

# **REASONS THE CHURCH IS DISTINCT FROM ISRAEL**

“The practical implications of this are profound. Christians, particularly Western evangelicals, have been quick today to endorse the territorial agenda of modern Israel for *theological reasons*. Often it is a zeal for eschatological fulfillment that has prompted some evangelicals to make commitments to Israeli nationalism. However, deep within the New Testament is an announcement of a reversal, a radical reversal . . . Just as Jesus is a replacement for the religious functions of the temple, so too Jesus replaces the religious inheritance of the Land” (*John*, in The NIV Application Commentary, Gary Burge, 432).

“God granted to Abraham a land (Gen 15:7). In Christ (who is our Land and our Rest), the typological land becomes a kingdom (John 18:36)” (*Covenant Theology: A Reformed Baptist Primer*, Douglas Van Dorn, 127). He goes on to say that a physical nation and “a plot of land in the Middle East” are merely types (shadows) of the spiritual realities we now enjoy (92).

No one denies the *continuities* between Israel and the Church—

- saved by faith
- requirement of individual salvation
- partakers in the Abrahamic Covenant and partakers in the New Covenant
- indwelling of the Holy Spirit in every saved individual.

## Big-Picture Notes:

1. In the broad scope of redemptive history, the emphasis doesn't stay so much on Israel vs. the Church. The Church is defined clearly as the people of God on earth between Pentecost and Rapture.
2. The burden of proof is absolutely on the one who believes that the church is not a separate entity. There is, as Walt Kaiser wrote, "an enormous body of biblical evidence" that one must maintain the distinctions (including both continuities and discontinuities).

## Preliminary considerations.

- It is a false dichotomy and a straw man argument to say, “So you believe God has two separate peoples?”
- Ultimately, God has one people: all who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. But this one people have glorious *chronological* and *ethnic* varieties.
- Many who believe that we should erase the distinction between Israel/Church push back against the idea of “replacement theology” or supersessionism. But the idea of the church replacing Israel is historically part of the Covenant Theology belief system.

# Reasons to Consider Israel and the Church as Distinct:

PART ONE: Directly from Scripture

1. To have the church and Israel be indistinct now forces a spiritualized interpretation onto huge portions of prophetic Scripture affecting literally hundreds of passages.



2. The Bible explicitly promises that God's covenant (Abrahamic and ultimately New) is *eternal and unbreakable*. Jeremiah 31:35-37 is particularly explicit about this.
  - a. Jeremiah 31:35-37 "Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar— the LORD of hosts is his name: 36 "If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the LORD, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever." 37 Thus says the LORD: "If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, declares the LORD."

3. The Apostle Paul's declaration: Romans 11:1-2. In no way does Paul ever try to say the CHURCH is ISRAEL now.
4. The other times in Romans 9-11 Paul keeps the Church and Israel distinct: 9:4, 24, 30-31; 10:1-2, 19, 20; 11:1-2, 11, 12, 13, 17-18ff, 25.
5. The context of Paul saying, "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek" (Rom 10:12) is NOT that Israel/Church are now interchangeable; it is that "for the same Lord is LORD of all."

6. The New Testament explicitly says that the Old Testament promises to Israel are still the possession of Israel, NOT that they are somehow fulfilled in the Church or in Christ.
  - a. Romans 9:4-5
  - b. Romans 11:29

7. The Old Testament teaches the future, literal, permanent restoration of the nation of Israel—*on a massive scale*. Deuteronomy 30:1-6; Jeremiah 30-33; Ezekiel 36-39; Amos 9:11-15 Zephaniah 3:14-20; Zechariah 12-14; Isaiah 60.
  - a. Amos 9:11-15 “In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name,” declares the LORD who does this. “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. 15 I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them,” says the LORD your God.

8. The New Testament reiterates the future salvation and restoration of Israel. See Luke 21:24; Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30; Matt 23:37-39; Luke 13:34-35; Romans 11:26-27
9. The apostles believed in a restored national Israel and Jesus did not correct this. He just wouldn't tell them when it was happening. Acts 1:6-7
10. The New Testament *never* uses the term "Israel" for those who are not ethnic Jews. There is no nomenclature for a "new Israel." The title "Israel" is used 73 times in the New Testament and always refers to ethnic Jews.

11. The New Testament still consistently refers to national Israel as “Israel” even after Pentecost: Acts 3:12; 4:10; 5:21, 31, 35; 21:28.
12. Acts maintains a clear distinction, referring to Israel 20 times and *Ekklesia* 19 times, yet the two are never mixed.
13. Commonly used proof-texts for the replacement and/or fulfillment position (Gal 3:7, 29; Eph 2:11-22; Romans 11:17-24, Romans 9:6-8; Galatians 6:16) all have perfectly reasonable explanations within a framework of a distinct church and Israel.

14. Matthew 19:28 explicitly says that the apostles will in the future rule over the 12 tribes of Israel.
15. The Apostles preached the restoration of Israel to Israel's leaders in Acts 3:19-21—*during* the now-inaugurated *CHURCH AGE* thus making a distinction between the age of the church and the age of Israel's restoration.
16. Romans 9:6 indicates that *believing Jews* are the true Israel
17. Paul says that God is faithful to Israel because of his specific promises to the patriarchs: Romans 11:28

18. The quotation of Amos 9:11-15 in Acts 15:13-18 shows that Gentiles becoming the people of God is consistent with prophetic predictions.
19. Israelite language is used in the New Testament but this bears witness to continuities, *not* to a complete amalgamation. For example, 1 Peter 2:9-10 and Romans 9:24-26



20. Isaiah 19:24-25 predicts that someday, God will call Egypt “my people” (ostensibly referring to saved Egyptians) but Egypt is mentioned *alongside* Israel as a distinct entity, not an inculcated entity. Egypt is “my people” but they are *not* Israel.
21. New Testament prophecy is abounding with predictions of a *future Israel*. In Revelation 7:4-8 Matthew 24:15ff  
2 Thessalonians 2:4
22. Jesus said, “I have other sheep that are not of this fold,” speaking of Gentile elect (John 10:16). He made a distinction between saved *Jews* and saved *Gentiles*.

- 23. New Jerusalem will have gates named after the 12 Tribes of Israel (Rev 21:12). There is a clearly national Israel flavor to this.
- 24. The Davidic Covenant demands a national Israel which is different from the Church. 2 Samuel 7

# Reasons to Consider Israel and the Church as Distinct:

PART TWO: Other considerations

25. If God has changed the definitions of land and nation to mean provision and church, then He has deceived Abraham.
- a. Is the Land now spiritualized? Gary Burge, “Jesus spiritualizes the Land [in John 15]”
  - b. Genesis 13:17
  - c. Genesis 15:18
  - d. Genesis 17:8

26. The church as replacing or being the fulfillment of Israel has been strongly connected with Christian anti-semitism in history. Barry Horner, in his book *Future Israel: What Christian Anti-Judaism Must be Challenged*, makes an airtight case for the historical nature of the association between replacement theology and anti-semitic leanings.
27. Christian Jewish organizations who *vehemently* cling to the promises of a restored Israel include: Friends of Israel , International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, Jew for Jesus, Chosen People Ministries, they all have in common is the same hermeneutic:

28. The massive inconsistency of views among the church-is-Israel proponents.
  - “punitive supersessionism”
  - “economic supersessionism”
  - “structural supersessionism”
29. Twice in history God has regathered a completely scattered Israel
30. The Church is a *partaker* currently of the spiritual blessing of the New Covenant but certainly we are not partaking in the physical blessings of the New Covenant.

31. One must reinterpret nearly the entire book of Isaiah to get rid of a future national Israel which is distinct from the Church of this age.
32. The faulty argument from silence: “The New Testament doesn’t mention the land promises” to mean, “The land promises are now only a symbol.”