

Christ is Israel

In this chapter we look at the meaning of the biblical term *Israel*. Topics include:

- The Old Testament view.
- Jesus' view on Israel.
- Paul's view on Israel.
- The Promised Land.
- Romans chapter 11.
- What does national Israel mean today?

There are four main theories to explain the identity of Israel:

1. *Israel is the racial nation* of the Jews, today situated in the Middle East and scattered in other nations. We believe that in some contexts in the Bible the term is used for a *racial group* and in other instances it is used for a *faith group*.
2. *Replacement Theology*, which is the idea that the church has replaced Israel. This view holds that God has no restoration plan for racial Israel. This term is used more by detractors of the two views below. The *replacement* view is not seriously held by many.
3. *Inclusion Theology*, which means that the Gentiles are more widely included in the *Commonwealth of Israel* in the New Covenant era. This is view we hold in this chapter.
4. *Christ is Israel* and He includes with Him believing Jews and Gentiles. This is more exactly the view that we hold in this chapter.

There are other theories, such as *British Israel* (BI), which holds that British tribes are the lost tribes of the northern House of Israel. There is also *Japanese Israel* (JI) and many other forms, as various nations stake their claim. These are fables and harmful doctrines. Calling is in the cross of Christ, not through nationality.

Dispensationalists hold to the *racial theory* of Israel. In this view Israel *according to the flesh* (the natural descendants of Abraham) is Israel. This can be disproved in one statement: If the seed of the flesh are Israel, then Ishmael and Esau would be Israel also. They too are the sons of Abraham. Paul said this directly in Galatians 4, which we look at below.

This view also sees the land of Palestine today as the *Holy Land*. It sees the return of the Jews there today as a *last-days* event before the Second Coming of Christ. The view also holds that he who blesses Israel as a nation is blessing Abraham's seed and so will be blessed of God. The view claims that we should pray in a particular way for the city of Jerusalem.

It is also said by some that there is spiritual merit, even a greater access to God in prayer, in travelling to Israel. Not all hold the teaching to this extreme, but this does show the potential for an *antichrist* position. There is one access to the Father and that is through the blood of Christ. Access is through Jesus Christ alone.

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Rom 5:1-2).

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter the holiest through the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He has consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh. (Heb 10:19-20).

A Definition of Israel

Israel was a term used before Israel ever became a nation. It was used to designate the worshippers of Jehovah. Gerhard Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* shows this ancient usage of *Israel*. It meant literally to have *power with God*, meaning relationship, or to overcome in faith. It means *the people of God*, to be in the *family of God*, to be the *elect of God*, to be *called of grace through faith*.

Israel is not a racial term. It is a theological term. It means to be the people of God by the election of grace. The first time we see this term in the Bible is with Jacob in the book of Genesis. He was called Jacob which means *deceiver* or *swindler* and that is what he did until the time that he met with God on his way back from staying with his uncle Laban.

God called Jacob according to His plan before he was born and met him face to face. This encounter changed Jacob's character and from that time he was a changed man. Before that time he had a religious faith, but was still a deceiver. When he met with God his name was changed to *Israel*, which meant *God's heir, possessor of the promises*, elect of God and one who is in God's family.

Jesus' View on Israel

We will start with John the Baptist, who introduced Jesus' ministry. John said to the Jews:

Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham as our father: for I say to you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham. (Matt 3:9).

Here it is clear that having a natural lineage from Abraham does not make us Abraham's seed. This is the teaching right through the Gospels. Jesus said to some of the Jews that they were not Abraham's children, but children of the devil:

They answered and said to Him, Abraham is our father. Jesus said to them, If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a man that has told you the truth, which I have heard from God: this Abraham did not do...You are of your father the devil. (John 8:39-44).

Here Jesus claimed that whether we are children of Abraham depends on our deeds. Thus Jesus said that the children of Abraham shall come from afar and many in the racial kingdom of Israel shall not be included in Abraham's seed:

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

In Jesus mind it is clear that *Abraham's seed* meant those who have the faith of and who walk in the steps of, Abraham.

Jesus and the Temple

Jesus stated that His kingdom was not of this world and that He fulfilled and thereby put away the Old Covenant types and shadows. For example, in John 7:37-39 He stated that He is the fulfilment of the *Feast of Tabernacles* and the Old Testament *temple imagery*. John 7:38 refers back to Ezekiel's

temple in Ezekiel 47, out of which flowed rivers of living water. Jesus' interpretation of Ezekiel's temple was not a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, but the church.

Nowhere in the Gospels did Jesus interpret this in any other way, nor speak of any kingdom or temple in Israel to come. Jesus did not prophesy of a national kingdom of God in Israel during or after the church era on earth.

Jesus said to the Jews, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." (John 2:19). The temple He spoke of was His body. Jesus put Himself forward as the fulfilment of *all* Old Testament shadows and types. It is clear in scripture that He fulfilled:

1. The Old Covenant priesthood (Heb 8:1).
2. The promises to David that a king would not fail to sit on his throne forever (Zech 6:3).
3. The Sabbath.
4. All the feasts (festivals).
5. The Jubilee.
6. The tabernacle and temple.
7. The Old Covenant sacrifices.
8. Israel.
9. The Promised Land.

Jesus fulfilled *all* Old Covenant types and shadows, not some of them. The whole testimony of scripture is concerning Jesus Christ. He is the spirit of prophecy, meaning the whole word of God points to Him (Rev 19:10).

...I come, in the volume of the book it is written of Me, to do Your will, O God...He takes away the first that He may establish the second. (Heb 10:7, 9).

The *first* that He took away was the Old Covenant and all its imagery and types. He came to fulfil all. He is the will of God. The shadow is not the will of God and has been taken away by the reality of Jesus Christ.

The Early Christian Church

All Old Covenant imagery relates to Christ and has its fulfilment in Him. This is what made the church distinctive in its early years. It claimed that Christ fulfilled *all* the expectations and hopes of Israel. A doctrine that does not find its fulfilment in Him, but in some peripheral idea or event, is not Christian. "Faith is the *substance* of things hoped for," which means all the types under the Old Covenant (Heb 11:1).

To think that the Jews, or a millennial kingdom in Israel, were to be a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy was unthinkable. All is fulfilled in Christ. Christ is everything. This is what makes Christianity Christianity and not a Judeo/Christian sect. There is no fulfilment of scripture outside of Christ. He is the theme of the entire word of God. This was Paul's view:

But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal to Caesar...because that for *the hope of Israel* I am bound with this chain...he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses

and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. (Acts 28:19-20, 23. See also Matt 5:17 and Luke 24:44).

Jesus is the *hope of Israel*, meaning that all of their hopes are fulfilled in Him. All of the prophetic and symbolic expectations are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This is what the church stood to declare in the book of Acts. Israel's hopes are not fulfilled in a national kingdom, but in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, for eternal life. The scriptures claim that those from Israel who do not follow Christ are cut off from God's people (Deut 18:15-19, Acts 3:22-23). This is the plain teaching of the word of God.

Fulfilled in Christ

The Gospel of John is full of *I am's*: "I am the bread of Life"; "I am the light of the world"; "Before Abraham was, I am..."; "I am the good shepherd"; "I am the door"; "I am the way the truth and the life". It is clear also that John was putting Jesus forward as the hope of Israel.

If Jesus fulfilled all the Old Covenant shadows, such as the priesthood, Sabbath and temple, etc. why do some not include in this that Jesus also fulfilled the imagery of the term *Israel* and the *Promised Land*? What is the difference? We should include the nation of Israel and the land. Jesus fulfilled them all.

Take for example Jacob. His name was changed to Israel. Did Jacob really overcome by his own works and merits, or was he given that blessing in Christ? The name *Israel* that was accredited to Jacob was really fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We know certainly that Jesus Christ alone overcame. Jacob (Israel) therefore was a picture of Christ and spoke of the coming redeemer.

Concerning the land, Jesus said, "...believe Me, the hour comes, when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father...But the hour comes and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth..." (John 4:21-23). With this one statement Jesus abrogated *all* holy land. It does not exist anymore. He is its fulfilment.

Jesus also said, "Wherever two or three are gathered, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt 18:20). By this He meant that no one had to come to the temple or to Jerusalem to worship. He also said in the *Sermon on the Mount*, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." (Matt 5:5).

The Greek word He used here for earth is *ge*. This term was used for land in general, or was used for Israel's land. In religious terms it referred to the fulfilment of promise. The Bible portrays the *Promised Land* as being fulfilled in *rest* and symbolizing redemption (Heb 4:8). Christ Himself is the promise of rest and redemption for the meek. "Thank you Father, for You have hid this from the wise and revealed it to babes...Come to Me...and I will give you rest." (Matt 11:25, 28).

The *land* refers to the Old Testament *garden* imagery: *paradise*. It means a place of rest, fulfilment, where there is no sin, where there is no frustration, where only good happens. This is not something to come, but it is our redemption. We hear this in secular songs, people wishing for such a place. We have such a place. He is Jesus, who overcomes sin in the heart with faith.

But many of the Jews were *Zionists*, meaning they wanted a restored kingdom in Israel, in Jerusalem. They wanted what they wanted, not what God was doing. This is not what Jesus came to do. All the apostles said that the church is the fulfilment of the Old Testament types and shadows. None of them mentioned any continuing role of *any* of these types, including Israel, the land, or the temple.

Christ Is Israel

Israel means to have power with God, or to be an overcomer in faith. Jacob received this name in type. Israel as a nation received this name in type. But they fell short of its meaning. They hardened

their heart and turned away from God. But God had a remnant, who was the real Israel, or those whom He had a relationship with. *Remnant theology* is throughout the Old Testament. These were the people of God.

Israel is a bit like the church today. The church as an organisation carries the name *church*, but it is not the church. The church is the body of Christ, those who are born again, who are in the household of faith, not in a brick building. The world thinks of the organisation, but the church is those who are in Christ. Israel is the same. It is not a nation. It is the people of God.

David's house was considered the remnant after the ten northern tribes defected. This left Judah. But even Judah fell. David's lineage itself fell away from God. At the end there was none that overcame in God's faith. Even the remnant fell short. The Bible says that God looked and there was no man, therefore His arm brought salvation (Is 59:16). The prophets called Israel a cut down tree, totally cut off in judgement, with no man or remnant remaining (Is 11:1, 10).

This means that all from Jacob fell short of the faith that the term *Israel* portrayed. Was this to be the end? Israel had its hope in David's offspring, but David's house was in judgement. But God had one from David's house who would not fail. He would overcome when tried. He would remain faithful. He would inherit the promises. He would fulfil everything meant by *Israel* and be the hope of our salvation.

It is at this point that Christ came forth, "the shoot", "the root of the stem of Jesse" and the "branch". Jesse was David's father, or David's house. His house had been cut down in judgement, so only the stump was left in the ground. There was no hope from any among man or from any remnant. So God brought forth Christ as a shoot from the stump and from Christ He brought salvation to His people.

When Israel fell and none could be counted as Israel, none had kept the faith. Christ alone was left. He alone overcame in His faith (John 14:31,16:33). This means that He perfectly obeyed the Father. Christ is God's Israel. According to *Strong's Hebrew Dictionary* Israel means "He will rule as God.". *He*, as in one: *seed*, as in singular. This was not Jacob. Jacob was a type. Christ is *Israel*, the Servant of the Lord.

Read Isaiah chapter 42 onwards, which depicts *Jesus as Israel the Servant*, along with Jacob whom the Servant redeemed (us). Israel was to serve God spreading His word in the world, but failed, so Jesus becomes that Servant to succeed and to redeem mankind. Here *Jacob* means the people of the Servant, believers from the Jews and from all the Gentile nations, the total elect whom the Servant saved.

You are My Servant O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. (Is 49:3).

It is a light thing that You should be My Servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the *preserved* of Israel. I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You may be salvation to the ends of the earth. (Is 49:6).

Israel is Jesus Christ, in whom are the *restored and preserved* (elect) of the nation Israel and the elect of all nations of the Gentiles, to the ends of the earth. This is Israel and Jacob, the family of God in Jesus Christ. The prophets could not have made it any clearer.

Jesus the Heir

That is why Jesus went down to Egypt as a child, to fulfil this type. Just as Israel came out of Egypt, so Jesus was called out of Egypt. God did this to show that Jesus is the real Israel and the fulfilment of all the promises and hopes of Israel. He is the one whom the Father loved and called *Israel*. When Jesus came out of Egypt the scripture says:

When Israel was a child, then I loved Him and called My Son out of Egypt. (Hosea 11:1).

And (Jesus) was there (in Egypt) until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called My Son. (Matt 2:15).

Jesus is called the *firstborn*, meaning the one God loves, whom He has chosen and the heir of Abraham (Matt 3:17, Heb 1:6). This is why Pharaoh lost all his firstborn (Ex 4:22-23). He was trying to stop God's firstborn from going out to serve the Lord. So God smote Pharaoh's firstborn. The nation Israel was not God's firstborn, but only a type. Pharaoh was touching Jesus Christ, God's real firstborn.

The nation of Israel failed as God's firstborn, so Jesus is His firstborn and heir. The whole Old Testament is about two things:

1. Man's failure.
2. God's remedy in Christ.

But the scripture has concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to all who believe. (Gal 3:22).

Paul explained this in Galatians when he said Christ is Abraham's seed. He said, not "seeds", as of many, but one seed, even Christ. There is only one seed of Abraham. That is Jesus Christ (Gal 3:16). So Israel is Christ and all of us who are in Him by His faith. "And if you be Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise." (Gal 3:29). Christ and His body (church) are one, which is Israel.

How Paul Defined Israel

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men but of God. (Rom 2:28-29).

Paul defined a Jew as one who has a relationship with God not based upon works. The seed of the flesh base their righteousness on themselves and do not believe the promises. The true seed are those elected by grace. Their calling is not due to their natural descent. This is the meaning of "whose praise is not of men". We do not put our confidence in our natural descent.

So to Paul, a Jew is one whose heart is circumcised by faith and the term is not determined by natural descent.

Not New Covenant Innovation

The next passage is lengthy, but it gives a biblical definition of Israel. Paul bases this definition on Old Testament theology, so therefore we cannot say that this is New Testament *replacement theology*, or an innovation of the New Covenant. Paul proves his theology from the Old Covenant, showing that God's view of Israel has always been the same. Paul goes back to Genesis:

...for they are not all Israel who are Israel. Neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac your seed shall be called. (Rom 9:6-7).

Here Paul ascribes two meanings to the word *Israel*. First, Israel is a term that refers to the children of God, not to a nation. Then he also mentions the national race of Israel. He says that not all in the nation of Israel are *Israel*, that is, the children of God.

Israel means *the children of God*. Paul claims that not all Abraham's natural children are *Abraham's seed*. "In Isaac *your seed* shall be called" means that it is the children of promise, not Abraham's natural seed, who are Abraham's true seed. Isaac was born by promise, not by Abraham's natural ability, "not by the will of the flesh." (John 1:13).

That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. (Rom 9:8).

Natural descent does not make someone a child of God. God makes children Himself by faith, promise, grace and election, i.e. by His Spirit. The seed of Abraham are those in Christ. Paul then shows the same again, by referring to Esau and Jacob.

Israel Means the Elect

For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calls...(Rom 9:11).

Isaac had two children. Jacob was counted for the seed and Esau was not. They were both born of Abraham, but only one was counted as Israel. Paul said again that it was the elect that was the seed (Israel), not the child of the flesh.

We will come back to Romans 11 later, but for now we will look at Paul's other epistles. Every time Paul mentions Israel he gives the same definition. He is following Jesus' pattern from the Gospels.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you be Christ's then are you Abraham's seed...(Gal 3:28-29).

In God there is no separate nation of Israel now. God has brought all into one in Christ. There is no Jew or Gentile, but those in Christ or out of Christ. Paul shows here again that Abraham's seed are *those of faith*.

For the promise that he should be heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law (natural descent), *but through the righteousness of faith*. (Rom 4:13).

Natural Israel is as Ishmael

For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was after the promise.

Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the Mount Sinai, which genders to bondage, which is Hagar. For this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and answers to Jerusalem which now is and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. (Gal 4:22-26).

The New Covenant Jerusalem is not a city in the Middle East. Jerusalem is the city of God from heaven. There is no prophetic significance to the city of Jerusalem in Israel today. That city is in bondage. We can cast every Muslim and Arab that we like to out of Jerusalem and it will still be in

bondage. There is no advantage in removing the Mosque and building a temple. They are both alike a rejection of Jesus Christ.

The second point of the above passage is that Paul shows that *natural Israel is Ishmael*. Ishmael was the son of Hagar. He was Abraham's seed according to the flesh. Israel as a nation is also Abraham's seed according to the flesh. Abraham's seed are those born according to the promise, not according to the flesh. Paul told the Jews that unless they are in Christ, they are the seed of the flesh, just as Ishmael was.

The Israel of God

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be upon them and mercy and upon the Israel of God. (Gal 6:15-16).

Israel is the new creature in Christ. Paul said that the church is the Israel of God. Dispensationalism claims that Paul is speaking here of two groups of people: the church and the nation of Israel and prays that peace be upon both of them. This contradicts Paul's point. He is plainly saying that the new born are Israel.

Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision (circumcised Jews). For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh. (Phil 3:2-3).

Paul told the believers to beware of the false leaven of the Jews, who spread legalism and the law and rejoice in their flesh and natural descent from Abraham. He said that the church is the true circumcision, or the true Israel of God.

For you, brethren, became followers of the churches...in Judea...for you also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets and have persecuted us; and they please not God and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost. (1 Thes 2:14-16).

Anti-Semitism

Paul said that wrath had come upon the Jewish nation to the uttermost and it certainly did, as Jesus forecast, in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD, a few years after this epistle was written. Some call this anti-Semitic.

Some say that the Holocaust came from teaching that claims that the Jews are not the children of God, unless they are born again by the gospel. No, the Holocaust came from the heart of sinful men, not from the truth. Some say that Luther contributed to the Holocaust because his words on the Jews inspired Hitler. Hitler and those who worked with him were inspired by their own sinful natures and have themselves only to blame.

Not only Jews were killed in the Nazi camps. It is claimed that 6 million Jews died, but 6 million non-Jews also died in the camps. Millions of Gypsies were killed in the camps, for they were considered foreign vagabonds as the Jews were. They were political scapegoats, just as the socialists, homosexuals and all the disabled. It is evil human behaviour. The Holocaust raised modern consciousness to oppose all forms of discrimination. But we do not approve of Communism or homosexuality as a response.

Hitler's *Mein Kampf* reveals that he justified his actions by Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1860) and *Descent of Man* (1875) and articles by Darwin's cousin Francis Galton on eugenics (social engineering by breeding) translated into German in the early 1900's.

Germany was largely taken in by the "God is dead" teaching of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), which claimed that evolution would produce a *superhuman* race. Hitler claimed that his struggle was part of this process. There is no way that Luther would have endorsed what Hitler did.

Luther did say some bad things, but in the exaggerated style of speech common in his day. He said some true things about Israel from scripture. He was also frustrated over his inability to convert the Jews to Christ. He wanted them to be saved. He said some grumpy things about them in his last years, when he was suffering a lot of pain and illness, but his language should not always be taken literally. Worse things were said of Luther, the Pope and the Turks at that time.

We should recognize our debt to the Jewish nation, for giving us the scripture and through whom Christ, according to the flesh, came. We should also desire them to be saved and reach out to them with the gospel, just as we would do for any people. We should also watch that we stand in faith ourselves, rather than rail against the faults of others. But errors in the past do not mean that we should abandon biblical truth and take an opposite extreme.

Some ask, "Whose side are you on today, Israel's or the Arab's?". Neither. We are with Christ. Our response to the situation in the Middle East should be based on what is right, not on an extreme religious view. Extreme religious views are dangerous. They have never helped in the past. Are we to say, "Bomb the Arabs for the sake of the Jews?". No! We will address this towards the end of this chapter.

All sorts of claims are made regarding us being a blessing to Abraham's natural seed. Some say that the German economy went down in the 1990's because their policy on the modern nation of Israel changed. Their economy went down because they brought in East Germany when Communism fell. Their economy is growing again now, but their policy on Israel has not reverted.

Provoking the Jews to Salvation

This is the point: we want the Jews saved (just as we want all men saved). How do we do this? By telling them they are our brothers in Abraham? Or, by telling them that without Christ they are not God's children, but that they can be grafted back into Christ by faith? Surely it is the latter.

Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them come and worship before your feet and to know that I have loved you. (Rev 3:9).

The Jews were not Jews in God's house, but lied about God's truth. They had been persecuting the churches. God said that He would make them recognize that He was in the Gentiles through Christ. This is the same as Paul said in Romans 11: that God would lead the elect of the Jews to Himself by provoking them to jealousy through the conversion of the Gentiles, to come and worship Christ because of the testimony of the Gentile's faith.

We are not to go to them and honour their Judaism. They are to come to Christ and honour His Son. We will come back to this later, but first we return to Paul's passages, then look at the book of Hebrews and then look in some detail at Romans 11.

Inclusion Theology

Inclusion Theology is not a fully accurate term. The term means that Gentiles have been included in Israel, the household of faith, under the New Covenant. However, Gentiles were always included in

Israel. Abraham was a Gentile when he was called. There were many others in the Old Testament, including Rahab and Ruth, both of whom were included in the lineage of Christ. The Old Testament law made provision for Gentiles to join Israel, to worship God and be saved.

However, during the Old Covenant Israel were not commanded to preach to all the Gentile nations. God kept a greater inclusion of all men into His household for the New Covenant age. Speaking of the Messiah's ministry and the New Covenant the Holy Spirit said:

I the Lord have called You in righteousness and will hold Your hand and will keep You and give You for a covenant for the people (Israel), for a light to the Gentiles. (Is 42:6).

In the New Testament James shows the same understanding:

...James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken to me: Simeon has declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. And to this agree the words of the prophets;

as it is written, After this I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof and I will set it up: That the residue of men ("remnant" [NIV]) might seek the Lord and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called, who does all these things. Known to God are all His works from the beginning of the world. (Acts 15:13-18).

James said here that the prophet's words about the rebuilding of David's tabernacle were fulfilled in the church. He said that the church was made up of the remnant of the nation of Israel and the elect of the Gentiles of all nations, whom the Lord would take out for Himself, according to His plan from before creation.

Dispensationalism misconstrues this passage, saying that "*after this*" means after the church age. James' clear intent was to show that the gospel age is the fulfilment of the prophets. The church is David's tabernacle.

Always in the mind of God *Israel* has meant God's people, not a tribe or nation. It has always referred to God's elect. Gentiles were included in that in the Old Covenant era, but in the New Covenant there is "much more" grace extended through Christ.

Paul's Mystery

Paul speaks about this greater inclusion of Gentiles in Ephesians. In Ephesians Paul is describing his call and ministry:

How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery; as I wrote before in a few words, whereby, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel...To me, who am less than the least of the saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. (Eph 3:3-8).

Paul explained the mystery: that the Gentiles are included in the same body of Christ through the gospel and that we are the seed of Abraham through Christ. In Ephesians 2 Paul explained that we, the Gentiles, who were once afar off have been made nigh by the blood of Christ and are included in the Commonwealth of Israel, which is Christ (Eph 2:11-22).

In Eph 3:2 Paul describes his ministry, "If you have heard of the dispensation (stewardship) of the grace of God that is given to me to for you.". He also shows this by his introduction to the epistle:

That in the dispensation of the fullness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; even in Him. (Eph 1:10).

This describes Christ's reconciliation on the cross, in bringing all things under His subjection and through the gospel gathering together the elect of the Jews and Gentiles into one body in Christ. *Things in heaven* means that we have peace with the Father, that we all may be one in Him. He brings us all into one body. This is what Paul's ministry was about, to declare Is 42:6, 49:6.

"That in the ages to come (*now in the church era*) He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Jesus Christ." (Eph 2:7). That is what God has been doing in the nations as He gathers in His elect throughout the ages that we are now in. Paul made the same point about this inclusion of the Gentiles in Romans 11. We look more closely at this further below.

The Land

We will be looking at the book of Hebrews to see what it says about Israel and the Promised Land. The concept of the Promised Land comes from *Paradise*, where Adam walked in relationship and communion with God.

The concept of paradise or the land appears in the prophets in symbolism, where it is a place of rest, or peace, of security from enemies and reconciliation and peace with God. Phrases like "every man sitting under his fig tree" describe the serenity of reconciliation in a way that can be understood in human terms (Is 65:22, Zech 3:10).

There are many pictures like this, of living in the land under the New Covenant. They do not picture a one thousand year reign of Christ in Jerusalem. They picture the redemption of Christ. The land is thus reconciliation. The land is Christ, just as the Sabbath is.

Spiritualizing Scripture

Some say this is spiritualization of the text, making the land to be the person of Christ. Rather, it is the specific intention of scripture. The prophets spoke in pictures. This is the language style that the Hebrew used. This is well known and accepted. Scripture has to be interpreted by its context and by its *genre*. Genre means the *kind* of text it is.

If it is Hebrew prophetic text then it used pictures to portray meaning, especially when the meaning is beyond usual human understanding. For the most part the Hebrew could not understand prophetic texts about Messiah unless redemption was expressed in the context of their current experience.

It is the stated intention of scripture that pictures, shadows and types are used to portray the redemption and kingdom of Christ. This is not miss-allegorising. Concerning terms such as *Israel* the prophets specifically stated that this meant God's elect (Is 42:1, 45:4, 65:9).

And I will bring forth a Seed out of Jacob and out of Judah an inheritor of My mountains; and Mine elect shall inherit it and My servants shall dwell there. (Is 65:9).

Dispensationalists say that they go by the literal interpretation of scripture. Actually they do not. They allegorise many passages. They suppose that Ezekiel 36 by "double fulfilment" speaks of a second return of the Jews to the land before Christ's return, while it was fulfilled over 400 years before Christ by the return of the captivity from Babylon and the nations of the north.

They allegorize the six days of creation in Genesis 1 to be 6,000 years of human history from creation until now, supposing that Christ will reign in Jerusalem for the 7th day (1,000 years). Genesis does not say this. Allegory is one of the roots of their hermeneutics. See an example in Charles Capps' book *End Times Events* which is an *allegorization* of Jesus' parables.

Allegory in itself is not wrong. John Bunyan wrote the classic *Pilgrim's Progress*, which is an allegory. Allegory is wrong when it misrepresents the intent of scripture, or invents themes not in the scripture. Good allegory is useful. Scripture often uses allegory, but we must be faithful to the scripture's intent.

Literalism

The scripture does not warrant allegorizing where it is not intended. But to give a literal interpretation to passages where the Bible context is clearly using a shadow or picture that points to fulfilment in the New Covenant in Christ, is also breaking the intention of scripture. "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Rev 19:10).

Literalism is as wrong as unwarranted allegorizing. Literalism is making literal what the Bible intends to be symbolic. But once we know that Jesus is the sum of the scriptural witness we have the right focal point for hermeneutics. We must interpret scripture by its intended plain meaning, neither allegorizing when unintended, nor literalizing when unintended.

Everlasting Promises

In the Old Testament everlasting promises were made to Abraham and this is what Dispensationalism has used to confuse some people. God promised that there would not fail a king upon David's throne forever and this has been fulfilled in Christ.

We know that this "forever" is fulfilled in Christ's reign on the throne of David. We know that Jesus is the seed of David in whom this promise is fulfilled. So this everlasting or eternal promise has been fulfilled in Christ and God's word to David has not fallen to the ground.

Similarly, when God promised the land to Israel "forever" in Psalm 105, this also is fulfilled in Christ. This is what the book of Hebrews sets out to explain. Why should we say that the promise to David was fulfilled in Christ, but the promise of the land is not fulfilled in Christ? We agree that the promise of the land was an everlasting covenant, just as the promise to David of a king was everlasting.

Everlasting describes a covenant begun in Israel by figure and type and fulfilled in Christ (Ezek 37:26). For example, Abraham's descendants were to keep the *everlasting* covenant of circumcision (Gen 17:13). This was given before the law, but we know it was a shadow fulfilled and ceased in Christ (Gal 6:15).

Everlasting is also used of the Aaronic priesthood, a covenant to "*all generations*", a phrase similar to that used in Psalm 105 regarding the land. The Aaronic/Levitical priesthood is fulfilled and ceased in Christ (Ex 40:15). The *Day of Atonement* was an *everlasting statute* and the book of Hebrews says it is fulfilled and the ceremony is ceased in Christ (Lev 16:34).

If we say *everlasting* can only be fulfilled in Palestine, then how does Israel being out of the land for the last 2,000 years work? If we are literalists we have a problem here. Also, if we say that *everlasting* for the land refers to Palestine, then it must also refer to Aaron, to the Day of Atonement and to the whole Law of Moses. This is the quagmire of Dispensationalism.

Psalm 105 says that God fulfilled His promise bringing Israel out of Egypt into the land, "That they might observe His statutes and keep His laws." (vs. 45). Deuteronomy states that Israel's occupancy of the land depended on this obedience. The promise concerning Palestine was conditional and was put aside (Heb 8:13).

Psalm 105 is a depiction of the types of Christ. Moses and Joseph are spoken of. 1st Corinthians 10 shows Moses was a type of Christ. The Psalm, therefore, has a *shadow* meaning, which is fulfilled in Christ, God's true Israel. In Him His promises are *yes and amen*. The oath to Abraham is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This is what the Psalms in general depict. This was Stephen's whole point to Israel in Acts 7.

The lament of John Gerstner locates Dispensationalist thought well: "This certainly does make it hard on the Jews! When they might have had a glorious piece of real estate on the Mediterranean, all they end up with under this interpretation is Christ." (in *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*). "All they get is Christ!" Is this how Dispensationalism views Christ?

Concerning a future return of Israel to Palestine, Stephen Sizer claims "Nowhere, however, is a third re-gathering to the land explicitly mentioned in the Bible. Each passage quoted by Scofield or (Hal) Lindsey refers either to the first or second re-gathering to the land (from Egypt and Babylon), or, as in Amos 9, to Pentecost." (in *Christian Zionism*). This statement would be difficult to refute using biblical hermeneutics.

Sizer concludes on the theology of Christian Zionism, that in it: the promises of blessings are isolated from their covenantal context; the interpretation of scripture by Jesus and the apostles is ignored and; the sacralising of Zionism ultimately subordinates the cross.

The Land in Hebrews

Now coming to the book of Hebrews:

For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that has entered into His rest, he has also ceased from his own works, as God did from His. (Heb 4:8-10).

(The KJV uses "Jesus", derived from the Greek for *Joshua*.) This passage is about Joshua bringing Israel into the Promised Land. The text says that when Joshua brought them into the Promised Land he did not succeed in giving the people rest. That is, this land was only a type, it was not the fulfilment. The fulfilment is Christ and this is the point of Hebrews.

Hebrews here is referring to Psalm 95, where the *rest* is still promised a long time after Israel had occupied the Promised Land. This shows that the land itself was not the *rest* and was not thus the promise. This is why Zionism completely misses the gospel intention of the scripture. The Jews looked to the land and not to Jesus. We are to "look unto Jesus." (Heb 12:2).

Hebrews said the same thing about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, when they dwelt in the Promised Land:

By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked for a city whose builder and maker was God. (Heb 11:9-10).

If Abraham had arrived in the land of promise, why did he sojourn there by faith? Because that was not the fulfilment of the promise! He counted the land as a *strange country*. This shows the mistake of Israel. They did not look beyond their land and see Christ, so they fell short of God's promise. Abraham had faith that he would yet see the fulfilment. What was the fulfilment that he was expecting? It was that he would come to the city whose builder and maker was God.

The same is said of Abraham's descendents who dwelt in the land:

For these all died in faith, not having seen the promises. But having seen them afar off and were persuaded of them and embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country...But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He has prepared for them a city. (Heb 11:13-16).

So all of Abraham's descendants who lived in the Promised Land confessed that they were pilgrims, meaning that they had not yet arrived in the land that God promised. This means that the land called the Promised Land today is not the land that God promised. He promised certain boundaries under the Old Covenant, but Hebrews explains that this was a type of our redemption, security and safety in Christ.

Joshua brought Israel into the shadow of the true land. The whole Covenant under Joshua was a shadow of the fulfilment in Christ. This is the whole meaning of Hebrews.

What is the City They Sought?

They lived in the land and had not received the promise. What was it that they looked for? The text says the promise they looked for was the heavenly promise in Christ, the land in Christ that God had prepared for them. Hebrews 11 goes through all the heroes of faith who dwelt in the Promised Land and concludes:

And all these, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. (Heb 11:39-40).

Hebrews 12 tells us what this city is:

But you are come to mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to an innumerable company of angels. To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven and to God the Judge of all and to the spirits of just men made perfect and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant and to the blood of sprinkling...(Heb 12:22-24).

Zion and Jerusalem are the church of Jesus Christ, the elect of God in Christ. Hebrews was written to show this very thing, to stop earthly Zionism and direct all to Christ as the fulfilment of the whole law and prophets. Galatians 4, Hebrews and the book of Revelation tell us that Jerusalem is the church.

Not a Place - A Person

This is *the place* that the Father prepared for us, *in Christ*. "I go to prepare a place for you." (John 14:1-3). This is the mystery that Paul spoke of: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Col 1:27). How simple and consistent is the revelation of scripture! How Dispensationalism has taken people away from the plain meaning of scripture, which is Jesus Christ, the Son of God!

Jesus is the fulfilment of the promises. He is the land. It is a person. Salvation is not a place. It is so much better than a piece of real estate. It is eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this is the record, that God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; and he who has not the Son of God has not life. (1 John 5:11-12).

Romans 11

We will start with a thematic review of the chapter. Romans in general is about God's plan to save His people. The book is about grace. It starts off by proving that both Jew and Gentile are under sin. The Jews have sinned by the law and the Gentiles have sinned by their conscience, so that all men are without an excuse before God. Neither the law, conscience, nor the witness of creation can save. They serve only to condemn. So the conclusion to this part is:

They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that does good, no not one. (Rom 3:12).

That being the case, the only way to God is through grace. This means that God will not allow any boasting by man. He will receive no man with a boast. He will receive us by one way only, through grace:

Therefore, it is of faith, that it might be by grace...(Rom 4:16).

From there Paul proceeds to show us how grace works. The essential ingredient he describes in Romans 9 and Romans 11 is election. It is because of election that we have no boast before God. From this footing Paul continues in Romans 11 to explain how God draws his people to Himself through grace alone. This is the summit of the book.

The Meaning of Rom 11

We have reviewed 30 commentaries on Romans 11. It is difficult to find good commentaries on this chapter. The most detailed commentary we have seen is by Daniel Thompson, available on the Internet.

Romans 11 has nothing to do with the last-days, or "end times". The chapter has nothing to do with the Second Coming of Christ. Nowhere in the chapter does Paul even hint that he is considering the Second Coming of Christ. Christ will come at the end of this world, but this is not the subject of Romans 11.

We will take Romans 11 step by step. First Paul asks, "Has God cast away national Israel?". He answers no. His proof runs like this:

1. Paul himself is an Israelite, meaning that if God had cast them off he would not be saved.
2. Paul explains from the Old Testament that God always kept a remnant from Israel as His people. There were 7,000 who did not bow the knee to Baal in Elijah's day, for example.
3. Paul states, "Even so at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." (Rom 11:5).

We can see that Paul's answer is that God has reserved a portion of national Israel by election, not the whole of the nation. Two things are clear from Rom 11:5. Paul was speaking about his *present time*, not the Second Coming of Christ; and Paul was speaking about a *remnant* of the nation of Israel being saved and not the whole of the nation. This is Paul's stated subject. The chapter then shows how this would be done.

Unconditional Grace

Paul goes back and once again describes the main factor in being the people of God – God's unconditional grace:

And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace; otherwise work is no more work. (Rom 11:6).

Paul then describes the fall of the reprobate, those of Israel in sin who reject Christ and who rejected God's prophets and God's ways since the beginning. Then Paul asks, "Have they stumbled that they should fall (irreconcilably)?" He means here, is Israel utterly cast off as a whole? His answer is no and he explains it in two steps.

Step one: Paul says the fall of Israel meant the gospel came to the Gentiles.

Step two: Paul says that the Gentiles receiving the gospel provoke some of the Jews to believe to be saved.

This is how God has designed to draw in all His people from among both Gentiles and Jews. We explain this further:

1. He proves the Gentiles under sin and then draws them by grace.

The Gentiles knew they were not the people of God. The Samaritan woman at the well knew. The Syro-Phenician woman who met Jesus knew. The parable of the *Good Samaritan* showed what all Jews thought about the Gentiles. They "are not a people".

...and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not My people, you are My people; and they shall say, You are my God. (Hos 2:23).

So God brings in from the Gentiles a people for Himself through grace. Grace comes to the sinful Gentiles because the Jews had rejected Christ and the gospel.

2. He proves the Jews under sin and then draws them also.

This is the difficult part because the Jews were convinced that they were all right as Abraham's children. They did not believe that they needed salvation. The Jews thought they were the people of God. They prided themselves on being God's people, but they did not know God. So, as they rejected Christ, who "came unto His own and His own received Him not", their sin was manifest and thus proven. (John 1:11).

Once their sin was obvious and the truth about their nature seen, God would then call the election from the Jews through grace. This is the wonder of God's working. He first proves under sin and then accepts under grace. This was God's program with Gentile and Jew in Paul's own day. This highlights God's wisdom and general program of salvation by grace.

God's Purpose in Romans 11

To prove this we see the end of the chapter:

For God has concluded them all under sin, that He might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements and His ways past finding out. (vs. 32-33).

This is what the chapter is all about. That God would have mercy upon "all" does not mean that all men will be saved, but all His people, whether the elect of the Jews or the elect of the Gentiles. It is twisting the whole chapter and the whole book, to say this means that all men will be saved.

Another point of debate is Paul's statement in Rom 11:26, "And so all Israel will be saved." This is not hard to understand. We have already seen how Paul defines Israel in chapter 9 when he said "Not all

Israel are Israel.”. He defined Israel several times in the book of Romans, explaining each time that Israel was the household of faith.

He did not mean that every Jew would be saved. In fact he said the opposite. (Rom 11:5) He said this again in Rom 11:14, “If by any means I might provoke to jealousy them which are of my flesh and might *save some of them*.”. Paul was talking about saving some of the Jews, the elect, not all. There is only one way of salvation and that is through faith in Christ. Many Jews have already perished without Christ, so they are not all saved.

Rom 11:12, 15 & 24

The next step is to explain verses 12, 15 and 24. Each of these verses is saying the same thing and repeating the same point to explain God’s programme. Verse 12 states that if the fall of national Israel brought riches to the world, “then much more their fullness”. This verse is misread by Dispensationalists to mean that if the fall of Israel brought blessing to the world, then much more the Jewish national salvation will bring blessing to the world.

From the context a correct understanding is that if the Gentiles can be saved through the fall of Israel, then much more is God able to save the elect of national Israel also. “Much more their fullness” refers to the salvation of the Jewish elect. John said, “Of His *fullness* have we all received and grace for grace.” (John 1:16). This means life, or abundant life, i.e. eternal life (John 10:10).

Paul said that if Gentiles who did not know God can be saved, how much more can the elect of Israel, who had the knowledge of God in the Old Testament also be saved? If barbarians who had almost no consciousness of the things of God can be turned by the Spirit of God, how much more can those whom God calls from Israel?

The same literary device is used here as Jesus used in, “If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, much more will your heavenly Father...”. It means that, “If one can do this, then how much more can the other do the same?”.

In vs. 15 Paul repeated the idea; “For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead”. Dispensationalists here say that *life from the dead* means the resurrection of the dead at the Second Coming of Christ. They say that national Israel shall be saved just before Christ comes.

This is all read into the verse, ignoring the context and the rest of the book of Romans. The passage does not say this. The Second Coming of Christ is not mentioned here or anywhere in this chapter, not even in the whole book of Romans.

Rather vs. 15 is referring to *eternal life*. It is saying that if the elect of the Gentiles found life, then the receiving of the elect from Israel shall be life from the dead for them also. They also shall be quickened, made alive in Christ. In case we had any doubt as to Paul’s meaning he repeats the same idea again in vs. 24 and explains his logic:

For if you (Gentiles) were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree; how much more shall these (the elect of national Israel), which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree.
(Rom 11:24).

The point of these three verses is this: “Gentiles, do not boast against the Jews. You have been received by faith. If you are proud you too may fall. Do you not realize that if they believe they can be grafted back in? In fact, that would be easier than you believing, because they are not strangers to the things of God like you were”. This is exactly what Paul said.

That is, “If you, who had no knowledge of the law, no experience in the temple and no expectation of Christ, could believe on a gospel that is so new to you, how much more could these who have the background and knowledge in the things of God in the Old Covenant believe and come back to Christ when God calls them?”.

Romans 11:25

Paul continues in vs. 25 and sums it up. The mystery of God’s plan for saving His people from both Jew and Gentile is:

Blindness in part is happened to (national) Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles comes. (Rom 11:25).

Dispensationalists say here that there is a full *number* of Gentiles to be saved and when that number is reached, Christ will return and all national Israel will be saved. This verse or its context is saying nothing at all about this. It is read into the text.

Some translations even have the word “number” written in the verse, but it is not in the original. It is not speaking about a number. The word “fullness” simply means life. It is not referring to a certain number of Gentiles. In vs. 12 the word *fullness* is used and there it is also clearly not referring to a number. It simply means eternal life. Also in John 1:16:

And of His fullness have we all received and grace for grace.

So fullness according to the scripture means to receive His grace. Paul’s mystery in vs. 25 is simply what he has been explaining throughout the chapter: “Blindness in part has happened until the elect of the Gentiles receive fullness and then this will provoke the elect of national Israel to be drawn by God and grafted back into the root by faith”. This is all there is to the chapter.

This is an ongoing work of God through the gospel throughout the generations. Again, how wise and wonderful is God’s plan of grace. We all come by grace alone. This is the point. This is a glorious chapter.

The Coming of Jesus

Paul concludes the section by rejoicing in the reason why Christ came. In Romans 11 Paul is showing us what Isaiah said and what Hosea said. We repeat:

I the Lord have called You in righteousness and will hold Your hand and will keep You and give You for a covenant for the people (Israel), for a light to the Gentiles. (Is 42:6).

And He said, It is a light thing You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give You for a light to the Gentiles, that You may be My salvation to the end of the earth. (Is 49:6).

“All Israel shall be saved”. That is, all God’s people from national Israel, plus all God’s people from among the Gentiles. God does it by first confirming them in sin and then by bringing in His people through unconditional grace. There is no other way of coming to God.

...as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. For this is My covenant for them, when I shall take away their sins. (Rom 11:26-27).

Dispensationalists say this is about Christ’s Second Coming. The text does not say this. Paul is referring to Christ’s birth and first coming, “He came to save His people from their sin.” (Matt 1:21).

This is what Jesus did in His first coming. He took away our sin, He established the New Covenant and He turned away ungodliness from Jacob, meaning from His people the church.

If God has not turned away ungodliness from us then we are not in Christ. This is what He does in us through salvation. Paul is saying that Jesus came to establish the New Covenant and bring in God's people and set them free from sin in salvation.

Conclusion to Romans 11

So Paul's enquiry is satisfied. He started by asking about his national people Israel (Rom 9:1-5). His answer was God has not cast them off. The callings and elections of God are without repentance. He said even at this present time there is a remnant from among them.

He said he wished to provoke them through the Gentiles so that he might save some (Rom 11:14). He said the Gentile's salvation would provoke them and by this God would lead to Himself those He has chosen from among national Israel. He said if the Gentiles could be grafted in, then the natural branches God chose could much more so be grafted back into fullness in Christ. Grace is the key to this chapter and to the whole book of Romans. God is saving His people through the finished work of Christ:

O the depth and the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements...For of Him and through Him and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory forever." (Rom 11: 33, 36).

Of Him, through Him, to Him is the whole purpose of this chapter and of Romans and of the whole gospel. It is also the whole purpose of this book that we have written.

Rom 11 is about the *Israel of God*, the church, the 144,000 (a symbol of completeness) of Revelation. It is all about the theme of Romans, that all have sinned, all are concluded under sin and God saves His people through grace alone.

"So then, it is of faith, so that it might be by grace, to the end that the promise might be *sure to all the seed*." (Rom 4:16). This is the theme of Romans. All Israel shall be saved. *All the seed* – Abraham's seed!

National Israel

These studies mean that:

1. As Christians we should not call a Jew who does not know the Lord Jesus a brother. We should instead preach Christ to him/her.
2. A Jew is not saved because he/she is a Jew.
3. God's promise to Abraham, "He who blesses your seed I will bless", is not fulfilled by blessing the Jews more than it is by blessing the Arabs or any other nation. The church of Jesus Christ is Abraham's seed.
4. "Christ is the end of the law for all those who believe." (Rom 10:4). There are not two churches, one for Gentile believers and one for Jewish believers.
5. Jews who believe in Christ are not under the Law of Moses any more than Gentile believers. The Old Covenant is totally and forever abolished.
6. God is not bringing back the Old Covenant or the temple or sacrifice again, since Jesus put away sin by the offering of Himself once forever.

7. The Jews do not have a covenant right to the land of Palestine. The Old Covenant is finished and put away (Heb 8:13). The land for all believers in the New Covenant is Christ.
8. This does not mean that Israel should not be in the land, but it means it is no longer an issue of it being their land by God's promise. The physical land today is a social, political and (no doubt) a military issue.
9. There does not appear to be any text in the Bible, Old or New Testament, that says that Israel will be re-gathered into their old Promised Land before the Second Coming of Christ.
10. We are not commanded to pray for Jerusalem in the New Covenant any more than we are commanded to pray for any people. The command to pray for Jerusalem was in the Psalms and was specific to David's time in the Old Covenant when he had just captured it from the Jebusites (Ps 122:6). Jerusalem today is the church. It is where the *ark* is (the presence), which is Jesus, *Emmanuel*, after the resurrection Christ in us.
11. There is no holy merit in the land of Israel. To teach that going to Israel will give us special access to God in prayer is wrong. It is by the blood of Jesus that we draw near to God.
12. If the Jews rebuilt the temple today it would be just as much an abomination as the Mosque. Both are a rejection of Christ and there is no merit in either.

Covenantal Zionism

For a comprehensive study of the Christian roots of Zionism from the days after the Reformation, see *Christian Zionism*, by Stephen Sizer. Both Luther and Calvin believed that "Israel", in Rom 11:26, refers to the elect from all nations, including the nation of Israel. Modern *Evangelical Zionism* began to take shape after this.

Thomas Brightman (1562-1607), a historicist post-millennialist, predicted the restoration of the Jews. He called Turkey the *false prophet* and the Pope the *antichrist* and believed in an imminent millennial period of glory in his own generation. This began the trend within some sectors of Protestantism towards hasty interpretations of world events.

The post-millennial hermeneutic saw the re-grafting of the whole Jewish nation into Christ, along with a great revival among all Gentile nations, as a period of glory for the church before Christ's Second Coming. This was in part due to the positivism of the Renaissance and early Industrial Revolution. The Promised Land did not necessarily have anything to do with this interpretation. But still, this position seems to assume an interpretation into Romans 11.

Zionism did not take on a pre-millennial stance until after the negative impact of the French Revolution (1789-1799). Some saw a last-days revival among the Jews before the Second Coming, with Jesus reigning in Jerusalem after His return. It is difficult to see how they could relate this Jewish revival to a return to the Promised Land, without also taking the next step towards the restitution of Israel's Law.

Then, through Darby and Scofield, Zionism moved away from *Covenantal Theology* towards Dispensationalism, where the Jews were seen as a separate people of God, with separate eternal promises apart from the church. In Dispensationalism, God has two people groups, the Jews and the church. Some see other nations (such as British Israel) included. This is all wrong. The promises were made to Abraham and to his Seed, Christ.

The main shift was in terms of hermeneutics. Sizer explains, "Christian Zionism is constructed upon a novel hermeneutic in which all scripture is interpreted in an ultra-literal sense; the prophetic parts of scripture are seen as pre-written history; and eschatology fulfilled in the interpreter's generation."

Sizer continues, "This differs from the traditional Protestant hermeneutic which, while also based on literalism, nevertheless begins with the setting of the author as well as recipients and is also shaped by the historical, cultural, grammatical and theological contexts."

Dispensationalism and historicist pre-millennialism both misinterpret the Old Testament prophecies of Christ's kingdom and have no New Testament reference except an unsupported reading of Rom 11 and a misreading of the Greek in Matt 24:14, which we address in a later chapter.

Israel

We are not against the Jews living in Israel. All people need to dwell in peace and safety. This is what "land" means and why it is a picture of redemption. There are situations in different parts of the world where people need security, including Israel, the Palestinians, the Kurds, Christian Burmese and Christian Sudanese.

Zionism as a movement may not have anything in particular to do with God's programme. One thousand years ago the Europeans attacked Jerusalem and took it. At that time it was 1,000 years after Christ and many Christians believed that it was a prophetic fulfilment of the millennium.

The Christians held Jerusalem and it was expected that Christ would come and set up his kingdom there. In those days this way of seeing things was compelling, yet we can see now that it was totally wrong. It was contrary to everything that Jesus preached. They did not realize that Jerusalem no longer had any significance in God's scheme of things.

We are not saying that everything that the Crusaders did was wrong. There was a large security risk in the region and in Europe in those days. It is beyond the scope of this book to look at this. We are only addressing the religious view of Jerusalem here. In regard to any religious significance of Jerusalem, the Crusader movement after about 200 years died out and came to nothing. But we have the advantage of hindsight.

So in the situation in Israel today we do not yet know how it will play out and what will come of it. It would be foolhardy to interpret scripture by what is happening in the world, again. "The one thing we learn from history is that we do not learn from history."

It is also not the first time that the Jews have retaken parts of the land after their expulsion in 70AD. We do not yet know the outcome of the current situation. This does not mean that we hope for their expulsion. It means that it may not have any implications for eschatology.

Stories of miracles in recent wars with Israel may not hold up under investigation. We have studied some of them and there are significant political and military reasons for Israel's success. For example, the Arab nations failed in the *Six Day War* because they distrusted each other, were not co-ordinated and were hopelessly inexperienced. Also the USA came to Israel's aid. Our point is that many popular stories are fables, even though well intentioned.

Today, national Israel serves the political interests of America in the Middle East and we are not saying that this is wrong. Israel currently is a democratic country committed to peace and does not use undue force against its enemies. At least it is capable of inflicting much more harm than it does. It is an ally against Islamic terrorism and dictatorships in the region. It was an ally when the USSR attempted to dominate the region for its oil. Allies should be protected.

It is popular among some Christian lobby groups to give Israel undue support and not care for the Palestinians. Which churches have stood up for the hundreds of thousands of Christian Palestinians who have been driven out the land of Palestine over the years? There were far more Palestinian Christians in the land than Jewish Christians. There is relative silence on issues like this, whereas Jesus commanded us to love our brethren: those who believe in Him.

For a description of Christians in Middle Eastern nations see *Who Are the Christians in the Middle East*, by Betty and Martin Bailey. An endorsement on the cover reads, "An indispensable overview of the...current tenuous situation and the prospect of their survival as vibrant communities caught between the resurgence of fundamentalist Judaism and fundamentalist Islam in the area."

Judaism

Some Evangelicals have said that the Jews serve the same God and encourage the Jews in their Judaism. If they do not accept Christ, they do not serve the same God. Jesus made that much clear. This approach to the Jews is contrary to that of Jesus and all the first apostles. They rebuked the Jews for their unbelief. Changing this approach will not turn the Jews to Christ. We need to preach the gospel to them, just as we do to any people.

The modern state of Israel started as a mainly European secular democracy. Presently, one third of the *Knesset* (Jewish Parliament) is made up of conservative religious Jews. Their goal is to restore Judaism. They currently influence the nation much more than a one third power would normally do.

If these fundamentalist Jews gain more power they could achieve one of their goals: to bring back the Sanhedrin and rule Israel like it was ruled in the days of Jesus. They could then be as much trouble to Christians in the area and as legalistic as the *Sharia Law* of Islam. The whole character of Israel could radically change from how it started.

Dispensationalists say that encouraging Judaism is fostering the Second Coming of Jesus by preparing the Jews. This is what Judas thought when he tried to get Jesus to take Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. This is what the Crusaders thought 1,000 years ago. It is a misunderstanding of the kingdom of Jesus and of the people of God. It is Zionism, not Christianity.

We should be careful about what it is that we are promoting. We should evangelise Jews for the gospel of Christ with all our might, as we do also all people. But we should not promote Judaism. We want Israel as a democratic secular nation that we may evangelise with the gospel. We do not want it to become a fundamentalist religious state.

We also do not want a fundamentalist religious American state, bent on fulfilling prophecy by establishing Israel. This is dangerous. It is also not righteous. We need to ally with Israel against Islamic militancy, but not against Arab rights. One television evangelist said that Iraq is where the Garden of Eden is and that God is using America in the *last-days* to take back His land. This is a reckless promotion of war.

This is not to say that America should not be doing what it is doing in the Middle East today. That is another discussion. We are speaking here of the prophetic implications, not so much of the economic, security or political issues at stake.

When God says that He delights in Jerusalem He means that He delights in His people, in faith, in righteousness and in the New Covenant, which was always His end purpose and which is the actual meaning of *Jerusalem*. It does not mean that He delights in bricks or mortar, temples made with stone, buildings, sacrifices, rituals or land.

Stephen Sizer

Sizer cited Palmer Robertson (*Land of Promise*, eds. Johnston and Walker):

In the process of redemptive history, a dramatic movement has been made from type to reality, from shadow to substance. The land, which once was the specific locale of God's redemptive working, served well within the Old Covenant as a picture of paradise lost and promised.

Now, however, in the era of the New Covenant fulfilment, the land has been expanded to encompass the kosmos...In this age of fulfilment, therefore, a retrogression to the limited forms of the Old Covenant must be neither expected or promoted. Reality must not give way to shadow.

Sizer's own conclusion to the matter was:

Ultimately, therefore, the choice is between two theologies: one based primarily of the shadows of the Old Covenant; the other on the reality of the New Covenant. In identifying with the former, *Christian Zionism* is an exclusive theology that focuses on the Jews in the land rather than an inclusive theology that centres of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world.

It consequently provides a theological endorsement for racial segregation, apartheid and war. This is diametrically opposed to the inclusive theology of justice, peace and reconciliation which lie at the heart of the New Covenant.

Advantage of the Jews

What advantages then do the Jews have?

What advantage then has the Jew? Or what profit is there in circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because to them were committed the oracles of God. (Rom 3:1).

When Paul mentioned here the advantages to national Israel, he did not mention the land or kingdom. His statement here is not Zionist.

The Jews have a rich heritage in the principles of God contained in the Bible, even though many of them do not believe in the person of whom the book speaks. Since they have the scriptures they have an advantage in that it is very easy to witness to a Jew from the Old Testament texts.

But the scriptures also give them an advantage for this life, even if they reject the gospel and the eternal advantage. Out of the scriptures they take values such as education and hard work and they raise their children to follow these values. This is why in many nations we see Jews rising to the top of their field.

They do not rise to the top today because they are sons of Abraham. It is because they work. It is because they have a rich heritage in the word of God and they apply it to their daily lives. When you go to Israel today you see that the part where the Jews are is green and prosperous but the part where the Palestinians are is barren and poor. It is the values that the people live by. But it is also because they have benefited from Christian democratic nations.

Salvation is of the Jews. Jesus and the first apostles were Jews. We have many blessings today from the Hebrew heritage given to them by God in the Old Covenant. But "henceforth we know no man after the flesh." (2 Cor 5:15-17). "There is neither Jew nor Gentile".

The way that we should show appreciation to the Jews is to preach Christ to them. We should tell them what this heritage means in Jesus. God did not promise to save the whole nation of Israel, but He has a people among them and we should reach out to them and God will bring them in to Christ.

Dispensationalism says there are different gospels for different ages and groups of people. That is not true. There is one gospel and one church. The law has passed away whether we are Jew or Gentile. Our identity is in Christ, not in our race or culture. "The callings and elections of God are without repentance." God has not cast off Israel, but has reserved His elect. Let's go preach to them and pray God to bring them in to Jesus Christ by faith and not by their law or culture.