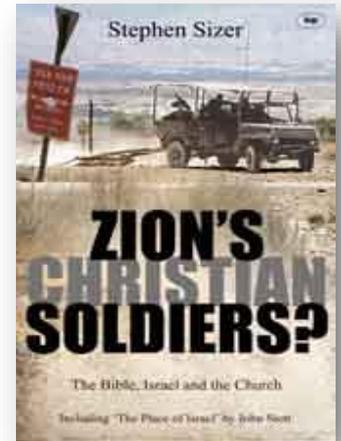


What is the Relationship between Israel and the Church? Seven Biblical Answers



1. Does God bless those who bless Israel and curse those who curse Israel?

This popular assumption is based on a misreading of Genesis 12:3. First, note that the promise was made to Abram (that is, Abraham) and no one else. Second, there is nothing in the text to indicate God intended the promise to apply to Abraham's physical descendants unconditionally, or in perpetuity. Third, in the New Testament we are told explicitly that the promises were fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in those who acknowledge Him as their Lord and Saviour. God's blessings come by grace through faith, not by works or race (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Promise	Fulfilment
"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 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 12:2-3).	"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... There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor 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 3:16, 28-29)
"I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore... and through your seed all nations on earth will be blessed..." (Genesis 22:17-18)	

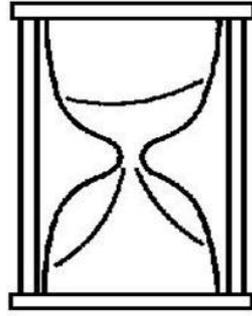
2. Are the Jewish people God's "chosen people"?

Both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures insist membership of God's people has always been open to all races on the basis of grace not race. In Isaiah 56, we see the Lord anticipate and repudiate the rise of an exclusive Israeli nationalism. In the New Testament the term "chosen" is used exclusively of the followers of Jesus, irrespective of race (See also Ephesians 2:14-16 and Colossians 3:11-12).

Old Testament	New Testament
"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)	"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)
"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)	"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)
"Let no foreigners who have bound themselves to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely exclude me from his people." ... foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants ... who hold fast to my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain... for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."" (Isaiah 56:3-7)	"Here there is no Gentile 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)

When the Lord Jesus died on the cross he was the sole remnant of Israel. "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6). All the promises made to Abraham were fulfilled in and through Jesus and only among those who acknowledge him. The remnant 'hour glass' shows how the promises were fulfilled only through Jesus.

Promise to Abraham
The Remnant of Judah
The Remnant of Exiles
Jesus the 'seed' Remnant
The Apostolic Remnant
The Pentecost Church
The Great Multitude



Genesis 12:3, 22:17
2 Kings 17
Isaiah 6:13; 10:20 Ezra 9:9-15
Isaiah 53; Galatians 3:16
Acts 1:12-14
John 1:12-13; Acts 2:41, 4:4
Revelation 7:4-10

The Remnant Hourglass – from promise to fulfilment

3. Was the “Promised Land” given by God exclusively to the Jewish people as their inheritance?

Contrary to popular assumption, the Scriptures repeatedly insist that the land belongs to God and that residence was always conditional. For example, God said to his people, “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers.” (Leviticus 25:23). In Ezekiel, it seems the Lord anticipated the reasoning of those who arrogantly claimed unconditional right to the land because of the covenant originally made with Abraham.

“Son of man, the people living in those ruins in the land of Israel are saying, ‘Abraham was only one man, yet he possessed the land. But we are many; surely the land has been given to us as our possession.’ Therefore say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Since you eat meat with the blood still in it and look to your idols and shed blood, should you then possess the land? You rely on your sword, you do detestable things... Should you then possess the land?’ ... I will make the land a desolate waste, and her proud strength will come to an end.’ (Ezekiel 33:24-26, 28-29)

Residence was open to all God’s people on the basis of faith not race. Indeed, the writer to Hebrews explains that the land was never their ultimate desire or inheritance, but a temporary residence until the coming of Jesus Christ. Their eternal inheritance, and ours, is heavenly not earthly.

Old Testament Command	New Testament Explanation
“You are to distribute this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the foreigners residing 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.” (Ezekiel 47:21-23)	“By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God... These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” (Hebrews 11:9-10; 39-40)

4. Is Jerusalem the exclusive, undivided and eternal capital of the Jewish people?

The assertion that God intended Jerusalem to be the exclusive and undivided eternal capital of the Jewish people has no basis whatsoever in Scripture. God insists in Psalm 87 that Jerusalem must be a shared and inclusive city. Nations specifically mentioned include what is today, Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon. Even the hated Philistines are mentioned as “...born in Zion” on the basis of faith not race. Likewise, the vision of Isaiah 2 associates Jerusalem with the end of war, with peace and reconciliation among the nations.

“In the last days the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” (Isaiah 2:2-3)

But what of Luke 21:24, “Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled”? The assertion that this prophecy came true in 1967 is problematic since Revelation 11:2 says the Gentile ‘trampling’ of Jerusalem would last only ‘42 months’. The context of Luke 21 shows Jesus was referring to the events of 70AD and God’s sovereign use of foreign tyrants to fulfil his purposes. The focus of the New Testament instead moves away from the earthly Jerusalem toward the new, heavenly Jerusalem as the home of all who trust in Jesus (Hebrews 12:22-23; Revelation 21:2; 22-27).

5. Must the Jewish Temple be rebuilt before Jesus can return?

Prophecy watchers like to quote Daniel 9 and Matthew 24 to suggest a future Temple must be built and desecrated by the anti-Christ, before Jesus can return to Jerusalem to set up his millennial kingdom.

But there is absolutely nothing in either text, or anywhere else in Scripture, to suggest that a future Temple is predicted, let alone mandated. Just the reverse – the Temple was declared redundant the moment Jesus died on the cross, and its giant curtain was torn in two from top to bottom (Hebrews 1:3; 10:1-3, 11). The Temple in Jerusalem was a type and foreshadowing of the true and lasting Temple which is the Lord Jesus himself and his church.

John 2:19-21 “Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” But the temple he had spoken of was his body.”	Ephesians 2:19-21 “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.”
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Indeed, the true Temple is still under construction. Quoting Old Testament temple imagery, the Apostle Peter writes, “you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:5-7)

6. Will believers soon be ‘raptured’ to heaven before the ‘End-Time’ Battle of Armageddon?

The ‘rapture’ is a popular idea that Jesus will return twice: first of all secretly, to rescue true believers out of the world, then later visibly with his saints to judge the world. However, again, this assumption has no basis in Scripture. The Bible is emphatic: Jesus will return personally, suddenly, publicly, visibly and gloriously.

Matthew 24:30-31 “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the peoples of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”	1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, 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.”
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The idea of a secret rapture in which believers will suddenly disappear and escape the Tribulation while unbelievers are left behind to suffer is the opposite of what Jesus taught in Matthew 24:40-41 and Luke 17:34-35. Jesus makes it very clear in the preceding verses who will be ‘taken’ and who will be ‘left behind’.

“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.” (Matthew 24:37-39)

In the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, Jesus similarly insists unbelievers will be taken first:

“Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.” (Matthew 13:30).

The vivid apocalyptic language of Daniel, Matthew and Revelation concerning the End Times must be interpreted carefully in the light of the clear vision of Paradise restored and the nations reconciled in Christ.

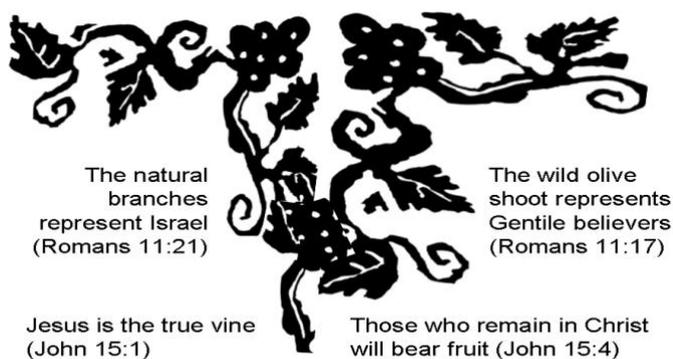
“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” (Revelation 22:1-2)

Our mandate is to be peacemakers not widow makers (Matthew 5:3-10). We are called to be ‘God’s co-workers’. We are his Ambassadors entrusted with a ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2).

7. Does God have a separate plan for the Jewish people apart from the Church?

The question that must be asked is this: “Does God have one people or two?” In the imagery of the vine and the branches (John 15) and the wild and natural branches of the olive tree (Romans 11), we see that God has only ever had one inclusive people, identified on the basis of faith not race.

If Gentiles “have been grafted in” (Romans 11:17), it begs the question “into what or whom have they been grafted?” In the letter to the Philippians, Paul explicitly identifies the Church as the true ‘circumcision’ (Philippians 3:3). This is entirely consistent with the Old Testament, where, citizenship of Israel was open to all ‘those who acknowledge me’ (Psalm 87:4).



Here is the clue to understanding Romans 9-11. Of course God has not rejected the Jewish people. His covenant purpose for them, as with every other race, has always been ‘that they may be saved’ (Romans 10:1), to create one people for himself, made of both Jews and Gentiles (Romans 11:26). God’s covenant purposes are fulfilled only in and through Jesus Christ. This is most fully explained in Ephesians 2.

“Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” ... remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by 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... 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.” (Ephesians 2: 11-16)

A chapter later, the oneness of God’s people is described as the ‘mystery of Christ’

“...the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 3:4-6)

The following passages show that there is a harmony between God’s purposes for his Old Testament saints and for his New Testament saints – a clear continuity between Israel and the Church.

Israel: The Church in the Old Testament	The Body of Christ: The Church in the New Testament
Righteous live by faithfulness (Habakkuk 2:4)	Righteous live by faith (Romans 1:17)
Holy people (Deuteronomy 7:6; 33:3; Numbers 16:3)	Holy people (Ephesians 1:1; Romans 1:7)
Chosen (Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2)	Chosen (Colossians 3:12; Titus 1:1)
Called (Isaiah 41:9; 2 Chronicles 7:14)	Called (Romans 1:6-7; 1 Corinthians 1:2)
‘Church’ = Assembly in Greek (Micah 2:5)	Church (Matthew 16:18; 18:17; Ephesians 2:20)
Flock (Ezekiel 34:2, 7; Psalm 77:20)	Flock (Luke 12:32; Acts 20:28)
Holy nation (Exodus 19:6)	Holy nation (1 Peter 2:9)
Treasured possession & kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:9)	Special possession & royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9)
Children of God and People of God (Hosea 1:10; 2:23)	Children of God (John 1:12); People of God (1 Peter 2:10)
People of his inheritance (Deuteronomy 4:20)	Glorious inheritance (Ephesians 1:18)
My dwelling place = tabernacle (Lev. 26:11; Ezek. 37:2)	Dwelling among us = tabernacle (John 1:14; 2 Cor. 6:16)
God is a husband betrothed (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:14; Hos. 2:19)	Christ is a husband betrothed (2 Cor. 11:2; Ephesians 5:25)
Twelve tribes (Genesis 49:28; Revelation 21:12)	Twelve Apostles (Mark 3:14; Revelation 21:14)

The fundamental questions are: 1. Does the New Testament teach that the coming of Jesus Christ was the fulfilment or the postponement of God’s promises to Abraham? 2. Does God have one people or two?

This study is based on Stephen Sizer’s book, [Zion’s Christian Soldiers: The Bible Israel and the Church](#) (IVP) and may be [downloaded](#). A more comprehensive [Bible study guide](#) addressing each of the seven points is available. Additional resources and Bible Studies can be found at www.stephensizer.com