

# End Time Trends 2012 Footsteps of the Antichrist – 023 and 024

*"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. – Mt. 21:43 (NASB)*

*Psalms 66:18 If I perceive sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.*

*Psalms 32:5 I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.*

*1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all other unrighteousness.*

*1 Cor 11:31 But if we judge ourselves rightly, we should not be judged.*

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Rom. 11:6, *"But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace."*

Gal. 2:21, *"I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."*

Gal. 3:24, *"Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith."*

1 Corinthians 3:11 *For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.'*

*John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."*

# Antichrist 2012...

*"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." - 2 Timothy 3:13, KJV*

We resume our study with the  
remainder of the article:

Israel and the Church - What's the  
Relationship?

by John J. Parsons Hebrew for  
Christians

## **The ekklesia issue**

There are a number of metaphors for the *ekklesia* of Jesus given in the New Testament, such as a household (1 Tim. 3:15), a kingdom (Col. 1:13; Phil 3:20), a priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9; Heb. 2:17); a temple (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Cor. 3:11); one “new man” (Eph. 2:14-15); a body (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Rom. 12:4-5; Col. 1:18); a servanthood (Luke 17:10-17); a flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 2:3; 5:4; John 10:1-18); an army (2 Tim. 2:3-4; Eph. 6:10-17); a wife (Eph. 5:22-32); a bride (Rev. 21); a vine (John 15:1-7); and an olive tree (Rom. 11:16-24).

Each of these needs to be taken into account when considering the relationship of the Church to ethnic Israel.

Some of these metaphors show obvious parallels to ethnic Israel of the Old Testament (e.g., kingdom, priesthood, flock, wife, vine, etc.), while others seem to be unique in reference to those of the *ekklesia* of Jesus (e.g., body, one new man, bride, olive tree, etc.).

In the following pages, I will survey the three main ways that theologians have attempted to understand God's relationship to the Church and historic, ethnic Israel:

## **1. Replacement Theology**

The Church and Israel refer to the *same* group of people.

**2. Separation Theology** The Church and Israel refer to *different* groups of people.

**3. Remnant Theology**

The Church and Israel *overlap* in some manner.

And, we now have a new one...

**4. Grafting Theology** The Believers of today are grafted into Israel and are the same as Israel. (Note the similarity to Replacement Theology – but, Replacement Theology says the Church replaces Israel, but Grafting says the Church “joins” Israel.

**Replacement Theology** The first theological option regarding the relationship of the Gentile Church and Israel is to claim that the “Church” and “Israel” actually refer to the same group of people.

More specifically, since Israel rejected Jesus as the Messiah, the *ekklesia* of Jesus is now the recipient of all the covenantal blessings and promises of God. This is the “mainstream” view of most Christian theologians today.

Replacement Theology claims that the Church is a “new and improved” Israel, better than the older tribal “version” revealed in the Old Testament.

In ancient times the “church” (*ekklesia*, *ek-* + *kaleo*, “called out ones”) was indeed national Israel, but

after Jesus' universal message of love was rejected by the Jews, God transferred all the covenants and promises from them to the Christian Church. The "New Covenant" given to Israel (Jer. 31:31-37) was therefore fulfilled through the Christian Church. This view is called "Replacement Theology" because the Christian Church now *replaces* national Israel as the true *ekklesia* of God.

"For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" (Rom.6:9). Because of their disobedience (i.e., the rejection of the "new covenant" and the rule of Jesus), Israel is no longer a "chosen nation" with any special status or future.

As Martin Luther said, since the Jews rejected Christ, the only thing left to

them are the curses found in the Bible, but none of the blessings. Therefore all the promises about Israel being regathered, restored, and delivered from her enemies in a coming Kingdom Age are to be allegorized (and transferred) to the Church.

And since Jesus now (symbolically) reigns from the throne of David, the Church's mission is to "usher in" the Kingdom of God upon the earth by means of the worldwide spread of the gospel.

At the end of the age, Jesus will return to separate the "sheep from the goats" (Matt. 25:32-33) and the eternal kingdom of God will prevail forever.

*Israel and the Church*

Please note that one consequence of

this view is that the Church is not *essentially* new, since it existed before the time of Jesus as the company of saints who trusted in the God of Israel for their salvation (i.e., the faithful remnant).

Since the Church is actually a sort of “reformed” or “renewed” Israel, it might be more appropriate to consider this view as “Renewal Theology,” because it implies that the Church is a renewed form of faithful Israel.

Paradoxically, this leads to the conclusion that the Israel needs to be “grafted back” into the Olive Tree of the Church, rather than understanding that the Gentile Church is composed of “wild olive shoots” that are grafted into the covenants given to Israel (Rom. 11:17-23; Eph. 2:12).

## **The Case for Replacement**

**Theology** The case for Replacement Theology is often made along these lines: “Israel” refers to all those who obey the New Covenant of Jesus, who are thereby called the “true children of Abraham” and heirs according to promise (Gal. 3:29). In spiritual terms, the Church is now “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16) and is composed of those Jews and Gentiles who are regenerated by means of their faith in Jesus (Matt 3:9, Luke 3:8, Gal. 3:6, 9). National Israel was really just the “seed” of the future Church, which will eventually restore the entire earth under God’s forthcoming dominion (Mal. 1:11, Rom. 4:13). The Church is now the heir and trustee of God upon the earth (Gal.

3:29). Jesus Himself taught that the Jews would lose their spiritual privileges and be replaced by “another people” (Matt. 21:43).

After the Church came into existence on the Day of Pentecost, God was “finished” with national Israel, and today, a “true Jew” is anyone born of the Spirit, whether he was physically born Jewish or not (Rom. 2:28-29). All the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament are now the possession of the Church of Jesus, who now (symbolically) reigns on David’s throne (2 Cor. 1:20).

In its more outspoken forms, Replacement Theology is aggressive and even dominionist in its outlook, since it alleges that the Church replaces Israel in the sense of

*overtaking her* by spiritual succession (the theological jargon for this is called “supercessionism,” i.e., the idea that Israel has been “superseded” by the Church). Since the Jews are no longer God’s chosen people, God does not have any unique future plans for the nation of Israel. The Church, not Israel, is now the “apple of God’s eye” (Deut. 32:10; Zech. 2:8).

In other words, the term “Israel” denotes *only* those who are Christians, and conversely *only* Christians are the inheritors of the covenants and blessings given to Abraham and his descendants.

In summary, the Church *is* Israel and Israel (spiritually understood) *is* the Church. Advocates of Replacement Theology include the Roman Catholic

Church, the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ECLA), the Presbyterian Church, the Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod), the Episcopal (and Anglican) Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the United Church of Christ, the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and of course Islam, which likewise claims that it has "replaced" Israel as God's chosen people on the earth. Perhaps it should be noted here that some varieties of Jewish theology return the favor of Christian replacement theologies by maintaining that Israel will one day triumph over the Church (understood collectively as "Gentiles," "Christians," or more generally as the idolatrous descendants of Esau). According to

such Jewish eschatology, in the days of the Mashiach the LORD will establish Jerusalem as the central point of the world, and all of the scattered Jewish people will be permanently restored to their ancient Promised Land.

All of the literal promises given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and confirmed by the Jewish prophets will be literally fulfilled.

All of the ancient enemies of the Jewish people (including the descendants of Esau) will be vanquished, and Israel will enter a Golden Age of peace upon the earth (this is often summarized by certain orthodox groups such as Chabad with the phrase, “Moshiach Now!”). As we will now see, Replacement Theology

draws its theoretical support from the faulty foundation known as Covenant Theology.

**The Faulty Foundation: Covenant Theology** Most replacement theologians are also advocates of so-called “Covenant Theology,” a rather speculative theological system that posits several overarching “covenants” that God made with “all of creation.”

According to this theological system, first there was the “Covenant of Works” in which God promised Adam eternal life if he would obey His commandments.

However, since Adam broke the covenant through disobedience, God established the “Covenant of Grace” in which He would graciously save

Adam and Eve (and their descendants) from the penalty of death.

The salvation process itself, however, would be based on a foreordained and secret “Covenant of Redemption,” in which God the Son agreed to be incarnated as the dying Redeemer of the fallen human race. All of the *biblical* covenants -- for example, the covenant made with Abraham, Moses, and King David -- are really “aspects” of the overarching “Covenant of Grace” that God enacted after the fall of mankind. Covenant Theology is in error for a number of reasons.

First of all, this abstract system of covenants (“Works-Grace-Redemption”) is not based on an inductive study of the Scriptures

themselves (since they do not mention these covenants), but is determined from (invalid) deductions made from the New Testament which are then “read back” into the language of the Old Testament.

As we will see, the primacy given to Gentile theologians who were influenced by Greek philosophy/theology greatly influences the reading of the Old Testament for most of these theologians.

For example, the Torah reveals that the covenant made with Abraham and his descendants is clearly *unconditional* in nature.

The language of the relevant texts is simply unambiguous (see Gen. 12:1-7; 13:14-17, 15:1-21; 17:1-27; 18:17-19; 22:15-18; 50:24; Ex.

2:24; Deut. 9:5-6; 4:31; 2 Kings 13:23; Mic. 7:18-20). Moreover, the covenant ritual itself was expressed unilaterally (Gen 15), and subsequent testimony - - even in the New Testament -- corroborates its unconditional nature (see Luke 1:54-5; Luke 1:68-74; Acts 3:25-26; Acts 13:26-25; Rom. 11:1-2; 2 Cor. 11:22; Heb. 6:13-20, etc.). However, based on preconceived (*a priori*) theological assumptions, the unconditional nature of this covenant is transformed into being a conditional one that now does not mean what the Scriptures plainly state. Now while it's true that we cannot completely "bracket" our understanding of the New Testament when we are reading the Old, it is a poor exegetical principle not to

honestly “listen to the text” of Scripture itself, in light of its historical context, while using the normal rules of grammar (i.e., “plain sense”).

And it is simply preposterous to take the promises explicitly given to Abraham and to ethnic Israel and reinterpret them as promises given to the Church.

In order to rationalize this approach, these theologians, influenced by the Gentile theologians of the past, are forced to use allegory and Greek symbolism in order to apply the terms of the covenant to refer solely to the Church.

Of course this exegetical approach works the other way around, too, as can be seen when the New Testament is forced to read in a way

that is not consonant with the plain sense given in the Old Testament. An example of this sort of disingenuous methodology is found in the translation given to the Greek word *kai* ("and") in Galatians 6:16 ("as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God"), which incidentally is the *only* place in the entire New Testament where the word Israel is not explicitly used to refer to ethnic Israel.

Covenant theologians conclude that the *kai* before the term "Israel of God" is best translated "even" (as the NIV translates), however most Greek scholars have noted that this would be an anomalous usage and is without grammatical warrant found in the

context itself (i.e., the argument against the Judaizers).

Indeed, the plain reading is simply that Paul uses "and" to pronounce a blessing on believing Gentiles *and* believing Jews in the church, *not* to equate national Israel with the Church.

Another flaw with Covenant Theology is that it is too simplistic.

To claim that the covenant made with Abraham is "essentially the same" covenant as that which was made with Moses at Sinai or with King David at Jerusalem is unwarranted reductionism.

These *biblical* covenants are not progressive revelations of a *non-biblical* "Covenant of Grace," but are concrete terms of agreement made by

the LORD God of Israel Himself with specific individuals.

This same sort of reductionism is also revealed in the New Covenant promised to Israel in the days to come (Jer. 31:31-37) and of which the Church presently partakes. Covenant Theology must posit the “Church” as something that *predated* the coming of Jesus, as being composed of the “elect of God” from all ages and times. However, Jesus told Peter that upon the rock of his confession he *would* build His church (Matt. 16:18), and Paul spoke distinctly about the “mystery” of the Church in God’s prophetic plan for the ages (Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26). Covenant Theology must force the plain reading of the biblical covenants into the mold

of its system, rather than letting the texts of Scripture speak for themselves. Yet another flaw with Covenant Theology is its use of the allegorical method of interpretation, which forces the literal denotation of a term (such as "Israel") to be either not a true denotation or one of a different denotation.

In other words, it is the corresponding spiritual reality which is the "real" or ultimate meaning of a term of a given passage, not the grammatical-historical understanding of the term (for more on this, see below).

The misunderstanding of the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New covenants inevitably leads Covenant theologians to misunderstand the nature of the Church itself as a

mystery “hidden” in the purposes of God but later revealed in the age of the New Testament.

Contrary to their view that the “Church” is the elect of God “from all ages,” the New Testament clearly teaches that it began with the ministry of Jesus Himself (Matt. 16:18).

Moreover, the Church could not come into existence without Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension (Eph. 1:20-23; Col 1:28). Further, the church is composed of those members who have been baptized into the body of Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 1:8; 2:38). Paul’s teaching about the “mystery” of the body of Christ means that it was not revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures (Eph. 3:3-6; Col. 1:26).

Finally, the New Testament *never* uses the terms “Israel” and “Church” to refer to the same group of people (1 Cor. 10:32; Eph 2:11-16, etc.). Even the “seed of Abraham” is never called “Israel” in Paul’s writings to the Galatians.

As we will see (below), it is a category mistake to infer that the *ekklesia* of Jesus is to be identified with the remnant of Israel. Most seriously, Covenant Theology insinuates that God changed His mind about national Israel, and that the *olam* (eternal) nature of His covenantal promises given to them are subject to nullification. But if God changed His mind regarding national Israel, what prevents Him from changing His mind regarding the Church and its future?

The Church must remember that it is graciously grafted into the Olive Tree *of Israel* and made partakers of the covenants given *to Israel*. In fact, the *only* reference to the New Covenant (*brit chadashah*) in the entire Old Testament is found in Jeremiah 31:31-37, where it is explicitly stated that the Jewish people will continue to exist *as a nation* as long as there is a sun and moon seen in the sky!

This is further confirmed by Paul's teaching about national Israel found in Romans 9-11. Replacement theology is a dangerous and false doctrine that has consistently led to anti-Semitism and false eschatological views.

Just as we believe that God will keep His promises to the Church, so we believe He will keep His promises to

national Israel - including the future restoration of Israel as the “head of the nations” during the kingdom of God on earth.

When the LORD Jesus comes back to earth, He is heading straight to national Israel, and to Jerusalem in particular.

There He will be finally received as Israel’s King and Savior and will rule during the millennial kingdom. The Fourth (i.e., Millennial) Temple will be built (Ezekiel 40-48) and the nations will come to Jerusalem to pay homage to the LORD God of Israel. All the nations will celebrate the feast of Sukkot, and those that refuse will be plagued with drought (Isa. 4:2-6; Zech. 14:17-18).

We will now consider the view of

“Separation Theology,” sometimes referred to as “dispensationalism.”

## **2. Separation Theology**

A second theological option regarding the relationship of the Church and Israel is to claim that the Church and Israel refer to *different* groups of people. This distinction is the essence of what is sometimes called “dispensationalism.”

Unlike Covenant Theology that sometimes resorts to the allegorical method of interpretation (see above), Dispensational theology *consistently* uses the “grammatical-historical” approach to Scripture.

That is, when reading a text of Scripture, first the grammar is studied and then certain historical questions are asked. For example: What is the

historical context of this text? Who was the author? To whom was it written? What is the literary style? What did this text mean to the original audience? If it is a promise, to whom was it given? Was it conditional or unconditional? Was it for a fixed period of time? Was it intended for an individual or for a people? Is it applicable to others outside that circle? The goal of this approach is to ascertain the normal meaning of the words, phrases and sentences in their historical context as intended by the original author.

The grammatical-historical method of reading Scripture leads to a clear distinction between Israel and the Church.

Based on the inductive evidence of

the Scriptures, ethnic Israel is not seen to be identified with the Church, since the terms “Israel” and “Church” are simply not interchangeable (for example, in the book of Acts, both Israel and the church exist simultaneously but the terms “Israel” and “Church” always refer to two distinct groups of people).

The Church is understood as a *new creation* that began with the advent of the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit) during *Shavu'ot* (Pentecost), and will continue until it is “translated” to heaven at the time of the Rapture (Eph. 1:9-11).

The Church is not under the covenantal obligations given to national Israel at Sinai (i.e., the Mosaic covenant), since this covenant

was ratified only with national Israel. The promises made to national Israel are fulfilled *to* Israel, not to the Church. The word “Israel” always means Israel in the Scriptures, whereas the word “Church” always refers to the Church.

There is not a single instance in the entire Bible where Israel refers to anything other than the Jewish people.

Unlike the view of Covenant Theology that believes that the Church predated the coming of Christ, dispensational theologians

point out that it began with the ministry of Jesus Himself (Matt 16:18), and is singularly based on Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension (Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 1:28). The Church

is a “called out” group of people from “every tribe and tongue” who have been baptized into the body of Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 1:8; 2:38).

Paul’s doctrine about the “mystery” of the body of Christ means that it was not revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures (Eph. 3:3-6; Col. 1:26).

Israel, on the other hand, is a called out nation (Ex. 19:6) that entered into specific, historical covenants made with the LORD.

The grammatical-historical reading of the Scriptures provides a framework for understanding eschatology that is very different than that of Covenant Theology.

For example, Daniel’s 70th week is understood to be yet fulfilled during

the coming Great Tribulation period. This explains certain teachings that Jesus gave which apply to Jews living in Israel at the time of “Jacob’s Trouble” (see Matt. 24).

This also explains the excitement that many dispensationalists have regarding the present existence of national Israel, since according to Jesus Himself Israel must be restored to the land before He returns.

The restoration of national Israel in 1948 is therefore considered to be a “super sign” (Ezekiel 36:16-28) that we are nearing the “end of days” when Jesus will return again.

And unlike the Covenant Theology view that regards the ascension of Jesus to mean that He is presently ruling from the throne of David,

dispensationalists foresee the Second Coming as the time when Jesus will take up that authority in Jerusalem during the 1,000 year millennial reign (Rev 20).

This trust in the plain reading of Scripture (rather than the allegorical method) likewise has interpretative implications, since it makes a distinction between the “Kingdom of God” and the present age of tribulation.

Premillennial eschatology is consistent with the ways Orthodox Jews understand their Bibles. The Orthodox Jew is awaiting the advent of the *Mashiach ben David* who will restore national Israel, rebuild the Temple, and save the Jewish people from all their enemies. Before he

arrives, however, there will be “70 birthpangs of the Messiah” during *chevlei Mashiach* (the Time of Jacob’s Trouble). After Mashiach appears, however, and defeats the enemies of Israel in the great Magog war, Israel will experience *yemot haMashiach* (days of the Messiah), a golden age of peace and blessing when Israel will be promoted and all the nations will co-exist in peace.

Yemot haMashiach is to be distinguished from *olam haba*, the world to come, which corresponds to the “eternal state” wherein Paradise lost is fully restored (the Jewish sages believe in two *olams* (worlds): a this-world (*olam hazeh*) and a next-world (*olam haba*), with a Messianic 'transitional' world somewhere at the

intersection). In other words, the plain reading of Scripture leads Jews who hold to a high view of Scripture to regard the future promises made to Israel to be literally fulfilled one day, and this is an argument in favor of a dispensational understanding of the future of national Israel.

Much more could be said on this subject, of course, but the upshot is that God has unfinished business with ethnic Israel.

God is sovereign over all of the nations, of course, and He has purposes that concern them all, but national Israel is a focal point of His plan for the ages.

From the call of Abram to the time of Jesus' return to Jerusalem, to the reign of Jesus upon David's throne in

the coming kingdom, to the “heavenly Jerusalem from above (with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel inscribed upon her gates” [Rev 21:10-12]), Israel is in focus.

The Church, on the other hand, is a distinct body of people who are related to God by means of the High Priestly work of Jesus on their behalf, but this group is not to be confused with “Israel” as a nation in the coming theater of the *acharit hayamim* (end of days).

In the coming Kingdom reign of Jesus as King over Israel, ruling from Jerusalem, the Church doubtlessly will have a share, though the role of the Church as the “Bride of Christ” will be different than that of ethnic Israel during the time of *yemot haMashiach*.

For the dispensationalist, then, today Israel refers to a modern nation state (secular Israel) that, though being in temporary disobedience to the terms of the New Covenant, are still the Chosen People of God who have a divine right to the land of Israel by means of the (unconditional) Abrahamic covenant.

God will ultimately restore national Israel to faith in the Mashiach Yeshua, at which time they shall be fully reinstated and receive the kingdom blessings promised to King David.

A (friendly) criticism of Separation Theology is that its hard distinction between ethnic Israel and the Church implies that there are three eternally distinct groups of people in the earth: Jews, Gentiles, and the Church

(which is composed of both Jew and Gentile and formed into “one new man”).

Jewishness is therefore regarded as “ontological” property that is preserved forever, though the exact status of a Jew who is also member of the Church is obscured.

Another criticism is that since it ignores the concept of the faithful remnant of Israel, it tends to induce the Church to disregard its Jewish roots, since the Covenants, blessings, and promises made to ethnic Israel are not to be applied directly to the Church.

In practice this can have the unwitting effect of minimizing the relevance of the Old Testament Scriptures, or at least subordinating them to a lesser

practical status than those of the New Testament epistles of Paul.

More unfriendly critics of Separation Theology sometimes present “straw man” arguments that such dispensationalism “divides” the people of God by positing separate programs of salvation (one for the Church and the other for national Israel).

Sometimes this is caricatured as meaning that the Church will one day inherit heavenly mansions, while Israel will inherit the earth. This is unfair for a number of reasons, but primarily because dispensationalists believe that national Israel will one day come to saving faith in the Messiah when she cries out *baruch haba b'shem Adonai*, “blessed is He that comes in the Name of the LORD

(Matt. 23:37- 39, Luke 13:35). Page 84 of 117

Then the prophecy of the New Covenant promised to national Israel will be fulfilled (Jer. 31:31-37) and “all Israel shall be saved” (Rom. 11:25-26).

### **3. Remnant Theology**

A third theological option regarding the relationship of the Church and Israel is to claim that the Church and Israel "overlap" in some manner.

In Replacement/Covenant Theology, the Church is said to supercede Israel in such a way that Israel is abandoned with no redemptive future.

In Separation theology, there is a distinction between Israel and the Church, but there is some question about how the two groups will interact, especially beyond the millennial reign

of Jesus into eternity.

Remnant Theology attempts to mediate these positions by understanding the Church to be a subset of faithful ethnic Israel who received Jesus (Yeshua) as the promised Messiah.

This faithful subset of Israel is called the Remnant or the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:6):

**She’arit Yisrael - The Remnant of Israel** The Scriptures make a distinction between being an ethnic Jew (i.e., one born Jewish) and one who is considered to be a member of *she’arit Yisrael*, the faithful remnant of Israel.

This can be seen in the following:

A person can be 1) outside of relationship to Israel altogether (i.e., a

Gentile); 2) within ethnic Israel by virtue of birth (to a Jewish mother); or 3) within *both* ethnic Israel (i.e., of Jewish lineage) *and* part of the faithful remnant (as a Jew who trusts the God of Israel). (Logically, there is a fourth option here, which will be discussed below). These distinctions are important because there are many who oversimplify the matter and confuse ethnic Israel with the “remnant of Israel chosen by the grace of God” (Rom. 11:5). The Remnant of Israel is a sovereignly chosen subset of ethnic Israel that has been faithfully preserved by the LORD over the centuries. Its existence is evidenced in the Old Testament Scriptures as is seen in the following cases:

- Isaac was chosen over Ishmael (Gen.17:19)
- Jacob was chosen over Esau (Gen.28:13-15)
- Joseph was chosen over his other brothers (Gen.45:7)
- Israel was chosen (as a nation) at Sinai and a remnant preserved after the sin with the Golden Calf (Ex.32)
- Caleb and Joshua were chosen among all those of the desert generation to enter into the Promised Land (Num.14:38)
- Elijah was told that God preserved 7,000 faithful during apostasy (1 Kings 19:18)
- Ezekiel was told that a remnant would be preserved from the northern kingdom after their captivity (Ezek. 37:19)
- The returning exiles from Babylon

were chosen (Zech 8:5) It is further evidenced in the New Testament:

- John the Baptist distinguished between those merely born Jewish and those who are part of remnant Israel (Matt.3:9)
- God chose a remnant of Israel to receive the Messiah (Rom.11:5)
- After the destruction of the Temple by the Romans, God preserved a remnant of Israel which has continued to this day.
- Paul spoke of the remnant of Israel chosen by God's grace (Rom. 2:28-29; 9:27, 11:5) and the one "New Man" composed of Jews and grafted in Gentiles (Eph 2:15).
- During the coming Great Tribulation, God will preserve a remnant of Israel (Rev.7:4) It's important to realize that

Remnant Theology understands that the Church is “grafted in” or “in-placed” *within remnant Israel*, and not the other way around -- i.e., remnant Israel is NOT understood to be placed within the Church:

This is a vital distinction, since otherwise the Church would be guilty of “boasting” that its “branches” have been grafted into the Olive Tree, rather than remembering that the root is what sustains the Church (Rom. 11:18). While only some ethnic Jews are part of the faithful remnant, all saved Gentiles are spiritually made Jewish (Rom. 2:29; Rom. 4:16; Eph. 2:12- 19), and are therefore partakers of the covenantal blessings given to remnant Israel. But it is crucial to understand that the Church

is incorporated into the chosen remnant of Israel, and not the other way around! In other words, a Jew doesn't need to disown his or her Jewishness in order to be a member of the Church.

A person can be 1) outside of relationship to Israel altogether (i.e., a Gentile); 2) within ethnic Israel by virtue of birth (to a Jewish mother); 3) within *both* ethnic Israel (i.e., of Jewish lineage) *and* as part of the faithful remnant (as a Jew who trusts the God of Israel), *or* 4) a Gentile who partakes of the blessings given to the faithful Remnant of Israel.

**The Olive Tree and the Remnant Chosen by Grace** The statement of

Paul that “not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (Rom.6:9) means that a person can be a descendant of ethnic Israel but not part of the remnant of Israel that was chosen by God for salvation in Messiah.

In Romans 9:1-31, Paul reveals his heartfelt desire to see all of Israel come to understand the truth of salvation as given through Jesus, though he specifically mentions that a godly remnant has always existed. Later Paul explicitly asked the question of whether God was “finished” with ethnic Israel, to which he replied:

“God forbid! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God

has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace."

(Rom.11:1-5) Paul goes on to give the analogy of the Olive Tree to illustrate how the Church is grafted in to the remnant of Israel.

The natural branches *broken off* represent unbelieving, ethnic Israel, while the "wild olive shoots" grafted in

*among the others* represent Gentiles who come to faith in the Messiah.

But note especially the prepositional phrase, “among the others.”

These *remaining branches* represent remnant Israel, who never were separated from the supporting Root (which represents the covenant promises given to the patriarchs of Israel - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob - as given by the LORD).

This metaphor clearly indicates that the wild olive shoots (believing Gentiles) are *placed within* the remaining branches on the tree (believing Jews).

The Olive Tree, in other words, pictures the covenantal saving program of God based on His faithfulness *to Israel*.

Note also that Paul goes on to state that the restoration of the broken off branches is within the power and ultimate purposes of God (Rom. 11:23-24), who has temporarily “hardened” ethnic Israel until all the “wild olive shoots” have been added to the remnant Tree (11:25), and then “all Israel will be saved” (11:26). While it is true that ethnic Israel has rejected their Mashiach (a “partial hardening of Israel” - Rom. 11:25), Paul consoles himself by reflecting that not all physical descendants of Abraham are made the inheritors of the covenantal blessings from the LORD.

No, Abraham had two sons, but it was Isaac (not Ishmael) who was chosen; and Isaac also had two sons, but it was Jacob (not Esau) who was

chosen.

In other words, even though Ishmael and Esau were physical descendants of Abraham, they were not chosen to be inheritors of the blessing of God. Indeed, regarding the case of Jacob and Esau, Paul goes further by saying that "though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad -- in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, Rebecca was told, "The older will serve the younger."

Paul then quotes from Malachi 1:3, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Paul then asks the rhetorical question of whether all this might be unfair. After all, was it Esau's fault that he was rejected when God had Himself

foreordained that the blessing should not be his? Paul answers this by flatly saying that the LORD God of Israel is sovereign and can choose to show mercy and grace to whomsoever He wills - man's objections notwithstanding.

In other words, God has the complete right to predestine outcomes to suit His good pleasure and purposes, and mankind must simply accept His rule and reign in the universe.

Being a physical descendant of Abraham is not enough to be a part of God's family, since only the *children of the promise* are counted as God's offspring. And that even includes Gentiles, as the prophet Hosea revealed: "those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her

who was not beloved I will call children of the Living God" (Hosea 1:10). And did not the prophet Isaiah also cry out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved"? Paul ends this line of thinking by saying that those who trust in the promise of God's salvation through the Mashiach have attained righteousness *by faith*; but those who pursue their own righteousness based on the law will never succeed in reaching that goal, since Yeshua alone is the "end of the law for righteousness" to all who believe.

\*\*\*\*\*

---

Important Addendum to this article

Based on some feedback I have received, I would like to stress the fact that I emphatically do *not* believe that Christians or Messianic Jews should become followers of Rabbinical (i.e., Talmudic) Judaism, nor do I think this is an implication of the argument presented above.

I am not a “Judaizer” and I have an article online that explicitly addresses the role of Torah in the life of the Christian today.

Perhaps it might help to understand that I wrote this article mainly to deal with those who have embraced certain aspects of Covenant theology, and in particular eschatological views that deny a future to national Israel. Sadly this viewpoint is widespread in the church today, and many pastors

maintain no special place of distinction for national Israel, even after the Second Coming of Jesus. Certain Covenant Theologians also confuse the nature of the Church, seeing it as pre-existing even national Israel, and therefore get the analogy of the Olive Tree turned upside down. In other words, though this article has some flaws and even dangers (i.e., it could be used to support a Judaizing view of Christianity), I consider the risk somewhat worth it, since the implications of Replacement Theology and Covenant Theology seriously impugn the faithfulness of the LORD God of Israel. Eschatological Postscript So what is the State of Israel after the death of Christ? It seems I am asked this question all

the time. I attempt to answer it the article presented above, though the implication might not be obvious. In short, God is not "finished" with national Israel, even though there's a "partial hardening" until the fullness of the Gentiles come to faith (Rom 11:25), and then "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26).

The Church is actually made a part of *she'arit yisrael* - the faithful remnant of Israel (Rom 11:17), and not the other way around.

The Gentile church shouldn't call faithful Jews away from their heritage, but rather should seek to embrace Jewish heritage as its own, since they are made co-heirs of the covenants unconditionally given to the Jewish people (Eph 2:11-13).

\*\*\*\*\*

---

Perhaps one additional note on this subject should be made. There is a distinction to be made between the *secular state of Israel* and *she'arit yisrael*, the chosen remnant (including those yet to be chosen in the future). This implies, among other things, that the secular state is not to be identified with any form of theocracy and does not itself hold any sacred status. God is sovereign over all the nations, including secular Israel, of course, but the secular state of Israel is actually a part of the *acharit hayamim* (end times) theater of operations. This is evidenced by many of the New World Order designs found on secular Israel's governmental buildings, most particularly the Israeli Supreme Court

building:

Notice the key symbol of the all-seeing eye of providence on the roof of the building, which can possibly be traced back to Egyptian mythology and the Eye of Horus.

This is essentially the same symbol used on the Great Seal of the United States, which openly avows adherence to *Novus Ordo Seclorum* - a Latin phrase that can be translated as “A New Order of the Ages,” or even as “a New World Order.”

The Messiah of evil will come and deceive many in Israel as their long-awaited Mashiach. Perhaps he will finally broker true peace in the Middle East.

But he will ultimately betray the Jewish people, much like Haman did

(or as the Greek Antiochus Epiphanies did), causing the Jewish people to flee for their lives. Only after the Jewish people cry out, *Baruch habah b'shem Adonai* in reference to the true Messiah, Jesus, will Israel be saved during this period of Great Tribulation (Matt. 23:29; Luke 13:35).

Then shall the prophecy of Zechariah be fulfilled: "I will pour out upon the kingship of David and the population of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication so that they will look to me, the one they have pierced.

They will lament for him as one laments for an only son, and there will be a bitter cry for him like the bitter cry for a firstborn" (Zech 12:10).

I am aware that many in the Gentile

Church who are “preterists,”  
“amillennialists,” “dominionists,”  
“theonomists,” “covenant theologians,”  
etc.

will strongly disagree with the sketch  
of the end times I have given above,  
but their thinking derives from faulty  
assumptions, exegetical fallacies, and  
errors that are lead inexorably to the  
false doctrine of Replacement  
Theology.

[Hebrew4christians.com](http://Hebrew4christians.com)

# **Torah Observance Redux** **Should Christians follow the** **Law of Moses?**

*by John J. Parsons Hebrew for Christians*

The other day someone asked me (yet again!) whether Christians are obligated to “follow the law” of Moses. After all, since Jesus was an observant Jew, and since we’re called to follow Him, shouldn’t we live as observant Jews as well?

This question is deceptively simple yet enormously complex, as most of you know. If it

resolves to the question as to whether we should study and obey the Torah as Jesus did, then the answer is *yes*, though of course we must be clear *exactly* what this means, especially in light of the collective teaching of the New Testament. Jesus said he was the “goal” (te,loj) and focal point of the Law and Prophets: “Do not think that I have come to destroy (katalu,w) the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill (plhro,w) them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass

away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished (pa,nta ge,nhtai).” Understanding exactly what Jesus meant by this statement (and therefore understanding his view of the Torah) defies simplistic answers, however, and that is part of the reason why his message was rejected by the Jewish sages of his day. On the other hand, if the question resolves to whether a Christian should follow the interpretation of the law (i.e., *halakhah*) as developed by the rabbis of the post-Second

Temple period, then it should be obvious that Christians are not subject to any authority that rejects the true King of Israel (i.e., Yeshua the Mashiach). Indeed, despite the Council of Yavne and its legacy (i.e., Mishnah/Talmud), there simply is no Torah-based Judaism apart from the Holy Temple. Over 40% (247) of the 613 *mitzvot* (Torah commandments) concern the ceremonial and cultic laws of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle). When the Second Temple was destroyed, the rabbis replaced the role of the priesthood with that of the

sage (i.e., rabbi) and redefined central concepts of the written Torah. Therefore the “Oral Law” claimed that study, prayer, and good deeds replace the need for sacrifices at the Temple, regardless of the clear statements from the Torah itself. As a product of Pharisaic reasoning, it should be clear that the Oral Law (which is similar to the Catholic dogma of the “Magisterium”) holds no authority over the life the Christian. Note that Rabbinical Judaism, not Christianity, has a problem here, since according to Yeshua,

the true Temple of God is his body (hw"hy> lk;yh)e offered up upon the cross at Moriah.

Indeed, in every aspect of the written law's requirements we see the surpassing glory of God in Yeshua: in the ceremonial law (as the ultimate High Priest, Sacrifice, and Temple), in social law (in promoting egalitarianism, transcending tribalism/racism, in the Kingship of Mashiach), in the moral law (in the ethic of sacrificial love), and especially in the power to transform the human heart. "You've heard that it was said to the ancients

(VHkou,sate o[ti evrre,qh toi/j avrcai,oij), **but I say to you...**" (Matt. 5:21-ff). This is the voice of Authority coming from a new mountain, *chaverim...*

Tragically, however, there are a large number of "Messianic Jewish" groups out there that will try to persuade you that Christians should "follow the law" as envisioned and interpreted by the rabbis.... "It's great," they say, "that you're a 'Christian' (*ahem*), but NOW I am going to give you the 'real story' about following the Jewish Messiah... Now I am going to give you

secret wisdom that will set you free from all the lies you've heard over the years in your Gentile 'churches'... Look, if you really want to follow Jesus, you've got to follow the laws, regulations, and ordinances given in the Torah....You've got to live as a Jew! Keep the Sabbath. Eat Kosher. Follow the *mitzvot* (commandments). You've got to drop your pagan ways and realize that 'Torah observance' is the next step after the conversion of the believer... *blah blah blah....*" Often such groups (or teachers)

are ill informed and love to get into high-sounding, even esoteric language about God and Jewish religion... “Don’t touch this; don’t do that...according to human precepts and teachings... These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” (Col. 2:21-23). Note that there is indeed an “appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion,” but this is a vain

exercise that's unable to truly change the heart... Instead of the liberty and glory of the simple gospel message, we are told we have to add something "man-made" -- something offered by the sweat of Cain's brow...

Though there was a "glory of the older covenant," that glory was destined to fade away (katarge,w) in light of the greater glory of Jesus (2 Cor. 3:7). I urge you therefore to beware the obfuscation and deceit of those who teach that the Gospel of Yeshua is somehow "not

enough” or needs to be supplemented. Beware of those who blaspheme by saying that Yeshua came to merely “renew” the covenant of Sinai rather than delivering us through the new covenant of Zion.... Beware of those who affect an outward show of spirituality and thereby imply that the weak, the foolish, and the ragamuffin are somehow excluded from God’s favor. Beware of those who traffic in spiritual pride, chaverim... Invariably such “Torah observant” groups will attempt to impress you with their

knowledge of Hebrew or with their talk about the “Jewish roots” of Christianity. Since you don’t know the “language game” as well as they do, you might feel overwhelmed listening to their jargon, perhaps even a bit intimidated. Don’t let them blow any smoke your way. Don’t get caught up in appearances or be “wowed” over sound bites. They might “dress up” as ultra-Orthodox Jews and “look the part.” They might blow really cool looking shofars or even chant Hebrew prayers fluently, but I appeal to you in the Name

of the LORD God Almighty:  
Judge righteous judgment,  
chaverim...

Don't settle for flash or special effects. Push them on the issues, especially regarding the clear teaching of the New Testament. Be relentless and seek the truth. Here are some questions you can use to "test the spirits," chaverim. Ask them EXACTLY what they mean by the word "Torah" -- especially in light of the covenantal acts of God in the Person of Yeshua, our Savior... Ask them EXACTLY what "sanctification"

means to them. Ask them whether they regard the writings of the Apostle Paul as having the same authority as the Law of Moses. Ask them EXACTLY what they mean by “new” in the term “New Covenant.” Ask them if they believe that Yeshua is none other than YHVH speaking in the flesh.... In short, if there’s any hint that “Torah observance” is a means of finding merit before the LORD God of Israel, the message of the Cross is being compromised... Perhaps you are thinking that all I’ve been saying undermines the

value of this ministry? Well, if I ever suggest that Christians should become Jews in the sense defined by the rabbis of Judaism, you should call me a false teacher and be done with me, chaverim... I am not here to scratch “itching ears” (2 Tim. 4:3). **God forbid.** No, this ministry is entirely grace-based and focused on the glory of God revealed in the Person and work of Yeshua the Messiah. We are saved by God’s grace (alone) through faith (alone) in the finished work of Yeshua (alone).

And as a pertinent reminder for any “Torah observant” visitors here -- this site is called “Hebrew for Christians” for a reason. I am unapologetically a Christian and I not ashamed of the simplicity of the gospel message. There is no “charade” going on here.

Anyway, since I get asked “whether a Christian should follow the law” fairly regularly, I thought it would be good for me to “go on record” once again and restate my view on this subject as clearly as possible. So, in answer to the question, “Should a Christian follow the law (as

understood by rabbinical Judaism)?”, my answer is simply: **NO**.

The Apostle Paul, surely the greatest Torah sage of his day, likened those who confused the terms of the covenant made at Sinai with the New Covenant made at Zion as being no less than spiritual adulterers. Trying to “mix the old and new wine” creates a witch’s brew that leads to spiritual promiscuity before God:

Do you not know, brothers - for I am speaking to those who know the law - that the law is binding

on a person only as long as he lives? Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who

has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God (Romans 7:1-4).

We are therefore in no way obligated to follow the laws of rabbinical Judaism, especially in attempt to acquire spiritual merit that defines personal sanctity or holiness. Our righteousness and sanctification are imputed - by faith - through the gift of God in the Mashiach Yeshua: "...whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). Christians are made *tzaddikim* because of the *Tzaddik ha-*

## *Gadol* Yeshua...

Recall that when the covenant was given at Sinai, Moses took some blood from sacrificial animals, threw half upon the altar, and then read the terms of the covenant to the people. The people ratified the covenant with the words *kol asher diber Adonai na'aseh v'nishma*: “all that the LORD says we will do and obey” (Exod. 24:7). Upon hearing their ratification, Moses took the other half of the sacrificial blood and threw it on the people saying, “Behold the blood of the

covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” The “match” was made and the bride had agreed to the Groom’s proposal... After this Moses and 70 of the elders of Israel ascended Sinai to eat a “covenant affirmation meal” between Israel and the LORD. It was there that the elders beheld the awesome glory of *Elohei Yisrael* (the God of Israel), under whose feet was “a pavement of sapphires, like the very heaven for clearness” (Exod. 24:9-10).

The Sinai experience was a

“marriage ceremony” between the newly redeemed Israelites and the LORD.

Now reconsider what Paul wrote when he said Christians were “married to another.” This harkens to when Yeshua told his disciples that His shed blood constituted the New Covenant (h'v'd"x] tyrlB.) with Israel. In the Upper Room after eating the Passover meal, Yeshua lifted the Cup of Redemption and said: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (Matt. 26:27-39; Luke 22:20). The Cup of Redemption signifies God’s promise to Israel

just before the Exodus: “I will redeem you with a demonstration of my power.” This cup also symbolizes participation in the *ketubah* (marriage contract) of the New Covenant, in which the groom (*chatan*) signifies his pledge by sharing a cup of wine with His bride (*kallah*). Passover, therefore, was originally intended to be the model for the Christian practice of Communion (or the “Lord’s Supper”). The author of the Book of Hebrews calls this ~l'A[ tyrlB. ~d: / “the blood of the everlasting

covenant” (Heb. 13:20). The covenant of Yeshua opens up Zion to us all... Sinai never brought us there.

As Paul also points out in the analogy of Hagar and Sarah, the Torah of Moses is far more extensive and glorious than the rabbis imagine. The heart of the Torah’s message is love, and love is the “law” of the Gospel... Often so-called “Messianic Jews” fall in step with rabbinical thinking, but they do not go back far enough. They do both too little and too much in their theology. They have yet to

clearly understand the radical nature of the Gospel message itself... They are scandalized by the idea of grace...

Recall Paul's words:

For you, brothers, became imitators of the *ekklesia* of God in the Messiah Yeshua that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be

saved - so as always to fill up the measure of their sins (1 Thess. 2:14-16).

There is the law of Moses and the meritocracy of traditional Judaism, and there is the gospel of Messiah and the grace of His love. You must choose your authority regarding the meaning of Torah: Yeshua's or the rabbis.... You can't have it both ways, and any admixture of the two eventually leads to perversion and error.

So should we then abandon the study of the Jewish roots of Christianity? Should we forget

Torah study? By no means! The problem never was with the Torah or the terms of Sinai, but with our *inability* to abide by the terms of the Covenant (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 3:10-13). The Torah is not sinful, but the human heart is desperately wicked and in need of salvation... All Scripture (including the Torah, of course) was given by God and is profitable for training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Jesus Himself taught from the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings (Luke 24:27), so why would you want to a return to a

Gentile-informed Christianity that has incorporated much Greek/Roman paganism into its theology? Why would you close your eyes to the essential Jewishness of Jesus and the importance of the Torah? But that said, it is IMPERATIVE to keep the distinction between “Torah” and “Covenant” in mind - - or else you will fall into the “Ebionite heresy” (which is essentially what many so-called “Torah Observant” messianic ministries do). Beware of the “concision” (katatomh,n, Phil. 3:2). Re-read the books of

Galatians, Hebrews, and take the time to savor Yeshua's message called the "Sermon on the Mount."

As always we must find a balance. Yeshua was a Jew, born King of the Jews, but that doesn't mean He came and died to make us followers of the rabbis... The rabbis who rejected Yeshua had established "Judaism without the Temple" after its destruction in 70 AD. The authority of the rabbis was consolidated at that time and various dogmatic traditions were established among the Diaspora

Jews... But none of that means that ancient “Judaism” -- and Torah study in particular – isn’t *essential* to properly reading and understanding the message of the New Testament. It is, and if we don’t take the time and effort to clearly understand the Torah and the Prophets, we are liable to misinterpret the words of the New Testament...

Much more can be said about this subject, of course, and I don’t want to repeat myself here.