

Are Israel and the Church distinct in scripture?



How does the Church relate to Israel in scripture? First we need to understand what is meant by Israel. Israel is the name given to Jacob by God at Peniel, when he (Jacob) struggled with God (Genesis 32:28). Jacob and his descendent from that point forward are known as Israel. The sons of Jacob, become the tribes of Israel and thus a nation is born, the nation of Israel (Genesis 49:28, Exodus 3:11). The children of Israel became God's people, God's kingdom a holy nation.

6 'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." Exodus 19:6

According to the Bible, specifically the book of Exodus, God has singled out the descendents of Jacob, the nation of Israel for His very special work among the nations. The promises to the descendents of Jacob (Israel) do not end with these words but continue from Exodus into the New Testament. Let's examine just a few of these promises to Israel.

Promises made to Israel

They would inherit the land of Israel

The land of Israel, current day Israel also known as Palestine plays significant role in the Bible. God promises Abraham the land of Mt. Moriah (Jerusalem) (Genesis 12:7). The Bible continues this promise of the land to Isaac and then to Jacob (Genesis 50:24, Exodus 6:8, 33:21). Through the prophet Ezekiel, who lived almost 900-years after the book of Exodus was written; God promises to bring back the "*Children of Israel*" to their "physical" land, making them one nation never to be divided again.

21 "Then say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land;

22 "and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again. Ezekiel 37:21-22

Israel will receive a New Covenant

The promises to Israel do not end with the land, but God also promised a *New Covenant*, a greater covenant with Israel, surpassing the *Mosaic Covenant*. This "New" Covenant is made specifically with the descendents of Jacob, the nation of Israel. Jeremiah wrote these words 600-years before the birth of Jesus, these promises were made to Israel. Was God mistaken by when He promised the house of Israel a New Covenant? Did he not know Israel would reject they Messiah and crucify Him? Of course God knew, Isaiah 53 tell us the details even before Jeremiah, the Messiah would be rejected by Israel and pay for the sins of all humanity. In his death, God would establish the New Covenant.

31 "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a (1) **new covenant** with (2) **the house of Israel and with the house of Judah** 32 (3) **not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers** in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord.

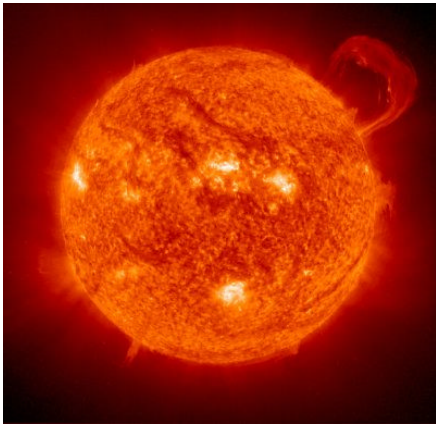
33 "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put (4) **My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts**; and (4) **I will be their God, and they shall be My people.**

34 "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they (6) **all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest** of them, says the Lord. For (7) **I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.**" **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

Let's examine the provisions of these promises. Notice who these promises are made too; the *House of Israel* and the *House of Judah*. The nation of Israel, the twelve tribes, were divided into two parts a southern kingdom Judah and a northern kingdom Israel. The promises of the New Covenant are made to the physical descendents of Jacob.

Provisions of the New Covenant Made with Israel

1. **Future:** A New Covenant
2. **Parties of the Covenant:** Made with the House of Israel and House of Judah:
3. **Priority:** Supersedes the Mosaic Covenant
4. **Location:** My Law is placed in their minds and hearts
5. **Relationship:** I will be their God; they shall be "My people"
6. **Understanding:** Knowledge of the Lord:
7. **Sins:** Forgiveness of sins:



Clearly by reading scripture this New Covenant is promised to Israel. How serious is God about His promises? Will He fulfill the words of His promises? According to the words in Jeremiah, the promises to the nation of Israel are surer than the moon stars and sun. The physical descendents of Israel, the "seed of Israel" will only cease to be a nation if ordinances or laws of the universe can be canceled.

35 Thus says the Lord, Who gives the sun for a light by day, The ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, And its waves roar (The Lord of hosts is His name):

36 "If those ordinances depart From before Me, says the Lord, Then the seed of Israel shall also cease From being a nation before Me forever."

37 Thus says the Lord: "If heaven above can be measured, And the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel For all that they have done, says the Lord. **Jeremiah 31:35-37**

Can God break His promises to Israel?

According to *Covenant Theology*, God does not have to keep His Word to Israel. They say, since Israel rejected Jesus, God fulfills the promises to Israel through the Church. How can God fulfill His promises to the physical descendents of Israel through the Church? He can't! To accept Covenant Theology is to say God will not keep His promises. Through Jeremiah God declares only if you can break His Law with the Sun, moon and stars will Israel cease to be a nation.

If God can break His promises to Israel?

Why should anybody trust the Word of God, if they believe God can break His promises. What does God WORD mean if He cannot keep it? Those who reject God's word, do it to their own injury. God's promises becoming meaningless because God's word becomes subject to their opinions, rather than God's intention.

God will keep His word with Israel, this is the point Paul makes in Romans. Paul makes a clear distinction between the Church and Israel. Therefore God will still fulfill His words to Physical Israel, regardless of what the World thinks.

The Church and Israel

In the book of Romans Paul addresses the distinction between these two groups and In *Colossians* Paul makes clear His ministry is to the gentile believers as opposed to Israel. Throughout scripture there is a clear distinction made between the "gentile believers" and Israel. In Romans chapters 9 through 11, Paul makes this distinction very clear.

Paul uses the metaphor of an Olive Tree, and describes how the Gentiles have received the "New Covenant" promised to Israel by being grafted into Israel's promise. The Gentiles do not "Replace" Israel as *Covenant Theology* argues, but are grafted into Israel's promises until the "Fullness of the Gentiles" (Romans 11:25) is achieved.

The error of Covenant theology is based on the desire of Christians who want to supersede Israel regardless of the Word of God. They want to see themselves as Israel and cannot bear the idea that God will still fulfill His Words to the physical descendents of Jacob.

Paul rejects Covenant/Reformed theology on their premise they are the "New Israel"

1. Paul makes a distinction between the two peoples of God...The Gentiles and Israel

From the start Paul refers to himself as part of the "Remnant" of God's people "His people" Israelites. Paul then relates the current status to the times of Elijah when Israel fell away, yet God preserved the physical descendents. If the Gentiles are the New Israel, Paul would not be making his point about a "Remnant". There should be no remnant if the Church replaces Israel. Therefore Israel and the Church are distinct because Paul says there is an Israelite "Remnant" according to the election of Grace.

Romans 11

1 I say then, has God cast away His people? (**Israel**) Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

2 God has not cast away His people (**Israel**) whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying,

3 "Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life?"

4 But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

5 Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. **Romans 11:1-5**

2. The saved: Israel and the Gentiles

Paul now draws a distinction between Israel in the Gentile Church in regards to salvation. Paul says Israel has been blinded, except for an "Elect", the "Remnant". They have attained salvation with the Gentiles, with the rest of Israel blinded. Paul makes sure the Gentile reader and the Jewish remnant understand that Israel's fall is temporary. In verse 11, he asks, "*Have they stumbled that they should fall?*" Paul replies to his question "*Certainly not!*".

7 What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

8 Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day."

9 And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them.

10 Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always."

11 I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. **Romans 11:7-11**

In verse 11, he specifically refers to the "Gentiles". Paul then makes the point; "Salvation" has come to the Gentiles to "Provoke" Israel to jealousy. Again, If Israel is the Gentiles, then this chapter would not make any sense. Paul makes a clear distinction between these two groups, the Gentiles and Israel.

3. Israel's coming restoration

Paul continues to draw the distinction between Israel and the Gentiles. Here Paul explains that Israel will one day be restored and their restoration coincides with the resurrection. Paul relates the blessing of the Gentiles corresponds with Israel. First he tells us their fall is "riches for the world", what does their fullness mean? Notice Paul makes the distinction, he is talking about two groups of people, the Gentiles and Israel. How anybody who reads scripture can see the church replacing Israel when they read Romans 11 is beyond understanding.

In verse 15, Paul answers his question in verse 12, he tells us Israel's acceptance means "Life from the dead" or resurrection.

- 12 Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!
13 For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,
14 if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.
15 For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?
16 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. **Romans 11:12-16**

Daniel links the resurrection with the restoration of Israel in the same way Paul does in Romans 11:15. Daniel writes those who are delivered are those who are written in *the book*, the book of life, Daniel's people is the of Israel.

- 1 "At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered. Every one who is found written in the book.
2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake. Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:1-2



4. The Two Olive trees: Israel and the Gentiles

Again Paul helps the Romans understand the distinction between Israel and the Gentile Church by using the imagery of two Olive trees, *one wild, and one cultivated*. Israel is the cultivated "Olive Tree" of God, while the Gentiles are the "Wild" tree. Paul makes clear we are looking at two different olive trees. A portion of Israel, "Branches" were broken off and the branches of the "Wild Olive Tree" were grafted in their place. He then goes on to argue they will again be restored once they come to faith.

- 17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,
18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.
19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in."
20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you

stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.

21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

22 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

23 And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

24 For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

Romans 11:17-24

5. Israel's salvation

Paul concludes Israel will one day be saved. Now if Israel and the church are the same, why would Paul make a clear distinction between these two separate groups? Paul makes a reference to the "*Fullness of the Gentiles*" as opposed to the "*blindness in part...to Israel*". Israel's stumble brought salvation to the

world, to the gentiles. Paul's describes himself as an apostle to the Gentiles. In Colossians Paul describes his ministry as a "Dispensation" (Colossians 1;25) to the Gentiles. When Israel is restored, the *fullness of the Gentiles* has taken place. This is the whole point of saying "Until", this is a break in the program as it currently stands.

25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

Romans 11:25

6. All Israel is saved

In verse 26, Paul makes a statement about "All Israel" being saved, what does this mean? Clearly through the whole chapter Paul draws the clear separation between Israel and the Gentiles. So he is not referring to the Gentiles, when he says "All Israel", Paul is referring to Israel's national salvation in the end of days, when Israel cries out to the Messiah.

26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;

27 For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."

28 Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.

29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. **Romans 11:26-29**

Jesus before he was crucified, made the following statement in Matthew 23:39, "you shall see me no more till you say, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!". Jesus addressed this statement to a Jerusalem, how can a city be addressed by such a statement. Is the city a person, where they can cry out and receive Jesus as Messiah?

37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

38 "See! Your house is left to you desolate;

39 "for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' "
Matthew 23:37-39

Jesus was rejected by the leadership of the city and when he stood before Pontus Pilate with the priesthood leading the charge. At the *Second Coming*, Jerusalem will need to cry out for Christ as the nations gather against the nation. The nation needs to come to national repentance, followed by national salvation, in the last days. Zechariah tells us God will pour out His Spirit on Jerusalem and they will come to salvation, when they look upon "Me" whom they pierced.

9 "It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

10 "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. **Zechariah 12:9-10**

In this scene all the nations, literally "the Gentiles" come against Jerusalem. God then pours out His Spirit on the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Jesus refers to these same inhabitants in Matthew 23:37-38. Therefore, the nation repents and comes to salvation, with their admission Jesus is the one who "*Comes in the name of the Lord*", Jesus returns with the saints of Heaven as the nations gather around Jerusalem. (Zechariah 14:5).

7. Israel and the Church the current status

Paul's final instruction to the Gentile Church is to understand their standing before God as contrasted to Israel. Even here Paul makes it very clear of the two dispensations, the Gentiles currently are "Obedient" and Israel is "Disobedient". If Israel and the Gentiles were the same this would make no sense.

30 For as you (**Gentiles**) were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience (**Israel**),

31 even so these (**Israel**) also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you (**Gentiles**) they (**Israel**) also may obtain mercy.

32 For God has committed them (**Israel**) all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.
33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!
34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?"
35 "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?"
36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. **Romans 11:25-36**

Therefore the only way we can understand scripture, both the Old and New Testaments is to understand them from the context of Israel and the Church. The Gentile Church is not Israel and Israel is not the Gentile Church. Each plays a role in God's plan of redemption, but God's Word can only be understood from its literal meaning.

Conclusion

Scripture is very clear, Israel and the Gentile Church are two distinct groups, with two different programs. The Gentile Church is currently the recipient of Israel's disobedience; the Church does not replace Israel but partakes with them of the *New Covenant*. When Israel comes to salvation they will be restored to the position of blessing, they had before they stumbled.

The *Gentile Church* along with *Israel* will be the people of God for the rest of eternity. For the time being there is a distinction between these two groups as the plan of redemption is manifested in the world.