

ISRAEL

“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth” (Deut 7:6).

In many parts of Europe today, Jewish families are so threatened and frightened they are making arrangements to move elsewhere, if not to Israel itself. Anti-semitism is also aggressive and ugly in New York City and parts of New Jersey. A contingent within our U.S. Congress sneers at Jews. The Black Lives Matter leadership is openly anti-Semitic and opposed to the existence of Israel. The Middle East is drenched with hatred of Jews. The *Danish Contemporary Bible 2020* has removed the word “Israel” from certain critical texts, for example, “He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” was changed to “He who watches over you will neither slumber nor sleep,” and the text in Matthew 15:31 says God is no longer the God of Israel; they translated Israel out of existence.

Is Israel important to the Church? To Christians? To *anyone*? Does it matter if Muslim Arabs succeed in throwing the Jews in Israel into the sea so that Israel disappears? Most of us don’t realize how important these questions are – and their answers. Discussions about Israel in evangelical circles usually focus on premillennialism, so-called replacement theology (that the church has permanently replaced Israel as the people of God), and how the Church owes its salvation to the ancient Nation of Israel. Such discussions are necessary, but there’s another side to the issue of Israel that’s more fundamental and deserving of reflection. Basically, it’s this: God specially created Israel, He has taken Israel to be their God, and He loves Israel with an everlasting love. Let’s unpack that.

I. Israel is a unique and special nation, unlike any other nation or people-group on earth. After the Flood, the descendents of Noah formed into families, tribes and then nations. There were 70 nations named in Genesis 10, but Israel wasn’t among them, for Israel didn’t exist yet. Those 70 nations all participated in rebellion against God at the Tower of Babel, so God abandoned them, placing a heavenly, spiritual being over each to govern them. And He then called Abraham with the intent of creating a new, special nation from Abraham’s offspring. That nation miraculously came into existence in Egypt, as documented in the early chapters of Exodus, and was then equally miraculously delivered from Egypt. A new nation on earth thus was born, uniquely created by God.

At Sinai, God personally took that nation He’d specially formed to be His own – unlike all those other nations that were under the authority of lesser, wicked heavenly beings. This special nation was given privileges no other nation on earth had (even to this day!). God called this nation His “son,” indicating He was to them as a father. Israel was also given responsibilities: to be holy, reflecting the holiness of their God, and to teach all the other nations on earth about Israel’s true, creator God.

Sadly, the people of Israel reproduced the story of Adam. Created innocent, they fell into sin and therefore suffered God’s necessary and just punishment, the judgment of death. The books of Judges and all the books of the monarchy (1,2 Samuel and 1,2 Chronicles) document the disobediences and rebellions of Israel. The Exile, being thrown out of the Land and from the presence of their God, reproduced Adam’s being banished from the Garden of Eden. Jonah in the belly of the great fish reproduced Israel’s death/exile. Yet, even in Exile, God watched over His beloved people. Thus the story of Esther, for example. And even while in Exile, God says of His people, by the hand of Zechariah, “whoever touches you touches the apple of My eye.” They are still His, they are still loved, and it’s on-going, the Exile –and God’s special love – continues all thru history until the future Day of the Lord.

Israel has been promised a restoration. That’s one of the functions of the writing prophets. In the future, God will bring them back into relationship with Himself, imbue them with the special gift of His Spirit, and they will be back in their promised Land faithfully serving their God. It will be like a resurrection from the dead.

In the course of history, most of the original 70 nations migrated into different lands and re-formed with different names, but the same 70 evil spiritual beings (called “principalities and powers” in the New Testament) rule them. They are the “Gentile” nations of the Bible. God’s intent was that Israel would be His servant to bring those nations to Himself. The Gentile nations will be brought to God in the future Kingdom, but during this transitional Church Age between Advents, while Israel remains in Exile (a figure of death), individuals from among the Gentile nations as well as from among Israel are invited through the Gospel to join to Christ. The Church, thus representing Christ himself, is to serve in this interim period as God’s servant to bring people from those nations to Himself. In other words, the Church, the body of Christ, the True Israel, God’s righteous Servant, exists to fulfill Israel’s mission.

II. Christ Jesus is the true Israel. The life of Jesus mirrors or repeats (in theology, recapitulates) the story of Israel. Miraculously born, He came up from Egypt to the Land, just as the natural Israel did. But this True Israel faithfully served God. He worshipped God, He loved God, and He revealed God as the natural Israel was supposed to do but didn't.

In Romans Chapters 9 to 11, Paul explains a "mystery." The mystery is, Christ repeats the life of Israel. Christ's death, burial and resurrection reflect Israel's. Note 11:15, "For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" Paul, referring to the "rejection" of Israel, ie, their being thrown into Exile (death), says that that has resulted in the offer of salvation (that is, "reconciliation" thru the Gospel) going out to the Gentile nations ("world"). And by "acceptance" and "life from the dead" he's referring to Israel's future resurrection when Christ comes back. Paul is tying salvation to Israel's future! Note carefully how 11:15 parallels 5:10.

And in Romans 11:17-21, Paul warns Gentile believers that they have been "grafted into an olive tree." Is that olive tree God's beloved Israel or Christ, the True Israel? The text is deliberately ambiguous, because it's *both*. They're inseparably linked, inseparably identified. So, reader, your salvation derives from and is inextricably linked to Israel. Israel is not just another nation. Nor is it merely the nation out of which came your Savior. Israel is the source of your salvation and God has spiritually linked you to Israel. To be "in Christ" is to be one also with the Israel which He recapitulates, which He will be King over and physically identified with during the future millennial Kingdom. In this era of the Church Age, Gentiles are offered salvation thru and in the Jewish Messiah and King.

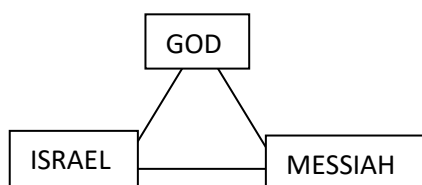
III. Israel stands for or represents God on earth. Sure, some nasty Jews have left an ugly mark on history. Marx, the Rothschild's, Trotsky, to name just a few. You can easily name lots more. That's no surprise, because with their rejection, they have been "hardened." Nevertheless, they are still God's "son." That hasn't changed. So, when Christ returns, there will be a judgment, a separation involving all the nations remaining on earth, based on their attitude toward Israel.

Jesus describes a judgment in Matt 25:31-46 that's usually termed "the Judgment of the Sheep and Goats." Gentile survivors of the Great Tribulation period will be brought to Jerusalem to face King Jesus and account for their treatment of Jews (or the nation of Israel) during the Tribulation period. During that horrible period, any Gentile who aids a Jew will place himself in mortal danger of the anti-Christ, so the only reason any would do so is not their kindness and courage but their awareness that Israel is identified with God. So the aid they offer is based on saving faith—faith in God, whom they seek to bless even if it might cost them their life. And so they will enter the Kingdom. Those who refuse such aid express contempt for God. The point of this is stark: God is so identified with Israel that that nation stands in for God Himself as the determinant of one's eternal destiny. This judgment, by the way, is a reprise of the blessing to Abraham in Genesis Chapter 12.

Israel must be physically in the Land for Christ to return. Zechariah makes that quite clear. If there's no Israel in the Land, Christ cannot come back. There's no millennial Kingdom, and Satan wins; he rules over earth forever. Perhaps Christians who (mistakenly) hold to amillennial or post-millennial traditions don't care about the Nation of Israel's continued existence, but evangelicals certainly should care greatly. Israel isn't merely a component of God's program for the future, Israel is the crucial key to it.

Consisting almost entirely of Gentiles, the Church sadly has assumed a thoroughly Gentile identity. So the Danish Bible Society took Israel out of their new Bible translation deliberately (they admit it) to dissociate Christianity from Israel. They fail to understand the very Scriptures they publish! Christianity *cannot* be dissociated from Israel. That's not because Christianity has its roots in Israel, as all evangelicals recognize, but because Christianity is inherently, irrevocably and permanently identified with Israel. Believers are united to the Jewish Messiah, the personal embodiment of Israel.

At Jesus' baptism and again at His transfiguration, God spoke from heaven declaring that Jesus is the beloved. As Jesus is a unique Person, so Israel (and *only* Israel) is a unique nation, "a special treasure," beloved by God.



Where is the Church in this schema? The Church is the body of Christ, in union with Jesus.