



Israel and the Church -

What's the Relationship?

When studying the Jewish roots of Christianity, certain questions often arise regarding the nature of the "Church," the nature of "Israel," and the relationship between them. Do Gentile Christians become "Jewish" on account of their relationship to Jesus? Does the "Church" somehow replace the Jewish people in God's plan as the "new Israel"? Exactly how should we understand the relationship between the Church and Israel today?

In general, Christian theology has developed three different interpretative systems that attempt to answer such questions:

- 1. Replacement Theology**

The Church and Israel refer to the *same* group of people.

- 2. Separation Theology**

The Church and Israel refer to *different* groups of people.

- 3. Remnant Theology**

The Church and Israel *overlap* in some manner.



Before we attempt to explore the ideas behind these three theological systems, we will need to define some terms. In particular, we will need to define "Israel" and the "Church."

Defining Israel

In the Torah (i.e., first 5 books of the Bible), Israel refers to the new name that Adonai gave to Jacob (or *Ya'akov*, meaning "heel holder" or "supplanter"), who was the son of Isaac, the grandson of Abraham, and the father of the twelve patriarchs of the tribes of Israel. The name Israel (*yisrael*) is formed from a wordplay using the verb *yisreh* (the imperfect form of *sara*, meaning "will fight") combined with the suffix *-el* (God), which is used to indicate the subject of the verb. Etymologically, then, Israel means "God fights." The wordplay occurs in the phrase "for you have striven (*sarita*) as a prince (*sar*) with God and with men and have prevailed" (Gen. 32:28).

Israel further refers to the 70 descendants of Jacob who entered into Egypt (under the auspices of Joseph), and that later grew into a great nation during the time of the Pharaohs. During the time of Moses, the clan fathered by Jacob is collectively called "The Children of Israel" or the "Israelites." It is this group of 600,000 men (not including women and children) that Moses led out of Egypt during *yetziat Mitzraim*, the great Exodus from Egypt, and who established them as the covenant nation of the LORD under the terms of the Sinai covenant. It was this same group of people who, under the leadership of Joshua, began to take possession of the land originally promised to Abraham by God Almighty.



After Joshua led the Israelites to victory in the land of Canaan, the fledgling nation of Israel functioned as a sort of priestly theocracy with the *mishkan* (tabernacle) as the central point of worship. In later centuries, after national apostasy, various *shofetim* (judges) arose that led battles against Philistine and Canaanite oppressors. Eventually, however, the people asked for a monarchy, and the prophet Samuel anointed Saul as Israel's first king. Later, King David succeeded him. It was King David who wanted to build the great Temple to honor the LORD God of Israel, and on account of his passion, God made covenant with him by solemnly promising that one of his descendants would rule over Israel forever (2 Sam. 7). David died, however, without building the Temple, though his son Solomon took the throne and completed the Temple project (1 Kings 5).

During the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam, Israel became a divided kingdom. The southern kingdom, called Judah, included the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. The northern kingdom continued to be called Israel. The two kingdoms often fought with one another until the Assyrian Empire conquered the northern kingdom around 721 BC. The Assyrians forced 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel out of Israel (the first Diaspora) and brought in foreigners to resettle the land (called Samaritans). Later, the Babylonian Empire overpowered the Assyrians under the reign of king Nebuchadnezzar, and Babylonia sought to expand its influence by forcing Judah into submission. Shortly thereafter, the Babylonian army attacked Judah and took more captives to Babylon (the prophet Ezekiel, one of the captives, explained that God was allowing Babylon to punish Judah because the people had been unfaithful to God). The aggression of Babylon continued until they destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple that Solomon built (c. 586 BC). Most of the remaining Jews were taken away as captives to Babylon.

After the death of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian Empire was conquered by Cyrus the Great (c. 539 BC), the king of the Medo-Persian Empire whom God anointed as a "messiah" by giving the Jews their freedom to return to Judah. A faithful remnant of the Jews returned to Judah and began to rebuild the Temple (c. 536 BC). The Temple was consecrated exactly 70 years after the Babylonians had destroyed it (c. 586 BC).

The Greeks began their rise to power under Alexander the Great, who defeated the Persian armies in Macedonia (333 BC) and eventually conquered the land of Palestine. Later, a Greek ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes ruled Syria (from about 175 BC to about 164 BC). Antiochus also ruled over Judah and tried to destroy the Jewish religion by defiling the Temple and burning copies the Torah. This led to the Maccabean revolt which opened the way for Jewish independence in Jerusalem and the surrounding area. This victory is commemorated during Chanukah.

After the death of Alexander the Great, the Greek empire was divided up among four generals, which weakened the empire. Eventually the Romans invaded Syria (under the leadership of Pompey) and Jerusalem fell under Roman rule. Awhile later, Jesus was born and performed His ministry to captive Israel. Several years after Jesus was crucified, the Roman Army (under Titus) destroyed Jerusalem and Herod's Temple (70 AD), in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy (Matt. 24:1-2).



Later, in 135 AD, the Romans (under Hadrian) suppressed the Bar Kochba uprising, completely destroying the Holy City of Jerusalem, and sending all the Jews into exile. In an attempt to end all Jewish hope for an independent state, Hadrian renamed the land from Judaea to “Palestine” - after the Jews' historic enemies, the Philistines. This is the start of the Galut, or great Jewish Diaspora.

In the late 1800's the Zionist movement began in Europe. Theodor Herzl, a journalist from Austria wrote *The Jewish State*, which called for the creation of a Jewish nation as a solution to the Diaspora. Herzl also organized the first World Zionist Congress, unifying diverse Zionist groups into a worldwide movement.

During World War I, the British forces defeated the Turks (Ottoman Empire) and governed the area (falsely) called “Palestine.” Under the Balfour Declaration, the Jews were permitted to return to resettle their ancient homeland. Later, Hitler's reign of terror in Germany eventuated in the Holocaust -- the Nazi's systematic murder of 6 million Jews -- which caused worldwide support for the Jews to reestablish the state of Israel as a permanent homeland. After further immigration to Palestine, on May 14, 1948, the Jews declared independence for the democratic state of Israel (*medinat Yisrael*), a modern miracle that revealed the providential care of God for the Jewish people over the millennia. The rebirth of the nation of Israel meant that after nearly 2,900 years (since the time of King Solomon) the nation of Israel was both independent and united. Within hours of Israel's declaration of independence, however, the surrounding Arab countries launched an invasion of Israel. Israel was victorious, however, and the nation was born. Later, in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, Israeli forces recaptured more of their ancient Jewish homeland, and during the Six-Day War of 1967, Israel retook control of Jerusalem. During recent years, the Intifada and the rise of Islamic militarism have again threatened to destroy the nation of Israel, despite various peace accords by world politicians.

Note: This historical definition of Israel implies that it is composed of those descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who are otherwise regarded today as ethnic “Jews.” Of course not all Jews are Israelis today, just as not all Israelis are Jews, but for the purposes of this discussion I am restricting the scope of the term “Israel” to refer to this group of people.

Defining the Church

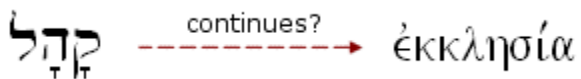
The word “church” does not appear in English translations of the Old Testament (as it does in the New Testament). The Greek translation of the OT (called the Septuagint or LXX) uses the word *ekklesia* (from *ek-* + *kaleo*, “to call”) for two Hebrew words that both refer to a “congregation” or “assembly”: *kahal* and *'edah*. *Kahal* (from the Hebrew *kol*, “voice”) is generally translated as “assembly” or “congregation” (though other words are sometimes used). The LXX uses the word *sunagoge* (synagogue) for the Hebrew word *'edah* (from the Hebrew word *'ed*, meaning witness or testimony), which is usually translated as “assembly.” Most Hebrew scholars consider *kahal* and *'edah* to be synonyms (see Num 20:1-13), even though they are based on different word roots.



| Tanakh | LXX/NT | English |
|--------|---------------------|---|
| קָהָל | ἐκκλησία / συναγωγή | OT: congregation (86); assembly (17); company (17); multitude (3); NT: "church," "synagogue" |
| עֲדָת | συναγωγή | OT: assembly; sometimes congregation; NT: "synagogue" (exclusively) |

What is puzzling is that the Greek translators did not appear to be consistent when translating *kahal*, since sometimes they chose the word *ekklesia*, but in 36 places they chose the word *sunagoge* (the word *'edah*, however, seems to be consistently translated as *sunagoge*). From my comparison of the terms, it seems that the word *kahal* conveys the idea of a general assembly, whereas the word *'edah* conveys the idea of assembling at a specific time *mo'ed* ("appointed time") or at a particular place of meeting (*ohel mo'ed*) for a particular purpose. In other words, the *kahal* is simply a group of some kind, whereas the *'edah* is an assembly brought together for a specific purpose, often for a meeting with the LORD God of Israel.

The reason I am providing all of this detail is because in the New Testament the word *ekklesia* is translated as "Church" in our English Bibles, and the question naturally arises as to whether this *ekklesia* is an extension of the *kahal* (or *'edah*) of the Old Testament or if it refers something entirely new in God's plan and purposes. This is perhaps the crucial question, and a lot of the discussion concerning the relationship between the "Church" and "Israel" hinges on how we decide to answer it.



It appears to be a major fault of various English translations of the "Christian Bible" that the word "Church" was translated for the Greek word *ekklesia* in the New Testament, since this suggests an anti-Jewish bias in their work by implying that there is a radical discontinuity between "Israel" and the *ekklesia* of Jesus (i.e., the "Church"). In other words, if the same Greek word (*ekklesia*) is used in both the LXX and the NT, then why was a new word coined for its usage in the English translation of the New Testament? Why not rather translate the word as it was used in the LXX, or better still, as it was used in the OT Scriptures?

In the New Testament sense, the word *ekklesia* refers to the group of "called out" people (from every tribe and tongue) in covenant with God by means of their trust in Jesus Christ. In particular, this *ekklesia* is composed of *only* those people who confess their faith that Jesus (Yeshua) is none other than Adonai come in the flesh, who died as a sinless substitutionary sacrifice for their sins, was buried, and resurrected from the dead (Rom. 10:9-10; 1 John 2:22, etc.).



Historically understood, the *ekklesia* mentioned in the New Testament was founded by a Torah observant Jew and began with the Jewish people (Gal. 4:4; Rom. 15:8). The first followers of Jesus (Yeshua) were all Jews, as were all the apostles and writers of the New Testament. The “church” was therefore born among the Jewish people in Jerusalem. Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost (i.e., Shavu'ot) was entirely Jewish, copiously quoting from the prophets and David, which would have meant little to any Gentiles in earshot (if there were any). It is likely, therefore, that the 3,000 people who were saved that day would have been all Jewish (Acts 2:1-41). These earliest members of the new church met regularly in the Temple, where Gentiles were explicitly excluded (Acts 2:46). Note that the apostles Peter and John are recorded to have gone to the Temple for prayer during the time of the minchah (afternoon) sacrifices (Acts 3:1). The ministry of the Apostles continued exclusively among the Jewish people, among whom were “thousands who believed and were zealous for the Torah” (Acts 21:20). Even after they were imprisoned but miraculously escaped, an angel told them to “Go, stand and speak in the Temple to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5:20). When Stephen was called before the High Priest and the council, he gave a defense that was thoroughly Jewish, encompassing the entire history of Israel before he was martyred (Acts 7)

Even Peter's vision and visit to the house of Cornelius, a *ger tzeddek* (“God fearer”) who attended synagogue and observed Jewish customs and traditions (Acts 10), was subject to a crisis of conscience for him. First, in his vision he said that he never would eat of the “unkosher” animals shown to him, and second, he had qualms about even entering the house of a non-Jew. This indicates, among other things, how steeped Peter was in the Torah, even after spending three years under the teaching of Jesus.

Likewise the Apostle Paul was an observant Jew. He was born in Tarsus but was brought up in Jerusalem and studied under the famous Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Did this Jewish Rabbi reject a Jewish lifestyle after his conversion on the Damascus Road? By no means, as the following events during his ministry clearly indicate:

- Paul identified himself a Jew, even to his dying day. In Acts 23:6 he confessed, “I *am* (not “was”) a Pharisee.” He even declared that concerning the observance of the Torah he was “blameless,” which indicates that he observed a Jewish lifestyle to the very end (Phil. 3:6). Paul testified that he kept the Torah throughout his life (Acts 25:7-8, see also Acts 28:17).
- Paul circumcised Timothy, the son of a Jewish mother and Greek father. He considered Timothy to be Jewish and wanted him to be circumcised before taking him on a trip to assist with the ministry among the Jews (Acts 16:1-3).
- Paul regularly attended synagogue. “He came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul, *as his manner was*, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures” (Acts 17:1-2).
- Paul went to Jerusalem for the “feast” (most likely Passover) at the end of his second journey (Acts 18:21-22; see also 1 Cor. 5:7).
- Paul took the Nazarite vow (Acts 18:18; see Num. 6:2-6,13-18).



- Paul sailed away from Philippi “after the days of Unleavened Bread” (Acts 20:6), indicating that he observed Passover and the days of unleavened bread (*chag hamatzot*) with the Church at Philippi (1 Cor. 5:7).
- After leaving Philippi he sailed along the coast of Asia Minor, stopping at a few places along the way, but skipped Ephesus because he wanted to be in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 20:16). This was at the end of his third missionary journey.
- Paul lived “in observance of the Torah” (Acts 21:23-24) and offered sacrifices in the Jewish Temple (Acts 21:26). Notice that Paul was not only going to pay for his own sacrifices in order to be released from his Nazarite vow, he was also going to pay for the sacrifices for four other Jewish believers! Notice also that this was performed at the explicit request of James, the head of the Jerusalem Church (and half-brother of Yeshua).
- Paul’s disagreement with Peter (Gal. 2:11-14) was about the requirement of the Gentiles to convert to Judaism, not about the lifestyle of the Jewish believers.
- Paul observed that the prison ship (on which he was sailing to Rome) was going too slowly and that “the fast was now already past” (Acts 27:9). The “fast” was universally regarded to refer to Yom Kippur.

In its earliest years, the *ekklesia* of Jesus composed a somewhat tolerated subset within larger Israel. After the national tragedy of the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, however, evidence of formal Jewish persecution of the followers of Jesus can be detected. This included the addition of the (infamous) Birkat HaMinim, a "blessing" (composed by the Sanhedrin at Yavneh) that was added to the weekday Amidah which invoked a curse on followers of Jesus (as well as the Essenes). Jews unwilling to recite the Birkat HaMinim were suspected of heresy and subject to *cherem* (excommunication).

The rift between the followers of Jesus and Rabbinic Judaism was intensified during the bloodiest of the Jewish-Roman wars, the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-135 AD). The Jewish sage Rabbi Akiva convinced the Sanhedrin at Yavneh to support the revolt and actually regarded its leader (Simon Bar Kokhba) to be the Jewish Messiah. Since the Jewish followers of Jesus could not support such a claim (and therefore could not support the war), the divide between Rabbinical Judaism and the early Jewish Church became sealed.

Concurrent with the rejection of the *ekklesia* of Jesus by the leaders of ethnic Israel, more and more Gentiles came to faith, and the Jewish roots of Jesus began to be forgotten. This “forgetfulness” was solidified by various Gentile Christian teachers of the first few centuries who, influenced by Greek philosophy, advocated severing the *ekklesia* from its historic Jewish roots. The Gentile “Church” then came into prominence as a distinct entity from Israel, with its own mission and purpose. Sampling the teaching of many of the early Gentile Christian leaders reveals the “Gentilization” of the *ekklesia*.



Here is an abbreviated sample:

- Marcion of Sinope (110-160 AD) was a Hellenist steeped in the ideas of Plato and Gnosticism and wanted to separate Christianity from any connection with Judaism and the law.
- Justin Martyr (100-165 AD), an early Christian apologist, wrote his “Dialogue with Trypho the Jew” in which he claimed that God's covenant with Israel was no longer valid, and that the Gentiles had replaced them.
- Tertullian (160-220 AD) was another Gentile Christian apologist who blamed the Jews for the death of Jesus.
- Origen (263-339 AD) founded a school in Alexandria Egypt that taught the allegorical interpretation of Scripture. Origen was heavily influenced by Neo-Platonic Gnosticism. He was also an anti-Semite who accused the Jews of plotting to kill Christians.
- Eusebius (263-339 AD) wrote an influential history of the church that blamed the calamities, which befell the Jewish nation on the Jews' role in the death of Jesus.
- John Chrysostom (344-407 AD) denounced Jews in a series of sermons to Christians who were taking part in Jewish festivals and other Jewish observances.
- Jerome (347-420 AD) produced the Latin translation of the Bible which became the official bible of the Catholic Church. He said, "Jews are incapable of understanding Scripture and should be severely punished until they confess the true faith."
- Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) spiritualized the kingdom of God and introduced amillennial thinking into the mainstream church. Augustine maintained that the Jews deserved death but were destined to wander the earth to witness the victory of Church over synagogue.

Besides these Gentile “Church” leaders who rejected the Jewish roots of Christianity, various Church Councils of the third and fourth centuries likewise rejected Jewish influence within the Church and abandoned the Jewishness of Jesus and His *ekklesia*. These include the Council of Elvira (306 AD), the Council of Nicea (325 AD), the Council of Antioch (341 AD), the Council of Laodicea (434 AD), and so on. These councils went so far as to forbid Jewish and Christian intermarriage, the observance of Passover, and worship on the Sabbath day.

The Reformers tried to return the Gentile Church to its early roots, but sadly this did not involve a return to the *Jewish roots* of the original *ekklesia*. For example, Martin Luther (1483-1586) became frustrated by Jewish unwillingness to embrace his own interpretation of Christianity and became one of the most bitter anti-Semites in history. His writings described Jews as “worse than devils.” Jews were “poisoners,” “ritual murderers,” and “parasites,” who should be expelled from Germany. He even went so far as to rouse the mob to “burn synagogues to the ground,” and seize Jewish holy books. Later on, Adolf Hitler would tell Germany that his Final Solution was just an attempt to finish the work that Luther had begun. (Note: The subject of Christian anti-Semitism is vast and should be soberly studied by all serious seekers of the truth. For an overview of the subject, please see the Wikipedia article entitled, Christianity and Anti-Semitism).



Many definitions of the “Church” offered by today’s theologians are essentially Gentile (and Western) in flavor and perspective, defining it in abstract terms while focusing on the organization of church government, the nature and role of Christian liturgy, and so on. However, in light of the fact that the Gentile Church owes its origin to the Jewish *ekklesia* of Jesus, it almost seems there is a “conspiracy of silence” regarding the Church’s Jewish heritage, and rarely is there adequate discussion regarding God’s relationship to Israel *today*. For example, if a Gentile Church regards the rebirth of ethnic, national Israel in 1948 as a modern-day miracle, it will tend to believe that God has sovereign plans for the nations *in addition to* His plans for the Gentile Church (and therefore “Separation Theology” or “Remnant Theology” will seem plausible). On the other hand, if a Gentile Church regards the rebirth of the state of Israel as an “accident” of history, it will tend to believe that it is of little theological significance, and perhaps even regard its existence with suspicion and even antagonism (the view of Replacement Theology and most Reformed Churches).

There are a number of metaphors for the *ekklesia* of Jesus given in the New Testament, such as a household (1 Tim. 3:15), a kingdom (Col. 1:13; Phil 3:20), a priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9; Heb. 2:17); a temple (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Cor. 3:11); one “new man” (Eph. 2:14-15); a body (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Rom. 12:4-5; Col. 1:18); a servanthood (Luke 17:10-17); a flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 2:3; 5:4; John 10:1-18); an army (2 Tim. 2:3-4; Eph. 6:10-17); a wife (Eph. 5:22-32); a bride (Rev. 21); a vine (John 15:1-7); and an olive tree (Rom. 11:16-24). Each of these needs to be taken into account when considering the relationship of the Church to ethnic Israel. Some of these metaphors show obvious parallels to ethnic Israel of the Old Testament (e.g., kingdom, priesthood, flock, wife, vine, etc.), while others seem to be unique in reference to those of the *ekklesia* of Jesus (e.g., body, one new man, bride, olive tree, etc.).

In the following pages, I will survey the three main ways that theologians have attempted to understand God’s relationship to the Church and historic, ethnic Israel:

1. Replacement Theology

The Church and Israel refer to the *same* group of people.

2. Separation Theology

The Church and Israel refer to *different* groups of people.

3. Remnant Theology

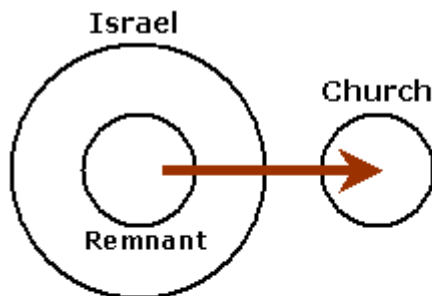
The Church and Israel *overlap* in some manner.

Important: In what follows, I will regularly use the Gentile term “Church” to refer to what the New Testament writings plainly refer to as the *ekklesia* of Jesus. Please keep this in mind as you are reading.



1. Replacement Theology

The first theological option regarding the relationship of the Gentile Church and Israel is to claim that the “Church” and “Israel” actually refer to the same group of people. More specifically, since Israel rejected Jesus as the Messiah, the *ekklesia* of Jesus is now the recipient of all the covenantal blessings and promises of God. This is the “mainstream” view of most Christian theologians today.



- *The covenants and promises given to Israel are transferred to the Gentile Church.*
- *Jews must convert to Gentile Christianity.*

Replacement Theology claims that the Church is a “new and improved” Israel, better than the older tribal “version” revealed in the Old Testament. In ancient times the “church” (*ekklesia*, *ek-* + *kaleo*, “called out ones”) was indeed national Israel, but after Jesus’ universal message of love was rejected by the Jews, God transferred all the covenants and promises from them to the Christian Church. The “New Covenant” given to Israel (Jer. 31:31-37) was therefore fulfilled through the Christian Church. This view is called “Replacement Theology” because the Christian Church now *replaces* national Israel as the true *ekklesia* of God. “For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (Rom. 9:6). Because of their disobedience (i.e., the rejection of the “new covenant” and the rule of Jesus), Israel is no longer a “chosen nation” with any special status or future. As Martin Luther said, since the Jews rejected Christ, the only thing left to them are the curses found in the Bible, but none of the blessings. Therefore all the promises about Israel being regathered, restored, and delivered from her enemies in a coming Kingdom Age are to be allegorized (and transferred) to the Church. And since Jesus now (symbolically) reigns from the throne of David, the Church’s mission is to “usher in” the Kingdom of God upon the earth by means of the worldwide spread of the gospel. At the end of the age, Jesus will return to separate the “sheep from the goats” (Matt. 25:32-33) and the eternal kingdom of God will prevail forever.



Please note that one consequence of this view is that the Church is not *essentially* new, since it existed before the time of Jesus as the company of saints who trusted in the God of Israel for their salvation (i.e., the faithful remnant). Since the Church is actually a sort of “reformed” or “renewed” Israel, it might be more appropriate to consider this view as “Renewal Theology,” because it implies that the Church is a renewed form of faithful Israel. Paradoxically, this leads to the conclusion that the Israel needs to be “grafted back” into the Olive Tree of the Church, rather than understanding that the Gentile Church is composed of “wild olive shoots” that are grafted into the covenants given to Israel (Rom. 11:17-23; Eph. 2:12).

The Case for Replacement Theology

The case for Replacement Theology is often made along these lines: “Israel” refers to all those who obey the New Covenant of Jesus, who are thereby called the “true children of Abraham” and heirs according to promise (Gal. 3:29). In spiritual terms, the Church is now “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16) and is composed of those Jews and Gentiles who are regenerated by means of their faith in Jesus (Matt 3:9, Luke 3:8, Gal. 3:6, 9). National Israel was really just the “seed” of the future Church, which will eventually restore the entire earth under God’s forthcoming dominion (Mal. 1:11, Rom. 4:13). The Church is now the heir and trustee of God upon the earth (Gal. 3:29). Jesus Himself taught that the Jews would lose their spiritual privileges and be replaced by “another people” (Matt. 21:43). After the Church came into existence on the Day of Pentecost, God was “finished” with national Israel, and today, a “true Jew” is anyone born of the Spirit, whether he was physically born Jewish or not (Rom. 2:28-29). All the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament are now the possession of the Church of Jesus, who now (symbolically) reigns on David’s throne (2 Cor. 1:20).

In its more outspoken forms, Replacement Theology is aggressive and even dominionist in its outlook, since it alleges that the Church replaces Israel in the sense of *overtaking her* by spiritual succession (the theological jargon for this is called “supercessionism,” i.e., the idea that Israel has been “superseded” by the Church). Since the Jews are no longer God’s chosen people, God does not have any unique future plans for the nation of Israel. The Church, not Israel, is now the “apple of God’s eye” (Deut. 32:10; Zech. 2:8). In other words, the term “Israel” denotes *only* those who are Christians, and conversely *only* Christians are the inheritors of the covenants and blessings given to Abraham and his descendants. In summary, the Church *is* Israel and Israel (spiritually understood) *is* the Church.

Advocates of Replacement Theology include the Roman Catholic Church, the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), the Presbyterian Church, the Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod), the Episcopal (and Anglican) Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the United Church of Christ, the Mormons, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and of course Islam, which likewise claims that it has “replaced” Israel as God’s chosen people on the earth.



Perhaps it should be noted here that some varieties of Jewish theology return the favor of Christian replacement theologies by maintaining that Israel will one day triumph over the Church (understood collectively as “Gentiles,” “Christians,” or more generally as the idolatrous descendants of Esau). According to such Jewish eschatology, in the days of the Mashiach the LORD will establish Jerusalem as the central point of the world, and all of the scattered Jewish people will be permanently restored to their ancient Promised Land. All of the literal promises given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and confirmed by the Jewish prophets will be literally fulfilled. All of the ancient enemies of the Jewish people (including the descendants of Esau) will be vanquished, and Israel will enter a Golden Age of peace upon the earth (this is often summarized by certain orthodox groups such as Chabad with the phrase, “Moshiach Now!”).

As we will now see, Replacement Theology draws its theoretical support from the faulty foundation known as Covenant Theology.

The Faulty Foundation: Covenant Theology

Most replacement theologians are also advocates of so-called “Covenant Theology,” a rather speculative theological system that posits several overarching “covenants” that God made with “all of creation.” According to this theological system, first there was the “Covenant of Works” in which God promised Adam eternal life if he would obey His commandments. However, since Adam broke the covenant through disobedience, God established the “Covenant of Grace” in which He would graciously save Adam and Eve (and their descendants) from the penalty of death. The salvation process itself, however, would be based on a foreordained and secret “Covenant of Redemption,” in which God the Son agreed to be incarnated as the dying Redeemer of the fallen human race. All of the *biblical* covenants -- for example, the covenant made with Abraham, Moses, and King David -- are really “aspects” of the overarching “Covenant of Grace” that God enacted after the fall of mankind.

Covenant Theology is in error for a number of reasons. First of all, this abstract system of covenants (“Works-Grace-Redemption”) is not based on an inductive study of the Scriptures themselves (since they do not mention these covenants), but is determined from (invalid) deductions made from the New Testament which are then “read back” into the language of the Old Testament. As we will see, the primacy given to Gentile theologians who were influenced by Greek philosophy/theology greatly influences the reading of the Old Testament for most of these theologians.

For example, the Torah reveals that the covenant made with Abraham and his descendants is clearly *unconditional* in nature. The language of the relevant texts is simply unambiguous (see Gen. 12:1-7; 13:14-17, 15:1-21; 17:1-27; 18:17-19; 22:15-18; 50:24; Ex. 2:24; Deut. 9:5-6; 4:31; 2 Kings 13:23; Mic. 7:18-20). Moreover, the covenant ritual itself was expressed unilaterally (Gen 15), and subsequent testimony -- even in the New Testament -- corroborates its unconditional nature (see Luke 1:54-5; Luke 1:68-74; Acts 3:25-26; Acts 13:26-25; Rom. 11:1-2; 2 Cor. 11:22; Heb. 6:13-20, etc.). However, based on preconceived (*a priori*) theological assumptions, the unconditional nature of this covenant is transformed into being a conditional one that now does not mean what the Scriptures plainly state.



Now while it's true that we cannot completely "bracket" our understanding of the New Testament when we are reading the Old, it is a poor exegetical principle not to honestly "listen to the text" of Scripture itself, in light of its historical context, while using the normal rules of grammar (i.e., "plain sense"). And it is simply preposterous to take the promises explicitly given to Abraham and to ethnic Israel and reinterpret them as promises given to the Church. In order to rationalize this approach, these theologians, influenced by the Gentile theologians of the past, are forced to use allegory and Greek symbolism in order to apply the terms of the covenant to refer solely to the Church.

Of course this exegetic approach works the other way around, too, as can be seen when the New Testament is forced to read in a way that is not consonant with the plain sense given in the Old Testament. An example of this sort of disingenuous methodology is found in the translation given to the Greek word *kai* ("and") in Galatians 6:16 ("as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God"), which incidentally is the *only* place in the entire New Testament where the word Israel is not explicitly used to refer to ethnic Israel. Covenant theologians conclude that the *kai* before the term "Israel of God" is best translated "even" (as the NIV translates), however most Greek scholars have noted that this would be an anomalous usage and is without grammatical warrant found in the context itself (i.e., the argument against the Judaizers). Indeed, the plain reading is simply that Paul uses "and" to pronounce a blessing on believing Gentiles *and* believing Jews in the church, *not* to equate national Israel with the Church.

Another flaw with Covenant Theology is that it is too simplistic. To claim that the covenant made with Abraham is "essentially the same" covenant as that which was made with Moses at Sinai or with King David at Jerusalem is unwarranted reductionism. These *biblical* covenants are not progressive revelations of a *non-biblical* "Covenant of Grace," but are concrete terms of agreement made by the LORD God of Israel Himself with specific individuals. This same sort of reductionism is also revealed in the New Covenant promised to Israel in the days to come (Jer. 31:31-37) and of which the Church presently partakes. Covenant Theology must posit the "Church" as something that *predated* the coming of Jesus, as being composed of the "elect of God" from all ages and times. However, Jesus told Peter that upon the rock of his confession he *would* build His church (Matt. 16:18), and Paul spoke distinctly about the "mystery" of the Church in God's prophetic plan for the ages (Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26). Covenant Theology must force the plain reading of the biblical covenants into the mold of its system, rather than letting the texts of Scripture speak for themselves.

Yet another flaw with Covenant Theology is its use of the allegorical method of interpretation, which forces the literal denotation of a term (such as "Israel") to be either not a true denotation or one of a different denotation. In other words, it is the corresponding spiritual reality which is the "real" or ultimate meaning of a term of a given passage, not the grammatical-historical understanding of the term (for more on this, see below).



The misunderstanding of the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New covenants inevitably leads Covenant theologians to misunderstand the nature of the Church itself as a mystery “hidden” in the purposes of God but later revealed in the age of the New Testament. Contrary to their view that the “Church” is the elect of God “from all ages,” the New Testament clearly teaches that it began with the ministry of Jesus Himself (Matt. 16:18). Moreover, the Church could not come into existence without Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension (Eph. 1:20-23; Col 1:28). Further, the church is composed of those members who have been baptized into the body of Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 1:8; 2:38). Paul’s teaching about the “mystery” of the body of Christ means that it was not revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures (Eph. 3:3-6; Col. 1:26). Finally, the New Testament *never* uses the terms “Israel” and “Church” to refer to the same group of people (1 Cor. 10:32; Eph 2:11-16, etc.). Even the “seed of Abraham” is never called “Israel” in Paul’s writings to the Galatians. As we will see (below), it is a category mistake to infer that the *ekklesia* of Jesus is to be identified with the remnant of Israel.

Most seriously, Covenant Theology insinuates that God changed His mind about national Israel, and that the *olam* (eternal) nature of His covenantal promises given to them are subject to nullification. But if God changed His mind regarding national Israel, what prevents Him from changing His mind regarding the Church and its future?

The Church must remember that it is graciously grafted into the Olive Tree *of Israel* and made partakers of the covenants given *to Israel*. In fact, the *only* reference to the New Covenant (*brit chadashah*) in the entire Old Testament is found in Jeremiah 31:31-37, where it is explicitly stated that the Jewish people will continue to exist *as a nation* as long as there is a sun and moon seen in the sky! This is further confirmed by Paul’s teaching about national Israel found in Romans 9-11.

Replacement theology is a dangerous and false doctrine that has consistently led to anti-Semitism and false eschatological views. Just as we believe that God will keep His promises to the Church, so we believe He will keep His promises to national Israel - including the future restoration of Israel as the “head of the nations” during the kingdom of God on earth.

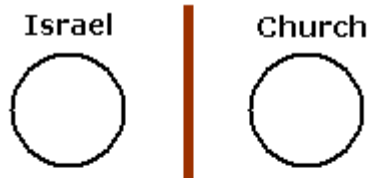
When the LORD Jesus comes back to earth, He is heading straight to national Israel, and to Jerusalem in particular. There He will be finally received as Israel’s King and Savior and will rule during the millennial kingdom. The Fourth (i.e., Millennial) Temple will be built (Ezekiel 40-48) and the nations will come to Jerusalem to pay homage to the LORD God of Israel. All the nations will celebrate the feast of Sukkot, and those that refuse will be plagued with drought (Isa. 4:2-6; Zech. 14:17-18).

We will now consider the view of “Separation Theology,” sometimes referred to as “dispensationalism.”



2. Separation Theology

A second theological option regarding the relationship of the Church and Israel is to claim that the Church and Israel refer to *different* groups of people. This distinction is the essence of what is sometimes called “dispensationalism.”



- *The Covenants and promises of ethnic Israel are not transferred to the Church.*
- *The Church is a new spiritual entity with a distinct purpose and destiny.*

Unlike Covenant Theology that sometimes resorts to the allegorical method of interpretation (see above), Dispensational theology *consistently* uses the “grammatical-historical” approach to Scripture. That is, when reading a text of Scripture, first the grammar is studied and then certain historical questions are asked. For example: What is the historical context of this text? Who was the author? To whom was it written? What is the literary style? What did this text mean to the original audience? If it is a promise, to whom was it given? Was it conditional or unconditional? Was it for a fixed period of time? Was it intended for an individual or for a people? Is it applicable to others outside that circle? The goal of this approach is to ascertain the normal meaning of the words, phrases and sentences in their historical context as intended by the original author.

The grammatical-historical method of reading Scripture leads to a clear distinction between Israel and the Church. Based on the inductive evidence of the Scriptures, ethnic Israel is not seen to be identified with the Church, since the terms “Israel” and “Church” are simply not interchangeable (for example, in the book of Acts, both Israel and the church exist simultaneously but the terms “Israel” and “Church” always refer to two distinct groups of people). The Church is understood as a *new creation* that began with the advent of the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit) during *Shavu’ot* (Pentecost), and will continue until it is “translated” to heaven at the time of the Rapture (Eph. 1:9-11). The Church is not under the covenantal obligations given to national Israel at Sinai (i.e., the Mosaic covenant), since this covenant was ratified only with national Israel. The promises made to national Israel are fulfilled *to* Israel, not to the Church. The word “Israel” always means Israel in the Scriptures, whereas the word “Church” always refers to the Church. There is not a single instance in the entire Bible where Israel refers to anything other than the Jewish people.



Unlike the view of Covenant Theology that believes that the Church predated the coming of Christ, dispensational theologians point out that it began with the ministry of Jesus Himself (Matt 16:18), and is singularly based on Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension (Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 1:28). The Church is a "called out" group of people from "every tribe and tongue" who have been baptized into the body of Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 1:8; 2:38). Paul's doctrine about the "mystery" of the body of Christ means that it was not revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures (Eph. 3:3-6; Col. 1:26). Israel, on the other hand, is a called out nation (Ex. 19:6) that entered into specific, historical covenants made with the LORD.

The grammatical-historical reading of the Scriptures provides a framework for understanding eschatology that is very different than that of Covenant Theology. For example, Daniel's 70th week is understood to be yet fulfilled during the coming Great Tribulation period. This explains certain teachings that Jesus gave which apply to Jews living in Israel at the time of "Jacob's Trouble" (see Matt. 24). This also explains the excitement that many dispensationalists have regarding the present existence of national Israel, since according to Jesus Himself Israel must be restored to the land before He returns. The restoration of national Israel in 1948 is therefore considered to be a "super sign" (Ezekiel 36:16-28) that we are nearing the "end of days" when Jesus will return again. And unlike the Covenant Theology view that regards the ascension of Jesus to mean that He is presently ruling from the throne of David, dispensationalists foresee the Second Coming as the time when Jesus will take up that authority in Jerusalem during the 1,000 year millennial reign (Rev 20). This trust in the plain reading of Scripture (rather than the allegorical method) likewise has interpretative implications, since it makes a distinction between the "Kingdom of God" and the present age of tribulation.

Premillennial eschatology is consistent with the ways Orthodox Jews understand their Bibles. The Orthodox Jew is awaiting the advent of the *Mashiach ben David* who will restore national Israel, rebuild the Temple, and save the Jewish people from all their enemies. Before he arrives, however, there will be "70 birthpangs of the Messiah" during *chevlei Mashiach* (the Time of Jacob's Trouble). After Mashiach appears, however, and defeats the enemies of Israel in the great Magog war, Israel will experience *yemot haMashiach* (days of the Messiah), a golden age of peace and blessing when Israel will be promoted and all the nations will co-exist in peace. Yemot haMashiach is to be distinguished from *olam haba*, the world to come, which corresponds to the "eternal state" wherein Paradise lost is fully restored (the Jewish sages believe in two *olams* (worlds): a this-world (*olam hazeh*) and a next-world (*olam haba*), with a Messianic 'transitional' world somewhere at the intersection). In other words, the plain reading of Scripture leads Jews who hold to a high view of Scripture to regard the future promises made to Israel to be literally fulfilled one day, and this is an argument in favor of a dispensational understanding of the future of national Israel.



Much more could be said on this subject, of course, but the upshot is that God has unfinished business with ethnic Israel. God is sovereign over all of the nations, of course, and He has purposes that concern them all, but national Israel is a focal point of His plan for the ages. From the call of Abram to the time of Jesus' return to Jerusalem, to the reign of Jesus upon David's throne in the coming kingdom, to the "heavenly Jerusalem from above (with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel inscribed upon her gates" [Rev 21:10-12]), Israel is in focus. The Church, on the other hand, is a distinct body of people who are related to God by means of the High Priestly work of Jesus on their behalf, but this group is not to be confused with "Israel" as a nation in the coming theater of the *acharit hayamim* (end of days). In the coming Kingdom reign of Jesus as King over Israel, ruling from Jerusalem, the Church doubtlessly will have a share, though the role of the Church as the "Bride of Christ" will be different than that of ethnic Israel during the time of *yemot haMashiach*.

For the dispensationalist, then, today Israel refers to a modern nation state (secular Israel) that, though being in temporary disobedience to the terms of the New Covenant, are still the Chosen People of God who have a divine right to the land of Israel by means of the (unconditional) Abrahamic covenant. God will ultimately restore national Israel to faith in the Mashiach Yeshua, at which time they shall be fully reinstated and receive the kingdom blessings promised to King David.

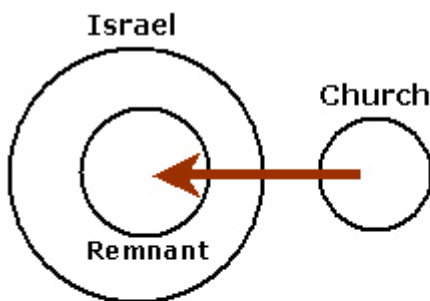
A (friendly) criticism of Separation Theology is that its hard distinction between ethnic Israel and the Church implies that there are three eternally distinct groups of people in the earth: Jews, Gentiles, and the Church (which is composed of both Jew and Gentile and formed into "one new man"). Jewishness is therefore regarded as "ontological" property that is preserved forever, though the exact status of a Jew who is also member of the Church is obscured. Another criticism is that since it ignores the concept of the faithful remnant of Israel, it tends to induce the Church to disregard its Jewish roots, since the Covenants, blessings, and promises made to ethnic Israel are not to be applied directly to the Church. In practice this can have the unwitting effect of minimizing the relevance of the Old Testament Scriptures, or at least subordinating them to a lesser practical status than those of the New Testament epistles of Paul.

More unfriendly critics of Separation Theology sometimes present "straw man" arguments that such dispensationalism "divides" the people of God by positing separate programs of salvation (one for the Church and the other for national Israel). Sometimes this is caricatured as meaning that the Church will one day inherit heavenly mansions, while Israel will inherit the earth. This is unfair for a number of reasons, but primarily because dispensationalists believe that national Israel will one day come to saving faith in the Messiah when she cries out *baruch haba b'shem Adonai*, "blessed is He that comes in the Name of the LORD (Matt. 23:37-39, Luke 13:35). Then the prophecy of the New Covenant promised to national Israel will be fulfilled (Jer. 31:31-37) and "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:25-26).



3. Remnant Theology

A third theological option regarding the relationship of the Church and Israel is to claim that the Church and Israel "overlap" in some manner. In Replacement/Covenant Theology, the Church is said to supersede Israel in such a way that Israel is abandoned with no redemptive future. In Separation theology, there is a distinction between Israel and the Church, but there is some question about how the two groups will interact, especially beyond the millennial reign of Jesus into eternity. Remnant Theology attempts to mediate these positions by understanding the Church to be a subset of faithful ethnic Israel who received Jesus (Yeshua) as the promised Messiah. This faithful subset of Israel is called the Remnant or the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:6):

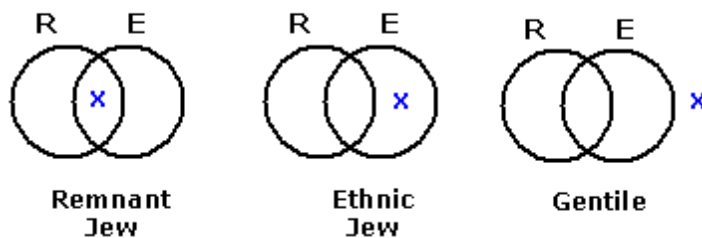


- *The Gentile Church partakes of the covenants and promises given to remnant Israel.*
- *Gentile Christians must identify with Remnant Israel.*

She'arit Yisrael - The Remnant of Israel

The Scriptures make a distinction between being an ethnic Jew (i.e., one born Jewish) and one who is considered to be a member of *she'arit Yisrael*, the faithful remnant of Israel. This can be seen in the following:

E = Ethnic Israel
R = Chosen Remnant





As can be seen from the preceding diagram, a person can be 1) outside of relationship to Israel altogether (i.e., a Gentile); 2) within ethnic Israel by virtue of birth (to a Jewish mother); or 3) within *both* ethnic Israel (i.e., of Jewish lineage) *and* part of the faithful remnant (as a Jew who trusts the God of Israel). (Logically, there is a fourth option here which will be discussed below). These distinctions are important because there are many who oversimplify the matter and confuse ethnic Israel with the “remnant of Israel chosen by the grace of God” (Rom. 11:5).

The Remnant of Israel is a sovereignly chosen subset of ethnic Israel that has been faithfully preserved by the LORD over the centuries. Its existence is evidenced in the Old Testament Scriptures as is seen in the following cases:

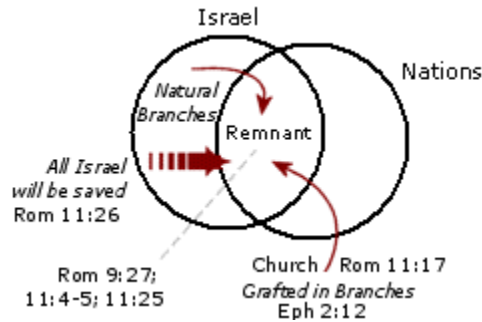
- Isaac was chosen over Ishmael (Gen. 17:19)
- Jacob was chosen over Esau (Gen. 28:13-15)
- Joseph was chosen over his other brothers (Gen. 45:7)
- Israel was chosen (as a nation) at Sinai and a remnant preserved after the sin with the Golden Calf (Ex. 32)
- Caleb and Joshua were chosen among all those of the desert generation to enter into the Promised Land (Num. 14:38)
- Elijah was told that God preserved 7,000 faithful during apostasy (1 Kings 19:18)
- Ezekiel was told that a remnant would be preserved from the northern kingdom after their captivity (Ezek. 37:19)
- The returning exiles from Babylon were chosen (Zech 8:5)

It is further evidenced in the New Testament:

- John the Baptist distinguished between those merely born Jewish and those who are part of remnant Israel (Matt. 3:9)
- God chose a remnant of Israel to receive the Messiah (Rom. 11:5)
- After the destruction of the Temple by the Romans, God preserved a remnant of Israel which has continued to this day.
- Paul spoke of the remnant of Israel chosen by God’s grace (Rom. 2:28-29; 9:27, 11:5) and the one “New Man” composed of Jews and grafted in Gentiles (Eph 2:15).
- During the coming Great Tribulation, God will preserve a remnant of Israel (Rev. 7:4)

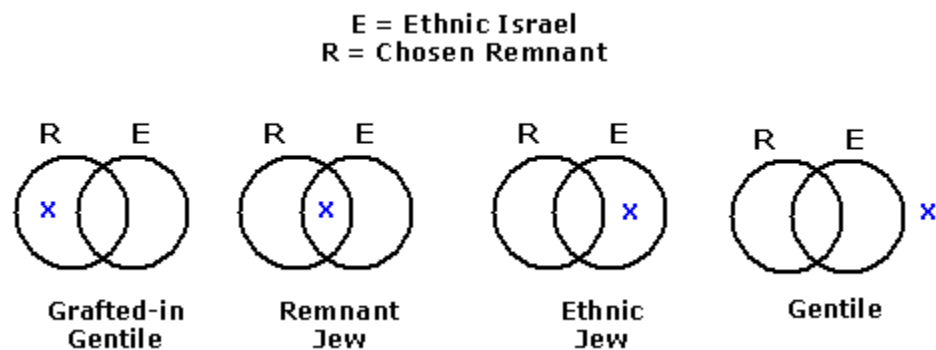


It's important to realize that Remnant Theology understands that the Church is "grafted in" or "in-placed" *within remnant Israel*, and not the other way around -- i.e., remnant Israel is NOT understood to be placed within the Church:



This is a vital distinction, since otherwise the Church would be guilty of “boasting” that its “branches” have been grafted into the Olive Tree, rather than remembering that the root is what sustains the Church (Rom. 11:18). While only some ethnic Jews are part of the faithful remnant, all saved Gentiles are spiritually made Jewish (Rom. 2:29; Rom. 4:16; Eph. 2:12-19), and are therefore partakers of the covenantal blessings given to remnant Israel. But it is crucial to understand that the Church is incorporated into the chosen remnant of Israel, and not the other way around! In other words, a Jew doesn't need to disown his or her Jewishness in order to be a member of the Church.

With this distinction in mind, we can finish the diagram that reveals the logical possibilities between ethnic Israel and the Remnant:



A person can be 1) outside of relationship to Israel altogether (i.e., a Gentile); 2) within ethnic Israel by virtue of birth (to a Jewish mother); 3) within *both* ethnic Israel (i.e., of Jewish lineage) *and* as part of the faithful remnant (as a Jew who trusts the God of Israel), or 4) a Gentile who partakes of the blessings given to the faithful Remnant of Israel.



The Olive Tree and the Remnant Chosen by Grace

The statement of Paul that “not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (Rom. 9:6) means that a person can be a descendant of ethnic Israel but not part of the remnant of Israel that was chosen by God for salvation in Messiah. In Romans 9:1-31, Paul reveals his heartfelt desire to see all of Israel come to understand the truth of salvation as given through Jesus, though he specifically mentions that a godly remnant has always existed.

Later Paul explicitly asked the question of whether God was “finished” with ethnic Israel, to which he replied:

God forbid! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. (Rom. 11:1-5)

Paul goes on to give the analogy of the Olive Tree to illustrate how the Church is grafted in to the remnant of Israel. The natural branches *broken off* represent unbelieving, ethnic Israel, while the “wild olive shoots” grafted in *among the others* represent Gentiles who come to faith in the Messiah. But note especially the prepositional phrase, “among the others.” These *remaining branches* represent remnant Israel, who never were separated from the supporting Root (which represents the covenant promises given to the patriarchs of Israel - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob - as given by the LORD). This metaphor clearly indicates that the wild olive shoots (believing Gentiles) are *placed within* the remaining branches on the tree (believing Jews). The Olive Tree, in other words, pictures the covenantal saving program of God based on His faithfulness *to Israel*.

Note also that Paul goes on to state that the restoration of the broken off branches is within the power and ultimate purposes of God (Rom. 11:23-24), who has temporarily “hardened” ethnic Israel until all the “wild olive shoots” have been added to the remnant Tree (11:25), and then “all Israel will be saved” (11:26).

While it is true that ethnic Israel has rejected their Mashiach (a “partial hardening of Israel” - Rom. 11:25), Paul consoles himself by reflecting that not all physical descendants of Abraham are made the inheritors of the covenantal blessings from the LORD. No, Abraham had two sons, but it was Isaac (not Ishmael) who was chosen; and Isaac also had two sons, but it was Jacob (not Esau) who was chosen. In other words, even though Ishmael and Esau were physical descendants of Abraham, they were not chosen to be inheritors of the blessing of God.

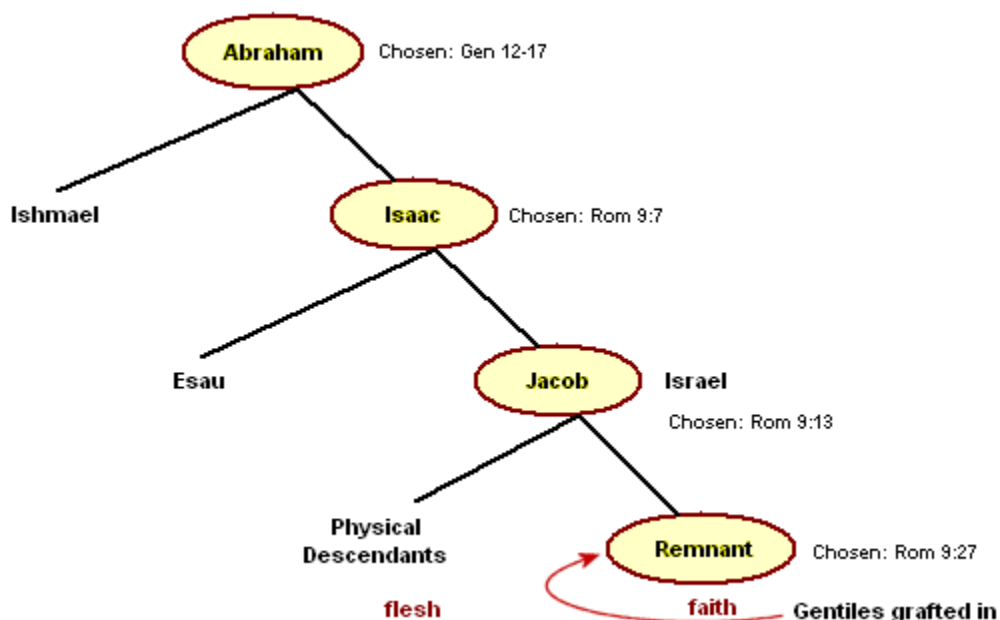


Indeed, regarding the case of Jacob and Esau, Paul goes further by saying that "though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad -- in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, Rebecca was told, "The older will serve the younger." Paul then quotes from Malachi 1:3, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Paul then asks the rhetorical question of whether all this might be unfair. After all, was it Esau's fault that he was rejected when God had Himself foreordained that the blessing should not be his? Paul answers this by flatly saying that the LORD God of Israel is sovereign and can choose to show mercy and grace to whomsoever He wills - man's objections notwithstanding. In other words, God has the complete right to predestine outcomes to suit His good pleasure and purposes, and mankind must simply accept His rule and reign in the universe.

Being a physical descendant of Abraham is not enough to be a part of God's family, since only the *children of the promise* are counted as God's offspring. And that even includes Gentiles, as the prophet Hosea revealed: "those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call children of the Living God" (Hosea 1:10). And did not the prophet Isaiah also cry out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved"?

Paul ends this line of thinking by saying that those who trust in the promise of God's salvation through the Mashiach have attained righteousness *by faith*; but those who pursue their own righteousness based on the law will never succeed in reaching that goal, since Yeshua alone is the "end of the law for righteousness" to all who believe.



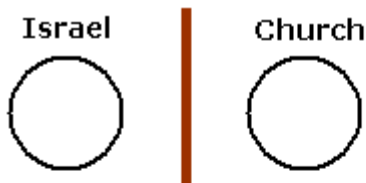


Summary and Conclusion

There are three basic theological options regarding the relationship between the Church and Israel: Replacement Theology, Separation Theology, and Remnant Theology.

Separation Theology

Separation Theology, with its hard distinction between ethnic Israel and the Church, implies that there are three distinct groups of people in the earth: Jews, Gentiles, and the Church (which is composed of both Jew and Gentile and formed into “one new man”). Jewishness is therefore regarded as “ontological” property that is preserved forever, though the exact status of a Jew who is *also* member of the Church is obscured. Separation Theology also makes the Church relatively indifferent to the status of ethnic Israel in this present dispensation, since the Covenants, blessings, and promises made to ethnic Israel are not to be applied directly to the Church. In practice this can have the unwitting effect of minimizing the relevance of the Old Testament Scriptures, or at least subordinating them to a lesser practical status than those of the New Testament epistles of Paul.

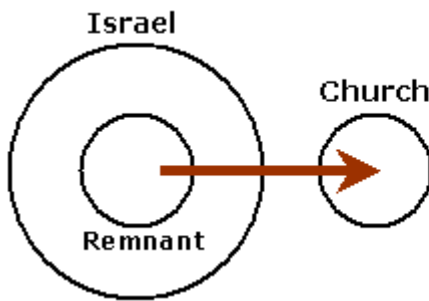


Separation Theology

- *The covenants and promises given to Israel are not transferred to the Gentile Church.*
- *The Church is a new spiritual entity with a distinct purpose and destiny.*

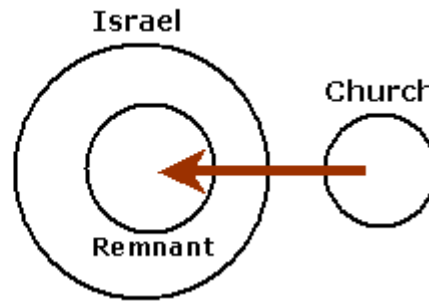
Replacement and Remnant Theology

Since Replacement Theology is based on Covenant Theology, the concept of the Church takes priority over ethnic Israel, since it is claimed to have existed within Israel in the form of the believing remnant. After Jesus came, only those Jews that convert to Christianity are the legitimate “Israel of God.” Remnant Theology, on the other hand, is dispensational in outlook, but understands that Gentile Church is a new creation that is *grafted into* the covenants and blessings given to Remnant Israel. This distinction can be more clearly seen in the following diagram.



Replacement Theology

- *The covenants and promises given to Israel are transferred to the Gentile Church.*
- *Jews must convert to Gentile Christianity.*



Remnant Theology

- *The Gentile Church partakes of the covenants and promises given to Remnant Israel.*
- *Gentile Christians must identify with Remnant Israel.*

As you can see, the differences regarding the identity of the remnant leads to profoundly different interpretations regarding the identity of the Church. If the remnant of Israel is regarded as the “Church,” then Replacement/Covenant theology will seem appealing. However, it is evident that the *ekklesia* of Jesus is something “over and above” the remnant of Israel (*she’arit yisrael*), and most Covenant Theologians do not attempt to translate the word *ekklesia* (as found in the LXX) to literally refer to the “Church” that Paul wrote about in his epistles.

Since the Church is revealed as a “new creation,” a mystery of God that was brought into being through the ministry of Jesus Christ, then it is evident that Remnant Theology is the most accurate of these views. One consequence of this perspective is that Gentile Christians must return to the Jewish roots of their faith and show their love and appreciation for Israel.

The metaphor of the Olive Tree clearly indicates that the Gentile Church is incorporated into the remnant of Israel. The Church must repent regarding its arrogant attitude toward the Jewish people and express profound gratitude to God for their miraculous preservation over the centuries. Moreover, the Gentile Church should stand with ethnic Israel by considering them as “eschatological brethren,” that is, future followers and partakers of the LORD Jesus Christ. For “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29), and “if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? (Rom. 11:15).

The overarching plan of the LORD is to redeem both Jews and Gentiles by means of the unconditional covenants and promises given to the faithful patriarchs of Israel. The Gentile Church does not exist *instead of* Israel (replacement theology); nor does it exist *outside of* Israel (separation theology); but rather it is incorporated *within* the faithful remnant of Israel. *Amen.*



Important Addendum to this article

Based on some feedback I have received, I would like to stress the fact that I emphatically do *not* believe that Christians or Messianic Jews should become followers of Rabbinical (i.e., Talmudic) Judaism, nor do I think this is an implication of the argument presented above. I am not a “Judaizer” and I have an article online that explicitly addresses the role of Torah in the life of the Christian today.

Perhaps it might help to understand that I wrote this article mainly to deal with those who have embraced certain aspects of Covenant theology, and in particular eschatological views that deny a future to national Israel. Sadly this viewpoint is widespread in the church today, and many pastors maintain no special place of distinction for national Israel, even after the Second Coming of Jesus. Certain Covenant Theologians also confuse the nature of the Church, seeing it as pre-existing even national Israel, and therefore get the analogy of the Olive Tree turned upside down. In other words, though this article has some flaws and even dangers (i.e., it could be used to support a Judaizing view of Christianity), I consider the risk somewhat worth it, since the implications of Replacement Theology and Covenant Theology seriously impugn the faithfulness of the LORD God of Israel.

Eschatological Postscript

So what is the State of Israel after the death of Christ?

It seems I am asked this question all the time. I attempt to answer it the article presented above, though the implication might not be obvious. In short, God is not “finished” with national Israel, even though there’s a “partial hardening” until the fullness of the Gentiles come to faith (Rom 11:25), and then “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26). The Church is actually made a part of *she’arit yisrael* - the faithful remnant of Israel (Rom 11:17), and not the other way around. The Gentile church shouldn’t call faithful Jews away from their heritage, but rather should seek to embrace Jewish heritage as its own, since they are made co-heirs of the covenants unconditionally given to the Jewish people (Eph 2:11-13).

So what’s our response to all of this supposed to be? Should we abandon the traditional (gentilish) Church and become Jewish in our liturgy, etc? *Not necessarily* (though we should be careful to reject the errors of “Replacement Theology” and any liturgical elements that are based upon it). We don’t abandon the Church, but rather seek to remind her of who she really is. She’s like an adopted child whose true father is a great King, though she thinks of herself as a “Cinderella” that is lowborn and unworthy. Or she’s like the unnamed Shulamite woman in the Song of Solomon who was passionately beloved of the (hidden) great King. Indeed, the Church is called *kallat Mashiach* - the Bride of Messiah - and is composed of all those from among the nations whom God has sovereignly chosen to be in a love relationship with Him.



King David was served in his elderly years by a young woman named Abishag (*Avishag* of 1 Kings 1:1-4, 15) who was perhaps this Shulamite woman (from the city of Shunem). Later, King Solomon's first wife was perhaps the same beautiful nurse who served his father. Similarly, the Church is precious to the LORD (typified by King Solomon), even as Abishag was indeed faithful to David and she'arit Yisrael.

Perhaps one additional note on this subject should be made. There is a distinction to be made between the *secular state of Israel* and *she'arit yisrael*, the chosen remnant (including those yet to be chosen in the future). This implies, among other things, that the secular state is not to be identified with any form of theocracy and does not itself hold any sacred status. God is sovereign over all the nations, including secular Israel, of course, but the secular state of Israel is actually a part of the *acharit hayamim* (end times) theater of operations. This is evidenced by many of the New World Order designs found on secular Israel's governmental buildings, most particularly the Israeli Supreme Court building:



Notice the key symbol of the all-seeing eye of providence on the roof of the building, which can possibly be traced back to Egyptian mythology and the Eye of Horus.



Closer view of the pyramid



This is essentially the same symbol used on the Great Seal of the United States, which openly avows adherence to *Novus Ordo Seclorum* - a Latin phrase that can be translated as "A New Order of the Ages," or even as "a New World Order."



The Messiah of evil will come and deceive many in Israel as their long-awaited Mashiach. Perhaps he will finally broker true peace in the Middle East. But he will ultimately betray the Jewish people, much like Haman did (or as the Greek Antiochus Epiphanies did), causing the Jewish people to flee for their lives.

Only after the Jewish people cry out, *Baruch habah b'shem Adonai* in reference to the true Messiah, Jesus, will Israel be saved during this period of Great Tribulation (Matt. 23:29; Luke 13:35). Then shall the prophecy of Zechariah be fulfilled: "I will pour out upon the kingship of David and the population of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication so that they will look to me, the one they have pierced. They will lament for him as one laments for an only son, and there will be a bitter cry for him like the bitter cry for a firstborn" (Zech 12:10).

I am aware that many in the Gentile Church who are "preterists," "amillennialists," "dominionists," "theonomists," "covenant theologians," etc. will strongly disagree with the sketch of the end times I have given above, but their thinking derives from faulty assumptions, exegetical fallacies, and errors that lead inexorably to the false doctrine of Replacement Theology.