

## Sabeel Advent Bible Study 2

### Colonialism and Apartheid: Deconstructing Exclusivity Among the People of God

#### Introduction

Israel's claims to be a democracy as well as a Jewish state were dispelled with the passing of the controversial "Nation-state" law in 2018 which defined Israel as the state exclusively for the Jewish people. Despite claims to the contrary, this has no biblical justification. The Hebrew scriptures emphasize spiritual purity not racial purity necessitating segregation. Instead, Israel as a nation is never narrowly restricted to those who were the physical descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob. Israel as a nation always incorporated people of other races and this extended not just to their identity and right of residence but also to their inheritance of the land and right to worship God in the Temple.

#### Bible Study

1. Christian Zionists argue that God's 'Chosen People' were identified by ethnic descent from Abraham. But what does Deuteronomy actually teach?

*"Do not despise an Edomite, for the Edomites are related to you. Do not despise an Egyptian, because you resided as foreigners in their country. The third generation of children born to them may enter the assembly of the LORD." (Deuteronomy 23:7-8)*

Rahab (Joshua 6:25) and Ruth (Ruth 1:16) are just two examples of Gentiles welcomed into the people of God.

2. David looked forward to the day when other ethnic groups would share the same identity and privileges as the Israelites. Note the phrase 'This one was born in Zion.' Why does the Lord God have to repeat himself three times in three verses?

*"I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me—Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush—and will say, 'This one was born in Zion.'" Indeed, of Zion it will be said, "This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High himself will establish her." The Lord will write in the register of the peoples: "This one was born in Zion." (Psalm 87:4-6)*

3. What was the status of non-Jews who acknowledged the Lord?
4. In the beautiful story of Esther, after God rescues his people from the hands of their enemies, what happened?

*"In every province and in every city to which the edict of the king came, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people*

*of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.”*  
(Esther 8:17)

5. In Isaiah 56, the Lord anticipates the rise of supremacism and racism among his people. He even expresses concern for foreigners who feared exclusion. What were the criteria for admittance into God’s Temple?

*“Let no foreigners who have bound themselves to the LORD say, “The LORD will surely exclude me from his people.” ... And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”* (Isaiah 56:3, 6-7)

6. If the Lord insisted that foreigners should not say, “*The Lord will surely exclude me from his people*”, why would they say it?

Presumably because the Lord’s people must have been doing the excluding – on the same supremacist grounds advocated by segregationist Zionists today. The people of God in scripture were always defined on the basis of faith not race and God’s land was to be shared. We must resist any attempt to make exclusive what God has made inclusive. The New Testament is even more explicit.

7. How did John the Baptist respond to those who claimed to be the descendants of Abraham?

*“John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”*” (Luke 3:7-9)

8. As Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, why does he quote Isaiah 56 discussed in question 5?

*“Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. “It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.”*” (Matthew 21:12-13)

9. When Jesus praises the faith of a centurion, what does he promise will happen at the heavenly banquet?

*“Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at*

*the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 8:10-12)*

10. What does Jesus say to those who presumed they would be at the banquet?

11. How does the Apostle Paul define a Jew in Romans 2?

*“A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God.” (Romans 2:28-29)*

12. How does Paul identify the children of Abraham in Romans 9?

*“It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring.” (Romans 9:6-8)*

13. Whom does the Apostle Peter identify as God’s ‘chosen people’?

*“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (1 Peter 2:9-10)*

14. In Galatians Paul shows how ethnic identities are transformed by the gospel.

*“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:15-18, 29)*

Paul explicitly denies the claim that the ‘seed’ of Abraham are the Jewish people by ethnicity or genealogy. There is no biblical justification for supremacism or segregation among Christians. Abraham’s inheritance is for all who trust in Jesus, irrespective of ethnicity. Ethnic divisions are transformed by the gospel because God’s ultimate purpose is to create one new humanity.

15. In Ephesians, we are given a glorious insight into how Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus Christ have been brought into a new ‘citizenship’ that transcends former ethnic barriers and religious divisions.

*“His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.” (Ephesians 2:11-16).*

16. Does God have two ‘chosen’ peoples or one?

17. Why is it important that we do not tolerate racial divisions or barriers among God’s people?

## **Conclusion**

The Bible repudiates racial exclusivity, preferential or elevated status within God’s kingdom. God’s intention has always been to create for himself one new people, drawn from every race and nation, under one head – the Lord Jesus Christ. Supremacy and ethnic segregation are repudiated by the New Testament insistence on our equality as sisters and brothers, in Jesus Christ, as the united but diverse family of God.

As we have seen, refuting the theological basis for apartheid (and Christian Zionism) is actually not that difficult. You don’t need a long list of scripture passages to counter those used to defend apartheid. Just one verse is sufficient. Imagine the theology of Christian Zionism is like a can of clear Sprite. It represents the demand for racial purity, a ban on mixed marriages, and fixed national boundaries based on ethnicity. What happens when you add some Coke to a glass of Sprite? It changes colour. How much Coke do you need to change the colour of Sprite? Very little. Once you have added even a small amount you cannot ever go back to pure clear Sprite. In the same way, just one mixed marriage is enough to confound any notion of racial purity. And in like manner, just one bible verse that challenges apartheid will irreversibly adulterate its theology.