

# The Jewish People and the Christian Church

Have you asked yourself:

- Are the Jewish people still ‘the people of God’?
- What is the relationship between the Old Testament and the New?
- Should the believer support Christian Zionists like John Hagee in their belief that the modern state of Israel is the fulfillment of biblical prophecy?
- Does God have a separate covenant with the Jews?

Well, in this article I will endeavor to provide some answers to these common questions. These questions, and many others have been rattling around in my mind for many years now. In this paper I present some important theological truths which must be taken into account if we want biblical answers. I still have many questions yet I have discovered that the New Testament does clearly speak to us on these contemporary issues. I have extracted *six foundation stones* from the New Testament which will be helpful for navigating through the very emotive and urgent issues surrounding Israel and the Church. I invite you to travel with me and to listen to the Scriptures and the theology contained in them. I trust that the thrust and tenor of the Scriptures will themselves shape your thinking, for it is not what we think, or feel, or what is popular or of long standing that makes an idea true. As always, the court of appeal remains the Word of God.

## FOUNDATIONS FOR THINKING (beacons for the way)

Foundations are not the whole structure, but support the superstructure. Likewise, in seeking to answer many questions regarding Israel and the Church, certain foundations need to be laid down and agreed upon (which is about as much as I will do in this paper). These will be short Scriptural affirmations and deductions which act as premises or ‘terms of reference’. Without common Biblical ground, we cannot come to any conclusions. [note the addendum on the term ‘Israel’ at the end of this paper].

### 1. The New Covenant blessings are ‘for the Jew first’

In the order of God’s history of salvation, He has brought salvation to the world through Abraham and his literal seed. This introduces us to a divine order in Scripture: to the Jew first, then to the Gentile. Jesus Himself said:

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24)

The Holy Spirit said through the mouth of Paul:

‘Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to accomplish the promises given to the patriarchs’. (Romans 15:8)

The Gospel came “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). It was Paul’s practice on his missionary activities to first seek out a Jewish synagogue to preach the gospel before turning to the Gentiles (Acts 13:14, 46).

Peter, speaking to the Jews stated:

“For you first, God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways” (Acts 3:26).

Why: the gospel about Jesus was promised to the Israelites and was in direct line with the entire history and purpose of the nation of Israel. The blessings of the New Covenant (the Messiah, the Cross, the Spirit and all we Christians enjoy) *are not natively ours as Gentiles, but belong to godly Israelites first and*

*foremost!* Paul made this very clear in Romans:

“...to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the ministry and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ...”  
(Romans 9:4-5).

“For if the Gentiles have shared in *their spiritual things*, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things” (Romans 15:27).

So, the blessings of knowing Jesus that we have are not ours natively. They were promised first to the sons of Israel. Because of this, Gentile believers can never be arrogant toward Israelites believers:

“it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you” (Romans 11:18).

The well known picture in Romans 11 is of an olive tree, consisting of *an Israelite root* with natural branches and alien in-grafted branches. The rich root of *believing* Israelites is behind the Gentiles spiritual blessings in the Gospel! There is no room for Gentile arrogance toward the Israelites.

Finally, for this reason Jesus said: “Salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). The Fountain Head of all the gospel blessings we enjoy come out of God’s covenant with Abraham and the Israelite people.

## **2. The early chapters of Acts speak of a Jewish church which experienced a unique fulfillment of Old Testament promises.**

The form of the early church was singularly Jewish at its inception. The period of Acts 1 – 12 was in direct geographical, biological and architectural continuity with the OT. The first revival was limited to Jews, to Jerusalem, and centered around the Temple. We could almost say that the early church was a revival movement within 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Judaism. They were Israel within Israel, the remnant within the nation.

So the early ‘Christians’ were true Israelites (both physically and spiritually). The OT was their Bible, Palestine their Land, Jerusalem their City, and the temple there ‘church’. Jerusalem had played a pivotal part in God’s redemptive purposes: Jesus died there, Jesus was raised there, Jesus ascended near there, the Spirit was sent on Jews in that particular place and in that place the church was born. Thus there was Old Testament *form* and New Testament *content* conjoined in an unparalleled manner in church history. There was thus a very literal and tight fulfillment of the promises: as the promises were spoken first to Jews, so many of them were first fulfilled to Jews. Things would change, but this was a unique Jewish Church. Thus once again, ‘to the Jew first and then to the Gentile’.

However, there was a growing realization that the New Covenant promises did not require a ‘literal’ and physical application. So in Acts 15:16-17, James says:

“After these things I will return,  
and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen;  
And I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it;  
in order that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord  
and all the Gentiles who are called by My Name”

James clearly pointed to his contemporary Jewish church as fulfillment of this prophesy and of the divine prediction of the Gentile mission. *Yet note that the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David is no longer a physical matter but has been upgraded to a spiritual reality in the church of Jesus Christ.*

This section is important for it does show that the Messiah and the promises did come to the Jew first, and that they also came in a very literal and physical manner. Noting this shows the continuity with the Old and it also reminds us of the need to progress into the full nature of the New Covenant leaving behind many of the Jewish forms in which the promises were wrapped. Christ was born in a crib, yet He soon left the crib behind.

Lastly, this section also guides us in understanding what any hope for Israelites should look like. The revival in Acts was a true Jewish movement and *that type* of renewal should be what we want for all Jews. It is not the literal temple or merely a state entity but an acceptance of their crucified Messiah and a reception of the Holy Spirit that is their hope – as seen in the early chapters of Acts.

### **3. Believing Gentiles are grafted into the native blessings of the Israelites. Gentiles are now also descendants or ‘seed’ of Abraham, forming one new identity.**

We who were not the natural branches have now been included into the commonwealth of Israel and their kingdom by faith in their Messiah. It was a great mystery and surprise, that the Gentiles are co-heirs with the Israelite saints. Christ is now not only dwelling in Israelite believers, but in Gentiles as well! Many early Jewish believers found it very hard to imagine that the Gentiles now had equal standing and share in promises that were originally spoken uniquely to Israelites.

The story is that the promises that were spoken to the Israelites in the Old Testament were proclaimed by Jesus and received by those who believed. As you know, the 12 disciples were all Jewish as was the very early church as found in Acts chapter 1-12. Then into *that* believing Israelite body the Gentiles were brought in and made co-possessors of the Old Testament promises. The Messiah had also come to live in the Gentiles – not indirectly though their association with Jews *but directly Messiah in Gentile!* This is a key theme in both Ephesians and Colossians:

“...we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to put our hope in Christ [Jewish believers], might be for the praise of His glory. And you also [Gentiles] were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (Ephesians 1:11-13)

“So then you [Gentiles] are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints [Israelite believers in Christ] and members of God’s household” (Ephesians 2:19)

“This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 3:6)

For this reason, Gentiles now share the rich root of the Old Testament fathers. They are now *our* fathers as well. Thus Paul speaking to Gentile Corinthians says that “*our* fathers were all under the cloud..” (1 Corinthians 10:1). Also,

“The promise may be certain to all the descendents of Abraham, not only to those who are of the Law [Israelites] but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, ‘a father of many nations have I made you’ (Romans 4:16-17)

“In Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:14)

Because of this grafting in and sharing in the Messiah and the Spirit by believing Jew and Gentile alike, there is now only *one* body, *one* people of God, made up of *believing* Jew and Gentile. There is only one olive tree, not two:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek.... for you are all one in Christ Jesus; and if you are Christ’s then you are Abraham’s descendents, heir according to promise” (Galatians 3:28-29)

“For He Himself [Jesus] is our peace, who made both [Jew and Gentile] one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall....that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, making peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the Cross, by it having put to death the enmity” (Ephesians 2:14-16)

“Here there is not Greek or Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free; but Christ is all and in all” (Colossians 3:11)

“to whom God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:17)

God is now working and building an *inclusively ethnic people*. He has ‘upgraded’ His promises and universalized them to now include Jew and Gentile. The people of God are now a multiracial and multinational entity, very different from the racial and national Old Testament people. For this reason the apostle Paul calls the *church* ‘the Israel of God’:

“For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy upon them, even upon the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:15-16).

It would be good to finish this section off with our Lord’s words in Matthew 8:11, John 10:16 and 11:51-52:

“Truly I say to you, I have not found such faith with any one in Israel [to the Gentile centurion]. And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west [Gentiles], and recline with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom [Jews] shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth”.

“I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become *one flock* with one shepherd”

“he [Caiaphas] prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather together into *one* the children of God who are scattered abroad”

It is very important to know that *in Christ* there is a new people with a *new identity*. In the new body of His Son, God has abolished the issues that once divided us. What God has joined together, let no man separate.

#### **4: The Bible clearly tells us that God considers faith more important blood.**

Pedigree is of value only if coupled with a living faith in God. If not, the pedigree is an empty privilege that only brings more accountability. John the Baptist made it clear that having the blood of Abraham in ones veins gave as much spiritual standing with God as a stone has:

“And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’, for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham’ (Matthew 3:9)

Jesus called certain Jewish children of Abraham ‘sons of the devil’ and implied that his Jewish listeners were not true Jews if they did not behave like Abraham (John 8:31-59). He also said: “whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother” Mark 3:35. When Jesus saw Nathaniel he cried out: “ Look, a true Israelite!” (John 1:47). A true Israelite is one of the heart.

Paul himself came to realize that being Jewish gained him no beneficial standing with God. He actually had to consider it as loss for the sake of gaining Christ. All the privileges of being Jewish are things ‘of the flesh’ and are of no value spiritually:

“I could put confidence in the flesh... circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews... But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted loss for the sake of Christ” (Philippians 3: 4-7).

Remembering that circumcision was a sign of being an Israelite and was embedded in the fleshy organ that perpetuated biological seed for Abraham, Paul’s words reveal that *Abrahamic blood no longer count in the New Covenant*:

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working by love” (Galatians 5:6)

"For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation"  
(Galatians 6:15)

"Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is keeping the commandments of God" (1 Corinthians 7:19)

Paul also was clear in Romans that a Gentile who obeys the moral law is more Jewish than a disobedient Israelite. Being a Jew to Paul was actually not about marks of circumcision or Abrahamic blood, but about *an Abrahamic heart*:

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

In Romans 9, Paul also clearly shows that all Israelites are not *true* Israelites, but only those whom God Himself has chosen for salvation. God makes a differentiation *within* Israel:

"For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but 'through Isaac your descendants will be called'. That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise who are regarded as descendants" (Romans 9:6-8).

In other words, the people of God are no longer constituted on the basis of biological descent neither ultimately on faith, but on the choice of God Himself.

Paul later goes on to show that it is the *faith of Abraham* that matters above all. Those who share Abraham's faith are the eternal people of God:

"Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness... not while circumcised but while uncircumcised; and he received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness of the faith he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while circumcised" (Romans 4:10-12)

So Paul believed that only if you are of the faith of Abraham can you claim him as your father. *Jews need to become like the uncircumcised Gentile sinners in order to be saved*. According to the Holy Spirit, Abraham was a Gentile when he was made a member of the people of God by faith (Rom 4:10ff). All Israelites must do the same. Every Jew has to go back in time to before Abraham received his Jewish identity marker (circumcision) in order to receive the promises: "and the father of those who also follow in the steps of the faith of Abraham which he had while uncircumcised" (4:12). This shows that the external Jewish physical marks are of far less importance than the faith of Abraham. Faith is so important that externals fall away. This thinking was most offensive to many unbelieving Israelites in Paul's day.

Thus Philippians 3:3 clearly shows that it is one's heart and faith which determines whether you are part of the people of God or not:

"we [writing to a predominantly Gentile church] are the circumcision, who serve [a priestly term in the Grk] in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh"

*It is so vital to grasp that in the kingdom of God there is no racial differentiation*. The people of God are now redefined upon the basis of election and faith. Jewishness *per se* is not perpetuated in the kingdom of God:

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in His Name, who were born not of *bloods*, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God" (John 1:12-13).

## 5: The New Covenant has outstripped the Old Covenant and made it obsolete

I want to make some rather long statements which arise from pondering the way the New Testament interprets the Old:

Because the spiritual realities that the Church of Jesus Christ enjoys in the New Covenant *are vastly superior* to the physical, geographical and earthly provisions of God in the Old Covenant, the Old Covenant forms *are now obsolete*. Any attempt to return to them is going against God's plans in salvation-history.

As we read the New Testament/Covenant we see that the physical Land, the City of Jerusalem, the Davidic Throne in Jerusalem, the Temple with its Priesthood and Sacrifices and Jewish biological identity have been *substantially redefined and reconstituted after having been fulfilled, consummated, universalized and surpassed by Christ and the Spirit in the New Covenant*. They are thus no longer the hope and aspiration of the New Testament. They became outdate, archaic and passed away after having been fulfilled and surpassed in Christ. *The Temple Veil was torn from top to bottom*. The whole of the book of Hebrews is proof of this. When the sun comes out, the candle is no longer necessary.

Jesus Himself often pointed to the superlative and greater realities He was bringing to the nation. He did not focus on the issues of the land or temple or Israelite-Roman politics, but rather spoke of a present more 'spiritual' Kingdom of God. His silence on the issues which His contemporaries debated and discussed (land, Rome, temple, priesthood etc) is very significant. It is why he filled the politically suggestive word 'kingdom of God' with his own content. For Him, the kingdom contained realities that were far greater than anything in Israel's past or present:

"But I tell you, something greater than the temple is here!" (Matthew 12:6)

"Behold, something greater than Jonah is here.... Behold, something greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:42).

Our Lord Jesus Himself said that in the New Covenant geography was no longer important neither the focus any longer. To the woman at the well he said that it was not in Samaria or Jerusalem that people would worship God, but now God was to be worshipped in the Holy Spirit and in Truth. He also said that "My kingdom is not of this world"! A Kingdom which is spiritual, international, faith-based, universal and inclusive of all peoples (non-ethnic). This is the exact opposite of what the Jews expected or the kingdom under the Old Covenant (physical, national, genetic based, local and exclusive).

The superior nature of the New Covenant is the main theme of the book of Hebrews. A clear reading of this marvelous book in the Bible will bear the truth of the statements above. The Holy Spirit shows there that all that the temple and sacrifices offered (could not do) is done superlatively in Christ. Through His final, once for all sacrifice, no other literal sacrifices are necessary. The sacrifices are now nullified by the sacrifice of Christ. Now that Christ has come and His Cross is the altar, those who cling to the physical Jewish altar cannot be saved (Hebrews 13:10). Jewish believers must now join Christ in being a stigma, a reproach and a curse within the Old Covenant itself. He was killed outside the city (Hebrews 13:12); so God is now working outside the physical city of Jerusalem.

Let me list some of the emphases in Hebrews and the New Testament:

- The physical sacrifices of the Old Covenant as mentioned in the OT are now superseded by spiritual sacrifices (Rom 12:1; Philippians 3:3; Heb 13:15).
- Physical circumcision has been replaced by heart circumcision (Romans 2:29; Philippians 3:3).
- The priesthood that God has now instituted is inclusive of the Gentiles and is for all the people of

God (and not just the tribe of Levi) – 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6. This new priesthood is now based upon the Melchizedek order.

- The Aaronic priesthood and its laws are now nullified and obsolete by the Melchizedek priesthood of Christ (Hebrews 7). The Aaronic Priesthood from Aaron was imperfect, weak and useless (7:18) and has now been upgraded/changed with a new order. This new order is of an eternal nature and not physical in nature or based on biological descent. It is explicitly non-Jewish. It is explicitly superior to the Jewish Aaronic priesthood. It is based on a *Gentile*, Melchizedek, *who was greater than Abraham* (Hebrews 7). The Gentile blesses the Jew!
- The Law of the Old Testament - so integrally related to the Levitical sacrificial system - was an ineffective shadow that has been eclipsed by the efficacious law of the Spirit in Christ Jesus (Hebrews 10:1; Galatians 3:15-29; 5:18)
- We are not interested in an earthly Jerusalem or Zion any longer, but a heavenly new Jerusalem (Galatians 4:21-31. Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 3:12).
- We are not interested in a tangible mountain in Palestine any longer, but a intangible heavenly one (Ephesians 4:8; Hebrews 12:18-24).
- We are not interested in God speaking on earth from a mountain any longer as at Sinai, but His warning from heaven (Hebrews 12:25-29).
- Like Abraham, we are not looking for a city on the earth but for one which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Heb 11:10).
- Like Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob and Sarah and Rebekah and Rachael, we Christians are strangers and exiles on earth, and are not looking for any home down here. *We are looking for a heavenly country* which God has prepared for them who look to Him alone. That is *our own country*. (Heb 11:13-16). We are a wilderness generation.
- The promises of the land are no longer to do with Palestine, but in the New Covenant have been upgraded to the earth and the world (Romans 4:13; Ephesians 6:3 ).
- We are now receiving a kingdom that is not of this created order and that cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:28).
- Now the way into the holy of holies is open to all in Christ. In the Old Covenant the way into the holy place was closed. In the New Covenant it is now open. In the New Covenant - once the physical veil was torn and the entire temple system rendered obsolete – we are taken into the Presence of God into the Holy Holies in Heaven itself. This makes any emphasis on the earthly tabernacle a statement of an inaccessible God. (Hebrews 10:19-22).

#### *A Very Important Question:*

Many would affirm most of the above, but they would say that God has two peoples (earthly and heavenly) and two ways of understanding the Bible (literal and spiritual). They would say ‘Amen’ to all of the above, yet still affirm that physical genetic Israel still has a separate covenant and place in the purposes of God. So the big question is:

*With the New Covenant inaugurated, can we still expect physical Israel to feature in the purposes of God with regard to its distinctive race, land, promises, temple, culture and the like?*

The Holy Spirit in the book of Hebrews told us that to turn back to the Old Covenant forms, laws and realities *was to backslide and reject the New*. He exhorted the Jewish believers to embrace the New and to let go of the once useful old mode of doing things. We also dare not, and actually cannot, go back to the old B.C. We are living in A.D, this side of the Cross. God's workings in history have now permanently changed.

When the *greater* and *heavenly* reality and order arrives, then the *lesser* and *earthly* one fades and is rendered useless and outdated. Once the New Eternal Covenant had been sealed, the Old Covenant faded away. (Heb 13:20). The Old Covenant is now *obsolete* (8:13) and to sustain its importance is to reject the *new* and disobey God – and the writer to the Hebrews actually says that we must fear because the New Covenant has *great penalties* and consequences than the Old! Clearly then, if God has finally put away these Old Testament physical realities, then to turn back to them and to expect God to reinstitute them is to be out of step with God and go against the grain of what He has done.

- Once electricity is here, to want to go back to candle light is retrogressive.
- Once we have seen God's face in Christ, to want only to see His back is an insult to Him.
- Once we have the substance of all that the Old Testament pointed to, to want to reinstate the shadow is foolish.
- When the sun has risen, you must switch off the light!
- The butterfly has emerged. The chrysalis has served its purpose.

[All of the above is expressed in the understanding of *typology*. A type is a person, event or institution in the history of the Old Testament that prefigures a corresponding but greater reality in the New Testament (called the antitype). Understanding how typology works in the Bible reveals that when an OT type is fulfilled in the antitype, the original type in its historical emergence is no longer necessary for it is fulfilled and displaced by the greater reality. For example: once the new temple of Christ and His church appears (antitype), there is no longer any need or significance for the OT temple of stone (type).]

## **6: God has not terminated His dealings with the Israelites even after they crucified their Messiah.**

God's choice of Israel as an ethnic people group will not be revoked, even after their rejection of their Messiah. The Israelites remain an elect ethnic people group. They are a people group chosen, not in the sense of individual salvation, but for a non-political ethnic identity. In this sense they are distinctly 'the people [group] of God' (Romans 11:1-3). History bears out the truth of this, that though demonized, persecuted and made into a pariah people, God has preserved them. God has not rejected His people He has foreknown. Romans 11 is the most explicit testimony to this. Paul shows that this calling of the Israelite 'tribe' amidst the 'tribes' of the world is irrevocable and will consummate in 'all Israel being saved' once the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. I can summarize Romans 11 in a few statements:

- Even though Israel has rejected the Messiah, God will not abandon this people group of His. The Israelites as literal descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are chosen and loved. God will ensure their preservation. There will be a large harvest of Israelites who will be saved in the future (11:1-2; 28-31). The Book of Esther is eloquent testimony to this preservation, Acts 1-12 of this future revival amongst Jews.
- God has preserved elect individuals within this wider body. There has always been a remnant within Israel who are chosen by grace. Paul is the foremost example of how God's faithfulness to the Israelites is seen (Romans 10:21-11:10).
- Though the majority of Israelites are hardened to the gospel at present, this will change in the future.



- Though a remnant of Israelites are now saved and remain on the olive tree, a time is coming when a majority of Israelites ('all Israel') will be grafted in once again. This is called the 'fullness' of the Israelites (11:12) and will result in world wide blessing, 'life from the dead' (v 15).
- The mystery is that first the Gentile fullness must be grafted in, and then only will the fullness of Israel come into the kingdom. (vv 25-27)
- At the present time, the majority of the Israelites are enemies of the gospel and outside the kingdom (vs 28). This has been done by God for the Gentiles sake, so that the gospel could come to us. [is it not wonderful how Israel blesses the nations, even in their disobedience to God's purposes!]

What is often missed here is that *Paul identifies himself* as living proof that God's purposes for Israel are being realised in the present era. He himself is a trophy of the grace of God. The proof of God not forsaking ethnic Israel lies concretely in the present (Romans 11: 5). In the current situation a remnant of Israel remains. This is God's faithfulness in the present hour, certainly not in a political entity called 'the State of Israel' (which did exist during Paul's time but was of no concern of his). Once again, this faithfulness of God toward ethnic Israel described in Romans 11 is focused on those who, similar to Paul, *are within the church of Jesus Christ*. The present work of God toward Israelites centres around the church of Jesus Christ. So we can summarise Paul's description of God's faithfulness toward genetic Israel in Romans 11 as exemplified in Paul himself:

- Paul was an Israelite according to the flesh, of the tribe of Benjamin. God was still keeping faithful with the literal seed of Abraham even after the majority had rejected Messiah by *preserving* their continuity. This is the outer fact of His faithfulness.
- Paul was a Christian in the church of Jesus Christ. God's faithfulness is consummated by bringing Israelites into the experience of the New Covenant in the church. This is the inner core of His faithfulness.

If this is true, I believe that for popular Christian Zionists such as John Hagee to preach that the church must support and back political Israel is a distraction at least and a heresy at worst. God's purposes with Israel in salvation history run from the Old Covenant directly into the New Covenant Church of Jesus Christ. There is no parenthesis as Dispensationalists believe. Paul himself and his words in Romans 9-11 bear clear witness of this truth.

"The veil was torn from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51)

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## A Key Term

*'Israel/Israelite'*.

I will use this as an ethnic term, i.e., the biological descendants of Abraham; the Jewish race (those whom Paul calls 'my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites' in Romans 9: 3-4a). Paul was an Israelite himself, a Hebrew of the tribe of Benjamin, a biological offspring of Abraham (2 Cor 11:22). They are also spoken of as 'the circumcision' in Colossians 4:11 and Galatians 2:7-8. This term is strongly biological and is used by Paul to denote Jewish believers in the church. Paul is the foremost example of this ethnic identity even within the non-racial church of Jesus Christ: "I am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham". This identity is also described as 'in the flesh', i.e physical descent.

In the Bible there are six ways of speaking of *Israel* in the Bible:

1. 'Israel' Jacob's new name (Genesis 32:28)
2. 'Israel' as Jacob's immediate family (Genesis 34:7), then becoming all those who are his descendants according to the flesh (Genesis 47:27; Ex 4:22; 1 Cor 10:18). The 'sons of Israel', the 12 tribes and all their descendants. Biological stock of Abraham.
3. 'Israel' as the collective sociological group living in Palestine in their tribal groups under judges and later kings, or those who today live in our outside Palestine. Those forming a collective identity at a particular time in the OT.
4. 'Israel' as the elect individuals within the social group of Israel (Romans 9:6). The remnant.
5. 'Israel' as Christ (Isaiah 49:3)
6. 'Israel' as Church of Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:16)

In most of this article, Israel will mean number 2, the biological descendants of Abraham.

[This distinction between the present day *State* of Israel and *Israel* is very important. The *political* state of the Jews throughout history is not what defines Israel according to the Scripture. Present day political Israel governed by the Knesset is not mentioned in the Bible. Also, not all Jews today are Zionists or want to return to '*ha-eretz*' (the land) – yet they are still Israelites.]