



The Olive Branches

Natural and wild, together

Israel and the Church A Mystery: Both are Part of God's Plan for the World

Over 80% of the world's population claim some faith and some 30% claim to be Christian. In contrast, only some 0.2% of the world's inhabitants are Jews. Yet, the Bible says that the future of the world depends principally upon the tiny nation of Israel. The Bible says that this tiny nation was chosen by God to reveal Himself to the world. Despite 3,000 years of persecution, the Jews survive to continue their task, and today Israel has come to world prominence. Soon, Israel will be the vortex of world events.

How many recognise this? In particular, how many in the Christian church recognise Israel's importance? And how many in the church recognise that they are really part of God's plan alongside Israel, rather than in place of Israel? This is a spiritual mystery which few understand:

"Don't be ignorant of this mystery ... a temporary blindness has happened to Israel in order to bring some Gentiles to God" (Rom 11.25 paraphrase)



In 1915 there were just 83,000 Jews in Israel, but this increased to over 6 million Jews in 2013, corresponding to an amazing 7400% increase!

The People and Nation of Israel

First, what do we understand by the term 'Jew'? Strictly speaking, today's Jews (Hebrew, 'Yehudi') are those who follow Judaism and who are descendants from the kingdom of Judah. Over time, the word Yehudi described anyone from the kingdom of Judah, which included the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi. Today, the word 'Jew' is used to refer to all of the physical and spiritual descendants of Jacob/Israel, as well as to the patriarchs Abraham and Isaac link. So here we will loosely refer to the people of Israel as Jews.

In 1915 there were just 83,000 Jews in Israel, but this increased to over 6 million Jews in 2013, link, corresponding to an amazing 7400% increase! In comparison, over the same period the UK population increased just 55%. Over the same period, Israel has seen rapid agricultural and industrial expansion and the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. Today, Israel is completely changed from the days of Mark Twain, who described the land as a 'desolate country' after his visit in 1867.

There is a reason for all this: what we are seeing is the fulfilling of Bible End Time prophecy and the revealing of God's plan for the world. Sadly, most of today's Jews see only their election as God's chosen people, a special nation in the world, and they fail to see God's bigger picture. In particular, they fail to recognise the End Time role of Christ's church.



Religion and Spiritual Blindness

Since Jews do not see Jesus as their Messiah, the uncertainty of atonement today ultimately leads to a fear of God. Guilt and lack of hope remain, despite all the Jewish festivals. This is the path of religion and not freedom, a path unlit by the Holy Spirit of God. Reading God's word is an intellectual exercise rather than a meeting of the heart with God. The New Testament says that these Jews are suffering a (temporary) spiritual blindness and a (temporary) hardening of the heart towards God and especially towards Yeshua (Rom 11.25).

*"God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so they could not see"
(Rom 11.8)*

Jewish Worldviews

Israel's Jews are either ultra-Orthodox (8%), religious Zionists (17%), traditional Jews (55%), or secular Jews (20%) link. So some 80% of today's Jews follow Old Testament belief in some way (from fundamentalism to loose Jewish practice), whilst some 20% don't seem to care. So it is perhaps because of their narrow Old Testament (OT) worldview and neglect of full biblical teaching that the majority of today's Jews are hurting inside. Whilst they celebrate Jewish festivals and feel that special OT relationship to God, they still hurt, not just because of the holocaust, but because Judaism offers no hope after death! Religious and secular Jew alike have no hope of the resurrection offered through Christ.

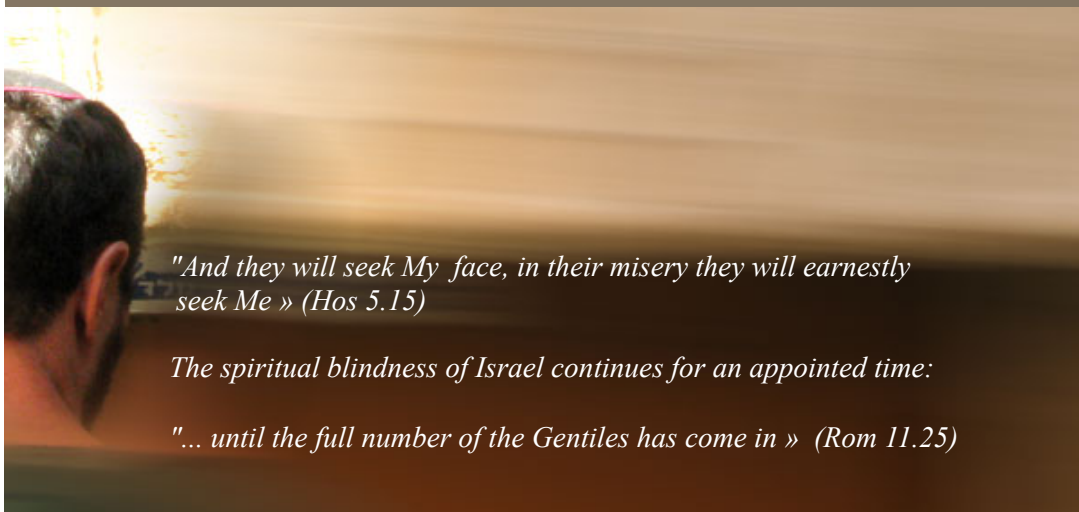
Forgiveness

For Jews, God's word is in the Torah (Heb: Tanakh) or first five books of the Bible, the prophets and the 'writings' e.g. Psalms. There is no New Testament. God's Law is in the Torah, pointing out sin and the way of atonement for sin via blood sacrifice (Lev 17.11). But animal sacrifice for sin essentially stopped once the Romans destroyed the Temple in AD 70. After this, non-Messianic rabbis decided to radically restructure Judaism, substituting synagogues, rabbis, prayers, study and commandments for the Temple, priests and sacrifices, link. So what about atonement today? Some Jews maintain that according to the Tanakh a blood sacrifice is not the only way to atone for sin, link, whilst others believe that today God's forgiveness for sins is obtained through repentance, prayer and good deeds (see also Hos 6.6).



The Spiritual Restoration of Israel

Today there are orthodox Jews in Israel who admit that their real problem is not the Palestinians but their need to return to their God. There is a spiritual stirring, and prophecy says this will grow to a real seeking of God. Just prior to the time of full spiritual restoration (see below), Israel will experience a time of testing through 'Jacob's trouble' (Jer 30.7). This is a time of real spiritual awakening as Israel starts to earnestly call upon her God:



"And they will seek My face, in their misery they will earnestly seek Me » (Hos 5.15)

The spiritual blindness of Israel continues for an appointed time:

"... until the full number of the Gentiles has come in » (Rom 11.25)

The church grows during the time of Israel's spiritual desert experience. Then, at the end of this age, God promises to pour out His Spirit on all people:

"I will pour out My Spirit on all people, ... for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance" (Joel 2.28-32)

These scriptures are often quoted in Christian circles as pertaining to the Church, implying some spiritual revival and empowering of the Church as in Acts 2. But the scriptural context of Joel 2 is broader than this and certainly embraces the people of Israel at the very end of this age. Currently only some 0.25% of Jews in Israel are Messianic, and only at the point of Jesus' return to earth does the full remnant of surviving Jews in Israel finally recognise Him as Saviour and Lord:

"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on Me, the One they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him ..." (Zech 12.10)

This is the time when Israel, like an unfaithful wife, is called back to the Lord, her husband. God talks like a husband to a wayward wife:

"For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back" (Isa 54.6,7)

At this time Israel is cleansed by the LORD; she is given a new heart to replace her heart of stone, and is given a new spirit, God's Spirit (Ezek 36.25-27). From this time onwards the people of Israel will be blessed and will know the Lord. They will acknowledge that Yeshua is their Messiah.

Today's Church

As with the majority of Jews today, many in today's church suffer from spiritual blindness and a hardening of the heart. The mainstream view of most Christian theologians and church teaching today is that, since the Jews rejected their Messiah, then the Church has replaced the people of Israel and now inherits all the Abrahamic covenant blessings link. Put simply, today's church is often blind to her Jewish roots. This 'Replacement Theology' was introduced to the Church shortly after Gentile leadership took over from Jewish leadership, and adopts the Greek way of spiritualizing scripture.



Many in this church believe:

The Jewish people are no longer God's chosen people. Instead, the Christian church now makes up God's chosen people

The Jewish people have no future, no hope, and no calling in the plan of God. They are like any other nation

In the New Testament after Pentecost, the term 'Israel' refers to the church

The Mosaic covenant of Law (Exodus 20) is replaced by the new covenant (Luke 22:20)

Actual circumcision is replaced by a circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:29)

The stern God of the Old Testament is not the same God of grace of the New Testament

This is the church of the Christmas tree rather than the olive tree of scripture (see below). These beliefs are Satanic deception and result in part from a lack of teaching on End Time prophecy. Today there are approximately 100 million American church members who have very little or no understanding of Bible prophecy.. They look at prophetic scriptures as allegorical and not literal and so do not understand the importance of Israel today. There is great spiritual ignorance and lack of understanding of the significance of world events, especially in the Middle East. Such ignorance then leads to an anti-Israel position, as held by the Church of England and the Baptist Union of Great Britain, for example, link. It also leads to increasing anti-Semitism in the West, especially in France and Germany and anti-Zionism via the United Nations. This (often rich) End Time church could be described as a Laodicean Church since it suffers from worldly thinking and spiritual blindness (Rev 3.14-22).



The 'Oneness' of Israel and the True Church

Paul likened Israel to natural branches of a cultivated olive tree (Romans 11.24). The tree itself is rooted in the Patriarchs, particularly Abraham, and ultimately in Jesus. The 'cultivation' is seen in the Abrahamic covenants, and so the Jewish nation was placed under a program governed by covenants. Gentiles, on the other hand are like wild branches in that they had no covenants (Ephesians 2.11-12).

The olive tree represents the place of blessing in God's program. But due to unbelief (stumbling, transgression) God broke off national Israel (the natural branches) from the tree and grafted Gentiles (the wild branches) into the place of blessing. Gentiles currently occupy the place of blessing previously held by Israel, but not for long. The End Time church has to recognise that she is really like wild branches that have been grafted into the this olive tree, and that God will soon graft Israel, the broken branches, back into their own olive tree (Rom 11.23,24):

"And so all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11.26)



Jesus made the same point:

"I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also ... and there will be one flock with one shepherd" (Jn 10.16, NLT)



Upon their turning to Christ, both Jews and Gentiles will be incorporated into one church. Recall that 'church' (Ekklesia in Greek) means 'the called out ones' or simply an assembly of followers of Christ. So, one shepherd makes one sheepfold, and one Christ makes one church! This could be a view of the millennial world, where Christ reigns from Jerusalem, and where Jewish Israel is a witness to the nations (Zech 8.23) and spiritual Israel (resurrected believers) reign with Christ.

The 'oneness' of Israel (Israel by birthright and spiritual Israel, today's church) is also clearly seen in the book of Revelation. Here, that Holy City of the future, the new Jerusalem where only the righteous dwell is described by beautiful symbolism. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel are written on the twelve gates of the city, and the high city wall has twelve foundations holding the names of the twelve apostles of Christ (Rev 21.12-14). So entrance to this city (salvation and reconciliation to God) is only via God's chosen people, Israel, and via the 'lion of the tribe of Judah', Jesus Christ. The church needs to remember that Jesus was a Jew! And, like that of the apostles, the essential role of the church is to proclaim that salvation is via Christ and Christ alone. The high walls standing on apostolic foundations symbolise that there is no other way to God and that the church has the key!