

## ARE WE SPIRITUAL ISRAEL? (Part two)

*Scripture Reading: Romans 2:17-29*

We have often heard the incredible suggestion that Gentile "Christians" are actually Jews. Even more incredible is the fact that many Christians believe this. Where do some Bible teachers get this notion, and what do the Scriptures actually teach?

The theory is largely based on a misunderstanding of Romans 2:28 & 29. "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and the circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." This certainly sounds like all true believers are Jews, according to Paul's definition in this verse.

Again, the context is the solution. In these particular verses, Paul is not addressing Gentiles and clearly states, "Behold thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God" (Romans 2:17). Paul is writing to the Jews of his generation who thought that just being related to Abraham entitled them to salvation. Christ encountered this same attitude when he was on earth. The Jews of His day said, "Abraham is our father" (John 8:39). Christ said to them, "Ye are of your father the devil" (John 8:44).

Paul is saying essentially the same thing. He reminds the Jews that even under God's dealings with Israel as a favored nation, national heritage was not enough. The individual Israelite (Jew) still had to have personal faith, resulting in "circumcision of the heart."

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## SEATED IN HEAVEN

*Scripture Reading: Matthew 19:28, Ephesians 2:4-6*

Where are you seated right now? Perhaps some of you are reading this while sitting on a sofa or recliner in your home. Maybe others have picked the book up in church and are sitting in a pew reading this while you should be listening to the preacher!

Wherever you are in the flesh, did you know that in Christ, you are seated in heaven? Paul writes that if we are saved, God "hath raised us up together and made us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). We enjoy this blessed estate *positionally* right now, and we will enjoy it *experientially* for all eternity. This blessing is only for members of the Body of Christ, the saved today in the dispensation of grace.

To the twelve apostles, who belong to the kingdom, God has given a different blessing. When Peter asked the Lord what he and the other apostles would receive for forsaking all and following Him, Christ answered, "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28). These thrones will be upon the earth; for Matthew also writes, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory" (Mt. 25:31). This Second Coming of Christ will be to establish Himself as King of the whole earth. His twelve apostles will reign with Him as judges over Israel. Our heavenly positions and their earthly positions will complete God's plan for subjecting and ruling the entire universe for His glory!

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## THIS YEAR ALSO

*Scripture Reading: Luke 13:6-9*

Bible teachers have traditionally taught that God set Israel aside, either temporarily or permanently, when they crucified the Lord on Calvary. While this was certainly a terrible act on Israel's part, a careful study of Scripture reveals that it did not result in the setting aside of Israel at that time.

Our text outlines the Lord's earthly ministry among the Jews, "Behold, these three years I [the owner of the vineyard] come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none..." (Luke 13:7a). Indeed, Christ sought fruit in Israel (represented by the fig tree) for a three year period and found no national repentance. Verse seven goes on to say, "cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" To this, most Bible teachers echo a hearty "Amen." What does the Lord go on to say in this parable? "And he [the worker] answering said unto him [the owner of the vineyard], Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down" (Luke 13:8, 9).

According to this text, Israel was allowed one more year *after* the cross to repent and receive her King and kingdom. Indeed, even as Christ hung on the cross, He cried out for His people, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). This prayer was heard, and Israel was given one more year to hear the kingdom offered and proclaimed. At the end of that year, Stephen stood before the Jews and confirmed that their time was up. As he gazed skyward, he proclaimed, "Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). Our Lord's standing posture indicated judgment. (See Isaiah 3:13.) The Jews recognized this, for upon hearing this indictment, they immediately proceeded to stone Stephen to death. Was Israel "set aside" at the cross? No! She was given another year to repent. Only after this, did God raise up a new apostle to go to the Gentiles.

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## OTHER SHEEP

*Scripture Reading: John 10:16*

"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: Them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10:16). Who are these other sheep, and what is the one fold? Traditionally, Bible teachers have identified these "other sheep" as the Gentiles and the "one fold" as the Body of Christ made up of Jew and Gentile. A careful study of Scripture shows this is not the case.

When our Lord walked the earth, He explicitly stated, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). Furthermore, at that time, the joint Body of Christ was still being kept secret, for it was first revealed to Paul. (See Ephesians 3:1-6.)

Who, then, were the "other sheep" who had become dispersed among the nations, through the various captivities and deportations? Ezekiel writes of these immediately following the great vision of the dry bones (Ez. 37:1-14). The Lord instructs Ezekiel to take two sticks and write "Judah" on one and "Ephraim" on the other (verses 15-20). These represented the houses of Israel and Judah of the divided kingdom. The Lord then promises that He will reunite these two houses and gather them from among the heathen (verse 21).

Finally, He states, "And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have *one shepherd*: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them" (Ezekial 37:24). Christ will fulfill this as He one day gathers His "other sheep," the Israelites who are dispersed among the nations. This process will begin after the Body of Christ is removed in the Rapture.

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## TRUSTING HIS NAME; TRUSTING HIS WORK

*Scripture Reading: John 20:31, I Corinthians 15:1-4*

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). Beautiful words, are they not, but the real question is *what* is it about Christ that must be believed? The answer is different under the kingdom program than it is under grace.

Under the kingdom (or prophetic) program, men are instructed, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that *believe on his name*” (John 1:12). What does it mean to believe on His name? John explains later in the book: “But these are written, that ye might believe that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31). Under the kingdom gospel, the key to life was acknowledging, by faith, that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

Under the grace (or mystery) program, it is still important to acknowledge and exalt the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (See I Corinthians 1:2-10.); but for salvation, the emphasis of the gospel is on the further truth of the *work of the Lord Jesus Christ*. Paul informs the Corinthians that “the gospel which I preached unto you” (I Cor. 15:1) is the truth “that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (I Corinthians 15:3, 4). This must be the object and focus of our faith in order to be saved.

It is of utmost importance that our witnessing and gospel presentations state the truth of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection on our behalf and for our sin. This is what it means to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” in this dispensation of Grace.

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## THE KINGDOM TAKEN AWAY

*Scripture Reading: Matthew 21:43, Luke 12:32*

Did the Lord bring an end to Israel’s kingdom hopes while He ministered here upon the earth? Many would answer “Yes.” Christ did indeed tell the Jewish leaders of His day, “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matthew 21:43). Is this a transfer of God’s spiritual program to the Gentiles, as some teach? Let us search the Scriptures and see.

By comparing Scripture with Scripture, we can find to whom the Lord gave the kingdom. Christ told His disciples, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to *give you the kingdom*” (Luke 12:32). Did not Christ say He was giving the kingdom to “a nation” (Matthew 21:43)? Yes, indeed! Notice that He said *nation* not *nations*. The Lord was not referring to the Gentile nations, but rather a specific group (the Greek word “ethnei,” meaning ethnic) within Israel. That group was none other than the twelve apostles. These were a part of the Godly remnant of Jews who will some day make up the true nation of Israel. Indeed, Peter informs the believing Jews of the dispersion that they are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, *an holy nation*” (I Peter 2:9). The Body of Christ is never referred to as a nation, nor could it be; for the Body of Christ is made up of believers from *all nations*.

To say that Christ took away Israel’s kingdom hope and gave it to the Gentiles is just another example of “spiritualizing” Israel’s promises and trying to apply them to the Church, the Body of Christ.

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## AT THE CROSS OR BY THE CROSS?

*Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2:16, I Timothy 2:6*

What a big difference a little word can make! This is especially true when it comes to the choice of words made by the Holy Spirit as He inspired the Scriptures. In Ephesians 2:16 we read, "And that he might reconcile both [Jew and Gentile] unto God in one body *by the cross*, having slain the enmity thereby." On the basis of this and similar passages, many conclude that the joint Body of Christ began at the time of the crucifixion of Christ. While it is easy to see how one could arrive at this conclusion, we must point out some important facts.

First, Paul does not say this joint Body was formed at the cross, but rather, *by* the cross. In other words, the Body of Christ was made possible by the wonderful sacrifice which our Lord performed at Calvary. Our text in Ephesians does *not* say that the Body of Christ was historically begun at that time. In the next chapter, Paul clearly states that the dispensation of the grace of God, including the *revelation* concerning the joint Body of Jew and Gentile, was a mystery until revealed to him (Ephesians 3:1-6).

Second, according to I Timothy 2:6, the full result of the death of Christ was not revealed when it occurred; for Paul says, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, *to be testified in due time*" (I Timothy 2:5, 6). When was this "due time"? The next verse tells us: "Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity" (I Timothy 2:7). The complete sacrifice for all mankind was accomplished *by* the cross but was not revealed until Paul.

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## CHRIST THE KING; CHRIST THE HEAD

*Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:2, Ephesians 1:22, 23*

Paul clearly affirms that in the final analysis, Jesus Christ is "King of kings and Lord of lords" (I Timothy 6:15). Yet with regard to His relationship to the Body of Christ, an important distinction must be drawn.

To Israel, Christ is portrayed primarily as King. The wise men from the east recognized this when they asked, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" (Matthew 2:2). Indeed, the very word, "Christ" means the "anointed" One. This is a reference to the ancient practice of anointing the one chosen to be a king. (See I Samuel 10:1; 16:12, 13.) The Old Testament Scriptures are filled with references to this coming "King of the Jews" of which the second Psalm is a notable example. Here, Christ is foretold as the Lord's "anointed" (verse 2), "my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (verse 6), and a "Son" (verses 7 & 12) who will rule with "a rod of iron" (verse 9).

However, to the church which is His body, Christ is not said to be a "King" but rather the "Head." Concerning Christ, Paul writes that the Father "hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the *head* over all things to *the church which is his body*, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:22, 23). Also in chapter five, Paul writes, "Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body" (Ephesians 5:23). This beautiful metaphor of a head and body suggests that we enjoy a unique and intimate relationship beyond that which Israel could have ever imagined. How we should thank God for our precious union with Christ as our Head!

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## IS THE BIBLE COMPLETE?

*Scripture Reading: Colossians 1:25, Revelation 22:18, 19*

As incredible as it may seem, there are still various groups within Christendom that do not believe the Bible is God's complete revelation to man. The Roman Catholic church has its traditions of the "fathers" which are supposedly on par with the Bible. Many charismatic groups believe that modern day visions and prophecies still supplement the Word of God. What saith the Scriptures to these things?

In Colossians 1:25, Paul writes, "Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God." The word *fulfill* here is from the Greek *pleroo*, meaning to fill completely. In this context, Paul is referring to the mystery (verse 26), which indeed fills up or completes God's full revelation to man. The Old Testament prophets and the Jewish apostles such as Peter, James and John were given revelation pertaining to God's dealings with Israel and the kingdom program; but they were not given one word about God's heavenly program, the Body of Christ. This only was committed to Paul; and according to our text, Paul completed the Word of God.

What about the prophetic program? Is God's revelation concerning His earthly, kingdom plan also complete? Yes, for in Revelation 22:18 & 19, we read the sober warning not to "add unto" nor "take away from the words of the book of this prophecy." We can rest assured that the Word of God is complete and that it is the final authority for faith and practice for the child of God, especially as we "rightly divide the word of truth."

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## THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

*Scripture Reading: Matthew 12:31, 32*

From time to time we are asked, "Do you think it is possible to commit the unpardonable sin today?" We are always happy to answer, "No, not in this dispensation of grace!" There *was* a time when it was possible to fall into such sin that it was impossible to return to the Lord.

Under the Law, God distinguished between sins of "ignorance" and "presumptuous" sin. (See Numbers 15:29, 30.) For the sin of ignorance, the Lord prescribed an appropriate sacrifice. "And if any soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she goat of the first year for a sin offering. And the priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance before the LORD, to make an atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him" (Numbers 15:27, 28). For the presumptuous (literally meaning "open handed") sin, God prescribed no sacrifice but rather commands, "Because he hath despised the word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him" (Numbers 15:31).

It is this same kind of open rebellion that the Lord refers to in Matthew 12:31 & 32: "Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." The nation of Israel committed this kind of "open handed" sin when they were privileged to personally witness the divine miracles and instruction of Christ, but rejected Him anyway. To these, the offer of forgiveness and a kingdom were withdrawn. But praise God, under grace, no sin is beyond forgiveness; as Paul states in Romans 5:20, "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." No matter what manner of sin you have committed, trust Christ today, and He will save you!

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