

ISRAEL, THE CHURCH AND THE LAND: A SURVEY OF PERSPECTIVES

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Perspectives on Israel and the Church

- Who are they? What is their relationship?
- Is the Church an extension of Israel or are they distinct groups?
- Has the Church replaced Israel in order to succeed where she has failed?

Christian theology has many views on the relationship between Israel and the Church, but there are two primary interpretive systems, those being:

- 1) The Church exists *instead* of Israel (**Replacement** Theology)
- 2) The Church exists *outside* of Israel (**Separation** Theology)

A Biblical definition of Israel from an HISTORICAL perspective:

- Israel is a physical, literal nation, consisting of physical, literal descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who are uniquely covenanted with God.
- Genesis 32:28 -- “*Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but **Israel**, for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.*”
- Exodus 1:1 -- “*Now these are the names of the **children of Israel** who came to Egypt, each man and his household came with Jacob.*”

SINAI (Mosaic) COVENANT: Made specifically with the Children of Israel

Exodus 19:1-6 -- “*In the third month after the **children of Israel** had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai...And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the **house of Jacob**, and tell the **children of Israel**: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people, for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you shall speak to the **children of Israel.**”*

DAVIDIC COVENANT: Made specifically with the physical House of David, concerning the unending Davidic rule over the nation Israel (2 Samuel 7:12-16)

- FULFILLED IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF JESUS' ETERNAL THEOCRACY

Isaiah 9:6 -- *“Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. Upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice, from that time forward, even forever...”*

JESUS' INITIAL INSTRUCTION: Mt 10:5,6 -- *“Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the **House of Israel**”.*

Luke 21:24 -- *“And they [Israel] will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”*

In contrast to the **historical** definition of Israel is the **allegorical** definition of Israel, which encompasses a variety of perspectives, including these:

- Israel is a spiritual entity comprised of ethnic Jews and Gentiles who have placed their trust in Jesus as Saviour
- Israel is a metaphor for “the people of God” in every generation
- Israel is the Church

BIBLICAL-HISTORICAL DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH

1) The Church is the Body of Christ

- Col 1:24

2) The Church is a mystery, now revealed

- Eph 3:3-9

- Rom 16:25-26a

3) All members of the Church become so by means of Spirit Immersion

- 1 Cor 12:12-14

4) The Church began on a specific day in history: Israel's Feast of Shavuot (Pentecost), approximately 33 AD

- Acts 2

Pentecost is important to the nation Israel for 3 reasons:

- it celebrates the anniversary of the giving of the Law on tablets of stone
 - it celebrates the birthday of the nation Israel
 - God's prescription for the celebration of Pentecost requires a gathering of Jews AND Gentiles (Dt 16)
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Biblical-Historical view of the identity of Israel and the Church:

ISRAEL -- a physical, literal nation, consisting of physical, literal descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who are uniquely covenanted with God.

THE CHURCH -- the physical, literal Body of Christ, a mystery once hidden but now revealed, manifested on a specific day in history (Pentecost, ~ 33AD)

- each is distinct from the other, never to be confused as one in the same
- one is God's "Wife" (Israel); the other is Christ's "Bride" (the Church)
- each is precious and fulfills specific purposes in God's plan of redemption
- neither is preferred over the other; neither replaces the other

REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY (“SUPERCESSIONISM”)

- Interprets the Scripture using the Allegorical Method
- The Church is a “new and improved” Israel, replacing the faulty tribal version from the OT.
- National Israel was the OT version of the ekklesia, but as a direct result of her national rejection of the Gospel, God transferred the covenant blessings and promises originally given to Israel, to the Christian Church.

THE BIBLICAL CASE FOR REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY

- 1) “Israel” refers to all those who trust Jesus as Saviour and embrace the New Covenant. These are “Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29).
 - 2) The Church is now “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16) and consists of Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus (Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8; Galatians 3:6,9)
 - 3) National Israel was the “seed” of the Church, which will eventually usher in a global restoration under God’s future dominion (Malachi 1:11; Romans 4:13).
 - 4) The Church is now the Heir and Trustee of God upon the earth (Galatians 3:29).
 - 5) The Jewish people have lost their spiritual privileges and are now replaced by “another people” (Matthew 21:43), namely, the Church. “Israel” denotes only those who are Christians, and only Christians are the inheritors of the covenants and blessings given to Abraham and his descendants.
 - 6) After the events recorded in Acts 2 (Pentecost), God was “finished” with national Israel. Today, a “true Jew” is anyone born of the Spirit, even if they are not descended of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Romans 2:28, 29).
 - 7) The Church now possesses all the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament.
 - 8) The Church, not Israel, is “the apple of God’s eye” (Deut. 32:10; Zech. 2:8).
 - 9) Jesus now, symbolically, reigns on the throne of David (2 Cor 1:20).
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SEPARATION THEOLOGY

Interprets the Scriptures using the Grammatical-Historical Method, asking such questions as:

- When is this happening and what is the history around it?
- Who is writing, and to whom is it being written?
- What is the literary style (eg; Figurative? Literal? Poetic? Metaphoric?)
- What did this mean to the original audience?
- Is a promise being made? If so, is it conditional or unconditional?
- To whom is the promise given, and for what period of time?
- Is the promise for an individual or for a group? Can it apply to others?

THE BIBLICAL CASE FOR SEPARATION THEOLOGY:

- 1) The terms “Israel” and “Church” are never interchangeable in the Scriptures, always referring to two distinct groups of people.
- 2) The Church is reliant upon Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension (Ephesians 1:20-23; Colossians 1:28) and therefore could not have existed previously. It is a new spiritual entity that began on the Day of Pentecost following Christ’s ascension (Acts 2).
- 3) The Church is not subject to the obligations of the Sinai (Mosaic) Covenant, since this covenant was ratified with the nation Israel specifically (Exodus 19, 20)
- 4) The Church consists of individuals “from every tribe and tongue,” “called out” from the world and baptized into the Body of Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 1:8; 2:38).
- 5) Israel is a “called out” nation (Exodus 19:6) that entered into specific, historical covenants with God.
- 6) The present-day restoration of national Israel is a partial fulfillment of prophecy (Ezekiel 36:16-28) that indicates the progress of the “end times”.
- 7) The Davidic Covenant will not be fulfilled until the Messiah returns to establish His throne in Jerusalem for a millennial (1000 year) reign (Revelation 20).
- 8) National Israel is a focal point of God’s plan for the ages. Prophecies concerning Israel which are currently unfulfilled will be fulfilled in the future (eg; Zechariah 12-14).

9) Israel is an “everlasting nation” whose survival is guaranteed by God (Jeremiah 31:35-37).

10) God will ultimately restore national Israel to faith in their Messiah, at which time they will receive the Kingdom blessings promised to King David (Zechariah 12:10).

OBJECTIONS TO THE CLAIMS OF REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY:

1) Romans 9:6 -- “Not all who are descended of Israel, are Israel”

(discussion)

2) Galatians 6:15,16

- compare a Dynamic Equivalent interpretation (eg; NIV) with a Literal Translation (eg; NASB)

3) Observations concerning Jeremiah 31:31-34 (prophecy of the New Covenant)

- it is made with the “house of Israel and the house of Judah” (both the northern and southern regions of Israel’s divided kingdom)
 - it is not like the Sinai Covenant previously made with their Israelite ancestors after the outgoing from Egypt, which they (national Israel) broke
 - it is made with a people to whom God considers Himself a “Husband” (national Israel)
 - it is made with a people whose previous iniquity and sin will no longer be remembered (national Israel)
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THE LAND -- WHOSE IS IT?

- The Biblical Boundaries:

1) SOUTHERN BORDER

“Your southern border shall be from the Wilderness of Zin along the border of Edom; then your southern border shall extend eastward to the end of the Salt Sea. Your border shall turn from the southern side of the Ascent of Akrabbim, continue to Zin, and be on the south of Kadesh Barnea; then it shall go on to Hazar Addar, and continue to Azmon. The border shall turn from Azmon to the Brook of Egypt, and it shall end at the Sea.” Num 34.3-5

The Southern border of the Promised Land (Canaan) runs from the southern end of the Dead Sea (Salt Sea), to approximately the middle of the Negev desert. From there, it turns Northward toward Wadi el Arish (brook of Egypt) and ends at the Mediterranean Sea.

2) WESTERN BORDER

*“As for the western border, you shall have the Great Sea for a border; this shall be your western border. “
Num 34.6*

The Western border of the Promised Land (Canaan) is the Mediterranean Sea (Great Sea).

3) NORTHERN BORDER

“And this shall be your northern border: From the Great Sea you shall mark out your border line to Mount Hor. From Mount Hor you shall mark out your border to the entrance of Hamath. Then the direction of the border shall be toward Zedad. The border shall proceed to Ziphron, and it shall end at Hazar Enan. This shall be your northern border.” Num 34.7-9

The Northern border of the Promised Land (Canaan) extends from the Northern region of Lebanon at the Mediterranean Sea, to a region east of Damascus in modern day Syria.

4) EASTERN BORDER

“You shall mark out your eastern border from Hazar Enan to Shepham. The border shall go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain. The border shall go down and reach to the eastern side of the Sea of Chinnereth. The border shall go down along the Jordan, and it shall end at the Salt Sea. This shall be your land with its surrounding boundaries.” Num 34.10-12

The Eastern border of the Promised Land (Canaan) goes southward for about 50 miles, starting from a region east of Damascus. Then it turns West to the Southern end of the Sea of Galilee (Sea of Chinnereth). From there it follows the Jordan River, ending at the Dead Sea (Salt Sea).

WHO OWNS THE LAND?

1) To whom did God originally give the Land, according to the Scriptures?

2) If the Land was originally given to Jewish descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, could it have been a temporary grant, and later transferred to others?

3) If the Land belongs to national Israel, are they guaranteed continual habitation in the Land?

OBJECTIONS TO ISRAEL’S CLAIM OF OWNERSHIP, AND COUNTERPOINTS:

1) In light of the fact that the land has been called “Palestine” for nearly 2000 years, this indicates rights of ownership to the Palestinian people.

Objections:

- The Bible never calls the land by this name. There is not a single instance in either the Old or New covenant wherein the land is called “Palestine” as opposed to “Israel”.

- The name “Palestine” is derived from the Hebrew word for “Philistine” and referred to the coastal plain inhabited by the Philistine people.
- Arab refugees in Israel only began identifying themselves as part of a Palestinian people in 1967, two decades after the establishment of the modern State of Israel.
- In AD 135, the Roman emperor Hadrian officially renamed the land, “Syria Palestina” in an attempt to sever it from its ancient association with the people of Israel

2) Some Palestinian people claim right to the land by reason of their being descended of the ancient Canaanites, who pre-dated Israel as occupants.

Objections:

- Palestinian Arabs are a mixed people group that immigrated to the land long after the Biblical period.
- Even if the claim of Canaanite descent were accurate, the Bible explicitly records God transferring ownership from the Canaanites to the Israelites.

3) Some claim that the Palestinian people have a right to the land by reason of their association with Jesus Christ.

Objections:

- Jesus was a direct descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah and David, none of whom identified himself as Palestinian.
- The vast majority of Palestinians are Muslims who would not claim a spiritual or physical association with Jesus.

4) Some Palestinian apologists claim that the Biblical Jewish association to the land is simply illegitimate.

Objection:

- Since the Jewish conquest in 1272 BC, the Jewish people had dominion over the land for one thousand years, with a continuous presence in the land for the past 3,300 years.
- Archeology and recorded history confirm the Biblical record of an enduring Jewish presence in the land, and particularly in Jerusalem.