cases, the Greek word and the English word look totally different, yet they are equivalents because the concepts are identical.

### **Transliteration**

Occasionally, a foreign word is brought straight over into another language (*hors d'oeuvres*, *coup d'état*, etc.). The pronunciation is retained, but the concept is often lost. For instance, here are a couple of examples of transliterations in our Bibles:

*Hallelujah* (Hebrew) = “Praise Yahweh”

*Messiah* (Hebrew) = *Christ* (Greek) = “Anointed”

Notice that in each of these cases, the Hebrew and the English are identical in pronunciation, yet we often use these transliterations without really understanding their meaning. That is, we sound authentic because we are using foreign-sounding words, but we are inauthentic if we do not understand what is the meaning behind the words.

### ***Ekklesia***

“Church” is the most common translation of the New Testament Greek word *ekklesia*. This is a serious problem because “church” is neither an accurate translation nor is it a transliteration of *ekklesia*. Let’s start with *ekklesia*.

### **Sum of Parts?**

Perhaps you have heard preachers explain *ekklesia* as derived from two parts:

- *Ek* = out of
- *Kaleo* = to call

It is argued that *ekklesia* refers to “those who have been called out” or “called-out-ones.” While this may be true in a general sense, this is simply bad exegesis.

Occasionally, you can determine what a word means by looking at the sum of its parts, but more often than not, this is improper. Such is the case with *ekklesia*. It does not necessarily mean “called-out-ones.”

### **Real Meaning of *Ekklesia***

*Ekklesia* means a group of people, a congregation of people, an assembly of people, a gathering of people. It refers to some kind of corporate group of people.

Right away, you should be able to spot that our typical usage of “church” does not correspond with this definition of *ekklesia*. We most often use “church” to refer to the building where we meet. For example:

- I went to church last week.
- I left my Bible at church.

These uses of “church” are referring to the building where we meet, which is quite different than the New Testament word *ekklesia*.

### **Secular Usage of *Ekklesia***

Furthermore, we use “church” in an exclusively religious context. Yet, *ekklesia* was a common word. It was often used to describe a public gathering of citizens to discuss and debate local politics. However, we would never think of using the word “church” to denote such a group. For us, “church” is exclusively a religious word.

So, why do we use the word “church” for *ekklesia*. How did this come about? Where does the word “church” come from and what does it mean?

## “Church”

“Church” is actually derived from the word “Lord.” The Greek word for “Lord” is *kurios*.

*Kurios* (Greek) → *Lord* (English)

### Possessives

In English, when we make a word possessive, we add an *apostrophe* and an “s.” For instance, “Eric’s” is possessive. It means “belonging to Eric.”

“Eric’s” = possessive of “Eric” = “belonging to Eric”

In Greek, when a word is made possessive, there is no “*apostrophe-s*”. However, the word does change form. So, whereas we would make “Lord” possessive by writing “Lord’s,” the Greeks would make *kurios* possessive by writing *kuriakos*.

*Kuriakos* = possessive of *kurios* = “belonging to the Lord”

*Kuriakos* was used to describe things that belonged to the Lord. For example:

- “The Lord’s Day” is called *kuriakos* day. It belongs to the Lord.
- “The Lord’s Supper” is called the *kuriakos* Supper. It belongs to the Lord.

In the time shortly after the New Testament was written, the word *kuriakos* was used by itself to refer to Christians.

*Kuriakos* people = “people who belong to the Lord”

Soon, *kuriakos* became used as shorthand to refer to Christians. Eventually, this was carried over into other languages. First, the Greek ending “-os” was dropped, so that *kuriakos* became *kuriak*.

*Kuriakos* → *Kuriak*

Next, some of the vowels were changed in various languages.

*Kuriak* → *Kurk* → *Kirk* (Scottish)

Eventually, *kirk* was Anglicized as “church.” Thus, the word “church” simply means “belonging to the Lord.” God’s people belong to him. It’s entirely appropriate to call them so. There’s nothing wrong with this.

Thus, *church* is derived from the Greek word *kuriakos*.

*Kuriakos* → “Church”

Notice that this is a transliteration, not a translation. As is the case in transliterations, “church” retains the similar sound of *kuriakos*, but the meaning of *kuriakos* has been lost. Very few Christians understand that “church” means “belonging to the Lord.”

This problem of transliteration has been exacerbated by another linguistic development. “Church” began to be used as a translation for *ekklesia*.

Now, in a theological sense, this is legitimate. The New Testament idea of *ekklesia* (“group of people”) did belong to God (“church”).

*Ekklesia* = “Church” (theologically)

However, in terms of translating of Scripture, this was a disastrous mistake. When *ekklesia* is translated as “church,” there is a compound problem. “Church” is a transliteration of a completely different word. *Ekklesia* and *kuriakos* (“church”) are completely different words that ought to be distinguished.

The failure to distinguish these words has contributed to the general misunderstanding of Israel and the church.

## **Israel and the Church**

For instance, Discontinuity (Dispensational) Theologians argue that there is a categorical difference between Israel and the church. However, which “church” is being referred to? Is this *ekklesia* or *kuriakos*?

### **Israel and *Kuriakos***

*Kuriakos* (“church”) means “belonging to the Lord.” Did Israel belong to the Lord? Was Israel known as the Lord’s people? Yes, of course.

Therefore, if we are using the literal meaning of “church,” then Israel was certainly the “church.” Israel belonged to the Lord. Israel was the church of the Old Testament.

### **Israel and *Ekklesia***

*Ekklesia* means “a group of people.” Was Israel a group of people? Yes, of course.

Therefore, if we are using the literal meaning of *ekklesia*, then Israel was certainly the *ekklesia* of God. They were the people of God. Israel was the *ekklesia* of the Old Testament.

So, strictly speaking, Israel was both the *ekklesia* and the *kuriakos* of the Old Testament. Israel was a group of people, and Israel belonged to God. No matter which way we slice it, Israel was the church.

### ***Ekklesia* in the Old Testament**

Furthermore, Israel was called an *ekklesia* in the Old Testament.

Around 200 BC, the Hebrew Scriptures were translated in Greek. This Greek version of the Old Testament is known as the *Septuagint*, or the *LXX*, referring to the seventy scholars that supposedly worked on it.

The Greek word *ekklesia* appears in the *Septuagint* ninety-two times, and approximately half of these refer to Israel.

When Jehoshaphat and his *people* [*ekklesia*] came to take away their spoil, they found among them an abundance of valuables on the dead bodies, and precious jewelry, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away; and they were three days gathering the spoil because there was so much (2 Chronicles 20:25).

And Yahweh said to me, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A plumb line.” Then the Lord said: “Behold, I am setting a plumb line In the midst of *My people* [*ekklesia*] Israel; I will not pass by them anymore (Amos 7:8).

These are just a couple of samples. Israel is called an *ekklesia* forty-five times in the *Septuagint*. This is significant because the *Septuagint* was commonly used during the time of Jesus and the early church. In fact,

Jesus and the New Testament writers often quoted from the *Septuagint*, rather than use their own translations from the Hebrew.

### ***Ekklesia* in the New Testament**

Therefore, when Jesus spoke about the church in Matthew 16 and 18, this was not a new concept for his hearers. They would have understood him to be referring to the people of God, to Israel. Israel was the church.

Another important New Testament passage is Stephen's speech in Acts 7:

This is he who was in *the congregation* [*ekklesia*] in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us (Acts 7:38).

Notice that Stephen is speaking of Israel as a congregation or *ekklesia* or "church." Stephen calls Israel by the name "the church."

## **Conclusion**

- Israel was the *ekklesia* or church. Israel is called the *ekklesia* both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.
- Israel was also the *kuriakos* or church. Israel belonged to God. Israel was God's people.

So, in both these ways, Israel was the church. This conclusion should not be controversial, provided that definitions are understood.

### 3

## Is the Church Israel?

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The most controversial issue regarding Israel and the church is whether the church is the continuation of Israel. Is the church Israel? Continuity (Covenant) Theologians would say yes, the church is basically a continuation of Israel. Discontinuity (Dispensational) Theologians would say no, the church is completely separate from Israel.

We must recognize that this is a complex issue that many good Christians disagree on. Nevertheless, this is an issue that we must study carefully because our conclusions will determine how we deal with the Old Testament, how we view Israel, and how we view the church.

### Who are the Descendents of Abraham?

The key to understanding this issue is determining who are the descendents of Abraham. Throughout Genesis 12-17, God makes promises to Abraham's descendents. The question that divides theologians is this: Who are the descendents of Abraham, that is, who will inherit the promises to Abraham?

**Discontinuity Theologians** argue that the descendents of Abraham are his physical offspring, those who are related to Abraham by **blood**. Because the promises are made to Abraham's physical children, only Jews can inherit the promises to Abraham. Therefore, the church cannot inherit the promises to Abraham.

**Continuity Theologians** argue that the descendents of Abraham are his spiritual offspring, those who are related

to Abraham by **faith**. Because the promises are made to Abraham's spiritual children, ethnicity is not the determining factor. Therefore, the church can inherit the promises to Abraham.

### **The Promise Narrows**

In examining this issue, we must recognize that not all of Abraham's physical descendents will inherit the promises. God uses universal language, such as:

Then Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, "To your *descendants* I will give this land." And there he built an altar to Yahweh, who had appeared to him (Genesis 12:7).

Yet, God never intended this to mean every single one of Abraham's children.

### **Ishmael**

Abraham asked God to include Ishmael.

And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. *But My covenant I will establish with Isaac*, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year (Genesis 17:20-21).

So, the descendents of Abraham through Ishmael are not included in the promises; only the descendents of Abraham through Isaac are included in the promises.

### **Keturah's Sons**

Also, Abraham had six sons with his second wife, Keturah, yet none of these are included in the promises.

Thus, out of Abraham's eight sons, only Isaac is included in the promises. In fact, Isaac is Abraham's "only son" according to God.

Then He said, "Take now your son, *your only son Isaac*, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Genesis 22:2).

From God's perspective, Isaac was Abraham's only son, or only "descendent." The others were not included in the covenant.

### **Esau and the Edomites**

Additionally, God again narrowed the promise to the line of Jacob. Esau and his descendents (Edomites) are not included in the promises. Though the Edomites are ethnic descendents of Abraham, they are not considered "descendents" with respect to the promises.

### **The Uncircumcised**

God also allowed for the further contraction of Abraham's "descendents."

And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant (Genesis 17:14).

An ethnic descendent of Abraham who was uncircumcised was not considered a descendent of the promises. Thus, physical descent *alone* does not make someone a "descendent" of Abraham.

### **The Promise Expands**

Furthermore, God allowed for the expansion of Abraham's "descendants" to include those not related to Abraham by blood.

He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant (Genesis 17:12).

When God instituted circumcision, Abraham was to circumcise not only his physical children, but also male children who were physical descendants of Abraham. That is, a foreigner who was circumcised became a descendant of Abraham.

### **Summary**

Thus, the picture that we get from Genesis is that the descendants of Abraham, those who would inherit the promises, were initially comprised of Jacob's physical descendants, *minus* those who were not circumcised, *plus* those foreigners who were circumcised.

## **More Old Testament Evidence**

### **Spiritual Circumcision**

We later learn that although physical circumcision was important and was required for entrance into the covenant, what God really wanted was spiritual circumcision.

Circumcise yourselves to the Lord,  
And take away the foreskins of your hearts,  
You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem,  
Lest My fury come forth like fire,

And burn so that no one can quench it,  
Because of the evil of your doings (Jeremiah 4:4).

In fact, those who were physically circumcised but not spiritually circumcised were cut off. Thus, God's promises were not necessarily to those who shared Abraham's bloodline, but to those who shared Abraham's faith. God's promises were to the spiritual descendents of Abraham.

### **Mixed Multitude**

As Israel departed from Egypt, a "mixed multitude" went with them.

*A mixed multitude* went up with them also, and flocks and herds--a great deal of livestock (Exodus 12:38).

This mixed multitude included Egyptians and possibly even other nationalities. These foreigners became Israelites, "descendents" of Abraham.

### **Canaanites and Moabites**

We also have several examples of foreigners becoming Jews. Prominently, two foreign women not only become Jews but also married into the line of David.

- Rahab was a Canaanite harlot, who became the mother of Boaz.
- Ruth was a Moabite, who married Boaz and became the great-grandmother of David. Thus, David was one-eighth Moabite and one-sixteenth Canaanite.

**Summary**

So, according to the Old Testament, the heirs of the promises to Abraham are his spiritual descendents. This is spelled out even more clearly in the New Testament.

**New Testament Evidence****Romans 2**

Paul explains who a true Jew is in Romans 2.

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God (Romans 2:28-29).

Notice that this occurs after Pentecost, and that Paul is speaking in the present tense. A Jew is not defined by ethnicity, but by the Spirit.

**Romans 9**

In Romans 9, Paul is dealing with the objection: Because God does not save Israel, God has failed to keep his covenant. Because God does not save every ethnic descendant of Jacob, God is unfaithful.

Is this true? Did God ever promise to save all of Israel or every single one of Abraham's ethnic descendants? No. Paul explains in verse 6.

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel (Romans 9:6).

He makes the cryptic statement, “they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel.” What does this mean? Paul is arguing that not all of Israel is included in God’s covenant with Abraham. Paul actually goes back to Abraham to prove his point.

nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In Isaac your *seed* shall be called” (Romans 9:7).

Not all of Abraham’s offspring are included in the covenant. Paul quotes Genesis 17, “in Isaac your seed shall be called.”

Paul then makes a critical statement.

That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the *seed* (Romans 9:8).

Not all of Abraham’s physical descendants are included in the promise. Only the children of the promise are counted as the seed/offspring/descendants.

For this is the word of promise: “At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son” (Romans 9:9).

Only the descendants of Abraham *and* Sarah receive the promises. Furthermore, this distinction continues with Isaac’s children.

And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who

calls), it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.” As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated” (Romans 9:10-13).

Esau was a “descendant” of Abraham ethnically, but he was not a descendant of the faith of Abraham.

The same is true of all unbelievers who are ethnically descended from Jacob. They are not God’s people. They are not in covenant with God. They are not heirs of the promise. They are not “true” Israel.

### **Galatians 3:7-15**

The New Testament explicitly teaches that the spiritual descendents of Abraham are the heirs to the promises to Abraham. For instance, Paul states this very thing in Galatians 3:7:

Therefore know that only those who are *of faith* are sons of Abraham (Galatians 3:7).

Paul is making a distinction among the children of Abraham. Not all of Abraham’s physical descendents will inherit the promises of Abraham. Specifically, only those who share Abraham’s faith are considered sons of Abraham.

Only those physical descendents who also have faith will receive the blessings of the covenant that God made with Abraham, as Paul states in Galatians 3:9,

So then those who are *of faith* are blessed with believing Abraham (Galatians 3:9).

Thus, God’s covenant with Abraham is not an “unconditional” covenant with all of Abraham’s physical

descendants. Rather, faith is the condition of inheriting the blessings. The unfaithful are cut off.

Furthermore, faithful non-physical descendants of Abraham can be grafted into the promises, as Paul states in Galatians 3:14,

that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:14).

Gentiles, who are not physically related to Abraham, can be grafted into the promises of Abraham if they are spiritually related to Abraham, that is, if they possess faith.

Therefore, in order to inherit the promises to Abraham, you do not have to look like Abraham (i.e., be a physical descendant). You must believe like Abraham (i.e., be a spiritual descendant).

### **Galatians 3:16-29**

As we are studying the issue of who are the descendants of Abraham, we need to understand a technical issue. The Hebrew word for “descendants” is *zarah*. The literal translation of *zarah* is “seed” or “offspring” or “descendant.” This is a collective noun, which means that even though it is singular, it could be referring to a group.

Paul picks up this concept in Galatians 3 in his discussion of the “seed” of Abraham. Paul makes this startling statement in Galatians 3:16:

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many,

but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ (Galatians 3:16).

Paul argues that because *zarah* is singular, it should be interpreted as such and not collectively. Jesus Christ is the true *zarah* (seed) of Abraham.

Thus, what is important is not physical descent from Abraham. What is important is spiritual descent from Abraham and ultimately, Abraham’s seed, Jesus Christ.

This is Paul’s point in Galatians 3:29:

And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29).

Gentiles who have no physical relationship with Abraham can become a descendent of Abraham if they are spiritually related to Jesus Christ.

## **Conclusion**

Is the New Testament church a continuation of Old Testament Israel? Based upon the few passages that we looked at, the evidence points in this direction. Again, we lack a clear statement from Scripture, so we must be cautious. There are many other important passages and many related issues that we will deal with in the rest of this book.

Nevertheless, passages like Romans 2, Romans 9, and Galatians 3 indicate we should think of continuity regarding Israel and the Church.

## 4

# Jesus and the Nation of Israel

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In the last chapter, we looked at the controversial issue of whether the New Testament Church is the continuation of Old Testament Israel. The central issue here is determining who the descendents of Abraham are.

**Discontinuity Theologians** argue that the descendents of Abraham are his physical offspring, those who are related to Abraham by **blood**. Because the promises are made to Abraham's physical children, only Jews can inherit the promises to Abraham. Therefore, the church cannot inherit the promises to Abraham.

**Continuity Theologians** argue that the descendents of Abraham are his spiritual offspring, those who are related to Abraham by **faith**. Because the promises are made to Abraham's spiritual children, ethnicity is not the determinative factor. Therefore, the church can inherit the promises to Abraham.

Obviously, the people to whom God makes promises must be the people who receive the fulfillment of the promises. The Israel of promise must be the Israel of fulfillment. Who is Israel?

### **Israel/Jew as Ethnic Terms**

There are times when the Bible speaks of Israel in terms of ethnicity, or physical descent from Abraham.

For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen *according to*

*the flesh*, who are *Israelites*, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen (Romans 9:3-5).

Paul speaks of the profound advantage that ethnic Jews had over Gentiles.

What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God (Romans 3:1-2).

The Bible does sometimes use “Israel” and “Jew” to refer to ethnic descendants from Abraham, regardless of their faith.

This is how most of the world uses these terms today. “Israel” is usually a reference to the modern nation of Israel, which is comprised of ethnic descendants from Abraham. We call them Jews. These are ethnic designations, having little or nothing to do with religion. An atheist Jew is still considered a Jew.

In fact, only 15% of the modern nation of Israel are practicing Jews. Even fewer are Orthodox Jews. Yet, we continue to call them “Jews” and “Israel.” This is fine, as long as we understand this as a strictly ethnic designation. We need to acknowledge that the Bible does sometimes speak of Israel/Jews in an ethnic sense.

## **Israel/Jew as Spiritual Terms**

What we need to remember is that ethnic descent from Abraham has never been a qualification for inheriting the promises to Abraham.

### **Genesis and the Old Testament**

In the last chapter, we looked at Genesis 12-17 and how not all of Abraham's natural offspring will inherit the promises. For example, Ishmael and his descendants are not part of the covenant. Abraham's six sons by Keturah are not included. The line of Esau is cut off. When God establishes circumcision in Genesis 17, he states that those who are not circumcised are cut off. So, not all of Abraham's ethnic descendants inherit the promises.

We also saw how God expands the line of promise beyond physical descendants. Foreigners became heirs to the promises through circumcision. Converts such as Rahab and Ruth not only became Jews but married into the line of David and of Christ.

### **Romans 2-3**

The New Testament makes this even more explicit. In Romans 2, Paul explains that a true Jew does not depend on ethnicity, but on an internal work of the heart. Paul then writes:

What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God (Romans 3:1-2).

Paul is saying in 3:1-2 that ethnic Jews have an advantage over Gentiles because ethnic Jews were in covenant with God, they were entrusted with the law of God, etc.

Nevertheless, Paul has already made it clear that this advantage is wasted if it is not combined with faith. In 2:28-29, Paul specifically states that spiritual Jews are true Jews.

For he is not a *Jew* who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a *Jew* who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God (Romans 2:28-29).

### **Romans 9**

In Romans 9:3-5, Paul laments that ethnic Israel does not believe in Jesus as Messiah.

I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are *Israelites*, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen (Romans 9:1-5).

Paul rehearses the advantages that ethnic Israelites have. Yet, Paul also teaches that not all of ethnic Israel will be saved.

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all *Israel* who are of *Israel* (Romans 9:6).

There is an Israel (ethnically) that is not Israel (spiritually). The promises given to Israel were not like automatic guarantees to be received apart from faith and obedience. Because Israel was disobedient, the prophets announced that in the end, only a remnant would be saved.

And it shall come to pass in that day That the *remnant* of Israel, And such as have escaped of the house of Jacob, Will never again depend on him who defeated them, But will depend on Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The *remnant* will return, the *remnant* of Jacob, To the Mighty God. For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, A *remnant* of them will return; The destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness (Isaiah 10:20-22).

The vast majority of ethnic Israel was faithless. This is why Jesus said that claiming ethnic descent from Abraham was never a sufficient basis for claiming the covenant promises.

and do not think to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our father.” For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones (Matthew 3:9).

Jesus is using “children of Abraham” in a spiritual sense. This was God’s desire all along, that ethnic Israel would also be spiritual Israel or believing Israel.

### **Galatians 3**

In Galatians 3, Paul explains that Abraham’s sons are those who have faith.

Therefore know that only those who are *of faith* are sons of Abraham (Galatians 3:7).

Furthermore, Paul states that the true descendent of Abraham is Jesus Christ.

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ (Galatians 3:16).

Thus, what is important is not physical descent from Abraham. What is important is spiritual descent from Abraham and ultimately, Abraham's seed, Jesus Christ.

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29).

Gentiles who have no physical relationship with Abraham can become a descendent of Abraham and heirs of the promise if they are spiritually related to Jesus Christ.

### **From Israel to the Nations**

God's promises to Abraham were always intended to expand beyond his ethnic descendents.

Now Yahweh had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*" (Genesis 12:1-3).

God later reiterated this promise.

In your seed *all the nations of the earth shall be blessed*, because you have obeyed My voice (Genesis 22:18).

The blessing of the nations was going to come from the descendents of Abraham.

### **Isaiah**

Isaiah prophesied of the blessing being given not just to Israel, but to the other nations as well.

In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will serve with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria-- a blessing in the midst of the land, whom Yahweh of hosts shall bless, saying, "Blessed is *Egypt My people*, and *Assyria the work of My hands*, and Israel My inheritance" (Isaiah 19:23-25).

Egypt will be called "My people." Assyria will be called "the work of My hands." These are prophesies of the expansion of the blessing from Israel to all the world.

Israel was to be a light to the nations.

I, Yahweh, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, *As a light to the Gentiles*, To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, Those who sit in darkness from the prison house (Isaiah 42:6-7).

God did not elect Israel to be his only people on the earth. He elected them to reach all the peoples on the earth.

### **Jesus**

Jesus was blunt with Israel in his day.

And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:11-12).

Just before his ascension, Jesus commands the gospel be taken to the world.

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of *all the nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:18-19).

Through Jesus, the Son of Abraham, all nations are being blessed and the promise to Abraham is being fulfilled. This fulfills the reason that the Father sent Jesus.

For God so loved *the world* that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

This is celebrated in heaven.

And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood *Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation* (Revelation 5:9).

Thus, God's plan was never to limit the blessing of his promises to the ethnic descendants of Abraham. God's plan was to use the ethnic descendants to bless the entire world.

Ethnic Israel largely failed at this task. It was not until God sent Jesus as the true Israel that the nations were brought to God. This task continues today through the church.



## 5

# Jesus and the Temple of Israel

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What is the relationship between Jesus and the temple of Israel? This is perhaps one of the most fascinating issues in the study of the Old and New Testaments.

### **The Temple in Heaven**

The temple or tabernacle of God is the place where God dwells. John saw this temple in heaven.

Then *the temple of God* was opened *in heaven*, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail (Revelation 11:19).

God's primary dwelling place is in heaven. This is described as his temple.

### **The Tabernacle**

After the Exodus, God gave his people instructions to build a tabernacle. The tabernacle was where God dwelled among his people.

Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and *the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle*. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35).

The tabernacle was also the place of atonement. If God, the holy God, were to dwell in the midst of Israel, an unclean, unholy, and sinful people, atonement had to be made by sacrifice. God's presence required cleansing

from sin. Thus, the tabernacle was where God dwelled and where sacrifices were made.

### **A House for Whom?**

David wanted to build a permanent residence, or a house, for God.

Now it came to pass when the king was dwelling in his house, and Yahweh had given him rest from all his enemies all around, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in *a house* of cedar, but the ark of God dwells inside tent curtains" (2 Samuel 7:1-2).

However, God did not give David permission to build a "house" for God.

Would you build *a house* for Me to dwell in? For I have not dwelt in a house since the time that I brought the children of Israel up from Egypt, even to this day, but have moved about in a tent and in a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about with all the children of Israel, have I ever spoken a word to anyone from the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?" (2 Samuel 7:5-7).

God has never asked to dwell in a house. Instead, God was going to build a house for David.

since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel, and have caused you to rest from all your enemies. Also Yahweh tells you that *He will make you a house*. When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after

you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom (2 Samuel 7:11-12).

*He shall build a house for My name*, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:13).

God promised to build a house for David, and that one of David's descendents would build a house for God's name. Obviously, this is a long-term prophecy about Jesus.

### **The First Temple**

In the meantime, David's son, Solomon, built a permanent house for God, the temple. The temple was patterned after the tabernacle and took over its functions.

And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of Yahweh, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for *the glory of Yahweh filled the house of Yahweh* (1 Kings 8:10).

Like the tabernacle, the temple was the place of God's presence and also the place of atonement.

However, God warned that he would withdraw from the temple if Israel was unfaithful.

But if you or your sons at all turn from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and *this house* which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight. Israel will be a proverb and a byword among all peoples. And as for *this house*, which is

exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and will hiss, and say, “Why has Yahweh done thus to this land and to *this house?*” (1 Kings 9:6-8).

This is precisely what happened. Israel misunderstood the temple. The people thought that God’s presence was automatically guaranteed by the temple in Jerusalem. They thought that the city and temple could never be destroyed. The temple had become a guarantee of safety, an idol.

Jeremiah warned against such an attitude.

Do not trust in these lying words, saying, “The temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh are these.” (Jeremiah 7:4).

Israel did not heed Jeremiah’s warnings. Ezekiel records what happened.

Then the glory of Yahweh departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim (Ezekiel 10:18).

So the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was high above them. And the glory of Yahweh went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which is on the east side of the city (Ezekiel 11:22-23).

Ichabod! The spirit of Yahweh departed, and then the Babylonians destroyed the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

## **The Second Temple**

Ezra led the rebuilding of the temple. However, this paled in comparison to Solomon's temple.

But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy (Ezra 3:12).

In the New Testament era, Herod remodeled and greatly expanded the second temple. This was a beautiful and magnificent structure.

## **Jesus and the Temple**

Jesus indicated that, in his day, the temple still retained significance as the place of the presence of God.

And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in *My Father's house?*" (Luke 2:49).

He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by *Him who dwells in it* (Matthew 23:21).

## **Jesus Cleanses the Temple**

Nevertheless, Jesus indicates that the temple was not what it should be.

So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. Then He taught, saying to them,

“Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a ‘den of thieves’” (Mark 11:15-17).

This passage is referred to as Jesus “cleansing” the temple. Usually, this is interpreted as Jesus protesting against the moneychangers who were ripping the people off. Actually, there was nothing wrong with having money changing and the selling of animals near the temple.

The sacrifices required animals that were pure. Most likely, those traveling to Jerusalem to make a sacrifice did not bring animals from their home. Instead, the travelers purchased such animals near the temple grounds. There’s nothing inherently wrong with such practices.

There is something wrong with exploiting such situations, and perhaps some of Jesus’ actions were to correct this, but this was not his major intention.

### **Den of Thieves**

Jesus says that the temple has been made into a “den of thieves.” “Den of thieves” is not necessarily a condemnation of the swindling of the moneychangers. The word for “thieves” is not the word for a swindler or an embezzler. It is much more rogue. The word for “thieves” is a robber or a bandit.

Jesus is specifically referring to the leaders of the temple. They are thieves, robbers, and bandits. Remember, it was the high priest that supported the release of Barabbas, the true criminal. Jesus was soon to be crucified between to robbers.

Certainly, Jesus is implicating the corrupt moneychangers, but the true guilt falls upon the leaders

of Israel. They have turned the temple into a den of thieves.

### **House of Prayer for All Nations**

Jesus says that the real purpose of the temple is that it would be a house of prayer for all nations. Jesus is quoting from Isaiah 56.

Even them I will bring to My holy mountain,  
And make them joyful in My house of prayer.  
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices  
Will be accepted on My altar;  
*For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all  
nations (Isaiah 56:7).*

Isaiah is prophesying what Israel will be like after the exile. Israel was supposed to fulfill this. Yet, here we find Jesus judging Jerusalem for falling from this standard. Jesus' perspective seems to be that the foreigners were supposed to already be worshipping God on his holy mountain.

The Jewish leaders had restricted foreigners to the court of the Gentiles. Yet, believing foreigners were supposed to have the same access to the temple that Jews had. Leviticus 22 describes such a procedure.

However, at the time of Jesus, the Temple had a barrier that kept out the Gentile God-fearers. This barrier was an offense against God. Jesus is clear that the Temple was for all nations.

### **True Worship**

As Jesus explains to the woman at the well, worship is no longer going to be local, in the city of Jerusalem, and at the temple.

The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.”

Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:19-24).

After Jesus’ resurrection, true worship is not localized at the temple in Jerusalem. The temple will no longer be the dwelling place of God. Jesus is the new temple of God.

## **Jesus is the Temple**

Jesus claims to be superior to the temple.

Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple (Matthew 12:6).

How could Jesus be greater than the temple? Because Jesus is the true temple. He fulfills both functions of the temple:

### 1) God Dwells in Jesus

So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?”

Jesus answered and said to them, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*”

Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?”

But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said (John 2:18-22).

Jesus was not just speaking metaphorically. When He refers to his body as the temple, he is saying that God dwells in him. Jesus is challenging the Jews by saying that He is the true temple.

John describes the incarnation as God dwelling among us.

And the Word became flesh and *dwelt* among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

When God took on humanity, this was a “tabernacling.” Jesus is the tabernacle and the temple because God dwells in him.

## 2) Jesus Forgives Sin

Jesus forgives sins directly, apart from temple sacrifice.

When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, *your sins are forgiven you.*”

And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, “Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? *Who can forgive sins but God alone?*” (Mark 2:5-7).

Jesus fulfills both functions of the temple. He contains the presence of God, and he forgives sins, through the sacrifice of himself. In Jesus, the temple becomes the sacrifice.

### Ichabod – Part 2

At Jesus’ death, the temple ceased to be the dwelling place of God.

Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Mark 15:38).

The veil of the temple meant that God had departed from the temple. Ichabod! Although the Jews continued to worship in the temple, God was not there. The temple was now a place of idolatry.

About forty years later, in AD 70, the temple was destroyed once and for all. It has never been rebuilt.

## **The Church and the Temple**

After God left the temple in Jerusalem, God now dwells in his people.

Do you not know that *you are the temple of God* and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Since God dwells in us, we are the temple of God.

Or do you not know that *your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit* who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? (1 Corinthians 6:19).

The church is being built into a living temple.

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 foundation of 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 dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

This is precisely what Jesus promised:

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will *build* My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus used “building” imagery to describe the growth of the church. As we grow, we are being “built” into a temple of God.

Coming to Him as to *a living stone*, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up *a spiritual house*, a holy *priesthood*, to offer up spiritual *sacrifices* acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion A chief *cornerstone*, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.” Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, “The *stone* which the

builders rejected Has become the chief *cornerstone*,” and “A *stone* of stumbling And a *rock* of offense.” They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. But you are a chosen generation, a royal *priesthood*, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy (1 Peter 2:4-10).

Peter uses Israelite temple language to refer to the church. The church is now the temple of God.

### **The Church is the Temple of Ezekiel**

In between the first and second temple, Ezekiel saw a vision of a new temple, which he recorded in Ezekiel 40-48. There is much detail here, but we can summarize this by saying that the church is the fulfillment of the temple that Ezekiel saw.

One clue to this is found in Ezekiel 37, which is a glorious description of the rebirth of Israel, the dry bones being brought to life. This is generally interpreted as setting the stage for temple of chapters 40-48. Ezekiel makes this statement near the end of chapter 37:

My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people (Ezekiel 37:27).

The apostle Paul quotes this exact verse and applies this to the church.

And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For *you are the temple of the living God*. As

God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people" (2 Corinthians 6:16).

According to Paul, Ezekiel's temple is fulfilled in Jesus and his church. Therefore, we are not expecting or waiting for another temple to be built on earth. Jesus is building his temple, which is the church.



## 6

# Jesus and the Land of Israel

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The land of Israel is a certainly a controversial political topic. To whom does the land belong? What should our attitude be toward the land of Israel?

### The “Promised” Land

God had Abraham move away from his family to a new land:

Now Yahweh had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To *a land* that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1).

God promised to give this “promised” land to Abraham’s descendents:

On the same day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram, saying: “To your descendants *I have given this land*, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates” (Genesis 15:18).

The land was indwelled by the Canaanites, but God was giving it to Abraham’s descendents:

Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, *all the land of Canaan*, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God (Genesis 17:8).

God promised to give this land to Isaac and his descendents:

Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for *to you and your descendants I give all these lands*, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father (Genesis 26:3).

### **The Promised Land is God's**

The reason that God can give the land is because it is his.

The land shall not be sold permanently, for *the land is Mine*; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me (Leviticus 25:23).

Because the land was God's, it was holy land. The holy land required holiness of the people who dwelled on it. The holy land would vomit out unholy people.

You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled), lest the land *vomit* you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you. For whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people (Leviticus 18:26-29).

Part of the reason for giving the people God's law is so that they would be holy and be able to live in the land.

### **Entering the Promised Land**

The promise of the land was secure. God does not lie. However, possession of the land was always conditioned upon faith.

For instance, God was ready to give Israel the land under the leadership of Moses:

And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, “Send men to spy out *the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel*; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them” (Numbers 13:1-2)

Joshua and Caleb urged Israel to trust in God:

and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: “The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If Yahweh delights in us, then *He will* bring us into this land and *give it to us*, ‘a land which flows with milk and honey.’ Only do not rebel against Yahweh, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and Yahweh is with us. Do not fear them” (Numbers 14:7-9).

Unfortunately, the congregation rebelled and did not trust God, and so the entire generation was sentenced to death.

And Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, “How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me. Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says Yahweh, ‘just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: *‘The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness*, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by

no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in' (Numbers 14:26-30).

Of the generation that was led out of Egypt, only two people actually inherited the promised land. This does not nullify God's promise. Remember, God's promises are only inherited by those who are of faith. Abraham's descendents are spiritual descendents. The heirs of the promise of the land are those who share Abraham's faith.

God was faithful, but Israel as a whole was unfaithful. The promised land was to be possessed by faith, not grasped by strength.

This was a lesson that Moses' generation did not learn. After they failed to trust God in entering the land, Israel foolishly attempted to seize the land by their own military might.

Then Moses told these words to all the children of Israel, and the people mourned greatly. And they rose early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, "Here we are, and we will go up to the place which Yahweh has promised, for we have sinned!"

And Moses said, "Now why do you transgress the command of Yahweh? For this will not succeed. Do not go up, lest you be defeated by your enemies, for Yahweh is not among you. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and you shall fall by the sword; because you have turned away from Yahweh, Yahweh will not be with you."

But they presumed to go up to the mountaintop; nevertheless, neither the ark of the covenant of

Yahweh nor Moses departed from the camp. Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah (Numbers 14:39-45).

Israel tried to grasp the land by their own strength, but the land was to be grasped by faith. The Promised Land cannot be possessed by military might.

### **The Fulfillment of the Promised Land**

God led the next generation of Israel into the promised land. Although the conquest was not perfect, Joshua summarizes it this way:

So Yahweh gave to Israel *all* the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. Yahweh gave them rest *all* around, according to *all* that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of *all* their enemies stood against them; Yahweh delivered *all* their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which Yahweh had spoken to the house of Israel. *All* came to pass (Joshua 21:43-45).

It is interesting to note that at the time that Joshua wrote this, Israel did not possess all of the promised land, nor had they driven out all of the Canaanites.

At the same time, we must note the comprehensiveness of this passage. "All" is mentioned six times, including the summary: "All came to pass." How do these two facts fit together?

We need to understand that this passage is written from God's perspective. From God's perspective, he had given them the land. Any failure to fully possess the land or

drive out the inhabitants was Israel's fault. God was not at fault. He had given them all the land that he promised. If Israel had been faithful, they would have possessed the land perfectly and kept it forever, just as God promised.

The rest of the Old Testament tells the story of how Israel disobeyed and distrusted God and lost the land. If at any time, Israel would have been faithful to the Lord, they would have possessed the land. Yet, time and time again, they were unfaithful.

## **New Testament and the Land**

In the Old Testament, "land" is one of the central themes, used 1493 times. However, "land" is used 52 times in the New Testament, most of which are the gospels and none are the epistles. There are many reasons for this, but one of the main reasons is that the land promised to Israel has been universalized into the earth.

### **The Great Commission**

Jesus came to reach the lost sheep of Israel. He labored primarily within the historical boundaries of the Promised Land. At his ascension, Jesus was crowned as King, not just King of Israel, but King of the Universe.

Jesus has authority over not just Israel, but all heaven and earth.

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me *in heaven and on earth*. "Go therefore and make disciples *of all the nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:18-19).

Because Jesus now has authority over the entire earth, the nations are to be disciplined.

### **Pentecost**

The disciples were still looking for the ethnic kingdom of Israel.

Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and *to the end of the earth*” (Acts 1:6-8).

The disciples were correct in that the kingdom started with Israel. The timing was yet unknown, but the kingdom was going to start in Jerusalem, with three thousand Jews converted at Pentecost. The gospel would then proceed to Judea and Samaria, and eventually encompass the whole world.

### **The Land vs. The Earth**

The promise to obedient children has changed from land to earth.

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon *the land* which Yahweh your God is giving you (Exodus 20:12).

Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be long,

and that it may be well with you in *the land* which the Lord your God is giving you (Deuteronomy 5:16).

“Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: “that it may be well with you and you may live long on *the earth*” (Ephesians 6:2-3).

This shows that the promised land has now become the promised earth. Furthermore, Gentiles now get in on the promises through Christ.

### **Abraham’s Understanding**

Abraham understood that he was going to inherit the world:

For the promise that he would be *the heir of the world* [*cosmos*] was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith (Romans 4:13).

God promised Abraham a land, but Abraham understood this to also embrace the entire world.

### **Abraham and the City**

Abraham did not put his hope in the land of Israel, but in the city of God.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for *the city* which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:8-10).

“The city” is what Abraham was waiting for. Indeed, all the Old Testament saints desired a heavenly country, or a city.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now *they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a *city* for them (Hebrews 11:13-16).

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, *God having provided something better for us*, that they should not be made perfect apart from us (Hebrews 11:39-40).

“The city” is better than the land of Canaan. It is superior.

### **The Heavenly Jerusalem**

What is this city that the book of Hebrews speaks of?

*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel* (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Notice this says, “you have come.” This is past tense. We have already come to Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem. So, what is this heavenly Jerusalem?

The author of Hebrews is speaking of the church, “the church of the firstborn.” The church is also known as “Mount Zion,” “the city of the living God,” and “the heavenly Jerusalem.”

John uses similar language to describe his vision:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, “Come, I will show you *the bride*, the Lamb’s wife.”

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me *the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God* (Revelation 21:9-10).

The church is the bride of Christ, the Lamb’s wife. She is called “the great city” and “the holy Jerusalem.” Notice also that the church is descending out of heaven from God. As the church grows, she continues to descend from heaven to earth. The Kingdom of Heaven is coming to earth.

## **Heaven and Earth**

The relationship between heaven and earth is one of the keys to understanding the eschatological significance of Jesus and the land of Israel.

### **The Separation of Heaven and Earth**

During the creation week, God blessed all the days of creation except for the second day (Genesis 1:4, 12, 18, 21, 31). God never said, "It was good" about the second day. Why is this? What happened on the second day?

Then God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters."

Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day (Genesis 1:6-8).

On the second day, God separated the heavens from the earth. Why did he not bless this? Because this separation was temporary. God never intended the separation of heaven and earth to be permanent.

He created man to unite heaven and earth, or to bring heaven down to earth. Adam failed in the Garden. Israel failed in the Promised Land. Jesus Christ is now fulfilling this task through the church.

### **Uniting Heaven and Earth**

Paul describes how heaven and earth are going to be united.

that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together [unite, sum up] in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him (Ephesians 1:10).

Jesus rules not just over Israel, but over the whole world, and not just over the whole world, but also over the whole universe, and not just over the whole universe, but Jesus is the One who is going to unite the physical universe with heaven, and he will rule over this one realm as its king.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

In the Lord's prayer, we learn more about the relationship between heaven and earth.

In this manner, therefore, pray:  
Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9).

We learn two things immediately:

1. God dwells in heaven.
2. God's will is done in heaven.

We learn two more things after a little thought:

3. If God's will is done in heaven, then God's name must be hallowed in heaven.
4. If God's will is done in heaven, then God's kingdom must be in heaven. Matthew prefers to refer to God's kingdom as "the kingdom of heaven."

These four truths are basically synonymous. Where God dwells, his name is going to be hallowed, his kingdom exists, and his will is done. Or, where his will is done, his kingdom exists, his name is hallowed, and he must dwell there.

Notice how Jesus tells us to pray. We do not have to pray for God to dwell on earth, because his temple is already spread over the earth. Jesus already does dwell through his Spirit in the church throughout the world. However, we are to pray for the other three requests.

2. God's name to be hallowed on earth.
3. God's kingdom to come to earth.
4. God's will to be done on earth.

This is the task of the church. As we preach the gospel, God's kingdom comes to earth, a little bit at a time. God's name becomes regarded as holy, a little bit at a time. God's will is done on earth, a little bit at a time.

This is the coming of the kingdom. The kingdom of God gradually descends from heaven to earth. As heaven and earth become one, the kingdom of Christ encompasses the whole earth.

This was prophesied in the Old Testament.

He shall have dominion also from sea to sea,  
And from the River to the ends of the earth (Psalm  
72:8).

## **Conclusion**

We have seen a pattern with respect to Jesus, Israel, and the Church.

The *descendants* of Abraham are narrowed to Jesus Christ, and then expanded to include both Jews and Gentiles, the church.

The *temple* of God narrowed to Jesus Christ, and has now been expanded to include the church throughout the world.

The *land* has now been expanded to include the whole earth because Jesus rules not just over Israel, but over heaven and earth.

## 7

# Jesus and the Law of Israel

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The law is a broad, expansive topic that could easily require weeks or months or even years studying. In this chapter, we are going to look at two issues related to the law:

- 1) how the sacrificial laws relate to Israel and to Jesus Christ
- 2) how the law relates to the church

## Animal Sacrifices

One of the key issues that we need to understand is the role of animal sacrifices for Israel. The Bible is very explicit that a properly administered sacrifice would “make atonement” and secure “forgiveness”

And he shall do with the bull as he did with the bull as a sin offering; thus he shall do with it. So the priest shall make *atonement* for them, and it shall be *forgiven* them (Leviticus 4:20).

The priest shall make *atonement* for him, for his sin that he has committed in any of these matters; and it shall be *forgiven* him. The rest shall be the priest’s as a grain offering (Leviticus 5:13).

Seventy-three times in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, atonement is used in reference to animal sacrifices. How did these sacrifices “atone” for sin and secure “forgiveness” in light of Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice?

**Down Payment?**

A frequently heard answer is that animal sacrifices were “down payments” until the sacrifice of Christ. However, a down payment is a partial payment. This would mean that animal sacrifices paid for some sins and Christ paid for the rest. This is obviously incorrect. Jesus Christ did not pay for some of our sins. He paid for all of our sins.

But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:12).

**Covering?**

Another frequently heard answer is that the word atonement means “covering.” Thus, the animal sacrifices atoned for sin in that they *covered* sin until complete atonement was secured through the death of Christ. Temporary forgiveness was earned through sacrifice until complete forgiveness was secured through the death of Christ.

However, this answer is inadequate. The word atonement does not mean “to cover.” It means “to appease” or “to expiate.” This fits with the idea of forgiveness. The language of atonement and forgiveness of sins is inescapable. So, what kind of “appeasement” and “forgiveness” did the Animal sacrifices bring?

**Animal Sacrifice vs. Christ’s Sacrifice**

Comparing the atonement of the animal sacrifices with the atonement of Christ reveals their differences. The value of the atonement of animal sacrifices was temporal, finite, and external. In contrast, the value of Christ’s atonement is eternal, infinite, and internal.

### 1) Temporal vs. Eternal

Animal sacrifices need to be repeated.

And every priest stands ministering daily and offering *repeatedly* the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins (Hebrews 10:11).

Animal sacrifices had to be repeated because they did not offer lasting benefits. Any benefit from animal sacrifices was only temporary or temporal because they did not permanently take away sin.

On the other hand, Christ's sacrifice is eternal because He died once for all time.

But this Man, after He had offered *one* sacrifice for sins *forever*, sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:12).

It does not need to be repeated because the benefits last forever.

### 2) Finite vs. Infinite

Animal sacrifices were finite because the sacrifices were only good for particular sins. The daily sacrifices, such as the sin offering and the guilt offering, were only good for one sin. They had to be repeated for each sin, as often as necessary. Likewise, the Day of Atonement only covered the sins committed for the previous year.

But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year (Hebrews 10:3).

On the other hand, Christ's atonement is infinite because He paid for all of the sins of believers.

so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation (Hebrews 9:28).

Christ's sacrifice is good for all of our sins that we have ever committed or ever will commit.

### 3) External vs. Internal

The animal sacrifices were external in that they did not necessarily produce a changed heart. On the other hand, the benefits of Christ's sacrifice are internal. God regenerates believers, giving us a new heart.

## **The Purposes of Animal Sacrifices**

There are at least two purposes for animal sacrifices.

### 1) Atonement and Forgiveness on Earth

If properly administered, the sacrifices provided a temporal, finite, and external exemption from physical death on earth.

Animal sacrifices provided *temporal* atonement in that they only excused the sinner from immediate stoning or burning, but they did not excuse him from eternal damnation. Forgiveness was temporal not eternal.

Animal sacrifices provided *finite* atonement in that they only excused the sinner from the immediate physical death of one sin at a time (the sin and guilt offerings) or one year at a time (the Day of Atonement). Each new sin required a new animal sacrifice. Forgiveness was finite not infinite.

Animal sacrifices provided *external* atonement in that they only pardoned the sinner from the external, physical consequences of sin, but had no impact on the sinner's eternal destiny. Forgiveness was external not internal.

In summary, we might say that animal sacrifices were good for *earthly* atonement and *earthly* forgiveness. They allowed a sinner to remain alive on the earth.

In contrast, Christ's sacrifice is good for *heavenly* atonement and *heavenly* forgiveness. It allows a sinner to remain alive in heaven.

## 2) Foreshadowing Christ's Sacrifice

The author of Hebrews refers to the sacrificial system as a shadow.

For the law, having *a shadow* of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect (Hebrews 10:1).

The sacrifices foreshadowed Christ's death on the cross. Each animal sacrifice pointed to Jesus Christ. Now that Christ has come, there is no longer a need for animal sacrifices. These have all been fulfilled.

## **The Law and the Church**

Is the church under law? We can answer this in two ways, depending upon our understanding of law.

### ***Torah***

Our English word "law" generally reminds us of rules. "Do this" or "don't do that." While rules are important,

they do not encompass all that God means by the word law.

Law comes from the Hebrew word *Torah*, which means “instruction.” When God gave his *Torah* to Israel, it did not just consist of a list of rules. *Torah* is not merely a legal code or a rule book. *Torah* includes much more.

The first five books of the Old Testament are called the *Torah*. Yet, a perusal of these books shows that they are not all rules or “law.” Furthermore, even in the sections where there are heavy concentrations of “law” (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), God never gives just a list of rules. He intersperses history, prophecy, poetry, songs, and other genres of literature.

Thus, if we take a narrow understanding of *Torah* (rules, “laws”), then we will be mistaken when we speak of the *Torah*. It is much better to think of the *Torah* as instruction, part of which includes rules.

We err when we think of the *Torah* as a rule book. The *Torah* is not a rule book; it is a covenant book. The *Torah* is the instruction of God to Israel concerning their covenant together. We call this the Old Testament or Old Covenant. The *Torah* is the Old Covenant instructions for Israel.

### **Jesus Fulfills the *Torah***

Jesus came to fulfill the Old Covenant.

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but *to fulfill* (Matthew 5:17).

Jesus did not come to do away with or to simply destroy the Old Covenant. He came to fulfill it. He lived a perfect life and died as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant.

### **A Change of the Law**

Because the Old Covenant is fulfilled, the church is not under the Old Covenant. As the author of Hebrews states:

Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? *For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law* (Hebrews 7:11-12).

The priesthood has changed from the sons of Levi to Jesus Christ. A change in priesthood requires a change of the law, a change in *Torah*, a change in covenant.

### **You are not under law**

Thus, we should be able to say with Paul,

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for *you are not under law* but under grace (Romans 6:14).

We are not under the Old Covenant law. We are no longer required to sacrifice animals. Jesus is the perfect sacrifice, as Paul later states:

For Christ is *the end of the law* for righteousness to everyone who believes (Romans 10:4).

The Old Covenant law has ended. Jesus Christ has fulfilled it. We are not under law.

**You are under law**

At the same time, we are under law. Paul calls this the law of Christ.

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill *the law of Christ* (Galatians 6:2).

One of the first things we notice is that Jesus repeats many of the commands of the Old Covenant. In fact, Jesus even summarizes the entire Old Covenant:

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:36-40).

The Old Covenant is summarized by loving God and loving your neighbor. So, the essence of the Old Covenant is retained in the New Covenant. As Jeremiah prophesied:

Behold, the days are coming, says Yahweh, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-- not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says Yahweh. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: *I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts*; and I will be

their God, and they shall be My people (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

The Old Covenant law is still present in the New Covenant. It has been transformed (e.g., the sacrificial laws are not literally binding).

Nevertheless, the church is now charged with bringing God's law to the nations. Jesus makes this clear in the Great Commission.

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you*; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen (Matthew 28:18-20).

Part of making disciples is teaching them to observe all things that Christ has commanded.

## **Conclusion**

In previous chapters, we have seen the pattern that the promises to Israel have been fulfilled in Christ, expanded to the church, and are spreading throughout the world.

Israel → Christ → Church → World

The descendents, or seed, of Israel was fulfilled in Christ, then expanded to the church, and are now spreading throughout the world.

The temple of Israel was fulfilled in Christ, then expanded to the church, and is now spreading throughout the world.

The land of Israel was fulfilled in Christ, then given to the church, and now encompasses the world.

The law of Israel was fulfilled in Christ, then given to the church, and is now taught throughout the world.

## 8

# Jesus and the Future of Ethnic Israel

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### **Israel → Jesus → Church → World**

This book has been surveying the various relationships between Jesus, Israel, and the Church. We have examined four key aspects of these relationships: descendents, temple, law, and land of Israel. Each of these key aspects has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, shared with the church, and are now spreading throughout the world.

### **Descendents → Jesus → Church → World**

The true descendent of Abraham is Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). The church is related by faith to Jesus Christ and are now heirs of the promises to Abraham (Galatians 3:29). Our task is to now make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19).

### **Temple → Jesus → Church → World**

The true temple of God is Jesus Christ (John 2:19). Because Christ dwells in us through the Spirit, the church is now the temple (1 Corinthians 3:16). This temple is being spread to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

### **Land → Jesus → Church → World**

The promised land was given to Israel (Joshua 21:43-45), but they failed to possess it because of their unbelief. God has now given the promised land and the rest of the world to Jesus (Matthew 28:18) who is sharing it with the church (Psalm 72:8).

### **Law → Jesus → Church → World**

The law was given to Israel, but they did not keep it by faith (Romans 9:31-32). The law is fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Romans 10:4). The church is now under the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). We are to teach this law to all the nations (Matthew 28:20).

### **Summary**

All that was promised to Israel has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, shared with the church, and universalized to encompass the entire world.

For all the promises of God in Him [Jesus Christ] are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us (2 Corinthians 1:20).

### **Shadows vs. Reality**

What was the purpose of the Israel, the temple, the land, and the law? These were “copies” and “shadows.”

who serve the *copy* and *shadow* of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, “See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain” (Hebrews 8:5).

The Old Covenant system with the tabernacle, the temple, and the animal sacrifices were copies and shadows of heaven. Now that Christ has come, he has fulfilled all of these things, so that there is no longer any use for them the shadows and copies.

In that He says, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming *obsolete* and growing *old* is ready to *vanish* away (Hebrews 8:13).

The Old Covenant system was “becoming obsolete” and “growing old” and was “ready to vanish away.” This was accomplished in AD 70 when the temple was destroyed. With the destruction of the temple, the Old Covenant system has become obsolete.

The Old Covenant pointed towards Jesus Christ. Now that we are in the New Covenant, God will not return to the Old Covenant system. That would be turning his back on Jesus Christ.

In fact, there is no going back to any of the unique characteristics of the Old Covenant:

- There will never again be a significance for an ethnic Israelite nation.
- There will never again be a literal temple of stone where God dwells.
- There will never again be a holy land.
- There will never again be an animal sacrifice securing forgiveness and atonement.

## **What about the Old Testament Promises?**

There are hundreds of Old Testament promises regarding the nation of Israel, the temple, the land, and the law. What happens to these? Are they going to be fulfilled?

Yes, all the promises of God have been or will be fulfilled. They are not all fulfilled at the same time and in the same way. Just as many were surprised at how prophecy was fulfilled at Jesus' first coming, so we will likely be surprised at how prophecy is fulfilled at Jesus' second

coming. Thus, we need to be careful in assuming we have it all figured out.

Here are five suggestions for how the promises might be fulfilled.

### 1) Conditional and Unfulfilled

Some Old Covenant promises were conditioned upon Israel's faith. Since Israel lacked faith, the timeframe of fulfillment has passed. These promises will go unfulfilled, but this is not due to a failure on God's part.

Remember, also, that conditions are not always stated or recorded in the text. Many times, repentance and faith are implicitly connected to a promise (e.g., the preaching of Jonah).

### 2) Fulfilled in Jesus Christ

Some Old Covenant promises were fulfilled in the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is especially true of the ascension, which is often overlooked. Many of the promises such as 2 Samuel 7, Psalm 2, and Psalm 110, were fulfilled in the ascension of Jesus Christ.

### 3) Fulfilled in the Apostolic Church

Some Old Covenant promises were fulfilled in the early church as recorded in the book of Acts.

For example, Pentecost is another event that is often disconnected from the Old Testament, yet this was the rebirth of Israel, the reunion of Judah and Israel. The early church was the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David, fulfilling Amos 9:11, as James says:

Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 'After this I will return And will rebuild *the tabernacle of David*, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the Lord who does all these things' (Acts 15:14-17).

#### 4) Fulfilled by the Church in History

Some Old Covenant promises are fulfilled by the church on earth in history up until the second coming of Christ. The church is the New Jerusalem and as such, she will fulfill many of the promises that ethnic Jews thought they were going to fulfill.

#### 5) Fulfilled by the Church in Eternity

Some Old Covenant promises will be fulfilled in eternity by all believers from all ages. In the New Heavens and the New Earth, all of God's people will live together in harmony. This will be the final fulfillment of some of the promises.

Thus, in eternity, we will be able to look back and say that all of the promises were fulfilled, either in Christ or his church, in history or in eternity. This gives us a Christ-centered expectation in how we look at the fulfillment of prophecy. All is fulfilled in Christ and his church.

### **The Future for Ethnic Israel/Jews**

If all of the Old Covenant promises are fulfilled in Christ and his church, then is there a future for ethnic Israel? Yes!

**Past Salvation of Ethnic Israel**

In Romans 9-11, Paul defends the righteousness of God. Some are questioning the righteousness and the faithfulness of God because many ethnic Jews are perishing even after the coming of their Messiah. If God is faithful, how can he allow this?

Paul begins by saying that this is not God's fault:

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel (Romans 9:6).

God has not failed nor has God's word has not failed. God never promised to save all of ethnic Israel.

**Present Salvation of Ethnic Israel**

Furthermore, God is presently saving some of ethnic Israel.

I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin (Romans 11:1).

Paul is an example. He is an ethnic Jew, and God has saved him. In fact, there were many ethnic Jews in the early church. God continues to save ethnic Jews throughout the history of the church.

Nevertheless, many ethnic Jews are not saved. This is because Israel has been hardened. They have stumbled and fallen. Israel's fall has brought salvation to the Gentiles.

### **Future Salvation of Ethnic Israel**

However, look at what God's purpose is in bringing salvation to the Gentiles:

I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to *jealousy*, salvation has come to the Gentiles (Romans 11:11).

God is saving Gentiles so that ethnic Israel will be provoked to jealousy. Paul describes this further:

Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their *fullness!* (Romans 11:12).

Notice that Paul speaks of the future of ethnic Jews. They will experience a "fullness."

### **The Olive Tree**

Paul uses the metaphor of the olive tree:

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 (Romans 11:17).

Ethnic Israel was broken off of the olive tree. Gentiles were grafted in. Yet, Paul expects ethnic Israel to be grafted in again.

For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will *these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?* (Romans 11:24).

Paul elaborates on the future of ethnic Jews.

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that *blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in* (Romans 11:25).

Paul indicates that ethnic Israel's blindness is temporary. His expectation seems to be that when the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, then God will deal with ethnic Israel.

## **All Israel Will Be Saved**

Paul then builds to his great conclusion:

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.” (Romans 11:26-27).

### **Who is “all Israel”?**

Some notable theologians, including Calvin, have argued that “all Israel” does not refer to ethnic Israel, but to the church. However, this goes against the entire context of Romans 9-11. “All Israel” must refer to ethnic Israel.

### **When will they be saved?**

This could be fulfilled either gradually or cataclysmically.

- 1) “All Israel Will Be Saved” could refer to God’s plan to gradually save some ethnic Jews throughout the history of the church. Thus, at the end of time, God can say, “All Israel was saved. I did not lose one of my people.”

- 2) “All Israel Will Be Saved” could refer to God’s plan to save all ethnic Jews that are alive just before the second coming. Thus, there is a point in time when God will save a massive number of Jews.

Neither view is conclusive, and since this regards the future fulfillment of a prophecy, we should be less than dogmatic. God may surprise us.

### **Salvation**

Nevertheless, notice that Paul is speaking of the salvation of ethnic Israel. This means that they will become part of the church. They will be part of the living temple of God. They will be co-heirs with us of the world. They will be under the law of Christ and in the New Covenant.

Moreover, saved ethnic Israelites do not and will not have a special status in the kingdom of God. Romans 11 says nothing about a return to the types and shadows of the Old Covenant. Ephesians 2-3 state that God has united Jew and Gentile in Christ.

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall (Ephesians 2:14).

Therefore, the final salvation of ethnic Israel is just that: salvation. In no way do we expect a return to an ethnic Jewish kingdom in the Middle East.

## **Israel Today**

So, what is unbelieving ethnic Israel’s status for today?

Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers (Romans 11:28).

They are enemies of the gospel in that they persecuted the early church. Yet, there will always be ethnic Israelites who become believers. Some ethnic Jews are elect. We do not know who they are. We must share the gospel with them. God will move the elect ones by jealousy to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

## **Conclusion**

Thinking about the salvation of ethnic Jews brings Paul to his knees in praise of God.

Oh, 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 has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:33-36).

This has to be the purpose of all of our studying. If we develop a smug attitude about understanding any truth in the Bible, then we are in sin. We understand nothing. The beginning and end of all of our studies should be for the glory of God, for the praise of God. The goal of all theology is doxology.

If our study of the Bible leads us to pride, to critical spirits, to judgmental hearts, or to boastful words, then we have utterly failed.

If at the end of this study, your thought is, “How stupid of anyone for not understanding this!” then you have reached a deadly conclusion. You are in sin, and you need to repent.

We should remember Paul’s plea for humility:

that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? (1 Corinthians 4:6-7).

If we understand anything, it is because of God’s grace to us. There is no room for pride or boasting.

As we think about God’s plan for the salvation of ethnic Jews, we should be driven to praise God. The goal of all theology is doxology.

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:36).



## Scripture Index

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Genesis 1:4	71	Joshua 21:43-45	65, 85
Genesis 1:6-8	71		
Genesis 1:12	71	2 Samuel 7	88
Genesis 1:18	71	2 Samuel 7:1-2	48
Genesis 1:21	71	2 Samuel 7:5-7	48
Genesis 1:31	71	2 Samuel 7:11-12	48-49
Genesis 3:15	12	2 Samuel 7:13	49
Genesis 12:1	61		
Genesis 12:1-3	42	1 Kings 8:10	49
Genesis 12:7	28	1 Kings 9:6-8	49-50
Genesis 12-17	27, 39		
Genesis 15:18	61	2 Chronicles 20:25	25
Genesis 17	33, 39		
Genesis 17:8	61	Ezra 3:12	51
Genesis 17:12	30		
Genesis 17:14	29	Psalms 2	88
Genesis 17:20-21	28	Psalms 72:8	73, 85
Genesis 22:2	29	Psalms 110	88
Genesis 22:18	43		
Genesis 26:3	62	Isaiah 10:20-22	41
		Isaiah 19:23-25	43
Exodus 12:38	31	Isaiah 42:6-7	43
Exodus 20:12	67	Isaiah 56	53
Exodus 40:34-35	47	Isaiah 56:7	53
Leviticus 4:20	75	Jeremiah 4:4	31
Leviticus 5:13	75	Jeremiah 7:4	50
Leviticus 18:26-29	62	Jeremiah 31:31-33	82-83
Leviticus 22	53		
Leviticus 25:23	62	Ezekiel 10:18	50
		Ezekiel 11:22-23	50
Numbers 13:1-2	63	Ezekiel 37	58
Numbers 14:7-9	63	Ezekiel 37:27	58
Numbers 14:26-30	64	Ezekiel 40-48	58
Numbers 14:39-45	64-65		
		Amos 7:8	25
Deuteronomy 5:16	67-68	Amos 9:11	88

Matthew 3:9	41	Romans 9:6	32, 40, 90
Matthew 5:17	80	Romans 9:7	33
Matthew 6:9	72	Romans 9:8	33
Matthew 8:11-12	44	Romans 9:9	33
Matthew 12:6	54	Romans 9:10-13	33-34
Matthew 16	26	Romans 9:31-32	86
Matthew 16:18	57	Romans 10:4	81, 86
Matthew 18	26	Romans 11	93
Matthew 22:36-40	82	Romans 11:1	90
Matthew 23:21	51	Romans 11:11	91
Matthew 28:18	85	Romans 11:12	91
Matthew 28:18-19	44, 66	Romans 11:17	91
Matthew 28:18-20	83	Romans 11:24	91
Matthew 28:19	85	Romans 11:25	92
Matthew 28:20	86	Romans 11:26-27	92
		Romans 11:28	94
Mark 2:5-7	55-56	Romans 11:33-36	94
Mark 11:15-17	51-52	Romans 11:36	95
Mark 15:38	56		
		1 Corinthians 3:16	56, 85
Luke 2:49	51	1 Corinthians 4:6-7	95
		1 Corinthians 6:19	57
John 1:14	55		
John 2:18-22	54-55	2 Corinthians 1:20	86
John 2:19	85	2 Corinthians 6:16	58-59
John 3:16	44		
John 4:19-24	53-54	Galatians 3	35, 36, 41-42
		Galatians 3:7	34, 42
Acts 1:6-8	67	Galatians 3:7-15	34
Acts 1:8	85	Galatians 3:9	34
Acts 7:38	26	Galatians 3:14	35
Acts 15:14-17	89	Galatians 3:16	35-36, 42, 85
		Galatians 3:16-29	35-36
Romans 2	32, 36	Galatians 3:29	36, 42, 85
Romans 2:28-29	32, 40	Galatians 6:2	82, 86
Romans 2-3	39-40		
Romans 3:1-2	38, 39	Ephesians 1:10	71
Romans 4:13	68	Ephesians 2-3	93
Romans 6:14	81	Ephesians 2:14	93
Romans 9	32-34	Ephesians 2:19-22	57
	36, 40-41	Ephesians 6:2-3	68
Romans 9-11	90, 92		
Romans 9:1-5	40	2 Timothy 2:15	13, 14
Romans 9:3-5	37-38, 40		

Hebrews 7:11-12	81
Hebrews 8:5	86
Hebrews 8:13	86
Hebrews 9:28	77-78
Hebrews 10:1	79
Hebrews 10:3	77
Hebrews 10:11	77
Hebrews 10:12	76, 77
Hebrews 11:8-10	68
Hebrews 11:13-16	69
Hebrews 11:39-40	69
Hebrews 12:22-24	69
Hebrews 13:8	14
1 Peter 2:4-10	57-58
Revelation 5:9	45
Revelation 11:19	47
Revelation 21:9-10	70