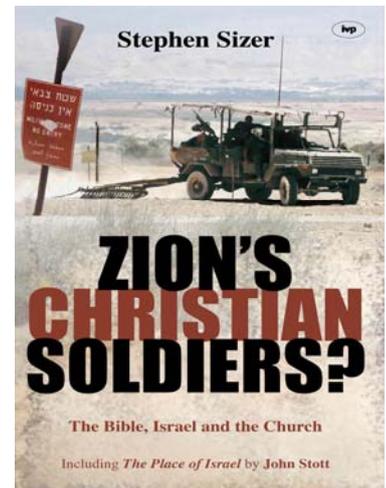


## Seminar 2

### Israel and the Church: Who are God's Chosen People?

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. (Ephesians 2:13-16)



How often have you heard the Jewish people described as God's 'chosen people'? Probably so often that you have never even questioned it. It is so ingrained that to deny it is often seen as evidence of anti-Semitism. As is the assumption that God blesses and curses nations on the basis of how they treat Israel – which is sometimes used as a threat. This view goes back to Genesis 12:3. Jerry Falwell, for example, says God is blessing America because 'America has been kind to the Jew.'<sup>1</sup> He claims that God 'will bless those who bless the Jews and curse whoever curses the Jews.'<sup>2</sup> That is why *Christians United for Israel* conducts 'a Night to Honor Israel'<sup>3</sup> in as many cities as possible so that God will continue to bless America and Canada.

It may surprise you to discover that the New Testament never uses the term 'chosen' to describe the Jewish people. It is only used of those who follow Jesus. Does that mean God has two separate 'chosen people'? Some like to think so. They are usually called 'dispensationalists' and this is a popular viewpoint among evangelicals in the United States.

In this chapter we will begin by looking at the evidence for two 'chosen people' and then tackle the 'blessing and cursing' issue. Then we will examine the term 'Israel' in the Old and New Testament. We shall then consider some of the biblical imagery

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Grace Halsell, *Forcing God's Hand* (Washington, Crossroads International, 1999) p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Prager, 'Those Who Curse the Jews and Those Who Bless the Jews' Christian Action for Israel <http://christianactionforisrael.org/antiholo/curse.html> [accessed August 2006]

<sup>3</sup> Christians United for Israel, Long Term Goals, <http://www.cufi.org/information.aspx> [Accessed August 2006]

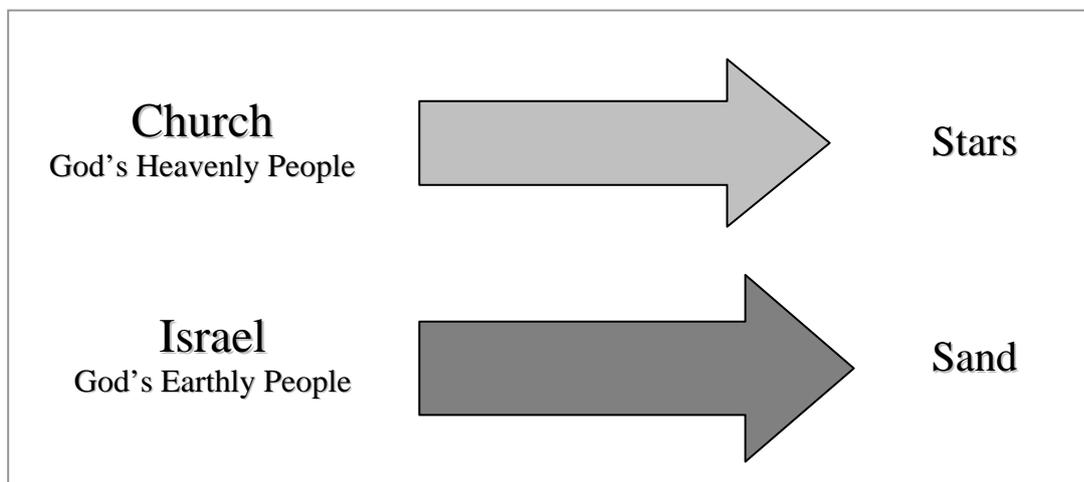
God uses to describe his relationship to his people such as the analogy of the vine and the vineyard. We also need to define what we mean by words like 'Jew', 'chosen' and 'children of God'.

### **The Sand and the Stars**

John Nelson Darby, one of the founders of the Brethren, along with Cyrus Scofield, through his Scofield Reference Bible, popularised the novel idea that God has two separate plans - one being fulfilled through the Church, the other through Israel. According to Scofield, 'Comparing then, what is said in Scripture concerning Israel and the Church, we find that in origin, calling, promise, worship, principles of conduct and future destiny all is contrast.'<sup>4</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, one of Scofield's students, elaborates on this alleged dichotomy between Israel and the church,

The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity... Israel is an eternal nation, heir to an eternal land, with an eternal kingdom, on which David rules from an eternal throne' so that in eternity ...never the twain, Israel and church, shall meet.<sup>5</sup>

If you imagine the way railway lines run parallel but never meet, well that is how many dispensationalists believe Israel and the Church remain separate.



*Genesis 22:17 according to John Hagee*

<sup>4</sup> C.I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, (New York, Loizeaux, 1896), p.3.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Dispensationalism* (Dallas, Seminary Press, 1936), p. 107; *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, Dallas Seminary Press, 1975), Vol. 4. pp. 315-323.

This leads John Hagee, for example, to a novel interpretation of Genesis 22 where God promises Abraham, 'I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.' (Genesis 22:17). Hagee states,

Stars are heavenly, not earthly. They represent the church, spiritual Israel. The 'sand of the shore' on the other hand, is earthly and represents an earthly kingdom with a literal Jerusalem as the capital city. Both stars and sand exist at the same time, and neither ever replaces the other. Just so, the nation of Israel and spiritual Israel, the church, exist at the same time and do not replace each other.<sup>6</sup>

Hagee's colourful interpretation, however, doesn't quite fit with the way Scripture interprets Scripture. Around 430 BC Nehemiah thanked God that the promise made to Abraham had already been fulfilled, 'You made their sons as numerous as the stars in the sky.' (Nehemiah 9:23). Notice Nehemiah likens Jews to the stars in the sky, not Gentiles. Maybe they are the sand not the stars...

Nevertheless, this view remains popular among many Evangelicals and Fundamentalists in the United States. It also lies behind best-sellers like Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth* as well as Tim LaHaye's blockbuster *Left Behind* series.

While not all Christian Zionists buy into Dispensationalism and the distinction between Israel and the Church, they nevertheless believe that the Jews remain God's 'chosen people' enjoying a unique relationship, status and purpose, separate from any promises made to the Church. They typically also believe that the promises made to Abraham in Genesis are being fulfilled in and through the physical descendants of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph who are living in Israel today. Based on passages like Genesis 15, *Christian Friends of Israel*, for example, state, 'The Bible teaches that Israel (people, land, nation) has a Divinely ordained and glorious future, and that God has neither rejected nor replaced his Jewish people.'<sup>7</sup> Similarly, *Jews for Jesus* distinguish between God's continuing purposes for Israel and those concerning the Church.

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<sup>6</sup> John Hagee, *Final Dawn over Jerusalem* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1998), pp. 108-109.

<sup>7</sup> Christian Friends of Israel, *About Us*, <https://www.cfi.org.uk/aboutus.php> [accessed August 2006]

We believe that Israel exists as a covenant people through whom God continues to accomplish his purposes and that the Church is an elect people in accordance with the New Covenant, comprising both Jews and Gentiles who acknowledge Jesus as Messiah and Redeemer.<sup>8</sup>

David Brickner affirms the novel position first propounded by J.N. Darby, that the Jews remain 'God's chosen people' while the church is merely 'a parenthesis' to God's future plans for the Jews.<sup>9</sup> These authors and organisations believe Jewish people somehow continue to enjoy a special covenant relationship with God apart from through Jesus Christ.

It is ironic that some Christian Zionists accuse their critics of holding to a 'replacement theology' – the idea that the Church has replaced Israel - when many actually believe Israel will soon replace the Church as God's people on earth. They have, as Dr Gilbert Bilezikian observed, made, 'Israel the bride and the Church the concubine'.<sup>10</sup>

### **Blessing and Cursing Israel**

The belief that God judges people, organizations and nations on the basis of how they treat the Jewish people and State of Israel is rooted in one of the promises God made to Abraham. 'I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you' (Genesis 12:3). The *International Christian Embassy, Jerusalem*, uses Genesis 12:3 to encourage Christians to pray for Israel and to support their work financially.

This promise was given to the Hebrew Patriarchs Abraham and Jacob - or Israel. So whoever blesses Israel will be blessed. But how can you bless Israel? The answer is easy: prayer; finances; come to Israel as a volunteer.<sup>11</sup>

At the Third International Christian Zionist Congress held in Jerusalem under the auspices of the ICEJ, some 1,500 delegates from over 40 countries unanimously affirmed 'The Lord in His zealous love for Israel and the Jewish People blesses and curses peoples and

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<sup>8</sup> Jews for Jesus, *Our Doctrinal Statement*, <http://www.jfjonline.org/about/statementoffaith.htm> [accessed August 2006]

<sup>9</sup> David Brickner, *Future Hope* (San Francisco, Purpose Pomegranate, 1999), p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Gilbert Bilezikian, unpublished correspondence, August 2006

<sup>11</sup> The International Christian Embassy, Jerusalem, Get Involved. [http://www.icej.org/article/get\\_involved](http://www.icej.org/article/get_involved) [accessed August 2006]

judges nations based upon their treatment of the Chosen People of Israel.<sup>12</sup> Hal Lindsey makes similar claims: ‘God has vowed, “He will bless those who bless Israel and curse those who curse her.”’<sup>13</sup>

Cyrus Scofield and E. Schuyler English are largely responsible for popularising this interpretation of Genesis 12:3 through the *Scofield Reference Bible* and its later editions. Notice how the footnotes in the *New Scofield Study Bible* ‘enhance’ Scofield’s original notes.

<b>The Scofield Reference Bible</b>	<b>The New Scofield Study Bible</b>
<p>Wonderfully fulfilled in the history of the dispersion. It has invariably fared ill with the people who have persecuted the Jew – well with those who have protected him.</p> <p>The future will still more remarkably prove this principle.<sup>14</sup></p>	<p>This was a warning literally fulfilled in the history of Israel’s persecutions. It has invariably fared ill with the people who have persecuted the Jew – well with those who have protected him. For a nation to commit the sin of anti-Semitism brings inevitable judgment. The future will still more remarkably prove this principle.<sup>15</sup></p>

It is hard to see how God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 could possibly apply to his physical descendents today. It is true that the promise was reiterated by Abraham’s son Isaac to his grandson Jacob in Genesis 27.

May God give you of heaven’s dew and of earth’s richness— an abundance of grain and new wine. May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed.  
(Genesis 27:28-29)<sup>16</sup>

But here, as with the promise made to Abraham, it is a personal blessing. On this occasion Isaac is primarily concerned with Jacob’s material needs and physical security in relation to his brothers.

<sup>12</sup> *International Christian Zionist Congress Proclamation*, The International Christian Embassy, Jerusalem, 25-29 February, 1996. <http://christianactionforisrael.org/congress.html> [Accessed August 2006]

<sup>13</sup> Hal Lindsey, Urgent Personal Message, 30/11/2005 [www.hallindseyoracle.com/articles.asp?ArticleID=12130](http://www.hallindseyoracle.com/articles.asp?ArticleID=12130) [Accessed August 2006]

<sup>14</sup> C.I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1917), p. 25, fn. 1.

<sup>15</sup> E. Schuyler English, *The New Scofield Study Bible* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> On one other occasion in the Old Testament a similar blessing is given by Balaam on the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness, ‘May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed’ (Numbers 24:9)

So how do some commentators make the 4,000 year jump to apply Genesis 12 today? Scofield and Schuyler English look to Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 and link this to their interpretation of Genesis 12. Once again, Schuyler English offers a more explicit application favouring the nation of Israel while expunging Scofield's rather eccentric 'End Times' theology.

<b>The Scofield Reference Bible</b>	<b>The New Scofield Study Bible</b>
<p>...the persons judged are living nations...</p> <p>three classes are present, sheep, goats, brethren...</p> <p>The test in this judgement is the treatment accorded by the nations to those whom Christ calls "my brethren". These "brethren" are the Jewish Remnant who will have preached the Gospel of the kingdom to all nations during the tribulation.<sup>17</sup></p>	<p>The subjects of this judgement are "all nations" i.e. all Gentiles when living on earth.</p> <p>Three classes of individuals are mentioned: (1) sheep, saved Gentiles; (2) goats, unsaved Gentiles; and (3) brothers, the people of Israel... The test of this judgment is the treatment of individual Gentiles of those whom Christ calls "brothers of mine" living in the preceding tribulation period when Israel is fearfully persecuted (cp. Gen. 12:3).<sup>18</sup></p>

Now there is just one small problem with this interpretation. It ignores earlier passages in Matthew where Jesus explains what he means by "my brethren". In Matthew 10, for example, Jesus describes the benefits of discipleship just before he sends out the Apostles on their first training mission: 'And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward' (Matthew 10:42). On another occasion, his mother and brothers are concerned for his welfare and come to take him home because they think "He is out of his mind" (Mark 3:21). When told that they are outside the house asking for him, Jesus replies,

"Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:48-49)

Jesus clearly distinguished between his natural family and his spiritual family, as John emphasizes in the introduction to his gospel (John 1:12-13). Jesus has defined "his brethren" as those who trust and believe in him irrespective of their racial origins. It is

<sup>17</sup> Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1036, fn.1.

<sup>18</sup> Schuyler English, *The New Scofield Study Bible*, pp. 1012-1013, fn. 3.

therefore illegitimate to take a personal promise of divine blessing made to Abraham, to Jacob and then to ancient Israel and apply it in perpetuity to their descendants today. It is also irresponsible to suggest that God will bless us materially if we support the largely secular State of Israel, especially when this invariably means ignoring the plight of the indigenous Christian population of Palestine. The promise made to Abraham that the nations would be blessed through him was fulfilled in and through his 'Seed', the Lord Jesus Christ (John 8:56; Galatians 3:16, 29).

So what is the relationship between Israel and the Church? Who are God's chosen people? Let's go back to the Bible and examine the way 'Israel' is defined in the Old and New Testaments.

### **The Israel of God in the Old Testament**

The myth of racial purity is nothing new, nor is the desire to limit or exclude those deemed inferior. This is particularly so today when defining Israel since national identity tends to be restricted to those who are Jewish by race. Surprisingly perhaps, the Old Testament knows nothing of this contemporary form of nationalism known as Zionism. Instead, as we shall see, Israel as a nation was 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.

### **An Inclusive Israel**

Moses, for example, warned the Jewish people against a racial exclusivity:

Do not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. Do not abhor an Egyptian, because you lived as an alien in his country. The third generation of children born to them may enter the assembly of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 23:7-8)

The Edomites, descended from Esau, lived in what is today the Negev and Southern Jordan. King David, similarly, looked forward to the day when other races - Egyptian (Rahab) Persian (Babylon), Palestinian (Philistia), Lebanese (Tyre) and African (Cush) would have the same identity and privileges as the Israelites: "I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me— Philistia too, and Tyre , along with

Cush...” (Psalm 87:4) Notice the only criterion for citizenship God lays down is faith. God welcomes all ‘those who acknowledge me’.

### **An Inclusive Inheritance**

As if to emphasize that ‘citizenship’ means much more than a new passport God instructs the Israelites to share the Land and give an inheritance to all who trust in him.

You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who have settled among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe the alien settles, there you are to give him his inheritance,” declares the Sovereign LORD. (Ezekiel 47:22-23)

Those of other races, therefore, have the same rights as ‘native Israelites’.

### **An Inclusive Temple**

The inclusive nature of Israel extends beyond identity and inheritance to include the right to worship God in the Temple. God declares through the prophet Isaiah his acceptance of all who come to him in faith.

Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the LORD say, “The LORD will surely exclude me from his people.” ... And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, 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)

Jesus cites Isaiah 56 to justify his actions in clearing the money changers and traders out of the Temple. The religious leaders had turned the Court of the Gentiles into a noisy market exploiting worshippers with inflated exchange rates and exorbitant prices for sacrifices.

### **The Israel of God in the New Testament**

The inclusive nature of ‘Israel’ in the Old Testament is developed in the New Testament. Those who presumed that ancestry gave them certain religious privileges were chastened. John the Baptist’s strong language indicates how seriously God viewed their pride and arrogance.

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)

Jesus gives a similar warning to those who were trying to trap him. 'Abraham is our father,' they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did.' (John 8:39). Jesus goes even further in Matthew 8 when he praises the faith of a Gentile Roman Centurion, 'I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.' (Matthew 8:10). Jesus then goes on to make a prediction:

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 8:11-12)

Here Jesus is warning his Jewish hearers that unless they recognize him as their Messiah they will be excluded from the Kingdom.

This is how we are to understand Paul when he specifically uses the expression "Israel of God" in Galatians 6:16. "Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule-to the Israel of God." (Galatians 6:16). For Christian Zionists, Paul is referring to Jews, or at least Christian Jews, but this flies in the face of everything he has said in the first five chapters of this letter. In Galatians 1, Paul says we are saved by God's initiative – his grace and justified by faith alone in Jesus Christ. In chapters 2-3 Paul is emphatic - we are not saved by our racial pedigree, by circumcision, by offering animal sacrifices or keeping the Law of Moses. In chapter 4, those who follow Jesus, as we shall see a little later, are likened to the free children of Sarah. Those seeking to be justified by the Law have been alienated from Jesus and are likened to the children of Hagar. Quoting Genesis 21, they will, he warns, "never share in the inheritance" (Galatians 4:30). In chapters 5-6, Paul speaks of our freedom in Christ and our new life in the Holy Spirit. He contrasts living by the Spirit with living by our sinful nature. In the closing verses of chapter 6, Paul summarises the argument of the whole letter.

Those who want to impress others by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God. From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen. (Galatians 6: 12-18)

Do you see what Paul is saying? We have a choice – grace or law, faith or works? When Paul writes “Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16) he is obviously referring to the followers of Jesus who have repudiated the legalists who wanted to impose circumcision and keeping the Law. John Stott provides one of the best explanations of this verse:

‘All who walk by this rule’ and ‘the Israel of God’ are not two groups, but one. The connecting particle *kai* should be translated ‘even’, not ‘and’, or be omitted (as in RSV). The Christian church enjoys a direct continuity with God’s people in the Old Testament. Those who are in Christ today are ‘the true circumcision’ (Phil. 3:3), ‘Abraham’s offspring’ (Gal. 3:29) and ‘the Israel of God’.<sup>19</sup>

And don’t worry about the phrase ‘walk by this rule’ either. The Greek word ‘rule’ is *kanon* and simply describes a carpenter’s or surveyor’s plumb line. John Stott says,

This is the ‘canon’ of Scripture, the doctrine of the apostles, and especially in the context of Galatians 6 the cross of Christ and the new creation. Such is the rule by which the church must walk and continuously judge and reform itself.<sup>20</sup>

In the closing sentences of this letter, Paul is drawing on an ancient prayer he would have prayed all his life on the Sabbath. Known as the additional 19<sup>th</sup> benediction to the 18 benedictions, and based on the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:24-26, God is asked in the final prayer for ‘Peace... and mercy on us and all Israel, your people.’ Now Paul prays this blessing on the Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus for they have become the ‘Israel of God’.

As we have already seen from John 5:39, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because they refused to acknowledge how the Hebrew Scriptures referred to him. Let us

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<sup>19</sup> John Stott, *Only one way: The Message of Galatians* (Leicester, IVP, 1968), p. 180.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

consider one example found in both the Old and New Testament - the powerful imagery of the vine and vineyard.

### The Vine and the Vineyard

The vine or vineyard is a symbol frequently associated with God's people in the Old Testament. Passages like Psalm 80, Isaiah 5, Jeremiah 2 and Hosea 10 provide the context for the way in which Jesus and his Apostles invest the term with new and wider meaning. Drawing heavily on Isaiah 5, Jesus tells a parable in which God is likened to a landowner who plants a vineyard.

<b>Isaiah 5:1-7</b>	<b>Matthew 21:33-41</b>
<p>"I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it. The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress." (Isaiah 5:1-7)</p>	<p>"There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. `They will respect my son,' he said. "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, `This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time." (Matthew 21:33-41)</p>

In Matthew 21, Jesus takes the vivid imagery of Isaiah 5, and applies it specifically to himself. The failure of Israel to bear fruit is paralleled by the way the tenants treat the servants and ultimately the vineyard owner's son. Here, Jesus not only predicts his

own death but warns that his Father will take the vineyard away from the Jewish leaders. 'I tell you, for this reason the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce the fruits of it.' (Matthew 21:43).

This prophecy found its fulfilment in the Acts of the Apostles. At Pisidian Antioch, Luke records Paul warning them, 'We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles' (Acts 13:46). The same thing occurred in Corinth. 'But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.'" (Acts 18:6). This is the basis for the view that the Church, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, is the successor of the promises originally made to Israel.

John 15 is the most significant passage in the New Testament for understanding the analogy of the vine and the relationship between Israel and the Church. When Jesus says "I am the vine" he is making a very provocative statement. In the Old Testament Israel is described as the vine (see for example, Jeremiah 11:16; Ezekiel 15:1-8; 17:1-10; Hosea 10:1-2; 14:6).

In Psalm 80, David uses the imagery of the vine to describe how God rescued the Israelites out of Egypt, 'planted it... cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land.' (Psalm 80:8-9). But David goes on to describe how because of Israel's sin, 'Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire; at your rebuke your people perish.' (Psalm 80:16). At the same time David weaves in another analogy alongside that of the vine, which with hindsight, points to someone else beyond Israel.

Watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself. Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire; at your rebuke your people perish. Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself. (Psalm 80:15-17)

Bruce Milne, in his helpful commentary on John 15, notes that 'Israel has failed God in the long-term role she was called to fulfil, that of being "a light for the Gentiles" (Is. 49:6), to bring God's salvation "to the ends of the earth".'<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Bruce Milne, *The Message of John* (Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), p. 219.

Israel, however, was more attracted by the gods of the surrounding nations than by her potential for penetrating them as a missionary... But God's purpose, from which Israel turns in final apostasy, does not fall to the ground. It is grasped anew by the one who stands in the midst of Israel, and among the disciples. In contrast to the vine which has destroyed itself by disobedience, Jesus is the 'true vine'. He is the obedient Son through whose sacrifice and consequent mission the age-old purpose of Israel would find fulfilment, the nations would be reached, and 'all the families of the earth shall bless themselves' (Gen. 12:3).<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, Jesus is the true vine, not Israel. He is the faithful Israelite who will accomplish all that the nation of Israel failed to do. And in this reinvigorated analogy, Jesus describes his followers as the living, fruit bearing branches of the vine. Remaining part of the vine and bearing fruit depends on our abiding in Christ. Here Jesus is echoing not only the language of Psalm 80 and Isaiah 5 but also that of John the Baptist who warned:

'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.' (Matthew 3:10).

Similarly, Luke records how Peter uses the same imagery in his sermon in Acts 3. Citing the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 18 concerning Jesus Christ, Peter warns:

'Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people' (Acts 3:23).

The Apostle Paul develops the analogy of the vine and branches further in his letter to the Romans. In chapter 11 he explains the relationship of the natural branches (Israel) to the wild branches (Gentiles). His purpose is to curb any arrogance on the part of Gentile believers:

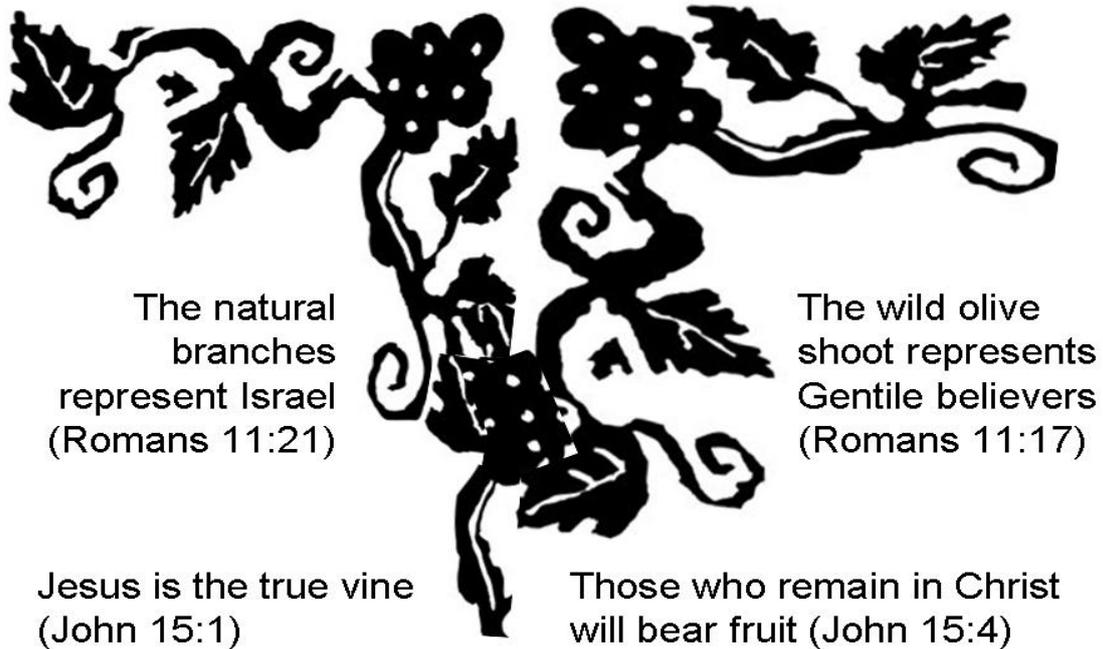
If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. (Romans 11:17-21)

Paul's use of the same analogy reinforces Jesus' own teaching in John 15. In the following verses Paul offers the hope that the Jewish people may once again be grafted in but only through faith in Jesus. (Romans 11:22-24)

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<sup>22</sup> Milne, *The Message of John*, p. 219.

## The Vine and the Branches



The New Testament does not teach that the Gentiles have superseded the Jews. But neither does it teach that the Jewish people retain a position of superiority over the Gentiles or over the Church. There is continuity between the believers under the Old Covenant who looked forward to the coming of Christ and believers under the New Covenant who look forward to his return. When Jesus died he broke down the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. 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 2:14-16).

It is tragic that some appear to want to rebuild it. The Bible does not warrant a racial exclusivity giving any race preferential or elevated status in God's kingdom. However, Jesus did teach that in the future, his Apostles would exert authority over Israel. "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matthew 19:28). 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.

### **What then does it mean to be a Jew?**

The apostle Paul once described himself as ‘a Hebrew of Hebrews’ and ‘as for legalistic righteousness, faultless’ (Philippians 3:5-6). He nevertheless refutes the notion that Jewishness may be defined by race or adherence to the Law of Moses. In his letter to the Romans, Paul explains:

A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God. (Romans 2:28-29).

This is why a little later he says,

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)

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul explicitly identifies the Church as the true circumcision. “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.” (Philippians 3:3)

This is entirely consistent with the Old Testament, where we have already seen, citizenship of Israel was open to all ‘those who acknowledge me’ (Psalm 87:4). This is the same criterion found in the New Testament.

### **What does ‘All Israel’ mean?**

Having identified the true Israel to be those who acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah, Paul can look forward to the day when, ‘all Israel will be saved.’ (Romans 11:26). What does he mean? Well, there are a variety of possibilities. First, in context, what does Paul actually say?

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not think you are superior: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written:

“The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for

God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. (Romans 11:25-32)

There are a number of possible ways to interpret this phrase 'all Israel will be saved'.

Does Paul mean

1. all physical descendants of Abraham and Sarah living and resurrected when Jesus returns?
2. the remnant of Jews who believe in Jesus?
3. all descendants of Abraham and Sarah alive when God brings a national revival or Jesus returns?
4. all Jews and Gentiles together who believe in Jesus?

A common mistake, often made by those who favour the first option, is to assume Paul is saying "And *then* all Israel will be saved" as if he is speaking chronologically. Scofield in his Reference Bible, for example, interprets the verse as promising a special role and status for national Israel after Jesus has returned and the Church has been taken up into heaven. In a footnote to this verse he writes, "According to the prophets, Israel, regathered from all nations, restored to her own land and converted, is yet to have her greatest earthly exaltation and glory."<sup>23</sup>

Dispensationalists like Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord and Arnold Fruchtenbaum, who believe God has two 'chosen' peoples - the Church and Israel, argue that 'all Israel' refers to a 'national salvation' for the Jewish people, before, during or after Jesus returns.<sup>24</sup> This interpretation makes a special case for the Jews. It gives them a 'second chance' to be saved either because the Old Testament covenants are 'unconditional', because God will accept future animal sacrifices, or because a national revival will occur after Jesus returns and they see "the one they have pierced" (Zechariah 12:10, see also John 19:37). However, none of these is taught in the New Testament. None of the passages referring to the return of Jesus give any hint of anyone being given a second chance. Hebrews 9 says "Just as

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<sup>23</sup> Scofield, Scofield., op. cit., fn. 1, p. 1206.

<sup>24</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin, California, Ariel Ministries, 1989), p. 552. John Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* ((Grand Rapids, Dunham publishing, 1958), pp. 190-192; Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 volumes (Dallas, Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), volume 3, pp. 105-108.

people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgement..." (Hebrew 9:27). If judgement follows death, it is reckless as well as inconsistent to believe God will treat Jews who are alive when Jesus returns any differently if they have, up to that point, rejected Jesus.

The TNIV helpfully translates the phrase "in this way all Israel will be saved" meaning "in this manner..."<sup>25</sup> As we have seen, Paul has already defined what he means by 'Israel' earlier: "For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (Romans 9:6). In narrowing his definition of 'Israel' to those who believe in Jesus, Paul has ruled out the first option. The term 'all Israel' cannot refer to those who have, or will reject Jesus, as they exclude themselves from the Israel of God.

Then does Paul mean by 'all Israel', just a remnant of Jews who believe in Jesus, that is, who are elect? The parallels with examples of how a 'remnant' was saved in the Old Testament are strong. God chose to save only a remnant during the Exodus wilderness experience, on the slopes of Mount Sinai when the Law was given to Moses, and during the return from exile in Babylon. Those who perished, assimilated or apostatised were clearly not elect. Martyn Lloyd-Jones favours this position interpreting 'all Israel' to mean "the total of all believing Jews in all ages and generations."<sup>26</sup> This view is shared by Louis Berkhof for whom 'all Israel' refers to "the whole number of the elect out of the ancient covenant people."<sup>27</sup> The weakness of this position, if it may be considered as such, is that if Paul had intended us to understand only a remnant of Jews would ever be saved, he would have said so. It also misses the contrast Paul has created in the preceding verses. During the time of Gentile conversion, he has already told us that only a remnant of Jews will be saved, but when the full number of Gentiles have entered God's kingdom, then 'all Israel' will be saved. If a remnant is all that is hoped for in the future, where is the mystery in that? (cf. Romans 11:25).

So does Paul mean us to understand by 'all Israel' an 'End Time' revival of national proportions? John Stott notes that while Paul identifies the Church as the 'Israel of

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<sup>25</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey, Presbyterian & Reformed, 2000), pp. 180-192

<sup>26</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Church and the Last Things* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 2002), p. 113.

<sup>27</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1939), pp. 698-700.

God' in Galatians, here in Romans 'Israel' refers to national or ethnic Israel as opposed to the Gentiles. Therefore he offers another possibility:

At present Israel is hardened except for a believing remnant, and will remain so until the Gentiles have come in. Then 'all Israel' must mean the great mass of Jewish people, comprising both the previously hardened majority and the believing minority.<sup>28</sup>

Agreeing with F.F. Bruce, Stott believes that the term does not mean 'every Jew without a single exception' but 'Israel as a whole.'<sup>29</sup> Steve Motyer, in his comprehensive treatment of Romans 9-11 also favours this interpretation:

The conversion of the last Gentile will be followed by a huge revival among the Jews, so that all Jews then alive will be ushered into the kingdom... 'All Israel' in 11:26, I believe, is the entire company of those 'from the Jews' whom God wills to call 'my people', in fulfilment of his purposes of election.<sup>30</sup>

Leon Morris also notes the link between verses 25 and 26 "and in this way" meaning just as a hardening on the part of Israel brought salvation to the Gentiles, when the full number of Gentiles have been saved, the temporary hardening of the Jews will come to an end and so "the nation of Israel as a whole will ultimately have its place in God's salvation."<sup>31</sup>

So is there any merit in the fourth option? John Calvin makes a good case:

I extend the word *Israel* to include all the people of God in this sense, 'When the Gentiles have come in, the Jews will at the same time return from their defection to the obedience of faith. The salvation of the whole Israel of God, which must be drawn from both, will thus be completed, and yet in such a way that the Jews, as the first born in the family of God, may obtain the first place. I have thought that this interpretation is the more suitable, because Paul wanted here to point to the consummation of the kingdom of Christ, which is by no means confined to the Jews, but includes the whole world. In the same way, in Gal. 6:16, he calls the Church, which was composed equally of Jews and Gentiles, the Israel of God.'<sup>32</sup>

In support of this position, Palmer Robertson observes that if in the preceding verse, "the fullness of the Gentiles" refers to Gentile believers, he asks, "into what do the full number of elect Gentiles come?"

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<sup>28</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), p. 303.

<sup>29</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans* (Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press, 1963), p. 209, cited in Stott, *Ibid.* This view is also shared by Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1971).

<sup>30</sup> Steve Motyer, *Israel in the Plan of God* (Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), pp. 151, 157.

<sup>31</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 420-421.

<sup>32</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Edinburgh, St Andrews Press, 1961), p. 255.

The answer is unavoidable. Believing Gentiles come *into Israel!* Is that not exactly the point made by Paul earlier in this chapter? Gentiles have been “grafted in among” the Israel of God (Rom. 11:17). They have become additional branches, joined in the single stock that is none other than Israel... In other words they have become “Israelites.”<sup>33</sup>

This parallels Paul’s arguments in Ephesians where he describes the Gentiles as “separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship *in Israel* and foreigners to the covenants of the promise... But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” (Ephesians 2:12-13)

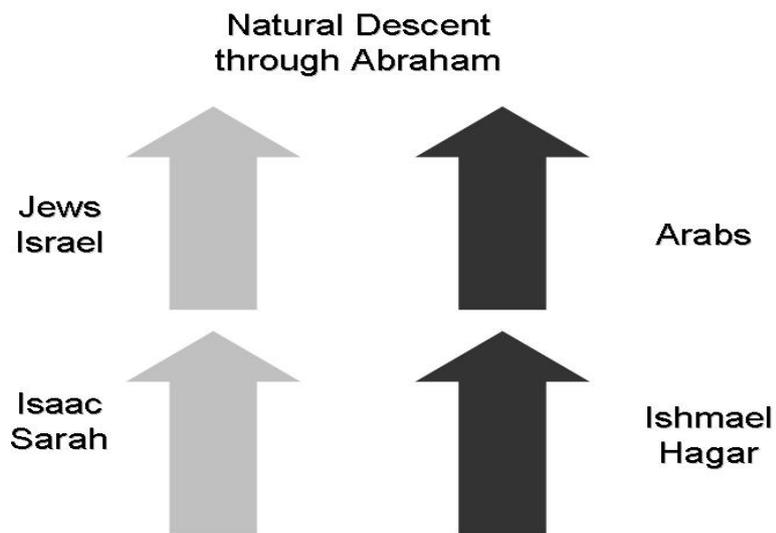
Gentile believers are now, “heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 3:6). It is precisely this – the incorporation of Jews and Gentiles within Israel – that says Paul – constitutes the mystery of the gospel. So Palmer Robertson concludes: “The full number that are the product of God’s electing grace, coming from both the Jewish and the Gentile communities, will constitute the final Israel of God.”<sup>34</sup>

That *Israel* now represents those who trust in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, is made more explicit in Paul’s letter to the Galatians. In Galatians 4, the well known story of Abraham’s two wives, Hagar and Sarah is allegorised to illustrate the tensions between the Jewish legalists and the Christians in Galatia. The religious Jews insisted that their racial descent from Abraham gave them certain privileges over the Gentiles.

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<sup>33</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *op.cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>34</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *op.cit.*, p. 188.



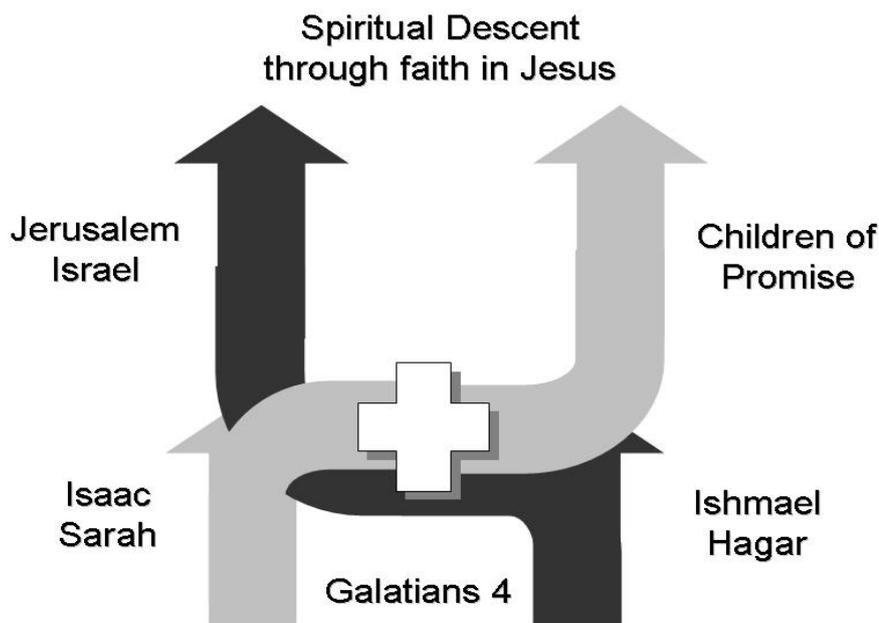
Controversially, Paul says that unbelieving Jews are the spiritual descendants of Hagar not Sarah while the Galatian Christians are, like Isaac, the true children of promise (Galatians 4:21-28).

The following chart highlights the contrast Paul is making.

<b>Galatians</b>	<b>Unbelieving Jews</b>	<b>Jewish &amp; Gentile Christians</b>
4:22	Hagar	Sarah
	Slave woman	Free woman
4:23	Natural procreation	Supernatural promise
	Ishmael	Isaac
4:24-26	Mount Sinai	Jerusalem above
4:25	Earthly Jerusalem	Heavenly Jerusalem
4:28-30	Slavery	Freedom
4:29	Persecuting	Persecuted
4:30	Excluded from inheritance	Included in inheritance
4:31	Children of the slave woman	Children of the free woman

The promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph are therefore now fulfilled only through those who follow Jesus Christ since they alone are designated the true children of Abraham and Sarah. Jews who reject Jesus Christ are outside the covenant of grace and are to be regarded as children of Hagar. Paul even takes Sarah's words of Genesis 21:10 and instructs the Galatian elders to eject the Judaizers who were corrupting the faith of the church in Galatia. 'Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share

in the inheritance with the free woman's son.' (Galatians 4:30). So the line of blessing is revealed to be spiritual or supernatural rather than natural. This is because legalism and grace, as means of gaining righteousness before God, are incompatible. And this is why, two chapters later, in summarising his argument, Paul



can describe God's new creation community of believing Jews and Gentiles as "the Israel of God." (Galatians 6:16)

So which interpretation of 'all Israel' should we accept? As long as we believe "there is no difference between Jew and Gentile", that "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:12-13) believing God "wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3) then perhaps we can accept which ever interpretation sounds most convincing and motivates us to love and good deeds.

## **What does it mean to be the 'Chosen People'?**

This understanding of Israel is enhanced by the way the Scriptures define the term 'chosen'. The first time the word is used it refers to God's promise to bless Abraham.

Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him. (Genesis 18:18-19)

Abraham was chosen to lead his family to follow the Lord, so that his descendants would become a godly nation and, through them, the whole world would be blessed. The promises made to Abraham were, however, conditional (Deuteronomy 7:6, 11-12, 8:1. See also Deuteronomy 14:2 & Amos 3:1-2). The privilege of being 'chosen' clearly brought with it responsibility. They were 'chosen' for a purpose. The blessings promised were conditional on the faithfulness and obedience of God's people to make him known.

In Isaiah, the concept of 'chosenness' is applied principally to the coming Messiah, the Servant of the Lord. The universal nature of his role fulfils and supersedes that of Israel, for he will be a light to the Gentiles.

It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth. (Isaiah 49:6. See also Isaiah 42:6)

The coming Messiah is portrayed as the one who will fulfil the role previously entrusted to Israel because she has failed to do so. 'Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.' (Isaiah 42:1). Note the contrast between the Servant of the Lord and servant Israel, who a few verses later are warned: 'Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send?' (Isaiah 42:18-19)

In his first public sermon, Jesus reads the prophecy given in Isaiah 61:1-2 and claims that it will be fulfilled in and through him (Luke 4:17-21). In Mark 13:20 Jesus clarifies that those who are 'chosen' are also known as the 'elect'. 'If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has

chosen, he has shortened them.’ (Mark 13:20). The apostle Peter similarly associates the two terms in the opening of his first epistle (1 Peter 1:1-2. See also 1 Peter 2:4). Here, Peter uses terminology associated with the Jewish Diaspora, scattered as a consequence of the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles, and applies it to the Church. Later in the same epistle, Peter describes the Church as the chosen people of God (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Notice that Peter simply describes the Church as God’s people. The choice to translate this with a definite article in the English NIV translation expresses well the dramatic change that has come about for Gentiles who trust in Christ. As ‘strangers in the world’ with no formal identity, they are nevertheless ‘elect’ having ‘been chosen according to the foreknowledge of the Father...’ (1 Peter 1:1-2). There is therefore no sense in which God has two separate peoples – the Church and Israel. Jesus Christ is the ‘Chosen One’ (Luke 23:35 cf. Isaiah 42:1), and those who trust in him demonstrate that they are chosen also. Peter goes on to elaborate further:

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake... For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame. (1 Peter 1:18-20, 2:6)

‘Chosenness’ is therefore the sovereign act of God’s grace, election and foreknowledge. It defines those who, by faith in Jesus Christ are redeemed as children of God. The Apostle Paul makes the same association in his letter to the Ephesians: ‘In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.’ (Ephesians 1:11). In his letter to the Colossians, Paul emphasizes the inclusive nature of chosenness within the Body of Christ:

Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. (Colossians 3:11-12)

In his letter to the Romans, Paul explains why the majority of Jewish people of his day, having rejected their Messiah, were now excluded from the covenant promises. However, as a sign that God has not rejected his people, Paul identifies himself with

a 'remnant' of believing Jews who are 'chosen by grace' and incorporated within the Body of Christ (Romans 11:5).

Before the Council in Jerusalem, Peter described how through signs and wonders God was drawing Gentiles to himself and 'did not discriminate between us and them' (Acts 15:9). James interprets this as the fulfilment of a prophecy of Amos (Amos 9:11-12).

Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

“ ‘After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the rest of humanity may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things’ — things known from long ago.

“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.” (Acts 15:14-19).

Some claim that Amos is predicting the restoration of Israel as a nation. This is certainly not how James understands the prophecy. He says “The words of the prophets are in agreement with this” - that is with how God had supernaturally “intervened to choose a people for his name among the Gentiles.” The context in which James cites Amos is entirely concerned with acknowledging that God was now choosing Gentiles as well as Jews to be his people. Both were saved equally by grace and without the necessity of circumcision or obedience to the Law.

In the Book of Revelation, John describes the ultimate security of those who trust in Jesus. ‘They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.’ (Revelation 17:14)

Significantly, the term 'chosen' is never used explicitly in the New Testament to refer to the Jewish people. It is used first of Jesus and then of all those who trust and believe in him, irrespective of nationality. Originally identified as the 'natural branches' and favoured because of the Patriarchs, the covenants, the law, temple worship and promises (Romans 9:1-4), the word 'chosen' has been invested with new meaning. It now means all who trust in Jesus Christ, irrespective of race.

### **What about the idea of a 'Remnant'?**

In Romans 11, Paul takes about a 'remnant chosen by grace' (Romans 11:5). Who are they and what does he mean? The idea of God saving a faithful remnant goes back to the story of Noah where God rescues just one family from the flood (Genesis 7:23). The concept is picked up again in the story of Joseph who realises why he has been elevated to high office in Egypt. "But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance." (Genesis 45:7). When Elijah thinks "I am the only one left" who is faithful (1 Kings 19:14), the Lord reveals that the remnant is actually much larger, "Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal." (1 Kings 19:18). Later in the history of the divided kingdom, the remnant becomes associated with just one tribe. "So the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left..." (2 Kings 17:18). A little later the prophet Isaiah advises a rather discouraged King Hezekiah, "Therefore pray for the remnant that still survives." (2 Kings 19:4). Just before his prediction of the birth of Immanuel, the Messiah, Isaiah promises, "though a tenth remain in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be a stump in the land." (Isaiah 6:13). God's people will, he promises, grow again through 'the holy seed'. Significantly, Jesus quotes the preceding verses (Isaiah 6:9-10) to explain why the unbelieving crowds will not understand his parable of the farmer's seed that will among those who "hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop-some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown." (Mark 4:1-20). And here we have the hint that, under the New Covenant, the small remnant will grow. Isaiah says as much a little later in his prophecy of judgement and restoration (Isaiah 10:17-22).

Notice the size of the remnant "so few a child could write them down"; and the place of return – first of all, "to the Mighty God." After the restoration from exile, Ezra can give thanks, "But now, for a brief moment, the Lord our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in his sanctuary..." (Ezra 9:8), though still as 'slaves' because of their sin (Ezra 9:9-15).

At the birth of Jesus, the remnant is made up of a few people like Simeon and Anna who praise God when they recognise the child as the one who will be "a light for

revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.” (Luke 2:25-38). Jesus specifically chose twelve Apostles (Mark 3:16-19) to take the good news, first to the lost sheep of the House of Israel (Matthew 10:5-6; 15:24).

But at his death, how many were left in that remnant? The short answer is ‘none’. At his arrest in Gethsemane, Matthew tells us “Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.” (Matthew 26:56) Even Peter disowns Jesus when challenged (Luke 22:54-62). In his death, it may be said that the ‘remnant of Israel’ has been reduced to one man. As Isaiah anticipates, “We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:6). When Jesus died, we were, says Paul, “God’s enemies.” (Romans 5:10). So Jesus was in his life, and supremely in his death, the remnant of Israel.

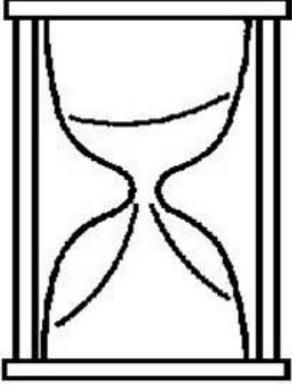
So, in reviewing the promise made to Abraham that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:3) and that his descendents would be like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore (Genesis 22:17), the apostle Paul could now understand these as fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ. “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ.” (Galatians 3:16). From the cross onwards, membership of the ‘remnant’ is now limited to those who identify with this ‘seed’ which is Christ. The apostle John writes,

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. (John 1:11-12).

At Pentecost, the ‘remnant’ of eleven restored disciples, together with the family of Jesus, is, through the preaching of the cross, supernaturally enlarged to three thousand (Acts 2:41), a number the Lord adds to daily (Acts 2:47) and soon grows to five thousand (Acts 4:4). In the Book of Revelation the remnant now includes “144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.” and “a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne.” (Revelation 7:4-10).

A helpful way to visualize this remnant, and its shape through history, from the promise made to Abraham to its fulfillment and realisation in heaven is to think of an hourglass.

This is how we should understand Paul's statement in Romans 11:5. The remnant

<b>Promise to Abraham</b>		<b>Genesis 12:3, 22:17</b>
<b>The Remnant of Judah</b>		<b>2 Kings 17</b>
<b>The Remnant of Exiles</b>		<b>Isaiah 6:13; 10:20 Ezra 9:9-15</b>
<b>Jesus the 'seed' Remnant</b>		<b>Isaiah 53; Galatians 3:16</b>
<b>The Apostolic Remnant</b>		<b>Acts 1:12-14</b>
<b>The Pentecost Church</b>		<b>John 1:12-13; Acts 2:41, 4:4</b>
<b>The Great Multitude</b>		<b>Revelation 7:4-10</b>

### **The Remnant Hourglass – from promise to fulfilment**

are “chosen by grace”. He goes on to spell out the consequences. “And if by grace, it cannot be based on works, if it were, grace would no longer be grace.” (Romans 11:6).

#### **So who are the real ‘Children of God’?**

While the majority of Jewish people of Jesus' generation rejected him, all who did receive him as their Lord and Saviour, irrespective of their race, were the legitimate heirs of the covenant promises. The apostle John explains this at the beginning of his gospel where he explains that those who receive Jesus are the ‘children of God’.

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (John 1:11-13)

In Acts 3, the apostle Peter explains to the many nationalities present in Jerusalem how the death of Jesus was no accident but the sovereign will of God, foretold by Moses and the prophets, and the sole means by which all people can be reconciled to God (Acts 3:24-26).

Significantly, Peter says that those who trust in Jesus are the 'heirs of the prophets and of the covenant.' He sees the promises made to Abraham fulfilled not through Israel but through the Church. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we are given a glorious insight into how Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus Christ have been brought into a new 'citizenship' (Ephesians 2:11-16).

The 'dividing wall of hostility' typified by the barrier that separated Jews and Gentiles in the Temple, has been broken down by Jesus Christ. It is ironic, if tragic that despite his willingness to comply with all the petty Temple regulations concerning ritual purity, that Paul would eventually be arrested for allegedly bringing Greeks into the Temple and defiling God's house. (Acts 21:28-29). Today, their successors in the government of Israel are seeking to erect a much higher and longer 'Separation Barrier' to preserve their racial identity and exclusive claim to the land of Palestine.

Paul goes on to show how, having broken down the wall of partition, Jesus has created a new living Temple made up of people of all races (Ephesians 2:19-22). Paul cites the prophet Hosea as evidence that this new inclusive understanding of God's people has always been God's intention and sovereign will (Romans 9:21-26 – See Hosea 1:10, 2:23).

The incorporation of both Jews and Gentiles into the one people of God is further illustrated by the way the writer of the Hebrews understands the continuity and unity between the saints of the Old Testament Church and the saints of the New Testament Church. In chapter 11, we find a catalogue of the Old Testament saints and how they suffered for their faith. The chapter concludes with this summary:

These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. (Hebrews 11:39-40)

Notice that the writer says "only *together with us* would they be made perfect." This is because the Old Testament saints, saved by faith as we are, could only hope for their salvation. They could not experience their inheritance in its fullest sense until the Lord Jesus had died in their place and the dead in Christ are raised (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Then, and only then will, "we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with

the Lord forever.” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Notice here, Paul uses the expression “*together with them.*” This is why Jesus could say, “Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.” (John 8:56). The Church of Jesus Christ therefore brings ‘together’ in a unity of faith and love his children under the Old and New Covenants, Jews and Gentiles who trust and believe in Jesus – the one looking forward, the other looking back to his first coming and upward for his second.

Finally, in the vision which God gave the Apostle John, we see the Church as she is becoming in all her radiant glory.

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. (Revelation 7:9)

This is why it is inappropriate to maintain racial distinctions within the Body of Christ, or claim the Jewish people have a separate relationship with God based on their ancestry or Mosaic law. The promises made to the Patriarchs and Israel are now being fulfilled in and through the Church. We must not therefore erect once again a wall of separation which Jesus has broken down by his death in our place (Ephesians 2:14).

It is very revealing to compare words used in the Old Testament to describe Israel and see how the New Testament applies them to the Church. Here are just a few examples:

<b>Israel: The Church in the Old Testament</b>	<b>The Body of Christ: The Church in the New Testament</b>
Righteous live by faithfulness (Hab. 2:4)	Righteous live by faith (Romans 1:17)
Holy people (Deu. 7:6; 33:3; Num. 16:3)	Holy people (Eph. 1:1; Rom. 1:7)
Chosen (Deu. 7:6; 14:2)	Chosen (Col. 3:12; Tit. 1:1)
Loved (Deu. 4:37)	Loved (Col. 3:12; 1 The. 1:4)
Called (Isa. 41:9; 2 Chr. 7:14)	Called (Rom. 1:6-7; 1 Cor. 1:2)
Assembly (Psa. 1:5; 89:5; 149:1)	Assembly (Acts 7:38; 20:28; Heb. 2:12)
‘Church’ = Assembly in Greek OT (Mic. 2:5)	Church (Matthew 16:18; 18:17; Eph 2:20)
Flock (Eze. 34:2, 7; Psa. 77:20)	Flock (Luke 12:32; Act. 20:28)
Holy nation (Exo. 19:6)	Holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9)
Treasured possession (Exo 19:5)	Special possession (1 Pet. 2:9)

Kingdom of priests (Exo. 19:6)	Royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9)
Children of God (Hos. 1:10)	Children of God (Joh. 1:12)
People of God (Hos. 2:23)	People of God ( 1 Pet. 2:10)
People of his inheritance (Deu. 4:20)	Glorious inheritance (Eph 1:18)
My dwelling place = tabernacle (Lev. 26:11 Eze. 37:27)	Dwelling among us = tabernacle (Joh. 1:14; 2 Cor. 6:16)
I will walk among you (Lev. 26:12; Jer. 32:38)	I will... walk among them (2 Cor. 6:16-17)
I will be his father = of David (2 Sam. 7:14)	I will be a father to you (2 Cor. 6:18)
God is a husband betrothed (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:14; 31:32; Hos. 2:19)	Christ is a husband betrothed (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph 5:25-30)
Twelve tribes (Gen. 49:28; Rev. 21:12)	Twelve Apostles (Mar. 3:14; Rev. 21:14)

As we have seen, the biblical imagery of the vineyard, the vine and branches as well as terms such as the 'Israel of God' and 'chosenness' point to the inclusive nature of God's new creation community. Through faith, and faith in Jesus Christ alone, we become children of God, members of the one and only, truly international Israel of God.

### Chapter Summary Points

1. God has only ever had one people
2. Citizenship of Israel was always open to all people who acknowledged God.
3. Old Testament analogies for Israel are applied in the New Testament to the Church
4. God's people has always been inclusive and spiritual not exclusive and physical
5. The promises made to Abraham are fulfilled in and through the Church.
6. Those who receive Jesus as their Lord and Saviour are:
  - Branches in the Vine
  - Brethren of Jesus
  - Chosen People
  - The Remnant
  - Children of God
  - Children of Abraham & Sarah
  - The Israel of God

### Passages to Review

John 15; Ephesians 2; Galatians 4; Romans 2; Romans 9-11.

## Questions for Further Study

1. Why are the followers of Jesus described as God's 'chosen people'?
2. Which of the Old Testament analogies for Israel applied to the Church in the New Testament do you find most meaningful and why?
3. What exactly was the 'wall of separation' that Jesus has broken down?
4. How did he remove it and why?
5. In what sense was the 'remnant of Israel' reduced to one man as Jesus died on the cross?
6. How does the idea of a remnant evolve and develop in scripture?
7. In the light of this how should we regard Jewish people today?