

Straightforward Scriptures Regarding The Modern Focus On Israel

I have written on this subject several times, particularly in my book, *The Veil of Moses*. In these I exposed the aberrational teaching behind the Jewish Root Movement, and others who focus upon Israel,¹ which are based upon the underlying errors of Dispensationalism. Any system that centres upon the flesh, the earth, and time instead of Christ, heaven and eternity is going to be seriously flawed. The Kingdom of God is not earthly, it is spiritual; it is not Jewish but heavenly, is not limited to 1,000 years but is eternal and consummated in a new heavens and earth at the end. I argued against these errors showing the Biblical, theological and historical mistakes that lie behind them, and urge you to read the short book if you want further information.

The history behind these ideas is also shocking. The roots of Dispensationalism are the ideas spawned in a seriously heretical Victorian church and particularly founded upon the ravings of a sick, occultist teenage girl.² The key principles of Dispensational teaching are absent in the church history before 1830 and the precursors are two Jesuits.³ Those who favour rabbinical writings and systems of interpretation fail to understand that modern rabbinic Judaism is not the same as Old Testament Israelite religion, but is the development of the very enemies of Jesus, the Pharisees. The Babylonian Talmud is filled with the most sick and blasphemous writings but it is the basis of modern Judaism, having more authority than the Torah (five books of Moses).⁴ Any Christian that supports such work is already seriously disobeying God.

However, there are very simple and straightforward Biblical statements that knock Jewish Root and Messianic Christianity teaching on the head in one blow, as well as destroying the idea that Christians should centre their attention on Israel, Jews and Judaism. God has ensured that we don't need to look into complex theological arguments or study history, we just need to obey the clear word of scripture. Here are some examples of this.

¹ Christian Zionism; Hebrew Root theology, Messianic Christianity etc.

² Margaret Macdonald's occult inspired visions led to the original idea of a secret rapture, which was taken up by Edward Irving and the Catholic Apostolic Church in London. This proto-Charismatic group scandalised society and ruined many good people until it faded away. Irving, who held a heretical view of the Lord Jesus, died a broken man, wrecked by the authoritarian apostolic leaders he had inspired.

³ Cardinal Ribera and Manuel Lacunza.

⁴ The Talmud promotes and exonerates paedophilia and lying to everyone, amongst other evils. It contains the most putrid blasphemies imaginable against the Lord Jesus.

We must ignore earthly tribal distinctions

Jews and Gentiles are the same under God in salvation

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. (Rm 10:12)

The context here is salvation. God does not look with favour upon any nation, not even Israel, since all are sinful flesh; all are under the same condemnation. Those who get saved are born again into a new world where the human tribal distinctions have no bearing whatsoever. There is no salvific benefit in being Jewish.

If there is no distinction, then we must not make one and centre our thinking on Israel.

... the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference. (Rm 3:22)

The context here is the guilt of the world requiring salvation and whether Jews have any advantage. Paul says that they do have an advantage (v1-2) since they have the Old Covenant word of God while other nations do not. However, he then labours the point that even with this advantage, they are in exactly the same place as all flesh – they are in sin and need to be converted. Their advantage of having God's oracles does not make them special, privileged or different to other men. 'What then? Are we better *than they*? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin' (v9). The Gospel comes with power to save the elect in all nations equally by divinely given faith 'God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith' (v30). Again, there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles.

Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.' (Acts 10:24-25)

Peter agrees with Paul; God is not partial. God does not favour one fleshly nation above another. To say that he favours Israel is to contradict God's own words.

Abraham is the father of those who believe in all nations

... that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also. (Rm 4:11)

Paul argues for this over and over again in Romans and Galatians. How can people ignore it? Abraham is the father (root) of all who believe whether Jew or Gentile.

Jews pride themselves on being descendants of Abraham since he was a friend of God. But Paul emphasises that Abraham is the root example of faith not nationhood. Everyone who believes is a son of Abraham, and is a receiver of the covenant promise made to him. 'And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.' (Gal 3:29) Abraham is a scriptural model of faith, not a model of nationhood.

There is no special spiritual benefit in being Jewish. The Gospel promise, first made in individual covenant terms to Abraham, is for all the elect in every nation. Indeed, Abraham wasn't strictly a Jew at all when he was called by God, but an uncircumcised Sumerian.

Jews only benefit from looking to Abraham if they also share his Gospel faith: 'and the father of circumcision to those who not only *are* of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham *had while still* uncircumcised' (Rm 4:12).

Jews are not the people of God by national descent

And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, *even* us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As He says also in Hosea: 'I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved.' (Rm 9:23-25)

Even in the Old Testament God explained that in the future (now, in the Gospel age) the people of God would be those who are called from all nations. Here it specifically says that the called of all nationalities are God's people. How can anyone state that God's people are fleshly Jews?

Only a few Jews will ever be God's people

Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: 'Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved. For He will finish the work and cut *it* short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth.' And as Isaiah said before: 'Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah.' (Rm 9:27-29)

What could be clearer? Out of the vast number of Jews, only a small remnant will be saved. If God did not leave this small remnant, Israel would have been like Sodom and Gomorrah – totally annihilated. Israel's history in the Old Testament pictures this. The vast majority of Israelites were destroyed or captured and exiled, while only a few returned to Jerusalem, and of them only a few were truly converted.

In Christ there are no Jews

For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:27-29)

There are not only no Jews but no other nation either. There are no human distinctives of any kind in the church because we are of an entirely new creation; a new humanity (2 Cor 5:17). Since we are a new creation in Christ, a heavenly creature, part of the body of Christ, there cannot be any kind of national distinctive.

This means that to maintain any national distinctive is blasphemous, for it denies God's word and disparages the work of Christ.

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. (Eph 2:14-19)

Just see the emphasis Paul puts here on destroying any thought of distinction between Jew and Gentile in Christ:

- Jews and Gentiles (Greeks) are both one in Christ; i.e. there is no national distinction.
 - The wall of separation between Jews and others has been destroyed.
 - The enmity between the two groups has been destroyed by the cross.
 - Jews and Gentiles are one new man in Christ, a new holy nation. Jewishness has ceased to exist in God's eyes.
 - Jews and Gentiles are citizens with the same rights and privileges in God's household.
- There is no special status of kingdom or race for Jews.

This further proves that any special focus upon Jews is against God's will.

... that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel. (Eph 3:6)

Further emphasis that Jews and Gentiles are the same in Christ; equal heirs. There is no difference or separation.

... and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all. (Col 3:10-11)

Note Paul's continuing emphasis that there is no fleshly nationhood, race or tribal status in Christ. No one has any advantage or special privileges. There are no Jews in Christ; all are Christians. Any attempt to re-introduce a special focus on national distinctives after conversion (such as celebrating Jewish feasts or diet) is a denial of the new creation in Christ and taking attention away from Christ.

Background to the changed status of Israel

The kingdom was judicially taken away from Israel by Christ

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD's doing, And it is marvellous in our eyes'? "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. "And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. (Matt 21:43-45)

Here Christ categorically states that the status of being the kingdom of God has been taken away from Israel as a nation. Israel is no longer the people of God ever since the days of Christ. This is unequivocal.

Some try to avoid this by saying that Christ is merely referring to the Pharisees and not all Israel. How foolish! When did God give the kingdom to the Pharisees? This religious party was not in existence when the kingdom was given to the Jewish race in the Old Covenant via Abraham, Moses and David. The Kingdom was Jewish under the Old Covenant, but this whole covenant has been rescinded and replaced by the New Covenant.

This was even promised by Old Covenant prophets. Isaiah explained that the kingdom of God would spread out to reach all nations and not remain within the enclave of Israel (Isa 49:22, 52:15, 56:7, 61:11, 18ff). Jeremiah prophesied that there would be a New Covenant that would be unlike the old one, being written on hearts; it would be an internal kingdom and not an external one. The covenant made with Israel would be cancelled and a new one established (Jer 31:31ff). Hosea prophesied that those who were not part of God's people (Gentiles) would become God's people (Hos 2:23). We could go on.

The kingdom of God is no longer Jewish; indeed it has no racial characteristics. The kingdom is all those in Christ who submit to his rule. In Christ there is no earthly tribal distinctives; all are one in a new spiritual creation.

The kingdom is the realm of the church

The kingdom is Christ; it is the realm where the rule of God is obeyed and where the kingship of Jesus is acknowledged. This has nothing to do with Israel since adherents of Judaism hate Christ and do not submit to God. Neither can this be avoided by pushing the kingdom into the future in a millennium when Jews will rule the world. To do this one first has to prove that there is a millennium reign, and this is Biblically impossible for reasons

we cannot go into here.⁵ In any case the kingdom is stated to be here now in the church, the place where God's rule is acknowledged. The consummation of the Kingdom is at the end when all the elect of all time are transformed and presented to God, but it is always present on the earth in the church. Note for instance:

- **THE KINGDOM IS SPIRITUAL AND HEAVENLY.** – Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.' (Jn 18:36). The Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve *me* for His heavenly kingdom. To Him *be* glory forever and ever. Amen! (2 Tim 4:18).
- **THE KINGDOM IS GIVEN TO THE SON AS THE REIGN OF HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS.** – But to the Son *He says*: 'Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness *is* the sceptre of Your Kingdom.' (Heb 1:8). For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rm 14:17).
- **THE KINGDOM ONLY CONTAINS THOSE WHO ARE RIGHTEOUS.** – Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor 6:9-10).
- **THE KINGDOM ONLY CONTAINS THOSE WHO LOVE JESUS.** – Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? (Jm 2:5)
- **THE KINGDOM IS NOT BASED ON HUMAN FEATURES, SUCH AS A CERTAIN NATION.** – 'Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption' (1 Cor 15:50).
- **THE KINGDOM IS THE SPIRITUAL REALM OCCUPIED BY THE CHURCH, THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN DELIVERED FROM DARKNESS.** – He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, (Col 1:13). Walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory (1 Thess 2:12, written to Gentile converts). 'I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.' (Rev 1:9).
- **THE FUTURE EXPRESSION OF THE KINGDOM IS DELIVERED BY CHRIST, WITH HIS PEOPLE, TO THE FATHER.** – Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. (1 Cor 15:24).
- **THE FUTURE CONSUMMATION OF THE KINGDOM CONSISTS OF THE HEAVENLY CHURCH.** – an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Pt 1:11; spoken to believers 1:1, 'To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.').

The kingdom is the expression of the victory of Christ. Consequently it is filled with those who share in that victory – the church which is His body (1 Cor 15:57; 1 Jn 5:4).

The kingdom is the spiritual realm of God's obedient servants and has nothing to do with the earth at all (Jn 18:36); this is why it has nothing to do with food or drink, ordinary human activities on Earth (Rm 14:17). Thus it is experienced here spiritually amongst the elect who, as new creatures, can manifest spiritual realities. Only those who have been regenerated can obey God from the heart, and thus be a servant in the kingdom.

There is no appearance of Israel in any of these texts. The reason is that Israel has nothing to do with the kingdom in any shape or form. No earthly nation or tribe or people form the kingdom. Only what is a new creation in Christ comprises the kingdom of God.

⁵ If interested the author has many papers on this matter

The church is now what Israel only typified under the Old Covenant

There are literally hundreds of occasions where what was said of Israel potentially (only a remnant of faithful Israelites actually obtained salvation) is now applied to the church. Fleshly Israel was a picture of what God intended his spiritual people to be; it was a living picture and example that helps us to understand what these features truly represent. Thus one can learn a great deal about what it means to be the people of God or the flock of God by studying Israel's history. It should also cause us to be sober and fear God to notice that Israel failed in obedience and was punished for constant spiritual adultery. We read the OT to learn about our relationship with God and heed warnings given to Israel in the past. There are many titles given to Israel that identify these various features, but they are now all attributed to the church. For instance,

Item	Israel	The Church
Beloved of God	Ex 15:13; Deut 33:3; Ezra 3:11	Rm 9:25; Eph 5:1; Col 3:12; 1 Jn 3:1
Children of God	Ex 4:22; Deut 14:1; Isa 1:2,4	Jn 1:12, 11:52; Rm 8:14, 16; 2 Cor 6:18
The Field of God	Jer 12:10	1 Cor 3:9
The Flock of God	Ps 78:52, 80:1; Isa 40:11	Jn 10:14, 16; Heb 13:20; 1 Pt 2:25, 5:2-3
The House of God	Num 12:7	1 Tim 3:15; Heb 13:2, 5, 6, 10:21; 1 Pt 4:17
The Kingdom of God	Ex 19:6; 1 Ch 17:14, 28:5	Rm 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20; Col 1:13, 4:11
The people of God	Ex 6:7; Deut 27:9; 2 Sam 7:23	Rm 9:25; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 4:12, 5:3; 2 Thess 1:10
The Vineyard of God	Isa 5:3-7; Jer 12:10	Lk 20:16
The Children of Abraham	2 Chr 20:7; Ps 105:6; Isa 41:8	Rm 4:11, 16; Gal 3:7, 29, 4:23, 28, 31
The Chosen people	Deut 7:7, 10:15; Isa 43:20-21	Col 3:12; 1 Pt 2:9
The Circumcised	Gen 17:10, 13; Jud 15:18	Rm 2:29; Phil 3:3; Col 2:11
Israel	Gen 32:28; Ex 12:3	Gal 6:15-16; Eph 2:12, 19; Rm 9:24-27
Zion	Ps 9:14, 14:7	Heb 12:22-24

To focus upon Israel today is to deny that this change under the New Covenant has taken place. It betrays a serious lack of understanding Biblical doctrine and interpretation, and in many cases arises from an overriding faulty theological system, such as Dispensationalism.

External Jewishness has no value to God after the cross

For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; but *he is a Jew who is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is not* from men but from God. (Rm 2:28-29)

This is also clear – after the cross Jewishness is not an outward form. Earthly descent, external appearances, religious associations, being born in Israel, all mean absolutely nothing to God. The principle of Jewishness in the Old Testament is being separated to God from amongst the nations as a result of calling (Deut 4:33ff). So, Israel was sanctified from all other nations as a result of God's choosing her. This principle of being set apart for God by calling is now not an external thing, but something internal. The principle of Jewishness, being set apart for God, is now determined by a changed heart, by a spiritual regeneration within. What Jews represented in the Old Testament, is today represented in the *ekklesia*; the community of the called out ones, those who have been born again.

This means that external Jewishness is of no value in spiritual terms to God in any way. Its nation has no value; its religious forms have no value; its scriptures (Talmud) have no value; its national characteristics have no value. To claim that they have requires one to re-write scripture.

Apostolic example

Though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ. (Phil 3:4-8).

If there were any value in being Jewish then Paul would have celebrated it, being a zealous Jew of impeccable background and Pharisaic training. But what do we see?

It was Paul's custom not to highlight his Jewish background at all since he was a missionary to the Gentiles. Admittedly he often tried an initial work in the synagogues, where he was usually treated very badly by religious Jews, but his ministry was pre-eminently to Gentiles. We know that he downplayed his Jewish background since when he is forced to defend his apostolic office to the Corinthians in 2 Cor 11:16-12:21, he begins his argument by referring to his Hebrew origin. This would only be necessary if he had ignored his Jewishness and Jewish techniques in his preaching and teaching for 18 months at Corinth. [Paul was dogged by Judaisers who tried to foist Judaism upon new converts and some were fooled to believe that adding on Jewish features made them more spiritual (see Galatians).]

We have Paul's clear thinking about his Jewish background in the passage from Philippians. What is his conclusion? Jewishness is counted as loss (i.e. worth losing) and also as rubbish. The Greek word for 'loss' more often means 'damage'; while the meaning of the word 'rubbish' is 'refuse', 'garbage' or very often the excrement of animals. Rabbis often used this word to attack others and the Talmud states that Jesus is currently in hell suffering in boiling excrement. Paul's use of this word is deliberate. Rabbinic Judaism is excrement according to Paul, and will damage believers. What could be more clear?

Ramifications of this for Christians today

All this means that the current focus on Israel and things Jewish is nothing but a deception intended to lead believers astray, and waste time and effort. It has happened before in church history (where it was condemned by the early church fathers) and is a growing movement today. The implications of what I have explained affect very many things in modern churches,⁶ but to discuss just a few:

Dedicated prayer meetings for Israel

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: 'May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, Prosperity within your palaces.' For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, 'Peace *be* within you.' Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek your good. (Ps 122:5-9)

Jews should be prayed for as much as anyone else; Israel should be prayed for as much as any other nation. However, the multitudes of groups set up to pray for Israel alone is a mistake. We are to pray for all rulers, all nations and all people (1 Tim 2:1-2); this is a clear

⁶ For example: the bad interpretation of many books on Israel and OT prophecy, wearing Jewish prayer shawls, using midrash interpretation, calling church leaders 'rabbi', using the term 'tree of sacrifice' instead of 'the cross', calling oneself a 'Messianic Jew' instead of the Biblical term 'Christian', using confusing Jewish terms like 'Torah' etc.

command by an apostle. We are never told by an apostle to pray for Jerusalem or for the Jewish people, but are commanded here by Paul to pray for everyone. If we spend all our time praying only for Israel then we are disobeying God.

From time to time God will call us to concentrate prayer, for a season, on one subject. This is normal and in accordance with being led by the Spirit. For instance the early church gathered just to pray for Peter who was in prison (Acts 12:5). But to do this without clear leading, agreed by the church, and to do it continually while neglecting other subjects, is a sin.

Therefore, Psalm 122:6 must be interpreted in line with apostolic teaching and not according to Dispensational heresies. The apostles frequently expounded prophecy in a non-literal way; in fact most prophecies are interpreted in the NT in a non-literal, and sometimes unexpected, fashion. Of 80 OT prophecies fulfilled in the NT, over 86% are realised by NT events in a spiritual way. Thus OT matters must be brought in line with the revelation of apostolic doctrine. If apostolic teaching shows us that God has taken the kingdom away from Israel and that Jerusalem, the temple, the tabernacle and other Jewish matters symbolise features of Christ's work and kingdom, then OT prophecies should be carefully interpreted.

Jerusalem symbolises the community of the people of God, the place where God dwells. This is, without doubt, now evidenced in the church, the dwelling place of God (1 Cor 3:16, 6:19; Rm 8:11; 2 Tim 1:14; 1 Jn 4:15). God is not interested in bricks and mortar, and has no place for earthly features; his dwelling place is now spiritual (Acts 7:48; Eph 2:22; 1 Pt 2:5; Heb 3:6). His purpose is with his people, and this is the church (Eph 1:11, 2:21, 3:10-11). Thus Ps 122:6 means that we should pray for the peace of God's people; pray that the church has peace to conduct its ministry.

If the apostles tell us that we are God's house, we are God's temple, we are God's city, then the physical Jerusalem cannot be those things. Even in the OT the prophets spoke of a different Jerusalem to that which was built of stone in Israel. In Isa 24 the prophet first speaks of the destruction of the earth: it is made empty and a wasteland (v1); cities are desolate and empty (v12); the earth is violently broken, split open, and shaken exceedingly (v19). The picture given is clearly that of the end of the age when the earth is burned up. Isaiah adds that angels and men are punished (v21), which confirms this interpretation. Despite this the prophet ends the chapter with a statement about Jerusalem: **'then the moon will be disgraced and the sun ashamed; for the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before His elders, gloriously'** (v23). This is not a millennial reign since Earth has been destroyed and this follows the judgment of men and angels. So Isaiah speaks of two Jerusalems: an earthly one and a heavenly one.

Paul picks this up and follows Isaiah's lead by explaining the earthly Jerusalem is in bondage, is earthly and is of the Old Covenant while the heavenly Jerusalem is the spiritual dwelling place of God and his people,

Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children - but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. (Gal 4:25-26)

This is the Jerusalem we are called to pray for and bless - the community of saints. The validity of the old, earthly Jerusalem has passed along with the Old Covenant. The writer to the Hebrews confirms this (remember he is writing to Jewish Christians):

You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect.

(Heb 12:22-23)

The Jerusalem that concerns believers is the place where God dwells with innumerable angels; where Christ sits in glory and where God's people, the body of Christ, are assembled.

It is vital that believers are not childish in their interpretation of the Bible; they must understand the plan of God throughout salvation history or they will be lost in a mist of doctrinal confusion. The Old Testament is an object lesson in salvation and continually points us to Christ in every way. Those times were under the Old Covenant, which has now been superseded. We must thus be very careful and not superficial in interpreting the OT, and especially OT prophecy, which can be made to mean anything by anyone. Many heretical groups have established aberration upon aberration through literal interpretations of OT prophecy. If we took all prophecy and prophetic actions as literally applicable today, then walking around naked for three years or publicly burying our underpants would be a valid sign and wonder. We would also be waiting for a literal city to descend from heaven to Earth with walls 1,500 miles high (Rev 21:16).⁷

The OT (and all prophecy) must be understood for what it is and not always interpreted literally. What is historical and literal must be accepted as such and this includes the fall of Adam and the creation of the world in 6 days. However, we must recognise what is typology, symbolism, figures of speech, or apocalyptic and prophetic literature. These must be carefully interpreted according to their form and according to the pattern given us in the NT.

The foolishness of always interpreting prophecy literally is evidenced in the excitement of some that a new Jerusalem temple will be rebuilt and atoning sacrifices offered upon it. Were such a thing actually erected, it would be a blasphemy against Christ to operate it. Such plans demonstrate an utter lack of understanding about the place of the Old Covenant and the purpose of types and symbols. They are the shadow not the reality (Heb 8:5, 10:1). As such, when the real thing (Christ) is experienced, the shadows have no value. Who would want to have a relationship with the shadow of his wife instead of being with her in person?

Focusing prayer upon Israel, Jews and Jerusalem at the expense of other national groups is wrong.

Adopting Jewishness

This is a fallacy of the first order. Many groups do this today to a lesser or greater degree. The sort of features adopted include:

- Changing one's name to a Jewish equivalent.
- Meeting on the Sabbath (Saturday).
- Calling one's group a synagogue.
- Calling the church leader a rabbi.
- Refusing to use the name of God, writing G-d and L-rd; calling Jesus 'Y'shua'.
- Calling the apostle Paul, 'rabbi Shaul'.
- Celebrating the Jewish feasts.

And many more. Some have even introduced circumcision.

According to Paul's sustained teaching in Galatians, this is to introduce bondage into one's Christian walk and sever a disciple from Christ (Gal 4:9-11, 5:1, 4). It is reverting to the

⁷ However, even the context here (v9-10) shows us that the city is the bride; i.e. the church – 'Then one of the seven angels ... came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem.' This is a further confirmation that Jerusalem = the ekklesia.

shadowy forms of the Old Covenant (Col 2:16-17), even though one is in Christ in the new covenant. It is aberrational, heretical and dangerous.

It is shocking that supposed believers can do these things considering the huge amount of NT teaching that warns against it. Despite this, folk fall into this error; indeed one reason is that they read very little of the NT preferring to concentrate on reading the OT. This is a failure to understand that the final words of Christ are given to us through the apostles empowered and inspired by the Spirit of Christ to lead us into truth. The OT must be understood in the light of apostolic teaching in the NT. Yet these folk continue to force an Old Covenant literal understanding of OT prophecy upon the NT as if the apostles never wrote anything at all.

Defending Israel's politics

This is an even more serious problem since Israel has committed very wicked acts for many years. No other country has so many UN security resolutions passed against it, far more than there ever were against Saddam Hussein.⁸ Indeed, the State of Israel was established through terrorist bombings, state controlled murder of politicians, destruction of Palestinian villages and massacres of Palestinian people. Prime Ministers, such as Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir were former terrorists. Shamir was the leader of the terrorist Lehi group ('Stern Gang') who ordered the killing of the British minister Lord Moyne in Cairo in 1944. This group also assassinated the UN representative in the Middle-East in 1948. Despite such things, Zionist Christians read the history with rose coloured glasses and defend such leaders; this is evidence of a great delusion and it is utterly opposed to Christian ethics.

Israel continues to practice apartheid, which is undergirded by illegal strategies and the promotion of human suffering. Imagine a country whose rules of engagement tolerates the deliberate shooting of children and unarmed civilians (including western journalists). A country that arbitrarily destroys homes and countenances acts of terrorism; that illegally engages in hostilities against neighbouring sovereign states. A nation that practises a form of ethnic cleansing and cuts off water supplies to villages; and so on. Such a country would have been universally vilified and possibly invaded; Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan were invaded for less. However Israel, befriended by the USA and supported by the world banking systems run by other Jews, is treated as an ally and a holy land for Christians to sentimentally vacation in.

Believers should never be engaged in such partisan politics at any level of interest, let alone actively supporting such an evil state and then saying that it is treated specially by God (though presently in unbelief). When people call evil good, then God will bring discipline (Isa 5:20). Failing to discern the difference between good and evil reveals a childish level of understanding and inability to maintain serious Bible study (Heb 5:14). 'Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.' (Rm 12:9)

Adopting Jewish forms is going backwards

While it is shocking and foolish for English people to pretend to be Jewish and think that God will bless them for it, it is perhaps understandable that converted Jews could try to add the trappings of Judaism to their faith. Testimonies of Jewish believers being treated shabbily by churches must certainly be condemned as sin. Jewish believers must be loved as much as any other believer. However, I have never witnessed this personally and have had good relationships with Jews that came to Christ. Nevertheless, if true, such behaviour must be condemned. However, there is no need to start Messianic churches to avoid this

⁸ Israel has been in breach of 63 flagrant abuses of UN resolutions between 1955-1992 alone.

problem just as there shouldn't be any dedicated black churches or Chinese churches or any other homogenous groupings.

This is also no reason to accept practising Jewishness as a feature of Christianity; there are no nationalistic forms in Christ, all is new. Just as it would be nonsense for a Zulu convert to argue that he could worship God in a grass skirt waving an assagai, so it is wrong for people to adopt Jewish forms in church, such as celebrating Jewish feasts or using Jewish terminology. This is to say nothing about more serious issues, such as setting up facsimiles of Jewish altars or practising circumcision (yes these have been done).

What is the church? It is the realm of believers. The local church gathering is a place where believers meet to edify one another and focus upon Christ. It is where Christians share a meal together and celebrate the Lord's Supper. It is where we teach and equip the saints. Where we sing songs to edify and admonish one another and read the scriptures. This is the apostolic instruction on gathering together, we do not introduce foreign formulas or the national characteristics of any nation.

Every culture will have variations on how this is done and the church should follow the normal cultural forms of the place where it finds itself. Such things would affect the time and place of meeting, the type of food eaten, the type of songs sung. But a national church meeting should not deliberately adopt the features of a foreign culture, and certainly should not believe that doing so brings about a better spirituality.

The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish believers going through a tough time. Persecution was hotting up and life was tough. It was also very difficult for converts to be alienated from all of one's family for confessing Christ. In these circumstances they were tempted to go back to Judaism or to take on the superficial features of it to enable them to live a happier life. They thought, 'surely it can't be bad to attend temple worship, adopt Judaic forms or celebrate Jewish feasts.' Yet the apostle spends the whole book exhorting and commanding them to move forward and not backward. Constantly he tells them to 'go on' and not fall back.

He shows them that Christ is more excellent than Moses, angels, the temple/tabernacle, the offering system and so on. Even Christ's priesthood is far superlative to that of the Levitical priesthood being based upon a different type, that of Melchizedek – a Canaanite king. These people appeared to have a good reason to revert to Jewish forms – they were Jews and these forms were the means God had used in earlier times. But the apostle constantly warns them that to do this will be to spurn the Son of God and trample his cross underfoot. He warns that anyone going back to these forms is in very great danger since there is no salvation remaining if Christ's cross is spurned. If you celebrate Passover you deny the cross; you have focussed on the temporary, powerless shadow and ignored the spiritual reality. You disparage Christ.

But for Gentile converts to consider adopting Jewish forms for a second is incredible. Under pressure from Judaizing teachers and self-proclaimed apostles, some Phrygians in Colosse and some Celts in Galatia had adopted aspects of Judaism. Paul brings swift denunciation of such things (Gal 2:4, 4:9-10, 24ff, 5:1; Col 2:16-17) warning them that they were in danger of being bound up in legalism and losing their reward for focussing upon earthly things and not looking to Christ. Later in history the Ebionites took this Judaizing tendency even further becoming completely heretical and denying much of the NT.

Looking to the forms of Jewish religion, in any way, is going backwards and abandoning the purity of worshipping Christ. He is our pre-eminent focus; anything that takes our full

attention from him is to be shunned. Yet many Christian Zionists spend much of their time not only focusing on Jewish matters and politics, but adopting rituals, terminology, and systems while some even insist on rabbinic interpretation – resulting in unbiblical teaching. Almost nothing is left that does not have a Jewish filter. Even prayer becomes a Jewish ritual with Hebrew words.

The apostles considered such behaviour as exceedingly dangerous and modern Messianic Jews, or Christians infatuated with Zionism, cannot have read the books of Galatians, Colossians or Hebrews properly. These insist that we centre upon Christ and press on in faith.

Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. (Phil 3:2-3)

We are the true circumcision (i.e. what Jews claimed to be, the true people of God, the real spirituality). Looking to Jewish forms is but trusting in something fleshly and earthly – Paul demands that we rejoice in Christ and ignore such fleshly items.

May God help us to centre upon Christ and not things of the earth.

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