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We Are Israel II: The Relationship of the Church to Israel (Eph 2:11-13)

Introduction – God is withholding, for the time being, a great work He promises for ethnic Israel, as we saw in Romans 11. There is a misunderstanding with some, however, that God had one purpose for Israel in the Old Testament, and a different purpose for the Church. Looking a bit closer, the Scriptures teach us that the Church is Israel today.

Once Far Off, Now Brought Near (Eph 2:11-13) – Gentiles are all those who are not physical Jews or not ceremonially circumcised. Circumcision marked those who were of Abraham (Gen 17). Everyone else was (previous to Christ's coming) far from the covenants of promise and they were without hope (v12). Gentiles were considered aliens and strangers with regard to those promises. Verse 13 is critical. We were brought near, not to Christ, but by Christ, to those covenants of promise. Not only are we brought into the covenant, vv14-18 notes that peace is brought to the relationship between Jew and Gentile. This is because we are all sons of God (Jew and Gentile) only through faith in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:26).

The New Testament teaches that the Church (Jew and Gentile) is Israel today.

A Son and a Tree (Gal 4:1-7, Rom 11:15-27) – In the Galatians passage, Paul likens the Jewish nation to an underage heir who, like a slave, is under bondage to “the elements of the world” (4:3). Jew and Gentile, however, are brought to maturity and adoption as they grow up, faithfully receiving Christ, who redeemed those under the law (v5). One way of looking at this passage is that as a child, his name was Israel. Grown up, his name is now Church. He is no longer under the tutelage of the Old Covenant administrations; he is no longer told when he has to take a nap. But as Church, he still follows the teachings of the Lawgiver, who is also His Savior and Lord, and the One to Whom he is truly an heir and a son.

In the Romans passage (esp. 11:16-17), Israel is likened to a natural olive tree which, because of unfaithfulness, has been cut down to the stalk. Wild olive branches (the Gentiles) have been grafted in, making the tree one tree with different flavors of fruit. There may be different branches, but there is only one tree, one covenant, one God, one Savior, and one Way to salvation.

The New Testament uses illustrations that show the Church (Jew and Gentile) is Israel today.

Promises and Commands – Throughout the New Testament, the writers use the promises and commands of the Old Testament as binding upon the Church. Here are just a couple examples –

Paying the “Ox” (1 Corinthians 9:9; 1 Tim 5:18) – Why do we pay pastors?

Christian Kids (Eph 6:1-3) – What are Christian kids supposed to do and why?

Abraham's Kids (Rom 4:11-12) – Who are Abraham's kids really?

Moses was a Christian (Heb 11:24-26) – Turning from his identification with Pharaoh, to Whom did Moses identify himself?

Partaking of Christ (1 Cor 10:1-4) – Where did partaking of Christ begin?

*The New Testament assumes that the promises and commands of the Old Testament are for the Church (Jew and Gentile),
that is the New Israel.*

Some Thoughts -

Be Careful About “Judeo-Christian” – We must be careful of this twentieth-century, American-invented phrase. Christians do not fundamentally have much in common with synagogue-attending Jews. This is not to encourage any kind of anti-Semitism. We must be gracious and thankful to the Jews, but we must be honest. Present day synagogue goes reject Jesus Christ as God, as Yahweh. This is essential doctrine to the Christian faith and cannot be disregarded. In some ways, we may have more hope for Chinese Buddhist, Iranian Muslims, and outright pagan cultures to come to Christ before our Judaic “brothers” come into the covenant (Rom 11:25). That is not to say that we should not witness to our Jewish friends; we should do so and with great hope (11:26-27).

Scripture to Scripture – Allow the Old Testament to teach you how to interpret the New Testament, and especially allow the New Testament teach you how to interpret the Old Testament. Jesus did not come to abolish the law, but rather to fulfill it. The entire Bible is ours and so we ought not try to become “New Testament” Christians; we should seek to be Christians like Abraham, Moses, Paul, Luke, and Timothy.

See the Grace – What is God in the business of doing? He turns mourning into laughter. He lifts up the downtrodden. He saves the sinner. There is no sin that you have committed that disqualifies you from being “in” more than any other sin. This whole covenant is by grace through faith. It always was; it always will be. Are you a wreck? Then you qualify. It is never about your works, it is about God's work and particularly the work of His Son who did not come into the world to condemn the world (Jew or Gentile) but that through Him the world (Jew and Gentile) would be saved (John 3:17).

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