

“Israel” as a Technical Term

³¹ *Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* ³² *Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God;* ³³ *just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved (1 Corinthians 10.31-33).*

The Categories of Man

The passage above indicates God has categorized man into three groups: Jews, Greeks, i.e., Gentiles, and the Church. Each has a separate and distinct purpose and administration in God's plan. Before God called Abraham, He dealt with mankind as a whole. Or, we might say that the world was all of one category, i.e., Gentile. With His call of Abraham, God created and divided the world into two peoples: Gentile and Jew. As a result, God created a unique relationship with the Jews. He gave them His covenants, entrusted them with the Word of God, and governed and guided them with the Mosaic Law and the prophets. The grand revelation God gave Israel through his prophets and covenants was that He would establish a kingdom with them, that they would be preeminent among all the earth's nations, and that a Messiah-King would rule this kingdom.

The distinct entities of Jew and Gentile continued until Paul. Through Paul, God revealed a third entity—the Church, the Body of Christ. The Church was a new creation which was unknown until the time of Paul. God did not reveal it to His prophets nor did Jesus reveal it to his disciples in His ministry on earth. Paul declared that the Church, the Body of Christ was a “secret” ([μυστήριον](#)) God had hid until He revealed it to Paul (Ephesians 2.11-22; 3.3-9; Colossians 1.26-27; Romans 16.25-27).

“Israel” a Technical Term

The term “Israel” in Scripture is technical. It is *always* used for the physical descendants of Jacob. In the same way, the term “Gentile” is a technical term. It always refers to a non-Jew. This fact is obvious and undisputed (except for some bizarre arguments) in the Old Testament. In New Testament studies, however, the meaning of the term “Israel” is a point of contention. The reason for the contention is a result of theology, not philology.

When the nation split after Solomon, ten of the tribes became known as “Israel.” The other tribes were called “Judah.” So Israel sometimes meant the northern tribes. At other times, Israel referred to the entire nation (Acts 2.36).

The lexical evidence that the word “Israel” means only the physical offspring of Jacob is overwhelming. No lexical evidence exists that “Israel” means anything other than ethnic Jews. In the New Testament, the term “Israel” occurs 71 times and the term “Israelite” 4 times. In every case, the terms refer to ethnic Jews. A simple word study of the term reveals this fact. As noted in Paul’s passage above, the Scriptures keep the entities of Israel, Gentiles, and the Church separate and distinct.¹

Despite the fact that the term “Israel” always refers to ethnic Jews, most of Christendom views the Church as “Israel.” Why? The answer is because an aberrant method of interpretation (hermeneutic) has been thrust upon the Scriptures—particularly those which deal with eschatology (future things) and ecclesiology (church doctrine). This methodology, the allegorizing of texts, is a result of *eisegesis* “reading into a text.” It is the opposite of *exegesis* in which interpretation is drawn from the text. A world of difference results from these two methods. One yields sound doctrine; the other error.

To understand why this issue exists requires some historical background. In the 2nd century A.D., a poisonous theory arose that promoted the idea that when and because the nation of Israel rejected Jesus as their Messiah, God ended His plan with them.² Advocates of this theory also rejected the idea that God's promises to Israel were literal. Their theory overturned two thousand years of orthodox theology.

Throughout Israel's history God's prophets had prophesied a coming kingdom. Familiar passages include those of the wolf and lamb lying down together, the lion eating straw, and swords beaten into plowshares (Isaiah 2.1-4, 11.6-10; 65.25; 2.4). John the Baptizer and Jesus proclaimed this kingdom. They declared that after hundreds of years of prophecy the kingdom was "near" (Matthew 3.2; 4.17; 10.7; Mark 1.15; Luke 10.9-11). Even after the Lord's resurrection and ascension, Peter continued to proclaim this kingdom to Israel and declared that if the nation repented (i.e., accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah) Jesus would return and set up his kingdom (Acts 3.18-21). But Israel refused to repent. As a result, the promised kingdom did not come. Rather than accept a normal reading of the passage many maintain that God's promises were not literal but *figurative or typical* ³.

As a result, those who hold to this errant theology argue that the Church is a "new" or "replacement" Israel and that the promises God made to Israel in the [covenants](#) were transferred to the Church and are being fulfilled "figuratively" by the Church.⁴ Among theologians, this view is known as supersessionism. They claim the promises God made to the nation in the covenants and proclaimed by the prophets were not meant to be understood literally. They argue Israel was a "type" of the Church and that the promises are being fulfilled by the Church. For this theological theory to work requires the following: 1) The prophets misunderstood the covenants and especially the kingdom; 2) Jesus misunderstood the covenants

and the kingdom; and 3) "Israel" does not mean the physical offspring of Jacob.

Perverting Texts

Luke wrote in his Gospel, in chapter 1 verses 30-33:

³⁰ *"The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; ³³ and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.'"*

The angel told Mary she would give birth to a son whom she would name Jesus and that God would give him the prophesied throne of his father David. God had made a covenant with David in which he had promised him that He would establish his throne forever (2 Samuel 7). Under this covenant, Jesus, as King, would reign over the house of Jacob, i.e., Israel, forever.

A normal reading of the passage means that Mary was to have a literal, physical son by means of a literal, physical pregnancy and birth. God promised that he would give this son the throne of David. Where was David's throne? From where had David ruled? One only has to read the Old Testament accounts in 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, etc. to answer this: Jerusalem. The angel declared that Mary's son would have the throne of his father David. Like David, He would rule the *house of Jacob*, that is, Israel. But, unlike the limited reign David had enjoyed, His reign and kingdom will have no end (Zechariah 14.9).

What did Mary make of this? The fact of her pregnancy was certainly confusing to her since she was a virgin. But the

fact of the Messiah reigning over the earth, and in particular as King of the Jews, was not. That had been prophesied and anticipated for hundreds of years. What kind of hermeneutical legerdemain would lead one to conclude that Mary's pregnancy and son were literal but that Jesus' kingship and kingdom were not, i.e., that His reign would not be in Jerusalem over the Jews? Tragically, most of Christendom teaches that Jesus presently occupies David's throne "in heaven" and is ruling over "spiritual" Israel, i.e., the Church. The problem is that no Scripture teaches this. The Scriptures teach Jesus is seated at the right hand of his Father's throne and that He is awaiting His Father's will in the fulfillment of His prophesied and covenanted rule over the nation of Israel (Psalm 110.1; Matthew 22.44; 26.64; Mark 12.36; 14.62; 16.19; Luke 22.69; Acts 2.33-34; 5.31; Romans 8.34; Ephesians 1.20; Colossians 3.1; Hebrews 1.3, 13; 8.1; 10.12; 12.2; 1 Peter 3.22).

Let us continue to analyze the passage in Luke following the logic and method of an allegorical hermeneutic by examining the verses which immediately follow those above. Luke recorded in Luke 1.34-37,

³⁴ "Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' ³⁵ The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.'"

If we are consistent with a hermeneutic that leads to the conclusion that Jesus is reigning "spiritually" over a "spiritual" Israel (the Church), we are obligated to conclude Mary was not a literal virgin but a "figurative" virgin, i.e.,

a woman of pure character and motives. If we move ahead in time with this interpretive method, it is not a long step to conclude Jesus did not rise literally (physically) from the dead but “spiritually” in the hearts of his followers. At this point, Christianity is destroyed. How did it happen? Without the discipline of a normal, consistent hermeneutic any interpretation becomes possible. Tragically, this interpretative poison is rampant throughout Christendom.

Children of Abraham

In Romans 4 (cf. Galatians 3), Paul wrote that those who believe in Christ are the children of Abraham. Does this mean that Paul taught that Gentiles or the Church was Israel? Quite the contrary. Throughout his writings, Paul kept Jew, Gentile, and the Church distinct. Paul’s argument with respect to Abraham was soteriological. Paul never taught that Gentiles or the Church were “Israel.” Paul’s argument was that Abraham obtained righteousness by faith alone and that all who believe in Christ in the Church age become children of Abraham because they obtain righteousness in the same way as Abraham. Paul used Abraham as his example to teach that salvation was now *by faith alone* or faith plus 0. Abraham was not saved by obeying the Mosaic Law (it did not exist), by works, or by a combination of faith plus works. Abraham was saved solely on the basis of his faith apart from works.

The Jew under the Law did *not* fit into this pattern. Under the Mosaic Law works were required for salvation in addition to faith. To understand this, let’s take an example of a Jew under the Law which had the Levitical sacrifices. Suppose a Jew said, “I believe an animal sacrifice will cover my sin but I’m not going to take an animal to the priest” (faith but no work). Or what if a Jew said, “I don’t believe an animal sacrifice will cover my sin but I’ll take an animal to the priest for a sacrifice nevertheless” (work but no faith). Would either of these Jews have been saved? No! Salvation under the Law required faith and works. A Jew had to believe

an animal sacrifice would cover his sin *and* take an animal to the priest. *Both* were required. As long as the Mosaic Law was in operation faith and works were required.

But for the Church Age believer, to whom Paul was the apostle (Romans 11.13), works are not required. Salvation is faith in Christ plus 0. Paul's point was that for this age, Abraham's experience of salvation was the pattern. What did the Scripture say regarding Abraham? It said, "Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Romans 4.3). Were works required? Not one. He believed what God had told him—that he was going to be the father of many nations, etc. (Genesis 15.3-6). An *entirely* different argument, one that requires an unscriptural leap, is the argument that those who believe are Abraham's children and therefore Israel. Such an interpretation is to misunderstand Paul's soteriological argument at its most basic level.

Paul revealed the Church, the body of Christ, was a new entity created by God and that prior to him the Church was a "secret" God had not revealed (Ephesians 2.11-22; 3.3-9; Colossians 1.26-27; Romans 16.25-27). Peter and the Twelve knew *nothing* of the Church until Paul revealed it to them. Not one of them mentions the body of Christ in their letters.

Paul's great treatise on Israel in Romans 9-11 asserted the nation's identity and affirmed God would fulfill his promises to the nation. He reiterated the covenantal relationship and promises God had made to Israel. Romans 9 deals with Israel's past, Romans 10 with Israel's present condition, and Romans 11 with Israel's future. Paul stated that one day national Israel (ethnic Jews), cf. Romans 9.3-8 would return to the Lord and be saved (Romans 11.25-27). Jesus prophetically summed this up as he concluded his tirade against the Pharisees in Matthew 23.37-39:

³⁷ "'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones

those who are sent to her! ³⁸ How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! ³⁹ For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’”

In verse 37, Jesus recorded Israel’s past (Romans 9), verse 38 (Romans 10) recorded Israel’s status when Jesus was present, and in verse 39 (Romans 11) Jesus prophesied Israel’s future. Jesus awaits the day when the nation will repent and say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” When national Israel utters these words—a divine certainty—Jesus will return as Israel’s Savior and King. God will then fulfill his covenantal promises to the nation. Thus, Paul asserted God had not abolished his promises to ethnic Israel nor applied them in a “spiritual” manner to the Church.

A Problem Passage: Galatians 6.16—Grammatical and Lexical Evidence

The text of Galatians 6.16 reads:

And those who will walk by this rule,	peace and mercy be upon them,	and upon the Israel of God.
καὶ ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν,	εἰρήνη ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔλεος,	καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ.

Paul wrote to the Galatians to address and correct the error of Jewish teachers who were teaching that Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic Law to be saved. Some maintain Paul addressed one group in Galatians 6.16. For this argument to be valid καὶ in the phrase καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ is interpreted in an ascensive sense of “even” rather than the usual connective sense of “and.” According to this sense, the passage would read, “and as many as who will walk by this

rule, peace upon them and mercy, even upon the Israel of God". Grammatically, such a translation is possible for καὶ can have an ascensive sense. The usual rendering for καὶ, however, is a simple connective sense, "and." The grammatical evidence is greater for the simple connective sense for the following reasons:

1. The normal rendering of καὶ is continuative. Thus the sense is that of "and" rather than "even." This is the rendering found in the vast majority of the uses of καὶ. As such, it should be accepted unless strong evidence exists for an alternate reading. This is unlikely due to the grammatical structure of the sentence.
2. Paul repeated ἐπὶ "upon", i.e. "upon them" and "upon the Israel of God." This repetition favors parallelism. Coupled with καὶ, it provides grammatical evidence Paul was addressing two groups of believers.
3. "Israel" means ethnic Jews in every passage of Scripture. To overturn this sense and define "Israel" to mean "Church" is not possible lexically and thus defeats such an exegetical application.

Another Possible Interpretation

Another reasonable interpretation is possible, however, using some of the same grammatical logic of those who try and make the Church to be Israel. If καὶ is interpreted in its ascensive sense of "even," Paul could have been addressing only the Judaizers. Thus, when he wrote, "and those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, even upon the Israel of God" he could have been addressing Jews (the Judaizers of Acts 15 and Galatians), who opposed him and wanted to bring Gentiles under the Law. In such a case, Paul was telling them if they ceased trying to bring Gentiles under the Law and perverting his gospel of grace, he wished them peace and mercy. This is a possible interpretation. Interpretively *impossible*, grammatically and theologically, is

that Paul meant that the Church was Israel. Such a statement would contradict 2,000 years of theology: the theology of the prophets, Jesus, and Paul. That's a lot to overturn to support such a translation. The NIV translators translated καὶ as "even" as opposed to the KJV and NASB "and." I doubt they intended to indicate the group Paul addressed was legalistic, Jews. They were endorsing the theological error the Church is Israel.

Lastly, we must not lose sight of the forest for the trees. In Galatians 6, Paul came full circle and closed the argument he began in chapter 1. In Chapter 1, Paul stated that anyone who preached a gospel different from his was accursed (Galatians 1.6-9). Paul wrote these words *after* the great Council of Jerusalem. The issue at the Council was whether Gentiles could be saved apart from circumcision and keeping the Mosaic Law, i.e., faith plus works. After a great argument, Peter finally rose to defend Paul. He made an incredible statement and declared, "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are" (Acts 15.11). Peter recognized Paul was right and they were wrong. Jews from this time forward had to be saved like Gentiles! This was unthinkable. For 2,000 years Gentiles had been saved like Jews. That was now reversed.

This is the context of Paul's closing statement in Galatians 6.16. He stated in chapter 1 that those who preached a different gospel from him were to be accursed. Paul could not have written these words prior the the Council of Jerusalem. But now, by Peter's statement, and formalized by James and the rest of the Council (Acts 15.13-20), he could. Thus, Paul closed his letter with the statement he wished "peace and mercy" to Gentiles to whom he ministered and to the Jews of Jerusalem who had opposed him at the Council (Galatians 6.12-13). But if they preached a gospel different from his gospel (Romans 2.16, 16.25), they were accursed. This was an extremely strong warning which Paul repeated twice.

Furthermore, just to make sure they “got it” he declared, “From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus” (Galatians 6.17). Paul’s testy statement was clear in its meaning: “I’ve had it. I’m willing to be at peace but I’m tired of your troubling me. I have wounds to show for my work—you don’t. Shut up. And stay out of my way.” (cf. 2 Corinthians 11.23).

Galatians 6.16—More Contextual Evidence

The choice of a translation or an interpretation is governed not only by grammatical or lexical evidence but its context. In the previous verse, Galatians 6.15, Paul wrote, “For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.” This is essentially what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 10.31-32. The circumcision was Jews; uncircumcision was Gentiles. The new creation was the Church. The two groups Paul had in mind were Gentile believers and Jewish believers. Earlier in the Epistle, in Galatians 2, Paul introduced these two groups in terms of ministry. According to Paul, he and the Twelve agreed on their missionary targets. Paul would go to Gentiles while Peter and the eleven would go to the Jews. Thus, Paul wrote:

⁷ But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised ⁸ (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), ⁹ and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we might go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised” (Galatians 2.7-9).

God commissioned Paul as the “apostle to the Gentiles” (Romans 11.13). Peter’s commission was to Israel (Acts 9.15-16;

14.26-28; 18.6; 22.21; 26.16-18; 28.28; Galatians 2.2; Romans 11.13; Ephesians 3.1, 8; 1 Timothy 2.7). These two ministries were distinct. Since Paul had not been part of Jesus' earthly ministry he did not meet the qualifications to be one of the Twelve (Act 1.21-22). Peter and the eleven received their commission from Christ on earth. Paul received his commission from the risen, glorified Christ from heaven. These verses indicate a change of commission from how Jesus had instructed them earlier. In Matthew 28.18-20, the Scripture records,

¹⁸ *"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'"*

Now, instead of going to the nations, i.e., Gentiles, the Twelve agreed to limit their ministry to Jews. Clearly, a major shift had taken place from the commission Jesus had given them. The Twelve continued to preach the "gospel of the kingdom" to Jews (cf. Acts 2.22, 38; 3.12, etc.). This was the message they had preached during Jesus' earthly ministry. Paul, on the other hand, according to his commission, preached the "gospel of the grace of God" not the "gospel of the kingdom."

What about Paul's teaching in Galatians 3.28-29? He wrote,

²⁸ *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise".*

Does this verse militate against the distinctiveness of Jew,

Gentile, and Church? Paul maintained the distinction of each of these groups while also revealing that a new relationship had been created by being a member of the body of Christ. Paul did not write that functional differences between slave and free had been abolished. He told slaves to obey their masters (Ephesians 6.5-6). The same was true of gender differences. Man and woman remain unchanged. Did Paul teach that the Church is the "Israel of God" because if one belongs to Christ one is Abraham's offspring in any ethnic sense? Not at all. Paul argued that those who trust in Christ are children of Abraham in a soteriological sense; they have come to God the same way Abraham did—by faith alone.

A Time of Transition

The lives of the apostles was a period of theological transition. Luke's primary purpose in writing Acts was to explain the fall of the nation of Israel, *not* the birth of the Church, as most teach. His record is the history of the transition of the prophetic program of Israel following Jesus' death and resurrection to the "secret" Church program.

In Galatians 6.16 Paul identified Jewish believers as the Israel of God. Paul had these believers in mind in Romans 9.6-8 when he stated, "they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel" (cf. Romans 2.28-29). A true Jew was not merely a descendant of Jacob; a true Jew was a descendant of Jacob who believed in YHVH, or in Jesus' day, one who believed that Jesus was the Messiah and had been baptized. These were the "Israel of God". The phrase "Israel of God" expressed adjectivally is "godly Israel". The transition period, which Luke partially recorded in Acts, ended with God's judgment of national Israel in 70 A.D. After this judgment no "Israel of God" existed. The "gospel of the grace of God" fully supplanted "the gospel of the kingdom." This had occurred largely by the close of Acts 28.26-28 when Paul declared:

²⁶ *"And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, 'The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, saying, "GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; ²⁷ FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES; OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.'28 "Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen."*

Today, under the dispensation of the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20.24), Jews and Gentiles who believe Paul's gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4) become members of the Church, the body of Christ, and are equal "in Christ." God is faithful and a future day remains in God's program for Israel. Once reinitiated, national Israel will recognize Jesus as her Messiah-King and be saved (Romans 9.26-27).

Conclusion

The grammatical, lexical, and contextual evidence for the distinctiveness and differences of Jew, Gentile, and the Church is overwhelming. On the basis of this evidence, Paul either addressed two groups of believers or one group that was Jewish in Galatians 6.16. The term "Israel" is technical since it is *always* used for ethnic Jews. Those who teach that the Church is a "new" or "replacement" Israel" do so without Scriptural support. The Judaizers, whom Paul opposed, taught that Gentile believers had to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic Law to be saved. Paul issued a stern warning against them at the beginning of his letter (Galatians 1.6-10) and concluded his letter by wishing peace and mercy upon the Gentile believers who followed his teaching and upon the

“true” or “godly Israel”, i.e., “the Israel of God.” For more exegetical analysis of Galatians 6.16 the reader is encouraged to read the paper by S. Lewis Johnson ⁵

¹ The reader can verify that every occurrence of the term “Israel” in the New Testament refers to the physical offspring of Jacob by examining the below verses. Paul *always* used the term in this manner as did every other Scripture writer. No instance exists in which “Israel” means Church or Gentile. Every case refers to Jews (believing or unbelieving) or the land of the Jews. See: Matthew 2.6, 20, 21; 8.10; 9.33; 10.6, 23; 15.24, 31; 19.28; 27.9, 42 Mark 12.29; 15.32; Luke 1.16, 54, 68, 80; 2.25, 32, 34; 4.25, 27; 7.9; 22.30; 24.21; John 1.31, 1.47, 49; 3.10; 12.13; Acts 1.6; 2.22, 36; 3.12; 4.10, 4.27; 5.21, 31, 35; 7.23, 37, 42; 9.15; 10.36; 13.16, 17; 13.23, 24; 21.28; 28.20; Romans 9.4, 6, 27, 31; 10.19, 21; 11.1, 2, 7, 25, 26; 1 Corinthians 10.18; 2 Corinthians 3.7; 3.13; 11.22; Galatians 6.16; Ephesians 2.12; Philippians 3.5; Hebrews 8.8, 10; 11.22; Revelation 2.14; 7.4; 21.12.

² Craig A. Blaising, “[The Future of Israel as a Theological Question](#)”, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 44/3 (September 2001), p. 435. This article discusses the theological theory of supersessionism from the writings of Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, and the Letter of Barnabas. The error of supersessionism began in the 2nd century and has poisoned theological thinking to such a degree that in our day it has become the predominate view of Christendom. While “replacement theology” began early in church history, many church fathers believed national Israel had a future and would be saved. See Michael J. Vlach, “[Rejection Then Hope: The Church’s Doctrine of Israel in the Patristic Era](#)”, *The Master’s Seminary Journal*, 19/1 (Spring 2008), p. 51-70.

³ The term “spiritual” is used by convention for figurative, non-literal, or non-normative language. Such terminology has nothing to do with the moral senses spirituality such as holiness, goodness, etc. Figurative language is legitimate in

a number of contexts and is easy to spot: in poetry, parables, prophecy (cf. Isaiah, “all flesh is grass”; Jesus, “I am the door”). But figurative language is not the norm. Literal language is the norm for 99.9% of communication.

⁴ Most who maintain the unsound theory that the Church is the “new” Israel profess to believe in God’s sovereignty. This is surely wrong. According to their theory, God’s sovereign promises were abrogated by the disobedience and failure of one generation of Jews! But Paul declared, “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11.29). He presciently warned against the arrogance of supersessionism in Romans 11.18-21 and declared in Romans 11.25-26 that *all* Israel will be saved. The logic of replacement theology leads to the conclusion that God is not sovereign and His word cannot be trusted. If He broke His promises to Israel, how can He be trusted to keep His promises to the Church? The root problem of supersessionism, that the Church is the “new” Israel, is unbelief.

⁵ S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. “[Paul and ‘The Israel of God’: An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study](#)”, *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 20/1 (Spring 2009), p. 41-55.

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Updated, 11/14/2014