

- I. Why Does This Matter?
 - A. We can't rightly pray for Israel if we don't understand who Israel is.
 - B. Many New Testament passages have been assumed to support supersessionism/ replacement theology/fulfillment theology. We need to take a closer look at them.
- II. The New Testament on "Who Is Israel?"
 - A. **Matthew 3:7-9** – John the Baptist's warning about confidence in ancestry.
 1. The question is raised: if God can make sons of Abraham from stones, does that make the Jewish people irrelevant?
 2. John's statement is consistent throughout the Hebrew scriptures – the people of Israel were always warned to not put their confidence in their lineage, but to walk rightly with God. The mark of a "True Jew" is that they walk in relationship with God. But if they don't, that does not negate their status as the covenant people of God.
 - B. **Matthew 21:18-19** – Jesus curses the fig tree.
 1. Often interpreted to be Jesus cursing the people of Israel for rejecting Him.
 2. Jesus was primarily speaking into the corruption of the temple service (Sadducees); confronting the religious elite. Not a statement about Israel as a whole.
 - C. **Matthew 21:33-45** – the Parable of the Tenants.
 1. Notice that the chief priests and pharisees perceived that Jesus was talking about *them* – the leadership of the nation – not the people of Israel (v.45). Again, this is a common theme throughout the Old Testament: holding leaders to account.
 2. Not saying that God was going to have a "new people", but that the old system was being exchanged for the new (Church, built on the foundation of the apostles).
 - D. **Acts 1:6-8** – "will you now restore the Kingdom to Israel?"
 1. Typically understood as "the disciples still don't get it, they're still focused on a carnal, earthly kingdom."
 2. Jesus didn't correct their question but told them their timing was off. It's more likely that the disciples rightly understood what Jesus had been teaching them about the Kingdom, they just hadn't understood the timing (all that must happen first before He establishes the Kingdom).

- E. **Romans 2:28-29** – being a Jew is an inward thing, not outward.
1. Paul’s correction is not opening the door for non-Jews to become Jews. He is speaking to Jews whose confidence was in their natural heritage and the external mark of being of the covenantal people of God; he is telling them that a True Jew is a Jewish person who has a godly heart.
- F. **Romans 9:6-8** – more thoughts on “True Israel”.
1. Same emphasis – the true Israelite is an Israelite who is living in the way the Israelites were called to live (walking with God). Claiming heritage is not enough.
 2. At the same time, the need for individuals to have their own right relationship with God does not deny or negate that God has a national covenant with Israel.
- G. **Galatians 3:6-9** – “sons of Abraham”.
1. Faith in Jesus brought Gentile believers into God’s family, but that’s not the same as becoming part of ethnic Israel. It caused them to *relate* to Israel more closely, but they didn’t become part of Israel.
 2. Again, none of this is a commentary on the issue of God’s ongoing faithfulness to His covenant with Israel.
 3. Jewish followers of Yeshua are both *natural* and *spiritual* children of Abraham, while non-Jewish followers of Yeshua are *spiritual* children of Abraham. This puts Jewish and Gentile believers in the same spiritual family, but it does not undermine the fact of God’s covenant with the natural Jewish descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- H. **Galatians 3:28-29** – “neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free...”
1. This does not mean that our national distinctions are irrelevant. Some Christian feminists have used this same passage to argue that there are no longer male or female distinctions in Christ, but we know that is not true.
 2. We understand that becoming a believer does not eradicate our biological sexual differences. In the same way, becoming a believer does not eradicate our ethnic differences.
 3. Paul is advocating for a profound unity. We can walk together *with our differences*, free from competition and comparison. He is not advocating for uniformity.

- I. **Ephesians 2:11 – 3:6** – the Mystery of the Gospel.
 1. Some interpret “the mystery” to be the Church, which had not been revealed before but was now front and centre. But that is not the whole picture: the mystery is that non-Jewish followers of the Messiah could become one family, one body together with Jewish followers of the Messiah; this was previously inconceivable.
 2. These non-Jewish followers being “welcomed at the table” with the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob does not make them part of the Jewish bloodline.
 3. The “one new man” (v.15) does not replace national distinctives, but indicates that we are enabled and empowered to experience unity together *in spite of* our differences, in Jesus. Again, this is unity in diversity.
 4. The Church does not become Israel, but is a trans-national gathering of the nations in the Messiah.

- J. **Philippians 3:3** – “the true circumcision”.
 1. This is referring to Jewish people (“those of the circumcision”) who also have circumcised hearts. It does not mean that everyone who believes is therefore part of “the circumcision”.

- K. **Colossians 2:11-12** – those of “the circumcision made without hands”.
 1. Refers to the spiritual reality (circumcision of the heart) that is represented by the outward mark of circumcision. But again, having the inward reality does not make one part of “the circumcision”, which Paul clearly used to speak of Jewish people.
 2. *Again, the reality of what all believers have in the Messiah does not negate God’s covenant with the people of Israel.*

- L. **1 Peter 2:9-10** – “a royal priesthood, holy nation”.
 1. “Once you were not a people...” is quoting Hos. 1:10, where God addressed the people of Israel, saying they once were “not a people”. This is Peter quoting a very Israel-specific passage, and likely addressing Jews (as he was sent to the Jews).
 2. Again, though this can be applied to the Church in some ways, it does not automatically undermine God’s covenant with the people of Israel, as supersessionism assumes. There is still no direct statement or evidence of God having ended His covenant with Israel.

3. The trouble comes when we read these passages with a supersessionist framework or lens and read these assumptions into the passages. If we read without that framework, we see it differently.

M. Revelation 2:9; 3:9 – “the synagogue of Satan”.

1. This phrase has been used to brand Jewish people in general, when it is actually referring to non-Jewish people falsely claiming to be Jews. Therefore, it is not a negative statement on Jewish people at all.

N. Galatians 6:15-16 – “the Israel of God”.

1. Many point to this verse as proof that Paul is saying believers are True Israel.
2. There is nothing in the Greek text that gives any indication that *kai* should be translated as “even” (which leads to the conclusion that “Israel of God” is referring to non-Jewish believers) instead of the more common “and”. Because there is nothing within the passage that dictates the identity of “Israel of God”, our interpretation of “Israel of God” is dependent upon other theological assumptions.
3. If we follow the trajectory of the rest of Galatians, we understand that Paul has been passionately unpacking how Gentile believers can be welcomed into the people of God without having to become like the Jews – emphasizing the distinctions that can, and should, remain. Then in closing, he blesses “all who walk by this rule” (Gentile believers who don’t feel compelled to become like the Jews) *and* “the Israel of God”. It appears he is distinctly blessing both groups.
 - a. In Acts, there were apparently rumors being circulated that Paul was teaching Jewish people to give up Torah and the Jewish traditions of his day. This may have branded Paul as being anti-Jewish. Here, Paul is clearly making a point of blessing the Jewish people, contrary to such an accusation.
4. This passage only suggests “Israel of God” refers to non-Jewish believers if you read it with a supersessionist lens.

III. Conclusion

- A. Earnestly seek to read the Scriptures clearly – without a lens that interprets through a supersessionist understanding – to see God’s faithfulness to Israel, so that we can pray for them more effectively.