

Israel and The Church

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MINISTRIES

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Yeshua:

The Lord spoke to Jacob, saying, *"Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed"* (Genesis 32:28, NKJV).ⁱ Here in Genesis, for the first time, we hear the name "Israel" given by God Himself to Jacob, the patriarch of twelve sons who would become the twelve tribes of Israel.

God's promise to Jacob would not be realized for more than another four hundred years when the Lord would deliver the children of Israel from their bondage and slavery in Egypt.ⁱⁱ We read, *"Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, 'This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you'"* (Exodus 12:1-2). *"So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance"* (Exodus 12:14).

On that glorious day, Israel became a mighty nation, and God *initiated* the fulfillment of His promises given to Abraham. As we read, *"I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing"* (Genesis 12:2). *"And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions"* (Genesis 15:14).

I say "initiated" because Israel would not realize the fullness of her inheritance until the very end of the age. Even at the reign of King Solomon (the man of peace), Israel would not see the entirety of her land and more. Israel was not yet a kingdom of priests as the Lord had promised, saying, *"And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel"* (Exodus 19:6). Not until Christ would come (the prince of peace) and take His rightful throne over Israel would she see the fullness of every promise and inheritance of God.

Therefore, we need to see God's dealing with Israel, and thus humanity, as one gradual and continuing dispensation. And yet, we also recognize that each unfolding promise of the Lord initiates a new bookmark in God's revelation of Himself within human history, the culmination of which none will realize until Christ returns, not even the church.

The meaning of the name "Israel" is complex and multifaceted. It is derived from two verbs, *sara* (סָרָה), meaning "to become rigid from the retention of liquidity," and *yashar* (יָשַׁר), meaning "to

be upright," straight," or "level." These two verbs are combined with the noun 'el (אל), as in 'elohim (אלהים), also known as 'eloah (אלה), and the name for God.

Interestingly, the Lord gave this name to Jacob after he wrestled with the angel of the Lord and prevailed. While Jacob triumphed, he also suffered, as we read, *"Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him"* (Genesis 32:25).

The implication here is that Jacob and his descendants would never walk perfectly upright with the Lord until the appointed time of their healing when Christ returns. God's retribution for Israel comes at the end of the age. It says, *"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, And render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people"* (Deuteronomy 32:43).

While it is evident that Israel's becoming a *great* nation fulfills one of several promises given to Abraham, there are other *mysterious* promises the Lord gave to him as well. He promised Abraham, saying, *"In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice"* (Genesis 22:18). Here God promised the coming of the Messiah through Abraham. And in saying, *"I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body"* (Genesis 35:11). Here, God promised that many other nations would also come from Abraham besides Israel.

The Apostle Paul later revealed these mysteries to the Gentiles, saying, *"This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church"* (Ephesians 5:32). While God had already revealed Israel to every nation, the Advent of Christ and His church was concealed. This factually distinguishes the church from Israel as the church was hidden, but Israel was not.

However, what distinctively differentiates the church from Israel?

The answer can be found in Paul's letter to the Colossians, where he said, *"To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory"* (Colossians 1:27).

Paul tells us that this *mystery* among the Gentiles was not previously known to Israel, that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same body of Israel and partakers of God's promise to Israel in Christ through the gospel.ⁱⁱⁱ

These mysteries were indeed hidden in scripture, as we just read. From Abraham, *"A nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body"* (Genesis 35:11). And yet, God's redemptive plans have always included the nations (Gentiles), as it is written: *"Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles"* (Isaiah 42:1). *"I, the Lord, 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"* (Isaiah 42:6). *"For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious"* (Isaiah 11:10).

Yeshua Himself said, *"Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd"* (John 10:16). The clear implication in all these verses is that God's Kingdom and His family are more extensive than just Israel. Therefore, we read, *"Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession"* (Psalm 2:8).

While Israel in scripture is called a "nation" (*goyee*, plural *goyeem* in Hebrew), the church is only referred to as the "*ecclesia*" (from the Greek *ekklēsia*). It means "a gathering of those summoned" or "the assembly of citizens in a city-state."^{iv} We see a picture of the *ecclesia* in Revelation. As we read, *"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, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth'"* (Revelation 5:9-10). Again, these verses factually distinguish the church from Israel as the church now includes the Gentiles.

These differences have led some theologians to incorrectly believe that Israel and the church are *entirely* separate entities; some even falsely believe that the church replaces Israel as a new entity or a "new Israel." These opinions create several problems scripturally. If Israel and the church are entirely separate, God now has two chosen groups—Israelites and Gentiles. Some even claim that Israel is God's bride, and the church is the bride of Christ. And yet, Jesus said, *"There will be one flock and one shepherd"* (John 10:16).

If the church *replaces* Israel, God has broken His covenant promises to Abraham and His Christ, meaning God has violated His name. The Lord declared, *"If My covenant is not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth, then I will cast away the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, so that I will not take any of his descendants to be rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will cause their captives to return, and will have mercy on them"* (Jeremiah 33:25-26).

With the inclusion of the Gentiles, the church is now a partial fulfillment of the covenant promises given to Abraham. In other words, the church does not replace Israel, but rather, Israel has become the church.

To be clear, I am not speaking about the present nation-state of Israel, most of whom do not believe that Yeshua is the Messiah. Any reference to Israel will always be to the Messianic remnant who believes in Christ. And when Yeshua returns, the surviving remnant of unbelieving Israel shall also be saved.

Now that we understand how the church is distinctively unique from historic Israel (meaning before Christ came), we will now discover how they are eternally connected and united in Christ. Once again, if we view scripture as God's work of redemption and restoration with and through Israel, and now all humanity, as one continuing dispensation. In that case, we now understand how the church and Israel, while distinct, are also eternally united as one diverse family of God.

At the First Advent, Christ not only atoned for the sins of Israel and the Gentiles, to those who believe, He also sent forth the Holy Spirit as a deposit of our eternal inheritance and partial fulfillment of the promises given to Abraham. As we read, *"you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory"* (Ephesians 1:13-14, NIV).

This mark of God's seal and deposit of the Holy Spirit, while it signifies our individual salvation, also initiates the construction of God's spiritual house and Temple. This house being assembled from His living stones, as we read, *"You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 2:5).

In other words, God's house is *one* yet diversely comprised of many unique stones—some Jewish and others gathered from the nations (Gentiles). We see this shadow of God's Kingdom with the nation of Israel. Under King David and later King Solomon, they were *one* but also twelve diverse and unique tribes—a commonwealth of smaller kingdoms united under one King. Paul explained this to the Gentiles by saying, *"At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world"* (Ephesians 2:12).

We now understand that God's eternal Kingdom is a commonwealth *like* Israel but expanded to include a remnant of every nation (the Gentiles). While Israel is central to God's Kingdom, we also see that she is not exclusive to it. As we read, *"God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne"* (Psalm 79:1).

Christ is Lord over all His creation. However, Israel and Jerusalem will always be at the heart of His Kingdom, and all nations will flow to it. As we read, *"Many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.' The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem"* (Isaiah 2:3).

The disciples understood this aspect of God's Kingdom, asking Yeshua, *"Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"* (Acts 1:6). But they had yet to recognize the full inclusion of the Gentiles, as that would not occur until after the Day of Pentecost when the Lord would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh.^v Salvation had come to not only Israel but also the Gentiles.

While God's covenant promises *were* given to Israel, as Paul said, *"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"* (Romans 9:3-4). Now, with the outpouring of God's Spirit, the Gentiles have become "fellow heirs" with Israel, *sharing* in their covenant promises.^{vi}

Yet, Israel was to be the vessel through which God would bring His salvation to the ends of the earth. Paul said, *"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). And Yeshua affirmed that *"Salvation is of the Jews"* (John 4:22).

But then, something unexpected happened. Paul went on to say that *"through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles"* (Romans 11:11). Many theologians have misunderstood Paul's writings in this area, suggesting that God either had two separate plans of salvation, one for the Jews and another for the Gentiles. Or worse, that God had changed His mind concerning Israel's election.

Neither is accurate, and Paul is not saying that the Gentiles are only saved because Israel rejected her Messiah. Nor is he suggesting somehow that the Gentiles would have never been saved if Israel *had* accepted Christ. If so, then why does Peter say, *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9). Or why John declared, *"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29).

No. Paul is affirming something entirely different, that God's *plan* of salvation was *through* Israel, even saying that Israel's gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.^{vii} However, because Israel rejected her calling, God has turned to the Gentiles to bring the Gospel to every nation. Peter witnessed this with his own eyes, saying, *"If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"* (Acts 11:17).

Peter realized that God not only brought His salvation to the Gentiles but that the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit were equally given to them also. And for what purpose did the Lord share these gifts? Like the apostles, the Gentiles were to equally demonstrate the love of God and the power of the Holy Spirit unto the salvation of the world.^{viii} To unsaved Israel, first, as it is written, *"Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me! We are for signs and wonders in Israel From the Lord of hosts, Who dwells in Mount Zion"* (Isaiah 8:18). And Paul said, *"For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things"* (Romans 15:27). And so, it appears from scripture that it will only be through the demonstrated power of the Holy Spirit through the Gentiles that Israel will be provoked to jealousy.

Now that we understand God's calling upon the Gentiles and their inclusion in the house of Israel (expanding believing Israel to become the church), what will it look like when these seemingly opposite worlds, Jew, and Gentile, come together as one family of God?

Paul used the analogy of a cultivated Olive tree. In speaking to the Gentiles, he said, *"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).

This verse has raised many questions for theologians. Is this cultivated Olive tree a picture of Israel or the church? Well, it is both, and it is neither. Let me explain.

To begin, God used the Fig tree as a symbol for Israel, not an Olive tree. Yeshua Himself even said, *"Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near" (Matthew 24:32)*. Also, if the Olive tree represents Israel, then the Gentiles being grafted in "among them," as Paul said, must become Israelites to be part of God's household. This assumption would require the Gentiles to follow the Law of Moses and be circumcised in their flesh. However, these requirements were rejected at the Council in Jerusalem.^{ix}

On the other hand, if this tree represents the church, which presently is mainly Gentile, then the church presumably has replaced natural Israel as the "new Israel." This opinion also conflicts with Paul's message. As he warned, *"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)*. This error in thinking is by somehow believing we are presently in the Kingdom.

So, what is the answer? The only possible explanation is that the cultivated Olive tree represents the *future* Kingdom of God. After all, is that not what Yeshua preached in all of Judea and Samaria? *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:2)*. While Yeshua declared that the Kingdom had arrived, He also said we would not enter it until He returned, saying, *"I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:29)*.

Now, you might be thinking, "Isn't the church the same as the Kingdom?" Well, it is, and it is not. At this present time, the church has only received a partial guarantee of the promises given to Abraham, including a deposit of the Holy Spirit. God's unconditional promises to Abraham cannot be fulfilled until *all* Israel is redeemed and returned to the land that He promised them as an eternal heritage. As Paul said, *"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'" (Romans 11:26)*.

We are reminded that God's promises to Abraham were to become the father of a great nation, Israel, and many nations, the Gentiles. And notice how Paul makes this connection for the Gentiles, in saying, *"And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed'" (Galatians 3:8)*.

Paul is careful to retain a distinction between the natural seed of Abraham and those who by faith are connected to him, in saying, *"Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, 'I have made you a father of many nations')" (Romans 4:16-17)*.

Therefore, Abraham is the root of God's Kingdom as we read, *"If you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you"* (Romans 11:18). And this deep root of faith is connected to Isaac and Jacob, the father of Israel. If some but not all of Israel were broken off because of their unbelief, and the Gentiles by faith have been grafted in contrary to nature.^x In that case, we surmise that the cultivated Olive can only represent the future Kingdom of God when *all* Israel is saved at the return of Christ. Therefore, Paul said, *"And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again"* (Romans 11:23).

When Christ returns, the Gentiles, not replacing Israel, have been grafted in amongst them (believing Israel) to become the expanded future commonwealth of Israel—a great nation and a company of nations that God promised to Abraham. Therefore, in God's Kingdom, the eternal physical connection between Israel and the church is unquestionable. Even the New Jerusalem has twelve gates named after the twelve tribes of Israel, and at its foundation are the twelve Apostles of the Lamb, who are all Israelites.^{xi}

This brings us to our final discussion, the spiritual connection between Israel and the church. Paul said, *"And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God"* (Galatians 6:16). Theologians have also misunderstood this verse, falsely assuming that either all Gentiles are now Israelites or that the church has somehow replaced Israel as the "new Israel."

We must understand, as Paul explained, that there is a natural body and a spiritual one.^{xii} And he invariably distinguished between the natural branches of Abraham and the Gentiles, who he said were also the "seed" of Abraham (some say the "spiritual" seed of Abraham) by faith. As we read, *"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (Galatians 3:26-29).

In this verse, it should be evident that Paul was not saying that men become women or vice versa, as Paul was declaring spiritual equality between all the branches, both Jew and Gentile. As we read, *"But you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God"* (Romans 8:15-16).

If the Gentiles have received the same spirit of adoption as Israel, then not only are they the spiritual seed of Abraham, but they are also spiritual Israel—the Israel of God. And they do not replace the natural branches but join them as one large, diverse family and "one new man" in Christ as Paul said, *"So as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross"* (Ephesians 2:15-16).

Here we see the complete and final picture of God's Kingdom, a cultivated Olive tree comprised of natural branches (Israel) and wild Olive branches grafted in from amongst every tongue, tribe, nation, and people to become one family and one household of God.^{xiii} And while there are

family distinctions in God’s Kingdom, we are also one Kingdom that encompasses the whole of creation and every kingdom on earth.

As the Lord promised that Israel would become a “kingdom of priests,” now all who in Christ are kings and priests unto the Lord—a royal priesthood, therefore, Peter declared, *“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”* (1 Peter 2:9).

We are the redeemed of the Lord—a great nation, Israel, and a company of nations joined to her. The commonwealth of Israel. We also are the Israel of God, spiritually united as one new man. And we will sing a new song unto the Lord, declaring, *“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, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth [in Christ’s Kingdom forever, and ever]”* (Revelation 5:9-10).

Amen!

ⁱ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.

ⁱⁱ *Bible Timeline: Old Testament*. Bible Hub.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ephesians 3:6.

^{iv} *Ecclesia: ancient Greek assembly*. Encyclopedia Britannica.

^v Joel 2:28.

^{vi} Ephesians 3:6.

^{vii} Romans 11:29.

^{viii} Romans 1:16, 2:9-10.

^{ix} Acts 15:6-29.

^x Matthew 8:11-12. Romans 11:17-24.

^{xi} Revelation 21:9-21.

^{xii} 1 Corinthians 15:44.

^{xiii} Revelation 5:9, 7:9.