

THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL AND THE SO-CALLED TEN LOST TRIBES

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Includes an Appendix of New Testament scripture texts

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Introduction

There are a number of passages in the prophets that speak of a restoration for all the tribes of Israel from the captivities. These texts are often used by some Christians as 'proof' texts that the modern State of Israel is fulfilling these prophecies (a view I once held for many years), but I believe this is incorrect. These restoration passages spoke of an era of repentance when a remnant from all the tribes of Israel would return to the land under the banner of Judah and Jerusalem, **under a renewed Old Covenant, while they waited for a New Covenant to be established through the coming Messiah.**

If one does some basic research into Jewish history, along with a simple, straightforward reading of the New Testament without 'dispensational' presuppositions, it becomes evident that these things have already been fulfilled in the ancient history of Israel, and the coming of Messiah Jesus and His kingdom. The true Israel of God are now those who become disciples of Christ - whether Jew or Gentile - and together they form the true Christian Church or Assembly (Ecclesia) of God. Of course, the New Testament makes it clear that the ultimate Day of the Lord, and the restoration of the heavens and the earth in a New Creation, awaits its fullest manifestation in the Second Coming of Christ at the end of this age. So there *is* a greater manifestation of the kingdom of God yet to come in the future, but it will not take the form of a Jewish kingdom, as many would have us believe.

Having said that, it is very evident from Romans 11 that God has not completely rejected Israel. Paul clearly teaches that there will always be a remnant of Israel who are the true Israel of God, and that towards the end of this age, this remnant will greatly increase, being described as the 'fullness of Israel.' This will coincide with 'the fullness of the Gentiles' entering in - hence 'all Israel (the true Israel) shall be saved.' This is my understanding of Paul's teaching, which I hope to show very clearly in this article. And there are many renowned biblical scholars, commentators and teachers who are very much in line with this understanding, particularly amongst the Reformed tradition. [1]

In New Testament terms, the Israel of God is synonymous with the Church of the Living God, the Bride/Body of Christ, composed of Jew and Gentile together. So does this have anything to do with the popular literal interpretation of the OT prophecies concerning the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem in Palestine; or the rebuilding of the temple; or a future 'millennial' age that will be characterised by a return to Jewish Old Testament ritual? I believe that the clearest evidence in the New Testament answers 'No' to this question.

Before we continue, I firstly want to make it abundantly clear that I am against all forms of anti-semitism, or any kind of unjust treatment or persecution against anyone for reasons of race or nationality or religion. I deplore the unjust treatment of Jews which has often been perpetrated by the religion of Christendom in the name of God and of Christ. I believe true followers of Jesus the Messiah should show love to all mankind and proclaim the Gospel to all, particularly the Jewish people.

I also believe that the Hebrew roots of the Christian Faith should be acknowledged and taught correctly so as to help us gain an accurate understanding of the whole

Bible, especially the teachings of Jesus, who initially came as a Jewish Rabbi proclaiming His message to Jews.

Nevertheless, I do not, as a rule, support the modern State of Israel based on the belief that they have a divine right to the land based on the alleged fulfillment of specific prophecies, as many Christian Zionists do today. I also think it is absolutely ridiculous to apply the text of Genesis 12:3 concerning Abraham's descendants and make it apply to modern Israel, as many Bible teachers commonly do today, saying that if you bless Israel you're OK, and if you don't you're cursed!

Only recently I've heard some well-known 'pastors' on Christian TV linking tragic events in America, such as Hurricane Katrina, to decisions that were made by President Bush to cause Israel to give up some Palestinian land! They claim that events such as these are God's judgment upon that nation for not fully supporting Israel and their possession of the whole land of Palestine. I firmly believe that these self-proclaimed 'prophets' are sending out the totally wrong message. In fact, if events such as these *are* specific judgments of God against America, then there are numerous national 'sins' and injustices that could have caused it - which, ironically, would surely include the lack of public Christian support for the Palestinian Church, choosing to favour Israel instead.

Anyhow, returning to our topic, the New Testament makes it very clear that, since the first coming of Christ, in God's eyes, Abraham's descendants today are not fleshly Jews, but they are composed of the true followers of Christ, i.e. the Christian Church, whether Jew or Gentile! This is not 'Replacement Theology' as many adamantly claim, but Expansion Theology (as I've heard it called by some, accurately so, in my opinion). The true Israel of God, the family of faith, has always been, first and foremost, spiritual - and now it includes numerous Gentiles, as well as Jews. See Romans 2:28-29; 3:27-31; 9:6-8; Ephesians 2:11-22; Galatians 3:26-4:7; 21-31.

I no longer hold to the Premillennial Dispensational view of a coming Millennial kingdom which shall in a sense revert back to Old Testament Jewish aspirations of the Messianic kingdom on earth. Having said that, I still believe that, according to Romans 11, Israel still has a place in the plan of God, but only so far as believing that God is saving a large remnant of Jews through faith in Jesus as the Messiah before the Second Coming of Christ. There will be a great ingathering of Gentiles *and* Jews just before the great Harvest at the end of the age (and I believe that this ingathering has already begun).

The present increasing focus on Israel and the archeology of the land is also helping the Church to regain its Hebrew roots in many respects - but this does not mean that we should all return to the Judaism of the past. God has already moved things on and has brought all things to fulfillment in Jesus the Messiah. He does not intend to go backwards in any way whatsoever!

I also have difficulty with those who believe that Christians should help Jews from other countries to return to the land of Israel to fulfill Biblical prophecy. If the focus is not on Jesus as the Messiah and the New Covenant He established (i.e. the Gospel) then helping someone physically relocate to Israel means nothing, biblically speaking - unless one is helping a refugee to better themselves out of love. But this principle should apply to all peoples, and not just Jews.

Citizenship in the 'New Jerusalem' is what really counts, not in the old one here on earth. All this focus on 'Israel' is beginning to go to extremes, I think, so that many Christian ministries are now declaring that you're spiritually blind if you don't support ethnic Israel and see their special place in God's future purposes! This is causing great division in the Body of Christ. This often results in the false accusations of "Anti-Semitism" being made against anyone who dares speak out against Israel! This is not unlike the 'political correctness' of the modern age that just goes to ridiculous extremes at times - employing words and phrases that ultimately avoids the simple truth just to prevent any kind of offence! When truth is spoken, even in love, it is bound to cause offence to someone - especially those who are in the wrong. What is needed is a balanced approach when seeking to understand the correct interpretation of the New Testament.

Before we consider some of the key prophetic texts on the restoration of Israel, here is a brief biblical survey on the scattering and gathering of the 12 tribes of Israel, beginning with the Assyrian Captivity. This simple survey on the history of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah will reveal that the Bible knows nothing about the so-called Ten Lost Tribes being restored as a political unit. The Bible makes it very clear who Israel really was, and is.

The Scattered Israelites

The majority of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were deported by the Assyrians in 721 BC. They were resettled in the eastern portion of the Assyrian Empire in Halah, in Gozan by the Habor River, and in the cities of the Medes (2 Kings 18:10-11). This not only involved those Israelites dwelling in Samaria and its vicinity, but it also included the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh who dwelt on the east side of the Jordan (1 Chronicles 5:26).

Also, some of the Simeonites escaped the deportation because they had resettled in the land of Edom (Seir) in the south and they were also closely allied to Judah (1 Chronicles 4:38-43).

It must be noted that the division of Israel and Judah was primarily **religious** and **territorial** rather than merely tribal. For instance, Rehoboam, king of Judah, still ruled over some of the Israelites who dwelt in Judah (2 Chronicles 10:17). Also, during the reign of Asa, king of Judah, many Israelites from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon joined with Judah and Benjamin in Asa's religious reforms, and they settled in Judah (2 Chronicles 15:9). There was still a remnant of Israel living in the land after the captivity and some of these also joined Hezekiah's reforms in Jerusalem - Jerusalem being the capital of all Israel, the city where God had placed His Name (2 Chronicles 30:6-14; 31:4-8).

The same thing occurred during the religious revival under king Josiah. In fact, Josiah's reforms encompassed the territory of Israel as far as Naphtali in the north (2 Chronicles 34:6-7, 9, 21, 33). Nevertheless, as a political kingdom, Israel was no more - its royal dynasty having been exiled without any promise of restoration.

The majority of the Southern Kingdom of Judah were deported to Babylon by the Babylonians, beginning in about 605 BC. This also included some of the Israelites who had joined with Judah and Benjamin (2 Kings 24). After 70 years, they began to

return to Jerusalem and Judah, primarily from Babylon. The initial proclamation to return, given by Cyrus of Persia, was addressed to all the Israelite exiles in his kingdom, not only Judah (Ezra 1:1-5). These Israelites became known as Jews or Judahites from this time onwards because the initial return was predominantly composed of those from Judah, Benjamin and Levi resettling in Jerusalem and Judah.

Yet throughout the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which gives details of the first two major returns of the exiles, these Jews are also called Israelites because they also included some of those from Ephraim, Manasseh, Simeon, Naphtali, as well as a remnant from *all* the tribes of Israel (1 Chronicles 9:1-3; Ezra 2:70; 6:16-17, 21; 7:13, 18; Nehemiah 8:1, 17; 11:3-4). This had been prophesied by Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Zechariah.

The promised restoration of all Israel from all the countries where they had been scattered occurred in a number of stages over a few centuries. And it was promised that Judah's royal dynasty through the house of David would also be restored, which was (and is) ultimately fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah.

In the New Testament, Anna the prophetess, who saw Jesus as a baby, was from the tribe of Asher, yet she was also a part of the Jewish remnant in the land (Luke 2:36-38).

The majority of the exiles of Israel *and* Judah, though, chose to remain in their new homelands, particularly in Babylon, Persia and Media in the East, and Egypt in the south. They also migrated into the western areas of the later Roman Empire, particularly in Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

The Apostles Peter and James addressed their first century letters to Jewish Christians in the dispersion. James addresses **'the twelve tribes in the dispersion'** (James 1:1), while Peter writes to those in Asia Minor (1 Peter 1:1). He also mentions the Jewish Christian ecclesia in Babylon, though it is possible that this was a cryptic description for Jerusalem itself (1 Peter 5:13). Peter also mentions that Paul had previously written to these Jewish believers in Asia Minor (2 Peter 3:1, 15-16). This was most probably his letter to the Galatians.

Some of the scattered Israelites, both of Israel and Judah, have lost their identity, becoming mingled with the other nations. Those who have kept, or are rediscovering, their Hebrew identity are known as Jews as well as Israelites. The tribe of Judah was originally given the rulership, while the tribe of Joseph, through Ephraim and Manasseh, was given the birthright (1 Chronicles 5:1-2; Genesis 49:8-12).

Be that as it may, the Bible only recognises those who are in active covenant relationship to God as being Jews or Israelites. All others who are 'lost' are cut off from the covenant. For example, in Acts 26:5-8, Paul stated clearly that the twelve tribes of Israel were earnestly serving God via the religion of Judaism in his own generation, in the first century, waiting for the promise to be fulfilled.

"And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see

fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me."

(Acts 26: 6-7 NIV)

He was talking about Israel according to the flesh or natural Israel, that is, all twelve tribes under the headship of Judah serving under the Old Covenant in the 1st century AD. Yet he also revealed that only those who are spiritually circumcised in accord with the New Covenant are now in covenant relationship with God through Christ Jesus.

"For not that which is apparent is the Jew, nor yet that which is apparent in flesh is circumcision; but that which is hidden is the Jew, and circumcision is of the heart, in spirit, not in letter, whose applause is not of men, but of God."

(Romans 2:28-29 CV)

Peter also made it very clear when addressing the Jews in the temple area in Acts 3:17-26 that Jesus was the Prophet like Moses, predicted in Deuteronomy 18, and that He was also the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, as well as fulfilling all the messianic predictions of the prophets concerning the kingdom of God. In quoting from Deuteronomy 18, Peter was also declaring that all those who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah and Prophet would be cut off from among God's people, that is, they would no longer be a part of His covenant people, Israel.

But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer... For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. **Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.'**

"Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways." (NIV)

A remnant of the tribes of Israel continues to exist in the Jewish nation so as to fulfill all prophecy. Messiah Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, ultimately fulfills the role of Ruler and King, as well as fulfilling the blessings of the Birthright for the whole spiritual Israel of God.

The prophets reveal that there is to be a restoration of all the tribes of Israel as a saved, believing remnant leading to, and including, the era of the Messiah (Ezekiel 37; 48; Jeremiah 31; 33; Romans 11:25-32). This has been literally fulfilled in the past through the physical restoration of all Israel after the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, as well as through the spiritual restoration of the Israel of God through the New Covenant in Messiah Jesus. Yet we are also witnessing another restoration (physically and spiritually) of all Israel in our own day, just before Christ returns. This is of great significance, nevertheless, this physical restoration is not fulfilling the words of the prophets, only, it could be said, in type and shadow - yet the *spiritual* restoration of Israel is the true fulfillment of certain prophecies.

Now let us briefly consider some of the more well known restoration texts.

Ezekiel 37

Ezekiel 37 contains one of the clearest prophecies that predicts the restoration of a faithful remnant of all the tribes of Israel *before* the coming of the Messiah. This Restoration is also mentioned in the subsequent 'Gog and Magog' prophecy of Ezekiel 38-39, where it says of Israel,

"...whose people were gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate. They had been brought out from the nations, and now all of them live in safety."

(Ezekiel 38:8 NIV)

Modern Dispensational Premillennialists contend that these things have not yet been fulfilled or that they are in the process of being fulfilled in the modern nation of Israel. They put forward the argument that the restoration of Israel in the past was predominantly from Babylon and Mesopotamia (which it was to begin with), and they allege that this was not a restoration of *all* the tribes from all nations. This is an inaccurate conclusion. A simple reading of the New Testament will show that the Jewish nation in Palestine in the time of Jesus was representative of all the tribes of Israel. We shall take a look at some of these texts shortly.

A remnant of all the tribes *had* returned to the land over many generations, dwelling under the banner of Judah and Jerusalem, as the prophecy foretold. And they *had* come from many nations of the world where they had been scattered during the previous captivities. The land had also been left desolate for a long time - i.e. the 70 years of the Babylonian captivity (about two generations), being a long time for the land to be left virtually empty and in ruins.

Initially, Jesus sent His Twelve Apostles to the lost sheep of the house of Israel who were in the land (Matthew 10:5-6), and years later Paul stated that the 12 tribes of Israel were actively involved in serving God in the temple (Acts 26:7). Just these two instances alone reveals the truth that a remnant of all the tribes of Israel were restored to the land and were represented within the Jewish nation, just as Ezekiel and others predicted. I do not believe that there is such a thing as the ten lost tribes of Israel, biblically speaking (even though I once held this belief for a while, many years ago). I believe the biblical and historical evidence reveals that all of these prophecies concerning ancient Israel have been fulfilled, either literally or spiritually or both.

Firstly, let us take a brief look at Ezekiel 37. The prophet sees a vision of a valley of dry bones. At the command of God, these bones come together to form a human multitude, and then spirit or breath is given to them so that they come to life. Verses 11-14 gives us the simple interpretation of the vision.

Then he said to me: "Son of man, **these bones are the whole house of Israel**. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: **O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel**. Then you, my

people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. **I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land.** Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.' " (NIV)

Yahweh stated that these bones represented the whole house of Israel. We must bear in mind that the northern kingdom of Israel and its kings had been exiled from the land by the Assyrians in 721/722 BC, and they no longer existed as a political body or kingdom. The same thing had now happened to the southern kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians, and Ezekiel was ministering among the exiles in Babylon. Yet God was predicting that a remnant of all the tribes of the whole house of Israel were going to be restored to the land, and this would occur through a spiritual revival of repentance and faith that would restore them under the terms of the Old Covenant. Yet nowhere was it prophesied that the northern kingdom of Israel would ever be restored as a political kingdom. This promise was only given to Judah because of God's covenant with David, as we shall see.

Some dispensational teachers try to make a two-fold division of this prophecy by saying that the physical restoration occurs first followed by the spiritual revival. This interpretation is forced upon the text to make it fit with the modern restoration of Israel. But the truth of the matter is that throughout the prophets, in accordance with the terms of the Old Covenant, **the physical restoration to the land was always based upon a spiritual restoration first, i.e. that of repentance and faith in the Law covenant.**

This is what actually occurred in the subsequent stages of the restoration from Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, and elsewhere. Contrary to this, the modern formation of the State of Israel by modern Zionists, as well as the ongoing return of the Jews to the land, was not, and is not, based on repentance and faith. **In fact, the only Divine Covenant in force now is the New Covenant in Jesus the Messiah - and this has nothing to do with the physical land of Israel under the terms of the Old Covenant!** In fact, under the New Covenant, the 'land promise' has been extended to include the whole earth! (cf. Romans 4:13; Hebrews 2:5; 2 Peter 3:13).

This prophecy is then elaborated further.

The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, take a stick of wood and write on it, '**Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him.**' Then take another stick of wood, and write on it, '**Ephraim's stick, belonging to Joseph and all the house of Israel associated with him.**' Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand.

"When your countrymen ask you, 'Won't you tell us what you mean by this?' say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am going to take the stick of Joseph—which is in Ephraim's hand—and of the Israelite tribes associated with him, and join it to Judah's stick, making them a single stick of wood, and they will become one in my hand.' Hold before their eyes the sticks you have written on and say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. They will no longer defile

themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God."

(Ezekiel 37:15-23 NIV)

Notice first of all that the prophet had to write Judah's stick first, then Ephraim/Joseph's stick, and together they represented the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel respectively. Both would be joined together to become one in God's hand. In this case, the NIV faithfully renders the underlying thought of the Hebrew text by indicating that the stick of Joseph was to be joined to the stick of Judah and not the other way around. That is, Judah would be the head of all Israel with its centre in Jerusalem. Hence the Jews or Judahites (as they became known at this time) would become synonymous with all Israel - which is how it is when we come to the New Testament.

A remnant of all the Israelites would eventually return to the land from all the nations where they had gone, from all around, to live together under the banner of Judah as representative of ALL Israel. God clearly stated that they would no longer be two kingdoms or two nations, and He would cleanse them from all their backsliding, which had brought on the captivities, and He would restore them to Himself. There is also the hint of a Messianic King, the greater descendant of David, ruling over them as one nation. This thought continues in verses 24-28.

" 'My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever (*for the age*), and David my servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever (*for the age*).' "

The subsequent governors of Judah, such as Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, were most probably the shepherds of Israel immediately referred to in the prophecy, yet these things are ultimately fulfilled in Christ and the spiritual remnant of Israel. The prophets often spoke of short-term, contemporary fulfillments, while at the same time projecting into the far future to see prophetic patterns and cycles being fulfilled in the long-term, being ultimately fulfilled in the Messianic kingdom of God.

Peter was making this point in 1 Peter 1:10-12 and 2 Peter 1:19-21. He was declaring that the ultimate purpose of the messages of the prophets concerned the coming of Christ and the establishing of His spiritual kingdom in the New Covenant. Even the prophets themselves didn't fully understand how or when their prophecies would be fulfilled, because their prophecies did not come about by their own interpretation. We must therefore rely on the writings of the New Testament apostles and prophets, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit, to gain a correct understanding as to how these prophecies were ultimately fulfilled.

Back in Ezekiel's prophecy, there was also a hint of the New Covenant, promised through Jeremiah, in the mention of 'the covenant of peace' which would last

indefinitely (verse 26), though in its immediate context, this was referring to the renewal of the Law Covenant due to the mercy of God. There was also the promise of a restored Temple and its services, which was fulfilled in the second Temple and the later renovation of Herod's Temple (see also the vision given to Ezekiel in 40-48 of his book). Again, these things have their ultimate fulfillment in Christ, Who is the true Temple of God, as well as His people, who are the living stones in the temple (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Revelation 3:12).

The prophet Zechariah prophesied further about these things during the early stages of the return from Babylon, revealing that many such 'returns' would take place for centuries that would include all the tribes of Israel (e.g. Zechariah 8 & 10). There would then follow a golden age of peace and prosperity and blessing for the Jews for quite some time, until the arrival of the era of the Messiah in 'the last days.' Yet just before the era of the Messiah and the arrival of His kingdom, the prophets revealed that the Jewish nation would become corrupt again, and therefore God would punish them again with an enemy out of the north. Jerusalem would be attacked and conquered and many Jews would be killed and sent away as captives. This is especially evident in the prophecies of Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah. All of these things were fulfilled during the eras of the Persian kings and the early years of the Greek Empire, with the peace and safety being shattered by Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the Seleucids, and the wars of the Maccabees, in the 2nd century BC.

For further details of this important subject of 'the Silent Years' of Israel during the inter-testamental period, I recommend the book ***Zechariah and Jewish Renewal*** by **Fred P. Miller**, available online at <http://www.ao.net/~fmoeller/zechdir.htm> . I would particularly draw the reader's attention to the introductory chapters 1-5, which are very useful in this regard.

Nevertheless, the prophecies of 'the golden era' were picturing something far greater, which had to do with the coming kingdom of God and His Messiah. This kingdom inheritance was described in Old Testament poetic imagery in terms of a new heaven and a new earth, where all is greatly blessed and at peace, even within the animal kingdom.

Isaiah 11

Isaiah chapter 11 is a well known Messianic prophecy describing some characteristics of the Messiah and His kingdom. In light of this Messianic figure from king David's line, Isaiah begins to prophesy, beginning in verse 10, about 'that Day' during which there will be a great Exodus of God's people from among the nations where they have been scattered to be gathered in to the kingdom of the Messiah. This great gathering would not only include a remnant of the exiles of Israel, but it would also include a remnant from among the Gentiles as well.

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea.

He will raise a banner for the nations
and gather the exiles of Israel;
he will assemble the scattered people of Judah
from the four quarters of the earth...

...There will be a highway for the remnant of his people
that is left from Assyria,
as there was for Israel
when they came up from Egypt.

(Isaiah 11:10-12, 16 NIV)

Verse 11 spoke of a time when God would gather this remnant of Israel from amongst the nations where they had been scattered: including Assyria, Egypt, Persia, Babylon and the islands of the sea. The Hebrew reads 'a second time' but some translations use the Greek Septuagint version which just reads 'again.' This verse is often interpreted by dispensationalists as prophesying a second re-gathering of Israel to the land after a second captivity. They then apply this to the 'second captivity' of the Jews by the Romans in the 1st century AD, and therefore, the 'second re-gathering' must be the modern founding of the state of Israel.

It is evident from the context, though, that this great Exodus and gathering of God's people 'a second time' or 'again' is being likened to the first Exodus from Egypt. Yet this one would be far greater than the first because they would be assembled from all the nations where they were being held captive, not just Egypt. Also, the context of this prophecy is ultimately Messianic. Therefore, the Messiah is likened to a greater Moses who leads the remnant of Israel into the true land of promise - along with a remnant from amongst the nations as well.

A very similar prophecy was given later by Jeremiah.

"The days are coming," declares the LORD,
"when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch,
a King who will reign wisely
and do what is just and right in the land.

In his days Judah will be saved
and Israel will live in safety.

This is the name by which he will be called:
The LORD Our Righteousness.

"So then, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when people will no longer say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,' but they will say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the descendants of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.' Then they will live in their own land."

(Jeremiah 23:5-8 NIV)

This is declaring the same truth as in Isaiah 11. Take note of the Messianic context and the allusion to the first Exodus of Israel from Egypt. In relation to this, there is mention of another Exodus of Israel from all the nations where they had been banished - and this second one would outdo the first.

In one sense, as a short term fulfillment, these things were fulfilled in the return of the Jews (as a remnant of all Israel) from the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities from the 6th century BC onwards. The main countries listed in Isaiah 11:11 were the primary countries from which a remnant of Jews returned to Palestine in the centuries following the end of the Babylonian captivity.

Yet this was just the prelude to the ultimate fulfillment of these prophecies, which had to do with the coming of Jesus as the Messiah. The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that Jesus is the greater son of David and the greater Prophet like Moses who leads His people - Jew and Gentile - out of the world of slavery to sin and death and into the real promised land of the inheritance of His spiritual kingdom and the coming New Creation.

The early preaching of Peter to the Jews of his day, recorded in Acts 2 & 3, reveals how the Holy Spirit interprets these ancient prophecies. In the details of what occurred on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon Christ's followers in fulfillment of prophecy, we are told the following.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs-we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

(Acts 2:5-11 NIV)

This remnant of Jews from every nation where the Jewish Diaspora had reached were about to experience the beginning of the ultimate Exodus of God's people from out of the world and into the kingdom of God. The result of Peter's preaching of the Gospel was that 3000 became disciples of Jesus that day, forming the core of the early Church in Jerusalem and beyond.

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." **Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.**

(Acts 2:36-41 NIV)

Not only this, but as we read through the book of Acts, and particularly Paul's epistles, we begin to see a huge number of Gentiles being gathered into the kingdom

of God as well. Jesus has truly become a Banner for the peoples, and all nations are rallying to Him - and He is gathering the exiles of Israel into His land, the inheritance of the kingdom and the New Earth. Together they are the true Israel of God.

Jeremiah 30-31

Chapters 30-31 in Jeremiah were written before the final overthrow of Jerusalem and Judah by the Babylonians in the 6th century BC. The contents of these chapters alternate between warnings of judgment and destruction and exile, and promises of restoration and healing for all the tribes of Israel. Jeremiah 31:7-8 makes it plain that this restoration was to include a remnant of all the clans of Israel being gathered back to the land from all the countries where they had been scattered as a result of the previous exiles.

³ The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess,' says the LORD."

⁴ These are the words the LORD spoke concerning Israel and Judah: ⁵ "This is what the LORD says:

" 'Cries of fear are heard—
terror, not peace.

⁶ Ask and see:

Can a man bear children?
Then why do I see every strong man
with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labor,
every face turned deathly pale?

⁷ How awful that day will be!

None will be like it.
It will be a time of trouble for Jacob,
but he will be saved out of it.

⁸ " 'In that day,' declares the LORD Almighty,
'I will break the yoke off their necks
and will tear off their bonds;
no longer will foreigners enslave them.

⁹ Instead, they will serve the LORD their God
and David their king,
whom I will raise up for them.

¹⁰ " 'So do not fear, O Jacob my servant;
do not be dismayed, O Israel,'
declares the LORD.
'I will surely save you out of a distant place,
your descendants from the land of their exile.
Jacob will again have peace and security,
and no one will make him afraid.

¹¹ I am with you and will save you,'
declares the LORD.
'Though I completely destroy all the nations

among which I scatter you,
I will not completely destroy you.
I will discipline you but only with justice;
I will not let you go entirely unpunished.'

(Jeremiah 30:3-11 NIV)

¹ "At that time," declares the LORD, "**I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they will be my people.**"

² This is what the LORD says:
"The people who survive the sword
will find favor in the desert;
I will come to give rest to Israel."

³ The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying:
"I have loved you with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

⁴ I will build you up again
and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel.
Again you will take up your tambourines
and go out to dance with the joyful.

⁵ Again you will plant vineyards
on the hills of Samaria;
the farmers will plant them
and enjoy their fruit.

⁶ There will be a day when watchmen cry out
on the hills of Ephraim,
'Come, let us go up to Zion,
to the LORD our God.' "

⁷ This is what the LORD says:
"Sing with joy for Jacob;
shout for the foremost of the nations.
Make your praises heard, and say,
'O LORD, save your people,
the remnant of Israel.'

⁸ See, I will bring them from the land of the north
and gather them from the ends of the earth.
Among them will be the blind and the lame,
expectant mothers and women in labor;
a great throng will return.

⁹ They will come with weeping;
they will pray as I bring them back.
I will lead them beside streams of water
on a level path where they will not stumble,
because I am Israel's father,
and Ephraim is my firstborn son.

- ¹⁰ "Hear the word of the LORD, O nations;
proclaim it in distant coastlands:
**'He who scattered Israel will gather them
and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.'**
- ¹¹ For the LORD will ransom Jacob
and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they.
- ¹² They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion;
they will rejoice in the bounty of the LORD—
the grain, the new wine and the oil,
the young of the flocks and herds.
They will be like a well-watered garden,
and they will sorrow no more.
- ¹³ Then maidens will dance and be glad,
young men and old as well.
I will turn their mourning into gladness;
I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.
- ¹⁴ I will satisfy the priests with abundance,
and my people will be filled with my bounty,"
declares the LORD.
- ¹⁵ This is what the LORD says:
"A voice is heard in Ramah,
mourning and great weeping,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because her children are no more..."
- ¹⁸ "...I have surely heard Ephraim's moaning:
'You disciplined me like an unruly calf,
and I have been disciplined.
Restore me, and I will return,
because you are the LORD my God.' "

(Jeremiah 31:1-15, 18 NIV)

These things were all fulfilled in the subsequent return from Babylon and the ongoing returns that took place for centuries afterwards. Some notable 'Christian Zionist' teachers have made much of Jeremiah 31:5-6, quoted above, to support their view that these verses are only fulfilled in the modern restoration of Israel. They allege that these verses were not fulfilled in the ancient past because ancient Israel never settled on the actual hills of Samaria and they didn't plant vineyards there due to the fact that this area was dominated by Samaritans who were not considered true Israelites.

On the surface of things this sounds like a good argument, but I believe this view is totally incorrect because, a) it ignores some of the facts of biblical history, and b) it misunderstands the use of the terms Samaria, Ephraim and Israel as used by the prophets. It makes the mistake of taking these phrases in an ultra-literal manner, and limiting their meaning to the central portion of Palestine, which became known as Samaria.

Yet this view unwittingly ignores the fact that a number of the prophets spoke of the northern kingdom of Israel as Samaria and Ephraim. For example, throughout the book of Hosea these terms are used interchangeably to refer to the whole kingdom of Israel in the north, as opposed to Judah in the south, with its capital in Samaria (Hosea 5:5; 7:1). The territory of Ephraim, one of Joseph's sons, became the dominant name for the whole kingdom, as did the name Samaria. So to speak of 'the mountains of Ephraim' and 'the mountains of Samaria' is synonymous with the phrase 'the mountains of Israel.' In fact, the book of Ezekiel refers many times to the mountains of Israel, which clearly applied to the whole land.

The 'mountains of Samaria' and the 'mountains of Ephraim' were clearly referring to the ancient territory of the kingdom of Israel as a whole, which included the region of Galilee in the north, and it was not limited to the actual hill country of Ephraim and Samaria alone. Yet having said that, many villages and towns in the ancient region of these actual hills of Ephraim, which were situated directly to the north of Judah, were resettled by the Jewish remnant, including Bethel (cf. Nehemiah 11:31-35). Bethel originally belonged to the northern kingdom of Israel, and it was often condemned for its calf idolatry (Hosea 8:4-6; 10:5-6; Amos 5:4-6; cf. 1 Kings 12:25-33). Yet after the Babylonian captivity, Bethel became a part of Judah. Interestingly enough, Amos had already spoken of Israel's restoration to the land in terms similar to that of Jeremiah concerning the blessings of vineyards, wine and mountains, etc, which clearly meant the whole land, not just Judah (Amos 9:13-15).

Also, a leading member of the Jewish Sanhedrin in the 1st century AD, Joseph, came from Arimathea, which the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia identifies with ancient Ramathaim (or Ramah) of 1 Samuel. This village was originally in the ancient hill country of Ephraim, yet Jews had evidently settled there during the restoration from Babylon and other countries.

By the time of the Messiah in the New Testament era, the Jewish remnant had spread out to fill much of the land, although the area around the city of Samaria in central Palestine was largely dominated by Samaritans who were generally viewed as enemies of the Jews and had their own brand of Judaistic religion. Nevertheless, a remnant of Israel returned to the ancient territories of Israel and Judah to eventually form a large population of Jews throughout the land.

Also, Jeremiah 31:27 indicated that the Jewish remnant of Israel and Judah would settle down in the land alongside some of the left over inhabitants of the land - with both man and animal - which must've included some 'Samaritans.' The books of Ezra and Nehemiah also record the fact that intermarriage was taking place amongst the returnees with the 'foreigners' in the land. Therefore many of the Samaritans became half caste Jews/Israelites.

In a greater sense, centuries later, numerous Samaritans and Jews throughout the land of Palestine came to faith in Jesus as the Messiah, which was the ultimate restoration of the lost sheep of the house of Israel in the land. Here was the true Virgin Israel, the Bride of Messiah. And it's interesting to note that in John 4:12 the Samaritan woman, whom Jesus spoke with, referred to Jacob as her patriarch - and Jesus never corrected her. He went on to say that her religious focus was wrong, concerning the temple worship on Mount Gerizim, but He also intimated that the

focus on the temple worship at Jerusalem would eventually diminish to be replaced by a spiritual city of worship and truth (verses 21-26).

We must also bear in mind that many Jews dwelt in the northern region of Galilee, which was dominated by Gentile colonists! And this was where Jesus spent most of His time. Samaritans were viewed as being closer to Jewish blood than Gentiles. In fact, the whole land was full of mixed races, as well as those of Jewish/Israelite descent. Eventually the Gospel of the kingdom went out to all races throughout the land.

¹ Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. **In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan-**

² The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.

(Isaiah 9:1-2 NIV; cf. Matthew 4:12-17)

So, again, there isn't any good reason to reject the fact that all of these things were fulfilled in the ancient history of Israel, right up to, and including, the time of Jesus and the Apostolic Church. The ultimate fulfillment of some of the things prophesied in these texts were fulfilled in Jesus Christ and His New Covenant people, the Israel of God - particularly in the establishment of the New Covenant itself.

For example, verse 15 above not only had a fulfillment at the time of the Babylonian invasion of Judah, but it had a further fulfillment during the time of Jesus the Messiah.

"A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

(Jeremiah 31:15)

In fact, this prophecy was fulfilled a number of times in relation to the judgments that came upon Jerusalem and Judah from invading armies and evil tyrants, but it had a particular fulfillment during the era of Christ when Herod killed all the male children up to two years old around Bethlehem (see Matthew 2:16-18). This Ramah was a town in the territory of Benjamin, in Judea, and Rachel's tomb was believed to be near Ramah and Bethlehem (see International Standard Bible Encyclopedia). The mention of Rachel is clearly figurative here. She was the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, both of whom represent the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. So Rachel represents the mothers of Israel.

This prophecy is describing great weeping and mourning in the vicinity of Bethlehem and Ramah because the mothers of Israel have been robbed of their children due to their son's deaths. This was literally fulfilled at the time of Christ. Yet the immediate context of this prophecy in Jeremiah has more to do with the judgment and restoration of Israel at the time of the Babylonian Captivity, rather

than Christ's First Coming. Furthermore, in relation to the coming of the Messiah, it also had a final fulfillment in the Jewish/Roman War of 66-70 AD, when the Old Covenant system was finally put to rest.

Here are two other important points worth considering at this stage in relation to the prophecies of Jeremiah 30-31 and their fulfillment.

Jeremiah 30:9 & 21 indicated clearly that the whole nation of Israel would be restored under the leadership of Judah and the Davidic dynasty, which ultimately pointed to the coming of the Messiah. The actual kingdom of Judah as a monarchy, though, was never re-established, for it is ultimately Messianic and has now been fulfilled in Christ Jesus as David's true Heir. The phrase "David their king" is not to be taken ultra-literally, for it speaks of the Messiah as the Son of David.

⁹ Instead, they will serve the LORD their God
and David their king,
whom I will raise up for them....

²¹ **Their leader will be one of their own;
their ruler will arise from among them.**
I will bring him near and he will come close to me,
for who is he who will devote himself
to be close to me?'
declares the LORD. (NIV)

Jeremiah 31:38-40 predicted plainly that the city of Jerusalem would be rebuilt on its ruins as before until the era of the New Covenant (see also 30:18).

³⁸ "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when this city will be rebuilt for me from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. ³⁹ The measuring line will stretch from there straight to the hill of Gareb and then turn to Goah. ⁴⁰ The whole valley where dead bodies and ashes are thrown, and all the terraces out to the Kidron Valley on the east as far as the corner of the Horse Gate, will be holy to the LORD. The city will never again be uprooted or demolished." (NIV)

Therefore, the identification of the ancient gates and towers of Jerusalem reveals that these things had to have been fulfilled in ancient times when the ruins of these gates and towers still existed, and the people would know where they were located. The end of verse 40 should more accurately read '*The city will not be uprooted or demolished again to the age*' or for generations; i.e. it would be established for a long time until the coming of the Messiah. It is not saying that the city would *never* be destroyed again - because it *was* destroyed again in 70 AD!

During the era of the Babylonian Captivity, to tie in with the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the prophet Daniel also went on to prophesy about the coming of the Messiah and the establishing of the New Covenant, wherein it was also revealed that the temple and the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed in relation to the Messiah's coming (cf. Daniel 9:24-27).

There isn't any good reason to believe that the Temple will yet again be rebuilt to fulfill these prophecies. It *was* rebuilt - many centuries before Jesus came! The books of Ezra and Nehemiah reveal that all these things began to be fulfilled in the subsequent returns from Babylon. The ultimate fulfillment of these things, which is

predominantly spiritual, is largely found in the NT book of Acts. There is no longer any need for a physical temple in Jerusalem for the Church is now the spiritual Temple of the living God - both corporately and individually. We shall consider this in further detail a little later.

In fact, Jesus made it very clear that the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in the 1st century AD, which was to be experienced by the very generation that had witnessed Christ's ministry, was the fulfillment of all that has been written in the Hebrew prophets.

²⁰"When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. ²¹Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. ²²**For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.**"

(Luke 21:20-22 NIV)

For further study of these things, see *The Prophecies of Jesus' Olivet Discourse*.

The New Covenant

²⁷ "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will plant the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the offspring of men and of animals. ²⁸ Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant," declares the LORD...

³¹ ..."The time is coming," declares the LORD,
**"when I will make a new covenant
with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah.**

³² It will not be like the covenant
I made with their forefathers
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them,"
declares the LORD.

³³ **"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel
after that time," declares the LORD.**
"I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

³⁴ No longer will a man teach his neighbor,
or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"
declares the LORD.

**"For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more."**

(Jeremiah 31:27-28, 31-34 NIV)

Jeremiah was given this prophecy of the New Covenant while he was prophesying about the coming judgment upon Judah and the subsequent restoration of all Israel. Verse 33 states that "after that time," that is, the time of the restoration of Israel from the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, God would establish a New Covenant with the house of Israel that is clearly related to the coming of the Messiah.

The New Testament writings (literally the New Covenant writings) make it abundantly clear that this New Covenant was established through Jesus the Messiah. It has been fulfilled in Christ. Before we look at some of these key texts, let us check the main points of the original prophecy.

- Firstly, God said that He would make this covenant with the house of Israel *and* Judah, that is, the whole house of Israel, meaning the remnant of all the tribes of restored Israel. This occurred in the 1st century AD. Jesus, as well as His Apostles, were initially sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel in the land of Palestine (Matthew 10:5-7, 23; 15:24) and the Gospel always went to the Jew first (Acts 3:24-26; Romans 1:16). The early chapters of Acts records the fact that the early church was primarily Jewish. The blessings of the New Covenant had been established with Jews first in the city of Jerusalem, which then spread to all Judea, Samaria, Galilee and beyond into the Jewish Diaspora. Only after the New Covenant had been officially established with the house of Israel in Jerusalem and Judah did the message go out to all the nations, i.e. the Gentiles.
- Secondly, this covenant would NOT be like the covenant of the Law given to Israel through Moses at Sinai after they left Egypt. Israel had broken that covenant, and it could never truly save them from their sins or rescue them from death. It could only lead to condemnation. Therefore, the New Covenant would ultimately deal with the greatest enemies of mankind, sin and death. And just like some of the previous Divine covenants, namely the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants, the New Covenant would be a blood covenant, the most solemn of all binding agreements. This meant that a greater Sacrifice than mere animals would be needed to secure this final covenant - and only God could provide it. It was provided in Jesus' death as the ultimate Passover Lamb (Luke 22:20; 1 Peter 1:18-19; 1 Corinthians 5:7).
- Thirdly, this covenant would supercede the Law covenant, as well as fulfilling the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant, due to its spiritual nature. The righteousness of God (His law) would be put into the hearts and minds of His people by His Spirit, sealing the covenant and guaranteeing that the true Israel of God would always be His people and will always remain in covenant relationship with their God. It is this 'New' Covenant that causes those who belong to God in the Messiah to inherit the kingdom of the heavens. This blood covenant is at the heart of the Gospel message of salvation and the kingdom of God, and only those who accept its establishment in Jesus the Messiah are considered the covenant people of God - which now includes both Jew *and* Gentile.

Here is what the writer to the Hebrew Christians of the 1st century AD had to say about the New Covenant by contrasting it with the Old Covenant of the Law.

⁵They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." ⁶But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs **as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one**, and it is founded on better promises.

⁷For if there had been nothing wrong with **that first covenant**, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸But God found fault with the people and said:

"The time is coming, declares the Lord,
when I will make a new covenant
with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah.

⁹It will not be like the covenant
I made with their forefathers
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they did not remain faithful to my covenant,
and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.

¹⁰This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel
after that time, declares the Lord.
I will put my laws in their minds
and write them on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

¹¹No longer will a man teach his neighbor,
or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.

¹²For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more."

¹³**By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.**

(Hebrews 8:5-13 NIV)

This states unequivocally that 'the first covenant' of the Law was about to be officially done away with (which occurred in 70 AD with the destruction of the Temple) due to the more superior 'new' covenant taking its place. The Law covenant has been fulfilled, and replaced, by the New Covenant in Christ, making the Law of Moses obsolete and 'old.' This means that all the literal, physical, worldly, fleshly aspects of that covenant - i.e. such as the Tabernacle/Temple worship system of Levitical priests and animal sacrifices, etc, and fleshly circumcision, and all manner of rituals and ceremonies and laws for ethnic Jews - have been superceded by the spiritual aspects of the New Covenant in Jesus the Messiah, who is now the High Priest/Mediator of this Covenant. They were only types and shadows of the reality found in Christ.

⁹This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper.
¹⁰They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—**external regulations applying until the time of the new order...**

¹¹...**The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves.**

(Hebrews 9:9-10; 10:1 NIV)

Therefore, the popular premillennial dispensational doctrines of a restored ethnic Israel in the land after Jesus returns, with a rebuilt Jewish temple and restored Jewish worship based on Old Covenant principles, cannot stand in the clear light of New Testament teaching. Nowhere in the New Testament does it clearly state that literal, physical Jerusalem or the land of Israel will be restored to ethnic Israel when Christ returns, or that a physical Temple will be rebuilt to offer sacrifices again in accordance with Levitical law. Yet there is plenty of clear teaching that states otherwise!

Again, the writer to the Hebrews, when comparing the New Covenant with the Old, stated the following.

²²But you have come **to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.** You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, ²⁴**to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant,** and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

(Hebrews 12:22-24 NIV)

He was declaring that the true spiritual Israel of God, the firstborn sons of God, belonged to the heavenly city of God, figuratively referred to as Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. These were those Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah and had come into the bonds of the New Covenant in Christ. The rest of the New Testament, particularly Paul's letters, reveals that believing Gentiles are now sharing in the covenantal blessings with the original Jewish believers. The focus is primarily spiritual and heavenly, and the true Israel of God has now been expanded to include Gentiles as well! So whichever way one looks at it, that which applies to the spiritual Israel of God in the New Covenant in Christ (i.e. the original Jewish believers of the early church) now also applies to Gentile disciples as well with complete equality (see Ephesians 2:11- 3:13). This is Expansion Theology not 'Replacement Theology!'

It is worth pointing out here that these things are revealed in visionary language in the book of Revelation, where the original Jewish messianic remnant of the 1st century AD , especially those in the land, are called 'the 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel' (7:1-8; 14:1-5). This 'restored Israel' is also identified as the Woman who gave birth to the Male Child, who was later persecuted by Satan the Dragon, and forced to flee the land (12:1-16). The believing Gentile remnant, who are now at one with true Israel (forming the Christian Church), are portrayed as the great multitude whom no one could count (7:9-17), and the rest of the Woman's offspring who were to be persecuted by the Dragon by means of the Beast of the Roman Empire (12:17-13:10).

The whole group of Old Testament and New Testament believers are ultimately described as being the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem, which has become the ultimate Temple, the very dwelling place of God (21:1 - 22:6). All are the heavenly Israel of God, the overcoming sons of God who have inherited the kingdom in immortality; who will rule the New Earth with Christ as Royal Priests of the order of Melchizedek. There is so much more that I could add to this, but this will have to suffice for now.

Moreover, in 2 Corinthians 3, the Apostle Paul talks openly about the New Covenant ministry he had received from Jesus his Messiah. In comparing the surpassing glory of the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant with the fading glory of the Old Covenant, he said this.

¹²Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. ¹³We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. ¹⁴But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵**Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.** ¹⁶**But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.** ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

(2 Corinthians 3:12-18 NIV)

To this very day, the Old Covenant of the Law of Moses puts a veil over the hearts of religious Jews so that they cannot see the true glory of Y'shua/Jesus, the promised Messiah - who *is* Yahweh, the God/Word of the Hebrew Scriptures. Only through faith in Christ is the veil taken away, and only then do they come into the bonds of the New Covenant to participate in the surpassing glory of the spiritual blessings of Christ Jesus, which leads to true freedom. In Romans 11, Paul allegorises this process of Jewish faith and spiritual enlightenment in Christ, which he himself had experienced, by describing such Jews as being discarded olive branches who are then grafted back into their own olive tree. We shall consider this in detail later.

The Mountain of the Lord

¹ This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

² In the last days

**the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established
as chief among the mountains;
it will be raised above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.**

³ 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."
**The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.**

⁴ He will judge between the nations
and will settle disputes for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.

⁵ Come, O house of Jacob,
let us walk in the light of the LORD.

(Isaiah 2:1-5 NIV)

⁷ He said: "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever. The house of Israel will never again defile my holy name—neither they nor their kings—by their prostitution and the lifeless idols of their kings at their high places...

¹² ..."This is the law of the temple: All the surrounding area on top of the mountain will be most holy. Such is the law of the temple."

(Ezekiel 43:7, 12 NIV)

¹ In the last days
**the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established
as chief among the mountains;**
it will be raised above the hills,
and **peoples will stream to it.**

² **Many nations 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."
The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

³ He will judge between many peoples
and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide.
They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.

⁴ Every man will sit under his own vine
and under his own fig tree,
and no one will make them afraid,
for the LORD Almighty has spoken.

⁵ All the nations may walk
in the name of their gods;

we will walk in the name of the LORD
our God for ever and ever.

⁶ "In that day," declares the LORD,
"I will gather the lame;
I will assemble the exiles
and those I have brought to grief.

⁷ I will make the lame a remnant,
those driven away a strong nation.
**The LORD will rule over them in Mount Zion
from that day and forever.**

⁸ As for you, O watchtower of the flock,
O stronghold of the Daughter of Zion,
the former dominion will be restored to you;
kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem."

(Micah 4:1-8 NIV)

These well-known prophecies foretold not only the restoration of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple, but they were ultimately foretelling the establishment of the kingdom of the Messiah in the last days. The focus here is upon Mount Zion and the Temple in Jerusalem. In Biblical typology, mountains and hills are figures of kingdoms and governments, so 'the Mountain of the Lord' is figuratively applied to the Kingdom of God as manifested through the reign of the Messiah.

The original city of Jerusalem, founded by king David in about the 10th century BC, which became the capital of ancient Israel, was situated on Mount Zion, known as the Ophel ridge. The city was then expanded northwards under Solomon to include the higher hill of Mount Moriah, on which the Temple was built. In later years, Jerusalem, as the centre of God's kingdom in Israel, became synonymous with Mount Zion and the Temple - the very dwelling place of Yahweh on earth.

These prophecies were describing a time when Jerusalem would become the spiritual centre of the world, becoming the chief Mountain (or Kingdom) raised above all others, with the Temple of God being central to it all, representing His Presence or dwelling place. Gentiles would be included among those who would come to seek the God of Israel from all nations, learning the way of peace and righteousness as taught by the Messiah. The righteous Law of the Messiah, the Word of God, would go forth from Zion and Jerusalem. In Micah's prophecy, the emphasis is on the remnant of Israel who would be restored both physically and spiritually, with great blessing, dwelling in peace with God and men.

To a lesser degree, many of these elements were fulfilled in the restored remnant of Israel, particularly during the first centuries before and after Jesus came. During the era of Herod the Great, Jerusalem rose to become one of the greatest metropolitan cities in the ancient world. Herod's massive rebuilding project included the enlargement of the Temple complex, which subsequently brought tens of thousands of regular visitors to the city from all over the Roman Empire, both Jews and Gentiles. He even added 'the Court of the Gentiles' which was said to be huge so as to accommodate all the visiting Gentiles.

Yet the New Testament writings make it abundantly evident that all the events surrounding the arrival of Jesus as the Messiah and the establishing of His spiritual Kingdom in the form of His Church (or Ecclesia) fulfilled the words of these prophecies in accordance with the ultimate intent of the One who inspired these prophecies in the first place - the Holy Spirit of God. His intent was that these Old Testament descriptions of kingdom blessings were to have primarily a spiritual fulfillment in accord with the New Covenant, rather than an ultra literal physical one in accord with the Old Covenant.

(See the Appendix below for a list of important New Testament texts that reveal, and confirm, how these prophecies have been fulfilled in Christ and His Church).

As mentioned previously, the New Testament writings, which contain the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles, make it very clear that those things that were a major part of the Old Covenant system have been fulfilled in the New Covenant kingdom of Christ. Therefore, that which concerns physical Israel as a nation, along with the physical land, and the physical city of Jerusalem and the temple (i.e. that which is worldly and fleshly), have been superceded by the spiritual realities of these things in Christ Jesus. The fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant via the New Covenant has resulted in the Promise being enlarged and expanded to include the whole earth and all nations.

The above prophecies are shown to be fulfilled in the New Jerusalem, the heavenly Mount Zion, and the heavenly spiritual Temple of God - which ultimately represents the people of God, the Israel of God, the Bride and Wife of the Lamb (Hebrews 12:22-24; Ephesians 2:11-22; Revelation 21:1- 22:5). The vision of Revelation ultimately views the people of God, represented as the New Jerusalem and Mount Zion, ruling over the rest of humanity on a New Earth. This will fulfill the types and shadows represented in Solomon's kingdom when the 'King of Peace' ruled over all the land of promise, not only over the territory of Israel, but over all the nations and peoples round about.

Nowhere does the New Testament clearly state that the fleshly, worldly elements of the Old Covenant will ever return - and this includes the physical Temple worship system and the importance of fleshly Israel. We shall now see that the apostles viewed themselves, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as the rebuilt Tabernacle of David, through their belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

The Tabernacle of David

¹¹ **"In that day I will restore
David's fallen tent.
I will repair its broken places,
restore its ruins,
and build it as it used to be,**

¹² so that they may possess the remnant of Edom
and all the nations that bear my name, "
declares the LORD, who will do these things.

¹³ "The days are coming," declares the LORD,
"when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman

and the planter by the one treading grapes.
New wine will drip from the mountains
and flow from all the hills.

¹⁴ **I will bring back my exiled people Israel;**
they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them.
They will plant vineyards and drink their wine;
they will make gardens and eat their fruit.

¹⁵ **I will plant Israel in their own land,
never again to be uprooted
from the land I have given them,"**
says the LORD your God.

(Amos 9:11-15 NIV)

The prophet Amos prophesied these things long before the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were destroyed and taken into exile. This particular prophecy was given in the context of prophesying the impending captivities of Israel, and the promised restoration that would take place after these things. 'In that day' the tabernacle or house of David, which had fallen due to the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, would be restored so that a royal king of Judah would establish a kingdom over the remnant of Edom (i.e. Esau) in the south, and he would even rule over a remnant of the nations that would become a part of God's covenant people. That is, those who were once the enemies of Yahweh would become followers of the God of Israel and there will be peace.

The prophet Isaiah prophesied something similar at about the same time as Amos.

⁵ **In love a throne will be established;
in faithfulness a man will sit on it—
one from the house of David—**
one who in judging seeks justice
and speeds the cause of righteousness.

(Isaiah 16:5 NIV)

These things had a form of fulfillment in the flesh when the nation of Judah was reborn after the Babylonian Captivity. The people of Israel were never completely ousted from the land again, even during the era of the Maccabees and the wars against the Seleucids, until after the promised Messiah had come in the form of Jesus of Nazareth. Even the remnant of Edom (i.e. Idumea) were ultimately conquered by the Jews in 126 BC and forcibly converted to Judaism.

But of course, the ultimate (intended) fulfillment of these things concerns the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, and His reign over Israel and the remnant of the nations who accept Him. The prophetic picture of great peace and blessing in the earth can only be fulfilled in the Messiah - that is, Jesus Christ. First and foremost, these things are to be fulfilled spiritually, although the kingdom of God will manifest in all its power and glory in the New Earth after the Second Advent of Christ.

The New Testament prophetic writings of the Apostles make it very clear that they considered these things to have been fulfilled in Jesus and His New Covenant people

- the Israel of God, composed of both Jews and Gentiles (i.e. the true Church of God). Acts 15 confirms this understanding, where the prophecy from Amos is quoted.

¹²The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. ¹³When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. ¹⁵The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁶" **After this I will return
and rebuild David's fallen tent.**

Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,

¹⁷**that the remnant of men may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who bear my name,**

says the Lord, who does these things'

¹⁸that have been known for ages.

¹⁹"It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God."

(Acts 15:12-19 NIV)

This was the famous first early Church Council held at Jerusalem, with the apostles and elders present. This whole council was convened because many of the Jewish followers of Jesus were saying that Gentile believers should be circumcised under the Law of Moses, that is to say, they should become Jewish proselytes and become part of physical Israel in accordance with the Old Covenant. Both Paul and Barnabas, along with Peter and James, strongly disagreed with this view. Peter spoke up and showed how God had used him to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles previously (the episode with Cornelius in Acts 10-11) and he made the emphatic point that they received the Holy Spirit by faith in accordance with the grace of the Lord Jesus. There was no distinction. The apostles knew that the New Covenant in Christ was based upon pure grace and that it had nothing to do with fleshly rituals or works whatsoever.

Then James confirms what Peter and Paul were declaring by quoting Amos 9:11-12. He states that the words of the prophets, such as Amos, were in agreement with a remnant of the Gentiles joining with Jewish believers in the Messiah. He therefore understood by the Spirit that the royal tabernacle of David was being restored through Jesus and His New Covenant Israel - which now included Gentiles as well. The apostles understood correctly that all these things were being fulfilled in Christ and His Church - the true spiritual Israel of God.

It is interesting to note that Luke, the writer of Acts, uses the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament when quoting Amos, which translates verse 12 as 'the remnant of mankind will seek the Lord,' choosing to translate Edom as mankind (because the root of the Hebrew for Edom is 'Adam' or 'human,' that is, humanity or mankind). So here we see that the Holy Spirit sanctions the use of Edom/Esau as a type of the Gentile nations who were physically outside the covenant promises to Israel. Yet through the coming of the Messianic King of the house of David, even the

Gentile enemies of God would become one with the remnant of Israel - together becoming the true spiritual, heavenly Israel of God.

This Jerusalem Council also resulted in the official acceptance of Paul's ministry, as all the apostles and elders recognised the special importance of Paul's unique ministry among the nations. And Paul's writings are very clear on this whole subject of Jew and Gentile being equal together in the spiritual kingdom of God and of Christ.

So let us now take a careful look at a portion of Paul's writings that gives us some of the clearest teaching in the New Testament on the whole subject of Israel and the Church in this present age - Romans 9-11.

The Israel of God: Romans 9-11

Here is how Paul begins the Romans 9-11 section.

"...my sorrow is great, and unintermittent pain is in my heart - for I myself wished to be anathema from Christ - **for my brethren, my relatives according to the flesh, who are Israelites**, whose is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the legislation (the Law) and the divine service (the temple worship) and the promises; whose are the fathers, and **out of whom is the Christ according to the flesh, Who is over all**, God be blessed for the eons. Amen!"

(Romans 9:2-5 CV)

Paul's love for his fellow countrymen was like the love of Jesus - Who became an accursed Sacrifice (anathema) before God to save His people from their sins. Paul deeply cared for his fellow Jews, whom he calls Israelites, his relatives according to the flesh. He clarifies the fact that the nation of Israel were the ones who were given the royal sonship; the Glory of the Presence of God; the covenants of God to Abraham and David, as well as the New Covenant; the Law given to Moses, and the Temple worship system; and all the promises of God to His covenant people. And to Israel belong the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and other chosen ones within the race; and ultimately Jesus the Messiah was born in the flesh as a descendant of David and Judah - a true Son of Abraham.

One thing is very clear from the outset, and that is, that the physical, ethnic nation of Israel, Israelites or Jews according to the flesh, is what Paul primarily has in view here. Yet having said that, he elaborates further in verses 6-9, clearly stating that the true Israel is not purely of flesh alone, but that the true nation consists of the spiritual remnant of believing Israel - that is, those who walk in obedience to God's commands by grace through faith.

⁶It is not as though God's word had failed. **For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.** ⁷**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." ⁸**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. ⁹For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

(Romans 9:6-9 NIV)

So let me repeat this. "Not all who are descended from Israel (i.e. according to the flesh) are Israel (i.e. the true Israel of God)". And "**...it is not the natural children (those in flesh) who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise...** (those in spirit)." This has always been the case.

The nation of Israel as a whole, especially its leaders and government, i.e. the Sanhedrin, had rejected Jesus as the Messiah. To many this posed the (understandable) problem that God's prophetic word had failed because the promised Messianic kingdom had largely been rejected by an unbelieving, rebellious nation claiming to be His people. So what now? Paul tackles the answer to this 'problem' in these three chapters.

He begins by saying that God's word has not failed, and that the real issue here is that the majority of those who call themselves Israel are not the true Israel of God at all. Just because someone is descended from Israel according to the flesh does not make them a true Jew or Israelite. Just because they are descended from Abraham according to flesh does not mean that they are a true son of Abraham and heirs of the covenant promises. Paul had already made this point earlier in his letter.

²⁸A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹**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 NIV)

In fact, this spiritual principle was nothing new, for God had already revealed this truth many centuries earlier through the prophet Jeremiah.

³ This is what the LORD says to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem:
"Break up your unplowed ground
and do not sow among thorns.

⁴ Circumcise yourselves to the LORD,
circumcise your hearts,
you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem,
or my wrath will break out and burn like fire
because of the evil you have done—
burn with no one to quench it."

(Jeremiah 4:3-4 NIV)

Paul goes on to reveal that the true Israel (or Circumcision) are those who are spiritually circumcised in the heart; they have been spiritually born from above, particularly since Jesus came and established the spiritual Kingdom of God, therefore, their position before God has nothing to do with the flesh (cf. Philippians 3:2-3). In the same way as Isaac was the child of promise, conceived miraculously by the power of God, so are those who belong to God in Christ. These children of

promise are the true spiritual ones who are the true seed of Abraham. Those who compose this spiritual remnant are the true Israel of God.

It is this very issue that Paul is addressing in detail in Galatians 3 & 4 - yet he also reveals that now, in Christ, believing Gentiles are also included together with believing Jews!

²⁶**You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,** ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹**if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**

(Galatians 3:26-29 NIV)

²⁸**Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.** ²⁹At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. ³⁰But what does the Scripture say? "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." ³¹Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

(Galatians 4:28-31 NIV)

This spiritual truth must be borne in mind when reading through the rest of Romans 9-11, because Paul never contradicts himself by reversing this principle to teach that Israel according to the flesh are God's chosen people. Now that the Messiah has come, things have changed. A New Covenant Kingdom has been established on earth through His spiritual people, the Church, composed of Jew and Gentile. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD was the vindication of Christ's power and authority as Messiah and Prophet, and it marked the official end of the Old Covenant system that had been centred on physical and fleshly Israel.

Yet contrary to the teachings of Jesus and Paul, and the Twelve Apostles, many sincere Christian Zionists are unwittingly teaching the very opposite of this. Nowhere does the New Testament teach that the focus of God's plan will return to Israel in accordance with Old Covenant principles or that a Judaistic kingdom will be established along Old Covenant lines. Yet there is very explicit evidence to the contrary - that the true Israel of God are the spiritual ones who follow Jesus the Messiah, and this now includes Gentile believers. The New Covenant mystery is primarily spiritual and heavenly focused, and it includes a New Creation.

The ultimate intent of God was to expand the Abrahamic covenant to include Jews and Gentiles together sharing the inheritance of being a royal priesthood in the Messiah ruling over a New Earth. This is it! This is the goal of God's plan for His chosen ones! And it does not in any way involve a return to fleshly Israel operating under a Millennial kind of Old Covenant scenario!

In fact, here is what the King Himself had to say about the Jews (and Judaism) of the 1st century AD who were persecuting His true covenant people.

"I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."

"...I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you."

(Revelation 2:9 & 3:9 NIV)

These are very sobering words indeed - and certainly not very 'politically correct' by modern standards! Nevertheless, it is truth.

The Elect Remnant of Israel

Let us now take a closer look at what Paul has to say in Romans Chapter 11.

¹I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! **I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.** ²God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: ³"Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? ⁴And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." ⁵**So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.** ⁶And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

⁷What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, **but the elect did.** The others were hardened, ⁸as it is written:

"God gave them a spirit of stupor,
eyes so that they could not see
and ears so that they could not hear,
to this very day." ⁹And David says:

"May their table become a snare and a trap,
a stumbling block and a retribution for them.

¹⁰May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see,
and their backs be bent forever."

(Romans 11:1-10 NIV)

Paul explains very clearly here that the true Israel of God, the true covenant people of God, have not been rejected, for he himself belonged to the true Israel as a true Jew, because he belonged to the 1st century remnant of Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah and had subsequently been brought into the bonds of the promised New Covenant, which was now in force. It is a well known biblical and historical fact that the early Christians were primarily Jewish, especially during the covenantal transitional era of 30-70 AD, largely covered by the book of Acts.

He uses Elijah as an example of this spiritual truth. Elijah was a type of Christ, the true Prophet and Servant of God, who was being rejected and hunted by the unbelievers of Israel according to the flesh, represented by Ahab and Jezebel (see 1 Kings 18-19). Yet God had reserved for Himself a remnant of faithful Israelites, of whom Elijah and Obadiah were a part, who represented the true covenant people of God. They are referred to as the '7000' who were not idolaters.

This Old Covenant remnant of grace in Elijah was a type of the New Covenant remnant of grace in Christ Jesus - that is, the Jewish Christians of the early church. The vision of Revelation refers to this remnant primarily as the '144,000 of Israel' as those who belong to the heavenly Mount Zion of Christ's kingdom (see Revelation 7 & 14). These remnants are also intimately connected together as the Bride of the New Jerusalem, where the 12 Tribes of Israel merge with the 12 Apostles of the Lamb (Revelation 21).

Be that as it may, as we've already learned, huge numbers of Gentile believers were to be added to this Jewish remnant so that together they would all become the Israel of God, the true Covenant People, which is the true Christian Church. Revelation 7:9-17 describes this innumerable multitude of believers from all nations being gathered in. It is not as though the Church has replaced Israel - for the true followers of Christ *are* the continuation of the true Israel of God!

These things began in the 1st century AD and they've continued throughout this present age. In verses 5-6, Paul also makes the point of declaring the Gospel of Grace - that is to say, that the faithful remnant of Israel, called the elect, are chosen by God's mercy and grace, and ultimately it has nothing to do with human works or merit. In fact, he is just reiterating what he had established earlier in chapter 9 in relation to the Sovereignty of God.

...in order that **God's purpose in election** might stand: not by works but by him who calls...

...It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, **but on God's mercy...**

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— **even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?**

...Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

"Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea,
only the remnant will be saved."

(Romans 9:11-12, 16, 22-24, 27 NIV)

Therefore, the elect of Israel - as well as the elect from among the Gentiles - are the true spiritual remnant who together form the Israel of God, the Body/Bride of Christ. As for the rest of the nation, they have been hardened, just like Pharaoh of old, full of spiritual blindness and deafness. The old, earthly Jerusalem had become like ancient Egypt and Babylon (as Hagar, the Egyptian handmaid - cf. Galatians 4:21-31; Revelation 11:8; & chapters 17-18) and its judgment was fast approaching (which occurred by 70 AD). The words of the prophets, quoted by Paul, were being fulfilled.

The Spiritual Renewal of Israel

¹¹Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? **Not at all!** Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. ¹²But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, **how much greater riches will their fullness bring!**

¹³I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry ¹⁴in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. ¹⁵For if their rejection is the reconciliation (Gr. 'conciliation'; see CV) of the world, **what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?**

(Romans 11:11-15 NIV)

Paul now makes the emphatic point that Jews can still be saved, even though the main purpose for the nation of Israel and the Old Covenant has now been fulfilled in the coming of Christ and the establishing of His kingdom. Those of Israel, whom Paul refers to as his brothers and his people, have not fallen beyond recovery, for God still has a plan for them in Christ in relation to a believing remnant. As a part of God's sovereign plan, Israel's transgression in rejecting their Messiah has led to the Gospel going to the nations, resulting in spiritual riches and blessings for the whole world. This teaches the age-old principle that what man intends for evil, God intends for good (cf. Genesis 50:19-20).

Yet there's no getting around the fact that Paul talks here of Israel's **loss, transgression** and **rejection** (or **casting aside**). The nation as a whole has transgressed (and been judged), has been rejected, and has suffered spiritual loss. Yet on the other side, the result of this has been **salvation, riches** and **conciliation** for the Gentiles, that is, for the whole world, for all nations. Paul also makes it very clear that this present reality is to make Israel envious in the hope that some of them may be saved from the judgment to come.

Be that as it may, in verses 12 and 15, Paul refers to '*the fullness*' or '*filling*' of Israel, and their '*acceptance*,' both of which results in '*greater riches*' and '*life from the dead!*' He is most definitely describing here the spiritual renewal of individual Jews who become believers in Jesus as the Messiah, particularly those who were once against God and His Son, like Paul himself was before his spiritual transformation. Nevertheless, it is possible that Paul is referring to something much more here, which may have something to do with an end-time spiritual renewal of Israel. It is more likely, though, that, rather than limiting this renewal to only one or two generations near the end of the age, he is actually describing the ultimate salvation of *all* the generations of Israel (the believing 'remnants' of each generation) that will be resurrected and united at the Return of Christ to bring greater blessings in the age to come, the age of the Restoration of all things.

How else could Israel's *fullness* or *completeness*, along with the spiritual renewal that is described as *resurrection life*, have such a profound effect *on the whole world* (which is what Paul is clearly implying here) so that it is described in such terms as '*greater riches*' and '*life from the dead!*' These terms have some connection to the

events of the Return of Christ which will bring resurrection, restoration and greater riches for the whole of creation.

Therefore, I think that there is good reason to believe that Paul was speaking about the whole sum of the true Israel of God from amongst the Jews from throughout history, not just from one era. Nevertheless, this doesn't rule out the possibility that just before the Return of Christ large numbers of Jews will accept the New Covenant in Christ Jesus as the great Harvest of this age draws near. We may have already entered that final era!

The heart of the issue here is that God will continue to call out His people from amongst the Jews to belong to His Ecclesia till the end of this age, yet He is also calling out huge numbers of Gentiles as well. His work is largely amongst the nations now, but Israel has not been totally neglected either. By His grace, Jew and Gentile are becoming one in Christ as the New Covenant Israel of God.

The Allegory of the Olive Tree

Paul now proceeds to explain these things further in verses 16-24, where, using the allegory of an olive tree, he reveals God's present purpose for Israel and the nations. Israel is figured as an olive tree a number of times in Scripture (see Jeremiah 11:16-17; Hosea 14:6; Zechariah 4), as well as a fig tree and a vine. But Christ, as the Prophet, King and Priest of Israel, is the True Vine, Fig Tree and Olive Tree, as He is the ultimate spiritual fulfillment of everything that these anointed figures represent.

¹⁶If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

¹⁷If 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, ¹⁸do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, **but the root supports you.** ¹⁹You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." ²⁰Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. ²¹For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

²²Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. ²³**And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.** ²⁴After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, **how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!**

(Romans 11:16-24 NIV)

Here is the meaning of this allegory of the Olive Tree, as Paul clearly interprets it.

- **The olive tree** represents Israel as God's vessel of testimony and illumination in the world; that is, His covenant people. Olive oil was used

for lighting the lamps in the Tabernacle and the Temple, and for the anointing of God's officials. It is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Yet ultimately this Tree symbolises Christ Himself, as the true Israel, for (to use another similar figure) He is the True Vine (John 15:1-8)

- **The root** of the tree represents the Patriarchs - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to whom the original covenants were given
- **The fatness** (or sap) of the tree represents the spiritual blessings of the Messiah Who, in His flesh, is of Abraham and Israel
- **The natural branches** of the tree represent the generations of Israel, some of which have been broken off due to unbelief and wickedness
- **The wild olive shoot**, which is grafted in to the cultivated olive tree, represents the generations of the Gentile nations who have become believers in Yahweh/Christ, who have now become God's primary vessel of testimony and illumination, sharing in the blessings of the Promise

In this passage, Paul reveals the following facts: The root (also figured as the firstfruit offering of the dough) is holy to God. If the firstfruit offering is acceptable to God then the rest of the harvest is as well. If the root is holy, then the whole tree is as well. The original promises and covenants given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have not been, and will not be, revoked. Due to God's choice, Israel is holy and beloved because of the fathers (see verse 28).

The nations have only been grafted in to the natural olive tree because some of the natural branches of Israel were broken off. This has resulted in the nations being joint-participants of the spiritual blessings of Israel's Messiah, sharing in the Promise. **But Paul warns them that they must not boast about this position, thinking that they deserve it, or believing that the Gentiles have completely replaced Israel - because the truth of the matter is that the whole Church, both Jew and Gentile, has become the spiritual Israel of God!**

We must understand that there is only One Olive Tree that represents the Covenant people of God! For the believing Jew, it is their own Olive Tree as they belong to the original covenant nation of Israel, yet for the believing Gentile, who originally belonged to a wild olive tree (representing the idolatrous nations), it is the Hebraic Messianic Tree which they have been grafted into to share together in the nourishing sap of the spiritual covenantal blessings in Christ Jesus. So for believing Gentiles to have an arrogant, boastful attitude towards unbelieving Jews is totally inappropriate.

Yet if any do boast of their new spiritual status, they must remember that, by God's grace alone, the nations are supported by the same root and sap of the natural olive tree. This Tree has Hebraic roots and is founded on the Old Testament. Yes, some of the natural (Jewish) boughs were broken off due to unbelief, so that the nations could be grafted in, but this position of the nations is based on *faith* and not works, so it is possible that they too can be broken off at some point due to unbelief, apostasy and hypocrisy. Faith is a gift from God, therefore, Paul warns the nations not to become arrogant and haughty, but to fear God (v 19-21).

If the *natural* boughs were not spared, neither will the *wild* boughs be spared. God has shown severity (or sternness) to Israel in cutting off some branches, and He has shown kindness to the nations by grafting them in to the olive tree. **But if the 'Christian' nations do not continue in the kindness of God then they too will be judged and hewn out of the olive tree!** (v 21-22)

Sadly, the Christian nations as a whole have not continued in God's kindness, and unbelief and arrogance has progressed more and more through the centuries within Christendom! Not only do many Christians believe that the Gentile Church has completely replaced Israel (with some even persecuting Jews), the majority of them also believe that they are the only ones who shall be saved, while the rest will be tormented in fire forever and ever! But the truth is, the nations are only wild olive branches that, contrary to nature, have been grafted in to the cultivated olive tree of spiritual Israel!

Paul then concludes this portion (in verses 23-24) by saying unequivocally that Jews, as the *natural* branches, can be easily grafted back in again to their own Olive Tree **when they no longer persist in unbelief, and instead turn back to their God and Father, and recognise their King/Messiah in Jesus.** God is most able to graft them in again to their original Olive Tree.

He is saying here that individual Jews, that is, Israel according to the flesh, can be grafted back in again to their own Olive Tree - and it occurs in exactly the same way as with Gentiles, that is, by faith in Jesus as the Messiah. There isn't any other Tree that represents the Covenant people of God outside of Christ. There isn't any other program available, one for Jews and one for Gentiles. The Gospel of the kingdom, the good news about God's Son and the salvation He brings, is the same for ALL. And there is only One New Covenant. Therefore, the whole world can be divided into three groups: 1) unbelieving Jews, 2) unbelieving Gentiles or 3) believing Jews and Gentiles who together form the Ecclesia of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:32).

The Salvation of All Israel, the Israel of God

²⁵I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: **Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.** ²⁶And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

"The deliverer will come from Zion;
he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

²⁷And this is my covenant with them
when I take away their sins."

²⁸As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; **but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs,** ²⁹for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. ³⁰Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, ³¹so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. ³²For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

(Romans 11:25-32 NIV)

In this closing section, Paul reveals the mystery (or secret) that Israel in general has experienced a partial hardening of heart so that the majority do not accept their true Messiah. Knowledge of this revealed secret should prevent believing Gentiles from getting conceited about their place in God's overall plan. This hardening is said to continue until the fullness (or complement) of the Gentiles (or nations) has come in. In other words, as Paul has just told us in the Olive Tree allegory, God is making room for many Gentiles to be grafted in to the Kingdom Tree by cutting off (or hardening) many Jews. Only when the full number of the elect Gentiles is complete will the hardening end, which is evidently synonymous with the end of this age.

Consequently, there is an elect group of Jews being gathered in throughout this age which will result in the fullness of Israel (and it is likely that this will increase as the end of this age draws near); and there is also an elect group of Gentiles who are also being gathered in who, in total, will represent the fullness of the Gentiles. The Greek word translated 'fullness' is *pleroma* which means 'that which completes or fills up' that is, a complement. Therefore, these 'complements' out of Israel and the nations will together become the 'all Israel' that will be saved at Christ's Return. Paul's conclusion is

"And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written..."

In the Greek here, Paul is not referring to chronological time, as in "And then" all Israel will be saved after the fullness of the Gentiles has entered in. He is saying "And so" or "And thus" meaning "in this manner" all Israel will be saved. Paul's subsequent quotation from the prophet Isaiah confirms the salvation of Israel through the New Covenant in Christ Jesus, Who is the Deliverer from Zion.

Now there are a number of ways in which the phrase 'all Israel will be saved' can be understood. Some understand it to mean the whole Church, while others believe that it refers to the whole nation of Israel being saved at Christ's Second Advent. But to my mind, the correct understanding has to be in line with what Paul has been talking about all along in Romans 9-11, as well as tying in with everything else revealed in his letters.

Firstly, he has been talking about Israel as Israel according to the flesh, that is, the Jewish nation, to which Paul himself belonged. Yet in 9:6 he made it abundantly clear that the true spiritual Israel was not the equivalent of the whole of fleshly Israel as a nation, but was the believing remnant within it. He has also been making a distinction between Jews and Gentiles according to flesh.

Secondly, he made it evident that in each generation there was a remnant of Israel that were viewed as the spiritual Israel, though he only used Elijah's generation and his own generation in the 1st century AD as examples of this.

Therefore, any mention of the "fullness" of spiritual Israel, which would be the equivalent of saying "all Israel," must refer to the total sum of all believing Jews throughout history, particularly since the coming of Jesus as the Messiah. This sum could be symbolically represented by the "144,000 of all the tribes of Israel" as mentioned in the Book of Revelation.

Be that as it may, I have shown that Paul also teaches that believing Gentiles are now at one with believing Jews so that, together, this Ecclesia (or Church) becomes

the Israel of God, the spiritual Bride and Body of Christ. This identification is revealed further in the vision of the heavenly New Jerusalem towards the end of the book of Revelation, where the 12 gates of the city are marked by the 12 Tribes of Israel, and the 12 foundations of the wall are marked by the 12 Apostles of the Lamb. The city itself is called the Bride, the Wife of the Lamb.

It seems evident to me that Paul is not limiting the 'all Israel' to just one generation of Jews being saved at the end of the age. He is saying that due to only a *partial* hardening of Israel, as opposed to a total hardening, the full number of the true spiritual Israel shall be saved, so that "in this manner all Israel will be saved." Yet, by extension, this can also include the full number of elect Gentiles from throughout this age, for believing Jews *and* Gentiles are now one in Christ! This is Expansion Theology, not replacement theology!

Finally, in verses 28-32, Paul goes on to say that, in relation to the Gospel, Israel as a nation are enemies of God's true people on account of the Gentiles being saved, yet, concerning the election of God, Israel as a people are loved and cannot be totally rejected because of God's promises and covenants to the Hebrew patriarchs - and God's gifts and His call are irreversible!

And just as pagan, disobedient Gentiles have now received mercy from God due to the disobedience of Israel, so Israel are now disobedient so that they too can now receive mercy due to that same mercy being poured out on the Gentiles! (Read that again slowly if you didn't get it).

Paul's concluding statement is profound,

"For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all."

What an amazing truth this is! God's ultimate purpose is to reveal His mercy and grace to ALL MANKIND by firstly giving them over to disobedience! This is true for Jew and Gentile alike, and for ALL HUMANITY, so that no one can boast before Him or others! In effect, Paul is revealing the flip side to the issue of God's absolute Sovereignty and Will in Romans 9 - that is, that His ultimate intention, even through the temporary destruction of His enemies, is to have mercy on ALL. Now that's comforting!

So ultimately, ALL Israel, that is, the true spiritual Israel of God, will be saved, and all the promises of God will find complete fulfillment in the age to come as He intended.

I wish to conclude this article with a few quotations from some respected Bible teachers concerning the oft-quoted text of Galatians 6:15-16 and the subject of the Israel of God in this passage. Is this the key text in the NT where the Church is called 'the Israel of God' or not? Here it is from a couple of different versions.

¹⁵Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. ¹⁶Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, **even (Gr. kai) to the Israel of God.** (NIV)

15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but a new creation.
16 And whoever shall observe the elements by this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, also (*Gr. kai*) on the Israel of God. (CV)

15 for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation; 16 and as many as by this rule do walk -- peace upon them, and kindness, and (*Gr. kai*) on the Israel of God! (YLT)

The crux of the problem that causes two very different interpretations is the Greek word *kai*, which is usually translated as *and* in most places, although it can also be translated somewhat differently, depending on the context (as can be seen above). For me, I think the underlying issue of whether this is referring to the nation of Israel or the Church has more to do with Paul's teaching of the Gospel, especially in this letter. In the preceding verse, he states plainly that fleshly circumcision no longer has any real value and that what counts is a new creation, meaning (as he describes it elsewhere) a new humanity. Therefore, in Christ, there isn't any distinction between Jew and Gentile.

Therefore, those who walk according to this rule, or spiritual principle, of the gospel of grace experience the peace and mercy of God - who ultimately are the Israel of God! The thing is, if Paul was singling out Jewish Christians here, (which, to my mind, is the only other viable interpretation that doesn't contradict his message) then he loses the force of his whole teaching about the spiritual status of *all* believers in Christ Jesus (cf. 3:26-29).

Here is what Anthony Hoekema had to say about this in his book ***The Bible and the Future***.

What follows in the Greek is *kai epi ton Israel tou theou*. John F. Walvoord, a dispensational writer, insists that the word *kai* must be translated *and*, so that "the Israel of God" refers to believing Jews. The problem with this interpretation is that believing Jews have already been included in the words "all who follow this rule." The word *kai*, therefore, should here be rendered *even*, as the New International Version has done. When the passage is so understood, "the Israel of God" is a further description of "all who follow this rule" -- that is, of all true believers, including both Jews and Gentiles, who constitute the New Testament church. Here, in other words, Paul clearly identifies the church as the true Israel. This would imply that promises which had been made to Israel during Old Testament times are fulfilled in the New Testament church. (from chapter 15, *A Critique of Dispensational Premillennialism*, p.197)

Stephen Sizer writes the following in his book ***Zion's Christian Soldiers?: The Bible, Israel and the Church***.

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'."

...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 nineteenth benediction to the eighteen 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.' (from chapter 3, *Israel and the church: Who are God's chosen people?* p.50)

This is the true meaning of the Restoration of Israel, and we await the final re-gathering of God's chosen ones when all biblical prophecy shall be brought to its stupendous climax at the Return of the Messiah - and then the New Creation shall truly be consummated in all its glory.

Footnotes

[1] Anthony A. Hoekema in his excellent book ***The Bible and the Future*** discusses this issue in chapter 12 entitled *The Signs in Particular*, pp. 139-147. See also, Kim Riddlebarger, ***A Case for Amillennialism***, chapter 14 entitled *Romans 11: Is there a Future for Israel?* and Stephen Sizer, ***Zion's Christian Soldiers? The Bible, Israel and the Church***, particularly chapter 3 entitled *Israel and the church: Who are God's chosen people?* These books also supply many references to other renowned works in relation to this subject.

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Appendix of New Testament Quotes

The aim of this appendix is to provide clear scriptural evidence for the subject at hand so that the texts can be read in conjunction with this article without having to look up every biblical reference. I've done some of the hard work for you, the reader, by searching out these texts and listing them here for your convenience. All quotations are taken from the New International Version.

The following texts are divided into two categories:

A. Those that confirm that the Hebrew Scriptures (i.e. the Old Covenant or Testament) are all fulfilled in Jesus Christ

And

B. Those that reveal that the New Covenant Kingdom of the Messiah (i.e. the spiritual remnant of believing Israel) would also include the nations or Gentiles - and together they form the Ecclesia or Church of God, the spiritual Bride of Christ. This Ecclesia of the overcoming Sons of God, who co-rule with Christ both now and in the age to come, are figuratively viewed as the Israel of God,

the New Jerusalem, the heavenly Mount Zion, and the Temple of the living God.

It is interesting to note the following in regard to the above, written by Anthony Hoekema in his book ***The Bible and the Future***:

...the Bible teaches continuity between the people of God of Old Testament and New Testament times; therefore the church must not be thought of as a parenthesis in the purposes of God. We can see this continuity in a number of ways. The Hebrew term *qahal*, commonly rendered *ekklesia* in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible), is applied to Israel in the Old Testament. To give just a few examples, we find the word *qahal* used of the assembly or congregation of Israel in Exodus 12:6, Numbers 14:5, Deuteronomy 5:22, Joshua 8:35, Ezra 2:64, and Joel 2:16. Since the Septuagint was the Bible of the apostles, their use of the Greek word *ekklesia*, the Septuagint equivalent of *qahal*, for the New Testament church clearly indicates continuity between that church and Old Testament Israel. (from chapter 15, *A Critique of Dispensational Premillennialism*, p.215)

Category A Texts

¹⁷"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

(Matthew 5:17-18)

¹⁶"The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. ¹⁷It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.

(Luke 16:16-17)

¹⁵"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

(Mark 1:15)

²²For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written...

³²"I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³³Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

(Luke 21:22, 32-33)

³²Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!

³³"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? ³⁴Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. ³⁵And so upon you will come all the righteous blood

that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. ³⁶I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.

(Matthew 23:32-36)

³⁴I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

(Matthew 24:34-35)

²⁵He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself...

⁴⁴He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

(Luke 24:25-27, 44)

²⁰But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.

(Luke 11:20)

⁴Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

(Romans 10:4)

¹¹These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.

(1 Corinthians 10:11)

¹⁶No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷"In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

¹⁹I will show wonders in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

²⁰The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

²¹And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

...³²God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.
³³Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. ³⁴For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,
"The Lord said to my Lord:
"Sit at my right hand
³⁵until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet." '

³⁶"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

(Acts 2:16-21, 32-36)

²²For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. ²³Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.'

²⁴"Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. ²⁵And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.'²⁶When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

(Acts 3:22-26)

⁴But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, ⁵to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

(Galatians 4:4-5)

²⁶Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

(Hebrews 9:26)

¹⁸The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless ¹⁹(for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God...

⁶But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.

⁷For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸But God found fault with the people and said:

"The time is coming, declares the Lord,
when I will make a new covenant
with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah.

⁹It will not be like the covenant
I made with their forefathers

when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they did not remain faithful to my covenant,
and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.
¹⁰This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel
after that time, declares the Lord.
I will put my laws in their minds
and write them on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
¹¹No longer will a man teach his neighbor,
or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.
¹²For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more."

¹³By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

(Hebrews 7:18-19; 8:6-13)

Category B Texts

⁴³"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."

(Matthew 21:43)

¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

(Matthew 28:18-20)

²¹Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

(John 4:21-24)

¹⁶I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

(John 10:16)

¹⁷So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?"

¹⁸When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

(Acts 11:17-18)

¹⁵But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel."

(Acts 9:15)

⁴⁶Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "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. ⁴⁷For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

" 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

⁴⁸When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

(Acts 13:46-48)

¹³When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. ¹⁵The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁶" 'After this I will return
and rebuild David's fallen tent.
Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,

¹⁷that the remnant of men may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who bear my name,
says the Lord, who does these things'

¹⁸that have been known for ages.

¹⁹"It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.

(Acts 15:13-19)

²⁸A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹No, 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)

²⁷Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. ²⁸For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. ²⁹Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, ³⁰since there is only one

God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

(Romans 3:27-30)

⁶It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ⁸In 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)

¹⁴He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit...

²⁶You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

(Galatians 3:14, 26-29)

²¹Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. ²³His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.

²⁴These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. ²⁵Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. ²⁷For it is written:

"Be glad, O barren woman,
who bears no children;
break forth and cry aloud,
you who have no labor pains;
because more are the children of the desolate woman
than of her who has a husband."

²⁸Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. ³⁰But what does the Scripture say? "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." ³¹Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

(Galatians 4:21-31)

⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love...

¹³Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. ¹⁴May 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. ¹⁵Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. ¹⁶Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.

(Galatians 5:6; 6:13-16)

¹¹Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)— ¹²remember 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. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by 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, ¹⁶and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²²And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

(Ephesians 2:11-22)

⁶This 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 3:6)

¹¹Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

¹²Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

(Colossians 3:11-12)

¹The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ²and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man...

⁶But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. ⁷For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another...

¹³By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

(Hebrews 8:1-2, 6-7, 13)

²²But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, ²⁴to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

(Hebrews 12:22-24)

¹⁰We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

(Hebrews 13:10)

⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

(1 Peter 2:9-10)

¹³But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

(2 Peter 3:13)

⁵...and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

(Revelation 1:5-6)

¹Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. ²And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. ³And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. ⁴These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among

men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. ⁵No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

(Revelation 14:1-5)

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea...

⁵He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true..."

⁹One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." ¹⁰And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹²It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. ¹³There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. ¹⁴The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

(Revelation 21:1, 5, 9-14)