

From Abraham to Christ to the Church

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TRUE ISRAEL

FROM ABRAHAM TO CHRIST TO THE CHURCH

To start out take a moment and answer these questions for yourself. What comes to mind when you hear the word “Israel”? Is Israel primarily a nation, a people, a covenant family, or something else? Why do you think so much of the Bible focuses on Israel?

Few places in the world generate as much discussion, debate, emotion, and attention as Israel. It seems hardly a week goes by without Israel appearing in the news. Wars, peace treaties, politics, prophecy, elections, international tensions, and religious debates continually keep Israel at the center of global conversations.

For Christians, this often raises important questions: What is the relationship between modern Israel and biblical Israel? Are they the same thing? What role does Israel play in God’s plan today? Who exactly are God’s covenant people? When the bible speaks about Israel, who is it talking about?

The challenge is that many Christians have formed their understanding of Israel from news headlines, political discussion, podcasts or social media before they have formed it from scripture itself. For many people, Israel is a place on a map. From a biblical perspective, Israel is a story. And until we understand the story, we’ll never understand the significance of the place. Many Christians know pieces of the Bible but struggle to see how the entire story fits together. This study traces the biblical theme of Israel from:

1. The calling of Abraham
2. The nation of Israel
3. Israel’s failure
4. Jesus as the faithful Israel
5. The Church as the people of God united to Christ

This study is not primarily about geopolitics, taking political sides, determining foreign policy, but to answer the question...What does the

Bible mean when it speaks of Israel? As the people of God, we always want to be guided by the truth of God's Word...no matter the topic. Our desire is to not allow culture to change how we read, and understand, the Word of God but to allow the Word of God to change the way we read, and understand, the things of culture.

To properly walk through this topic would require hundreds of pages of writing, since this is the overarching story from beginning to end, so for the sake of this study we will look at specific examples of scripture and connect them together in order to look at the truth of what/who is True Israel.

PART ONE

THE INCEPTION OF ISRAEL

Israel did not begin as a nation. Israel began as a promise. Most people think of Israel as a country on a map, but the bible begins somewhere much deeper. Israel starts with God's plan to redeem a broken world through one man, one family, and ultimately one Savior. The story of Israel is not primarily about land, politics, or ethnicity but it's about God's covenant faithfulness and His mission to bless the nations through Jesus Christ.

So to start take a moment and answer these questions for yourself...What makes a family a family? Is it because they have shared blood? Shared name? Shared values? Shared mission? What makes God's people God's people? This question will become central throughout this study.

Let's start by first understanding the context of the world that is communicated in the first 11 chapters of Genesis. If you read the first 11 chapters of Genesis you will read of the creation of humanity, the rebellion of humanity and then the consequences of that rebellion. You will read of Cain murdering Abel, the evil intent of all hearts on earth, the flood, and the tower of Babel. The Bible presents a world spiraling further and further from God.

Humanities story begins with relationship with their God but becomes a story of sin, rebellion, division and scattering. At Babel, humanity is dispersed among the nations but then something remarkable happens. God doesn't abandon the world but He initiates a rescue plan.

Genesis 12:1-3 "Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in/through you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This passage is one of the most important texts in the entire Bible. Notice God's command to Abram...GO! Abram must leave his country, his people and his family. This is the same thing that is asked of missionaries around the world. So we see that Abram is the first anointed and sent missionary to the world. From this passage what promises does God make Abram? Great Nation (I will make you into a great nation), Great Name (I will make your name great), Divine Protection (I will bless those who bless you), Global Blessing (All people's on earth will be blessed through you).

So we see how Abram was going to be blessed so that he could become a blessing to the whole world. Israel was never intended to be a reservoir, or a cul-de-sac, of God's blessings but was meant to be a channel that the blessings of God would flow through and be given everywhere. The Hebrew word for blessing is בָּרַךְ (barak) and it means to bestow favor, grant flourishing and to empower for life. God's blessing is never merely for comfort but it's the empowerment for purpose.

So we see the calling of Abram but now let's look at the covenant that God is going to make with Abram. Genesis 15:1-6 *"After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.'"² But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"³ And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."⁴ And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir."⁵ And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."⁶ And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness."*

God promises Abram descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky but there is a problem. Abram is old, Sarah is barren, and nothing appears possible for this promise to come true. However, it says that Abram believed God and this was counted to him as righteousness. This verse

becomes foundational throughout scripture as it points to the reality that salvation has always been by faith. To be God's people was never about works, ethnicity, or law-keeping but it starts with faith to believe the promises.

Then we see God forging this covenant with Abram in Genesis 15:7-21 by alone walking through the sacrificed animal as a smoking fire pot and flaming torch. This scene is mysterious but powerful. Think of this like a man, and a woman, walking down the aisle to get married. They both walk down as individuals but leave as one flesh. Here we see God making promises to Abram but then God alone walks down the aisle. God is placing the covenant obligations upon Himself. The covenant depends ultimately on God's faithfulness and not on Abram's perfection.

This then leads us to Genesis 17 when we see God giving Abram and Saria a brand-new identity, based on the covenant promises that God has made. *Genesis 17:1-8 When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, ² that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." ³ Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, ⁴ "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. ⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."*

This is a very important moment in the story of Israel. Biblically speaking names matter a lot. You will see throughout the bible that when God changes a person's name, He is really changing their identity. God changes

both of their names from Abram & Sarai to Abraham & Sarah. Notice that before God changes their circumstances, He changes their identity. This passage also shows us the repeated themes of descendants, land and relationships...but notice the most important promise that God makes with them. He says, "I will be their God." The greatest gift isn't land but the relationship with God Himself. In the introduction of this study, we read that Israel is not just a place on a map, but Israel is a story. And until we understand the story, we'll never understand the significance of the place.

Why does God make this covenant with Abraham and Sarah? What is God wanting from His people and for humanity? Our God is a relational God and He wants to restore what was lost in the Garden of Eden. He wants to restore the relationship between Himself and His creation. He wants to be able to walk with His people, talk with His people and ultimately to love His people in the fullest of ways.

This then leads us to Genesis 32 when we will see the birth of Israel. Genesis 32:22-30 ²² *The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.* ²³ *He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had.* ²⁴ *And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.* ²⁵ *When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.* ²⁶ *Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."* ²⁷ *And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."* ²⁸ *Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."* ²⁹ *Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him.* ³⁰ *So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered."*

Jacob's entire life has been marked by striving. His very name means

“supplanter” or “deceiver”. That is until God changes his name. We read of this mysterious interaction when Jacob wrestles with God Himself. It tells us that during the night a man came to Jacob and wrestled with him until the morning. When the mysterious man saw that He was not winning He touched Jacob’s hip and sent it out of joint. Then Jacob demands a blessing from this man and receives one, but also he received a new name.

The name that he is given is יִשְׂרָאֵל (Yisra'el) which means “He struggles with God” or “God prevails”. The nation’s story begins with a transformed man. The inception of Israel begins with God calling Abraham out of a fallen world and entering a covenant relationship with him. The purpose of God blessing this nation was so that they would be a blessing to the nations. Israel began not as a political entity, but as God’s covenant plan to bring salvation to the world.

In part 2 we will examine how Israel became God’s “firstborn son,” called to represent Him among the nations and why that mission ultimately required a faithful Son who could succeed where Israel failed.

PART TWO

THE NATION OF ISRAEL-GOD'S FIRSTBORN SON

In part 1 we looked at the inception of the nation of Israel. Israel began as a relationship with one man and one woman. Just as the first creation began with one man (Adam) and one woman (Eve), here we see the same thing happening. This people were called, by God, to represent God to the nations. It is important to understand that Israel was not chosen because they were superior, larger, or more righteous than everyone else. Scripture teaches exactly the opposite. Israel was chosen by grace for a distinct purpose in God's salvation plan for the whole world. God's goal was never simply to save Israel, but His goal was to use Israel to bring His salvation to the whole world.

The rest of Genesis shows the increasing of a people known as Israel. It culminates with the selling of Joseph to the Egyptians, Joseph interpreting the Pharaoh's dreams, saving the nation of Egypt from famine, and saving his own family, the Israelites, by moving them to Egypt. Now we begin a fly over of Exodus as we look at how this people grows in power and numbers. Exodus 1:6-7 says, *"⁶ Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. ⁷ But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them."*

It's in Egypt that we see the increase of the population of the Israelites. A new Pharaoh begins to rule, who did not have a relationship with Joseph, and he does not see these people as a blessing, but as a threat. He decides that before they can rise and overthrow the Egyptians, they will enslave them to their will. They force them into a life of heavy, difficult slave labor. But scripture says in Exodus 1:12 *"But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel."*

The more Pharaoh oppressed the people of Israel the stronger they became. The more he threatened them with death the more they

multiplied. From the people of Israel came one named Moses. Moses was placed in the Nile to save his life, because Pharaoh was commanding the death of all infant male Hebrew babies, and Moses was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter. She brought Moses into the royal family and their Moses grew.

The oppression of the people reached a boiling point when Moses killed an Egyptian for mistreating a Hebrew. Moses then fled to Midian to escape his punishment for what he had done. The oppression of the Israelite people grows, and it says in Exodus 2:23-25 “²³ During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. ²⁴ And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. ²⁵ God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.”

God always knew but now what the time God was going to act. He remembered the covenant that He had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and God went and secured a leader who would rescue His chosen people from the hands of the Egyptians. He speaks to Moses from a burning bush and gives him power & a message to deliver to Pharaoh. Exodus 4:21-23 “²¹ And the Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. ²² Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son,’ ²³ and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me.” If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.”

This is the first time in Scripture a nation is called God's son. Firstborn does not primarily mean “born first” but it often means the one who is an heir, representative, or one who holds special status. This is a title that speaks of position and purpose. This is important to understand because Israel is not merely God's people. Israel is called to reflect God's character to the world. A son was expected to resemble his father, and Israel was meant to resemble Yahweh.

Moses then returns to Egypt for an explosive confrontation. Notice, however, the contrast between Pharaoh & God's son. Egypt enslaves and God liberates. Pharaoh oppresses and God adopts. The Exodus story is not merely political, but it is familial as we see God rescuing His son. God does rescue them and leads them through the Red Sea and into the wilderness. God leads them to Mt Sinai where God is going to reveal His heart for His people.

One of the single most important Old Testament passages for understanding Israel's purpose has to be Exodus 19:4-6. It says, *"⁴ 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."*

God is always the one that does the heavy lifting in this relationship. God rescued them before they obeyed Him. The grace of God always comes before the law of God and relationship before commands. God isn't establishing salvation by works but He is describing covenant faithfulness. Israel's obedience to the command is the fruit of the relationship. Then God says you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These two titles define Israel's mission & purpose in the world.

What does a priest do? A priest represents God to the people, represents people to God, intercedes between people and God, teaches the commands and will of God and mediates between the cares and concerns of the people and God Himself. Israel's mission was a priestly mission to help the nations know God. Think of their mission like a lighthouse. A lighthouse doesn't exist for itself, but its purpose is to guide ships safely home. Israel was called to be God's lighthouse among the nations. Not merely to enjoy God's blessings but to point others toward Him.

Israel was not only meant to be a kingdom of priests but also a holy nation. The Hebrew word for holy is *קדוש* (qadosh) and means set apart, distinct, and different. Holy does not mean weird but it means distinct as one who belongs to God. Israel was meant to look different than the rest of the world because they belonged to God. This is important to understand that Israel's identity did not start with distinct land, distinct politics, power or privilege but their identity was as one who belonged to God as His people. Our God is a God who makes promises and always is faithful to His promises. He forged this covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. He acted on His promises when He rescued Israel from Egypt.

Throughout the Old Testament we will see God contending with Israel as He reminds them of who they are in His eyes but their purpose in this world never changed. Isaiah clearly speaks of this purpose in Isaiah 42 & 49. It says in Isaiah 42:6 "I am Yahweh; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations." We also see this in Isaiah 49:6 when it says, "It is to light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

In both passages we see that God always wanted to work through Israel to bring His blessing to the nations. It was never just about Israel but always who would be blessed through them. God always intended Gentiles (non-Jews) to be fully included in the blessings of a relationship with God. God's desire has always been for all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). Israel's four major purposes were to...

1. Reveal God's Character (the nations should see Yahweh through Israel)
2. Preserve God's Word (Israel was entrusted with God's revelation)
3. Model God's Kingdom (Justice, Mercy, Holiness, Worship)
4. Bring Forth the Messiah (the ultimate purpose was to bring forth the one that was promised in the Garden of Eden. A Christ (anointed one) who would reign as a forever king over God's people)

This is where the problem begins because the tragic pattern of Israel's history was..

God Blesses Israel Trusts Israel Prospers Israel Forgets Israel Rebels
Israel Suffers Israel Repents God Restores Repeat

Imagine someone looking into a mirror. The mirror's job is to reflect an image. If the mirror becomes cracked and distorted, the image becomes distorted. Israel was meant to reflect God to the world. Instead, because of sin, the reflection became distorted. The solution was not abandoning the mission but sending a perfect representative.

In part 3, we will examine Israel's failure, the prophets' warnings, and the growing expectations that God would one day send a faithful son, a faithful Israel who could accomplish what the nation never could.

NOTES

PART THREE

ISRAEL FAILS ITS MISSION

The tragedy of the Old Testament is not that Israel lacked God's blessings, revelation, or presence. The tragedy is that despite having everything to succeed, Israel repeatedly failed in its covenant calling. Yet, we will see, that Israel's failure does not end God's story. In fact, Israel's failure creates anticipation for Someone who will succeed where Israel failed. This session is the bridge between Israel the nation and Jesus the Messiah.

Have you ever had someone place tremendous trust in you, only to realize later that you let them down? Most people can relate to this feeling, and it begs a follow-up question. How many times can failure happen before someone gives up on you or you give up on them? This question gets at the heart of Israel's story because remarkably, God never gives up.

We saw in part 2 that Israel had a pattern they followed throughout the Old Testament.

God Blesses → Israel Trusts → Israel Prospers → Israel Forgets →
Israel Rebels → Israel Suffers → Israel Repents → God Restores → Repeat.

So let's look at a few of these stories and glean from them the failings of Israel and the hope painted through them. In Exodus 32 Moses has ascended Mt Sinai and the people are left wondering if he is going to return. They go to Aaron and instruct him to make them a new god they can worship. Aaron made a golden calf and the people bowed down and worshiped this new God.

The timing is shocking as Israel has just witnessed the plagues, the Exodus, the Red Sea parting and God's presence at Sinai, and yet, Moses disappears for 40 days and they build an idol. The issue for the Israelites was never a lack of evidence, but the issue was the human heart. Sin is not

primarily an information problem, but it is a worship problem. The Israelites placed their hope and trust in something that never made promises to them. Out of all the god's, religions, and faith expressions Yahweh is the only one who made the step towards His people. Every other expression is how humans work their way to God, but God wanted a people who would love and trust in His heart, and allow what He says over them, to be the ultimate reality/identity they lived by.

Let's look at another story in Numbers 14:1-4 when after seeing God's miracles repeatedly, Israel refuses to enter the Promised Land and instead wants to return to Egypt. God delivered them physically from Egypt, but Egypt still lived inside of them. The Israelites were free externally but not internally. The failings of Israel is that they could not, and many times would not, trust in the heart of God. God had promised to be their protection and provision, but their struggle was to trust that, especially in times of suffering.

Psalms 78 best describes the recurring pattern of the Israelites. Now this Psalm is 72 verses long, so we aren't going to read it all together, but I do suggest that you take a moment and read this Psalm for yourself. As you do notice the recurring phrases of "They forgot", "They rebelled", and "They tested God." One of the great themes of Israel's failure is their forgetfulness. God would bless, God would rescue, God would heal but the people often forgot all those situations and could only focus on the immediate thing they were facing in the moment. Like a spiritual "what have you done for me lately" syndrome. This syndrome makes a person believe that God is only a good God when things are going well in my immediate, right now, reality. The moment this person feels their safety, their comfort, their provision or protection is in question then they allow their circumstances to change the truth of their God.

This was the repetitive nature of the relationship between God and Israel for centuries. It was from this turbulent relationship that we see how deeply grieved God is when we read Isaiah 5 about the destruction of a

precious vineyard. The story is God plants a vineyard and removes the land of all stone. He builds a watchtower and provides everything the vineyard needs. Then he waits for fruit but instead receives wild grapes and bad fruit.

What is the farmer to do but destroy this weed infested garden before it can spread elsewhere. The vineyard, in the story, is Israel. God could not have done more for Israel, and the failure was not on the vineyard's owner but on the vineyard itself. Israel's problem was not lack of opportunity but a lack of faithfulness.

One more powerful story comes to us from Hosea 11 when we really see, and feel, the heartbreak of God. Just listen to these tender words of God's love and heartbreak for Israel from Hosea 11:1-4 *"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. ² The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols.³ Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them.⁴ I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them."*

Here we see so clearly that Israel is not merely a rebellious nation, but Israel is God's beloved son. God's love was constantly met with rejection. How does this passage challenge/change your view of God's emotions toward His people? Notice the language that God loved, taught, led and healed. The image that Scripture is giving us is the image of a parent with a small child. An attentive, compassionate, and very loving parent walking alongside of their child. Hosea 11 shows us that God has a human heart and His heart is broken.

The problem is that no amount of animal sacrifices, no amount of burnt offerings, no amount of grain offerings could appease the reality of the sin

that kept God from fully being with His people. Every human being is fallible, and we see this throughout the leadership of Israel. Saul, Israel's first king, fails. David, a man after God's own heart, still fails. Solomon, given wisdom beyond measure, still fails. Every prophet, every priest, and every king would eventually fail because they had original sin and were fallible human beings.

Eventually the nation of Israel splits between the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Both enter into the same cycle of idolatry and lack of trust in God. Then comes one of the most devastating moments in Israel's story and this is when they are sent into exile. First to the Assyrian Empire, and then to the Babylonian Empire, Israel is sent. They lose their land, temple, king and security. Everything that defined their national security was stripped from them. God did this in order to wake them up to the reality, God will be their everything.

If Israel is God's chosen people, then we need to ask the question...has God's plan failed? This is exactly the tension the prophets wrestled with. Look with me at Jeremiah 31:31-34 ³¹ *"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."*

The solution is not a better law but a transformed heart. The problem was never merely external behavior, but the problem was lack of internal transformation. We see God here declaring that a day will come when He

will make a new covenant with His people. He will place His law (His heart/will/desires) within His people. God is promising that He will not give up on His people and He is promising that a day will come when He will forgive them of their sin and nothing will stand between Him & His People.

This is the same promise and language that we see in Ezekiel 36:24-28 *“²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.^[a] ²⁸ You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.”*

Notice that God promises a new heart, new spirit, full cleansing and His presence. By the end of the Old Testament, several expectations have emerged that Israel needs a...

1. A Better Prophet (one who perfectly speaks God's Word)
2. A Better Priest (one who perfectly mediates between God and the people)
3. A Better King (one who perfectly rules and carries our justice)
4. A Better Son (one who perfectly obeys and trusts God's heart)
5. A Better Israel (one who fulfills the mission to bless the nations)

What if one person could succeed where the entire nation failed? This is where the Gospel enters. The Old Testament leaves us waiting for a faithful Son, true Servant, true King, true Israel and this is when the person of Jesus enters the story. The story that began with Abraham is about to reach its fulfillment and in part 4, we will discover that Jesus intentionally retraces Israel's story. He comes out of Egypt, passes through the waters, enters the wilderness, faces temptation, and succeeds where Israel failed. Jesus is not merely an Israelite. He is the faithful Israel reduced to One.

PART FOUR

FAITHFUL ISRAEL REDUCED TO ONE

Jesus does not merely come to help Israel. Jesus comes to be the faithful Israel that Israel could never be. This is the turning point of the entire story. Everything up to this point has been moving toward one question: How will God fulfill His promises when His covenant people repeatedly fail? The answer of the New Testament is astonishing! God fulfills Israel's calling in one faithful representative...Jesus Christ. Just as Adam represented humanity, Jesus becomes the New Adam. Just as Israel represented God's covenant people, Jesus becomes the True Israel. Jesus succeeds where Adam failed. Jesus succeeds where Israel failed. Jesus succeeds where we fail.

Have you ever noticed how often Jesus seems to relive events from Israel's history? Most Christians know individual stories but have never connected the pattern. This study will help us all to see that Jesus intentionally walks Israel's path to succeed where they had previously failed. So, before we look at some scripture together, let's first establish a key biblical concept. Throughout scripture, one person often represents many. Here is a quick overview of this concept.

Adam represents humanity. Abraham represents his descendants. David represents Israel. The High Priest represents the nation. The King represents the kingdom. We see then Jesus who becomes the ultimate representative for every earthly role and what He accomplishes counts for His people. Jesus becomes all things reduced to One.

The Gospel of Matthew, especially, presents Jesus as reliving Israel's history. Many scholars call Matthew's Gospel a "New Exodus". Matthew constantly quotes Old Testament passages about Israel and applies them to Jesus. Not because Matthew is ignoring context but because he is writing to a Jewish audience and wants to communicate clearly how Jesus is fulfilling Israel's story. Let's do a quick fly over of just the first two chapters of the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew begins the Gospel by clearly showing how you can trace the lineage of Jesus back to Abraham. So, he is making the connection of God's covenant people and that one would come to them who would be greater than all. Then when Jesus is born, Matthew quotes from Isaiah 7:14, *"behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call His name Immanuel (which means God with us)"*. Matthew then quotes from Micah 5:2 when he links the birthplace of Jesus with the prophecy that from Bethlehem one will come who will shepherd God's people. Then in Matthew 2:15 he quotes Hosea 11:1 that out of Egypt I called my son.

Just in the first two chapters of Matthew, we look upon the life of Jesus, and we see how it mirrors the plight of the Israelites. From the killing of the firstborn, to the fleeing to Egypt to escape, even to the returning of God's people to rescue them from the hand of slavery. Then in Matthew 3 Jesus enters the waters of baptism and is immediately led into the wilderness, for 40 days, to be tempted by Satan. This mirrors how Israel passed through the Red Sea and then were immediately in the wilderness to have their faithfulness tested by God. Every time Satan tempts Jesus, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy, and not just any passages, specifically passages that refer to Israel's wilderness failures. The three temptations were...

1. Turning stones into bread (explaining Israel's wilderness hunger)
2. Testing God (reference to Israel's testing God at Massah)
3. Worshipping Satan (warning against idolatry)

The point is that nothing in Scripture is random or by accident. Jesus isn't randomly quoting scripture but is intentionally succeeding where Israel failed. Imagine watching a movie where the hero retraces the path of someone who failed earlier. Every obstacle appears again, every challenge returns, but this time the hero succeeds. That's what Matthew is showing us in his Gospel.

Yet we also see that this goes far beyond just the Gospel of Matthew.

Throughout the Old Testament Israel was repeatedly called God's vine. In Psalm 80, Isaiah 5, Jeremiah 2 and Hosea 10 Israel is likened to a vine that repeatedly failed to bear fruit. In John 15:1 Jesus says, "I am the true vine"! In other words: what Israel failed to be, I am.

Why this matters so much is that the world needed a Savior. The problem of sin had to be dealt with and we as humans were/are powerless to do anything about it. If Jesus is merely a good teacher, then we still have a problem. If Jesus is merely a prophet, then we still have a problem. If Jesus is merely an example, then we still have a problem. We need someone to succeed where we failed.

So why is the New Testament's claim that Jesus is the True Israel such a radical and controversial claim? Because it re-centers the story on a person rather than on a nation. For much of the Old Testament, Israel is understood as a people, a nation, the descendants of Abraham and God's covenant community. The New Testament makes the startling claim that God's covenant purposes are concentrated in one person...Jesus. This feels radical because it shifts the center of God's redemptive plan from national identity to a Messianic identity.

During Jesus' day, many Jews expected a Messiah who would lead a military revolt against Rome, restore political sovereignty, reestablish David's throne and gather the dispersed tribes back to a centralized spot. Now in all fairness those expectations were not entirely wrong as they all came from biblical promises. The difficulty was that Jesus first came as a suffering servant, a faithful son and a sacrificial lamb. Jesus did fulfill prophecy, but not always in the way people expected. A crucified Messiah was difficult for many to reconcile with their expectations.

The two most startling fulfillments come to us in the final week of Jesus' earthly life. In Matthew 26 we are given a story of Jesus gathering with His disciples to celebrate the Passover meal. The Passover was the annual celebration of when God rescued the Israelite people from the hands of the Egyptians. On the final night, when Israel was in Egypt, God sent the

angel of death to kill all firstborn sons. God told the Israelites to take the blood of a lamb and paint the blood around the doorposts of their homes. When the angel of death would see the blood, it would Passover that home.

Jesus enters this celebration, with His disciples, and does something that no one saw coming. As they were eating the meal Jesus took bread, broke it, and gave it to them saying *"This is my body broken for you"*. Jesus then took a cup of wine and gave it to them all saying, *"Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."* This would not have been lost on those who Matthew is communicating with. Jesus is the New Covenant! Jesus is ushering in a New Covenant, new promises, and they are all focused on His body and blood.

Then Jesus is arrested and led away to stand trial. Fallen Israel could not stomach one who would claim to be the long-foretold Messiah and the very Son of God. They handed Jesus over to the Romans to be crucified and while Jesus is hanging on the cross, He cries out Psalm 22 *"My God My God why have you forsaken me"* and yields up His Spirit. It then says the curtain of the temple was torn in two. In the Old Testament the only way people could commune with God was by entering the Holy of Holies. Access to this area of the temple was limited to the High Priest only once a year. But now Jesus has made a way that all people can have communion with God again, but in a much greater way. Jesus is the perfect temple, Jesus is the sacrificial lamb, Jesus is everything of the Old Testament reduced to one and He was crushed so that we could be healed.

The difficulty to believe this is not merely a Jewish issue but is a human issue. People often prefer things of heritage, family background, religious affiliation or group membership to feel included. The New Testament insists that belonging to God's people comes through faith in Christ alone. Just look at these shocking words from Paul in Romans 9:6, *"For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel."* What is Paul saying?

Paul is speaking the biblical truth that true Israel is Jesus and only those who are connected to Jesus. That truth was controversial then and remains controversial today. One of the biggest challenges is that the apostles read the Old Testament Christologically. For example, they see that Jesus is the true vine (John 15), Jesus is God's Son (Matthew 3), Jesus is the Servant called Israel (Isaiah 49), Jesus is the Seed of Abraham (Galatians 3). The apostles are not abandoning Israel, but they are arguing that Israel's entire story reaches its fulfillment in Christ. The reality is that if someone rejects that premise, the New Testament's conclusions will naturally seem wrong.

The New Testament's most radical claim is not that Israel no longer matters. It is that Israel matters so much that God fulfills Israel's entire calling in His Son, Jesus Christ. The dividing line is no longer ethnicity but union with the Messiah. In the final part of this study we will explore one of the New Testament's most important questions: If Jesus is the True Israel, then who are God's covenant people now?

NOTES

PART FIVE

WHO ARE GOD'S COVENANT PEOPLE NOW?

If Jesus is the Faithful Israel, and has accomplished/fulfilled Israel's calling, then this brings up certain questions. Questions like...what happens to the promises now? Who inherits them? Who belongs to God's covenant family? What now defines the people of God? The answer of the New Testament is remarkably consistent that the defining characteristic of God people is no longer ethnicity, circumcision, nationality, or Torah observance. The defining characteristic is union with the Christ. This in no way means God broke His promises to Israel, but it means God's promises reached their fulfillment through Israel's Messiah.

So, let's start this study by asking the question...what makes someone part of a family? Possible answers could be birth, adoption, marriage or even shared identity. Family comes in many different shapes and sizes. You will often hear military personnel speak of their comrades as brothers or sports teams speak of their team as a family. One of the greatest honors/compliments that you could give to someone, who is not your biological blood, that they were family to me. This is family in the temporal but what about the divine...what makes someone part of God's family? This is the question Paul spends much of Romans and Galatians answering.

The key phrase for Paul is the phrase "In Christ". This phrase appears over 160 times in Paul's writings and for Paul everything hinges on union with Christ. This is a monumental change from the narrative that God's family are those who share ethnicity, nationality or family heritage. Look what Paul says again in Romans 9:6-8 " ⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring."

What Paul is not saying is that Jews do not matter, that Israel has no role in God's plan or that God's promises have failed. Paul will explicitly reject those ideas later in Romans 11. What Paul is saying is that there is now a very real distinction between physical Israel and faithful Israel. This is a really important point so let's expound on this a bit more. You will see the New Testament speak of the physical things becoming spiritual things. An example would be the temple in Jerusalem.

Throughout Israel's history the temple was the central place of their identity. The physical temple was God's presence amongst His people and where the people would commune with their God. Matthew tells us that when Jesus gave up His Spirit, on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two. The meaning of this event is that the presence of God left the building. The dividing line between God, and His people, had been dissolved through the sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of all humanity. Paul & Peter both speak to this topic. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 ¹⁶ *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?* ¹⁷ *If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.* Paul here is speaking of the collective church. The people of God have become the holy dwelling place of God. Peter also speaks into this in 1 Peter 2:5 ⁵ *you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* Peter is emphasizing that this entire spiritual temple is built upon Jesus, whom he refers to as the "living stone" rejected by men but precious to God. This is an example of the spiritual becoming more important than the physical. Let's look at another example in the physical action of circumcision.

In Genesis 17 God instructed Abram, as a sign of the covenant between God and His people, that all males should be circumcised. This is the way it was for thousands of years until the coming of Jesus. Circumcision was for the Old Covenant but what physical action do New Covenant people take part in? Paul answers this question in Colossians 2:11-14 when he writes, "¹¹ *In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without*

hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.” The spiritual circumcision, circumcision of Christ on the heart, is now more important (replaces) the physical circumcision as the primary physical action that a person belongs to the New Covenant.

The reality of Israel is another example of this very same thing. There is the reality of the physical nation state of Israel and the reality of a spiritual Israel. Paul expounds on this truth in Galatians 3:7-9 when he says, *“⁷ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” ⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”* In first-century Judaism, many believed Abraham’s descendants were identified primarily by ancestry, but Paul is saying that the true children of Abraham, the offspring of Abraham, are identified by faith.

Imagine for a minute a vast estate that is left to one heir. Anyone connected to that heir shares in the inheritance that was given to that person. Paul is saying that the inheritance belongs to Christ. Only those who are united to Jesus share in what is His and His alone. To hammer this point home let’s look at maybe the most important passage of the entire study from Galatians 3:26-29 *“²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”*

Notice the rich language that Paul is using when he says you are clothed with Christ, connected to Christ and united to Christ. He isn’t saying that

Jew and Gentile distinctions disappear, but he is saying that they no longer determine covenant status. So, the most important question that can be asked of anyone now is “Do they belong to Jesus”? Jesus explicitly said in John 14:6 that He alone is the way, the truth, and the life and that no one can come to the Father except through Him. Jesus has become the cornerstone that this entire spiritual dwelling place is being built upon and union to Him alone is all that matters.

Let's look at one more important example of this from Ephesians 2:13-22. Paul says, “¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

At the time this was written there was great hostility between Jews & Gentiles. They were separated, not merely socially, but religiously, covenantally and historically. The solution to this hostility was given in the person of Jesus who has made peace by His shed blood. Peace is not just a nice concept but became a living breathing person. It wasn't that Jews become Gentiles, or that Gentiles become Jews, but a new humanity was created in the person of Jesus. Imagine two rivers flowing separately for centuries and then merging into one mighty river. The rivers retain their history, but they now share in one identity, one purpose and one mission on earth.

Paul speaks this exact point in 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 when he says, *"¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. ¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* I hope you can see how massive this truth is. There are not many paths that lead to God but only one way that a human being can live forever...and that is by being reconciled to God through Christ.

Now comes the powerful turn that connects the calling of Abraham with the people of God now. In 1 Peter 2:9-10 he says, *"⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."*

The Church is God's chosen race, royal priesthood and Holy nation. The Church now shares Israel's calling because it is united to Israel's Messiah. Notice though the mission of God has not changed and will never change. God's people exist to display God's glory, proclaim His goodness, bless the nations and represent His kingdom in this world.

So, who is the Holy Nation of Israel now? The answer is all those who belong to the person of Jesus and call upon Him as Lord. There is the

reality of “blood family” but now there is also the reality of “Jesus blood family”. That no matter someone's ethnic, political or national heritage we can all be brought together as sons and daughters of God by sharing in the blood of Jesus. Jesus is the cornerstone, Jesus is the foundation, Jesus is what has made a way for all humanity to enter back again into the divine image they were created within. The family of Abraham now spans all languages, cultures, nations and continents. This was God’s plan from Genesis 12.

Jesus truly is the faithful Israel. Therefore, all who are united to Him by faith become heirs of Abraham and participants in God’s covenant promises. The people of God are defined by their union with Jesus...and Jesus alone. The story that began with one man, Abraham, expands to include people from every tribe, language, people, and nation just as we see in Revelations. In part 6 we will look at the question of what does it mean to live as the True Israel in the world now and what is our relationship with the nation of Israel in the modern day?

PART SIX

OUR IDENTITY, MISSION, AND RELATIONSHIP TO MODERN ISRAEL

This final part of the study will move from theology to application. Throughout this study we have seen that Abraham was chosen by grace, Israel was called as God's son, Israel failed its mission, Jesus fulfills Israel's calling and believers in Jesus have become God's covenant people through their union to Christ. The question now becomes how should we live in light of this new reality? If Jesus is the True Israel and we are united to Him, then our primary identity is found in Christ, our mission is the mission of God's covenant people, and our hope rests not in any earthly nation but in the Kingdom of God.

What is the primary thing that shapes your identity? Our identity is how we describe who we are. Is it your nationality, occupation, family, career, politics, church, ethnicity or something else? What does the New Testament say should define us above everything else? The entirety of the scriptures is communicating to us the Gospel. God's overarching love story for His fallen people.

Abraham ➔ Israel ➔ Exodus ➔ Kingdom ➔ Exile ➔ Messiah ➔ Church ➔ New Creation

The Bible's story has always been moving toward a restored humanity in Christ. Let's look again at 1 Peter 2:9-10 *"⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."*

Notice the titles that are given to those who are part of the Church... Christians. They are a Chosen People, Royal Priesthood, Holy Nation and a People for God's Own Possession. Every one of these originally belonged to Israel. Now Peter is fully applying them to the Church. Why? Because true Israel (God's covenant people) are now those united to Israel's Messiah...

Jesus. The Church does not replace Christ, but the Church are those who participate in the life of Christ and everything flows from Him.

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The failing of Israel was that it didn't live through the unique, and distinct, identity it had as God's chosen nation. They were called to live differently, set-apart, as God's blessed nation to bring those blessings to others. We as the Church must be careful that we do not fail in the same way. So, let's look at these distinctive characteristics of mission that we bring to the world. The first is that we live as a Royal Priesthood. The priesthood would represent God to people, represent people to God, intercede, teach and bless. So as believers we are called to pray for others, speak God's truth in love, serve the world, point people to Christ and intercede for those who are far from God. Imagine a bridge...a bridge doesn't exist for itself but connects two places. The Church exists to help connect people to God through Christ.

The second is that we are a Holy Nation. Holy meaning that we are set apart, different, as those belonging to God. Holiness does not mean isolation or that we don't engage with the world but we are called to engage with the world with a very particular mission. Jesus ate with sinners and remained holy, and believers are called to do the same. For believers it is never an "Us vs Them" mentality but always an "Us for Them" posture. So how can we as Christian be distinct without becoming isolated or assimilating? Look what Jesus says in John 17:14-16 " ¹⁴ *I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.* ¹⁵ *I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.* ¹⁶ *They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*"

To truly live through the power of the Word of God will mean that our core values will not connect with the core values of this world. Some of the fundamental core values of the American culture are individualism, liberty, equality, progress and efficiency. The core values of Jesus followers are a life marked by sacrificial love, faith in suffering, forgiveness, compassion, generosity and integrity. The example of America could be made of any nation of this earth. Every worldly nation has values that govern the way they approach being a nation with others. To live as a Holy Nation means Christians live for the values of the Kingdom of God, while they also live within a particular nation with a particular set of values it holds to.

We live with the core identity that we belong to Christ as His possession, in order to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light. Let's look at Matthew 28:18-20 " ¹⁸ *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Notice how God's mission has expanded. Remember in Genesis 12 God promised Abraham that he would be blessed to be a blessing to the nations? Now Jesus is sending His Church to make disciples of all the nations. The mission never changed but has greatly expanded. God is currently bringing together a Global Family. Revelation 7:9-10 gives us a picture of that family in heaven. John says, ⁹ *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*

Revelation is a vision of heaven that God gave to John and just meditate on

the image that John is given. John see's every nation, every tribe, every people group, every language and they are all standing around the throne of Jesus...worshipping the Lamb. This eternal, global, family is crying out as one *"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"* Can you see how the Bible ends where Genesis 12 was always headed. God's goal was never merely one nation but was always redeeming people from every nation. John also saw in Revelation 21:1-5 *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new. Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

This is where the story ends. Not with Israel alone, Rome alone, America alone or any earthly kingdom. The story ends with a new heaven, new earth, God's presence and a renewed humanity. The final hope of Christians is not a nation-state but the hope of the forever Kingdom of God. So, what is our relationship now to modern Israel?

The first thing is to recognize that modern Israel and biblical Israel are not the same thing. The modern State of Israel was established in 1948. Biblical Israel began with Abraham and developed through God's covenant promises. They are related historically but are not identical theologically. The modern nation-state is a political reality, but the biblical Israel is a covenant reality. These are two categories that should not be confused.

The second important point is that Christians never have permission to hate anyone but are to pray for everyone. Jesus Himself was Jewish, and Christians are the fulfillment of Judaism, and this should bring about a

grateful, humble, and respectful spirit towards all those outside of the true faith. We need to be in genuine prayer for all people because God loves them. Jesus died for them. Paul makes this exact point in 1 Timothy 2:1-6 when he says, *"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ²for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. They need to know of the true hope that they can have in the person of Jesus."*

The third truth, that we need to remember, is not to place our hope in ANY earthly nation. This includes Israel, America or any government. The Church's hope is not political, but our hope is in Christ and Christ alone. We are called again to pray for our leaders, submit to our leaders and honor them, but this is done because we firstly submit to Jesus as Lord. We believe that Jesus alone is the Sovereign King over all forms of leadership of this world and they are ultimately accountable to Him.

The fourth point is God is not finished with the Jewish people, or any people of this earth. God remains faithful and, as we saw earlier, His desire is that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. The Gospel remains available for all people, anywhere, anytime, no matter what they have done.

The fifth point is that we have the ability to be critical, of any nation on earth, when their actions don't align with the heart of our God. There is a big difference between praying for a country and thinking we have to support every decision that they make. No nation on earth is 100% aligned with the heart of the true God. Every nation is fallible and subject to mistakes. I believe the Christian values, as seen in the person of Jesus, are what would be best for every human and every nation under heaven;

however, I also agree with Paul who said in Philippians 3:20 this important truth, *"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,"* Christians are those who are in the world but never of the world. Christians pray that God's Kingdom would come and His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. This is a portion of the prayer that Jesus taught to His disciples and has given to His followers. Notice that what is best for this world has to come from heaven first.

The land of Israel, and surrounding regions, is so wonderful for the sole reality that Jesus walked there. It is a beautiful place to visit and to see, first-hand, the beauty that is the Holy Land. Biblically speaking though this land holds no greater value than anywhere else on earth. Every piece of this earth is owned by God, and all is sacred because He made it. The modern nation-state of Israel falls into the list of all nations of earth. They shouldn't be treated worse, or better, because they bear the name of the biblical people of God.

God's chosen people are those who are united to Christ. As God's people we live as citizens of Heaven, we bless the nations, we proclaim the Gospel, we pursue holiness, we love Jewish people, we love Gentile people, we pray for peace, and we place our hope in Christ alone. The central question of Scripture is not, "what nation do I belong to?" but "am I united to Jesus Christ?". Because Jesus is the True Israel, and every promise of God finds its "Yes" and "Amen" in Him (2 Corinthians 1:20).

NOTES



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