



Dirk
Hiemstra

Israel

*How it
relates to the*

Kingdom of God

Bible translation:

Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations in this publication are taken from the King James Version.

Any emphasis in the Bible text is my own addition, obviously.

Preface

A few years ago, I was overcome with the urge to write an article about Israel. Having grown up in a Reformed Christian family, I have always been exposed to a positive attitude towards the State of Israel. I was 13 years old when the Six-Day War broke out in 1967, and I still remember it quite clearly. I was also particularly interested in the Holocaust and its consequences for Jews during the Second World War. From a young age, we had a radio play at home based on Leon Uris's novel Exodus. I later read almost all of Leon Uris's books, many of which dealt with the situation of the Jews during and around World War II.

In the various church settings I have been part of over the years, I have also encountered a predominantly positive attitude towards Jews and the State of Israel. I was convinced that the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was the fulfillment of biblical prophecies.

The big question that has preoccupied me enormously in recent years is this: 'What does the Bible have to say about this?' The more I read, the more it nagged at me, and I began to question my positive attitude. Is it all true, and does it all correspond with the Bible? This prompted me to set aside my preconceptions and take a closer look at the Bible in relation to this topic specifically, asking myself whether the commonly used Scriptures might be subject to some kind of arbitrary interpretation rather than pure exegesis.

*¹⁹We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: ²⁰**knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.** ²¹For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*
(2 Peter 1:19-21)

The result was an article about Israel in 2021, which I published on my website under the title "Israel and how it relates to the Kingdom of God". The article caused quite a stir in my personal circle almost immediately. Since

then, I have continued to delve deeper into the subject and found that a number of issues remained unresolved. This prompted me to revise the article and publish it as a small book with the same title.

It took quite a few hours to write everything down. I adjusted the layout, rewrote parts of it and, with the help of my dear wife, went through the spelling and sentence structure once more. This way, not only did I know what I had written, but I also knew that someone else had read it to check that she understood the message.

Many thanks to my dear wife for her constant reading, commenting and correcting of my work. Above all, thanks to God. I am convinced that He helped me through His Spirit to get it all down on paper correctly.

Dirk Hiemstra

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Introduction

There is currently a global movement emerging. Christians of various denominations suddenly seem to realise that the Bible does not consist solely of the New Testament. They are coming to understand that the gospel is not only to be found in Paul's epistles. Many people claim to have reached the conclusion that they must obey the Law of Moses. All over the world, people are discussing dreams in which the Holy Spirit supposedly reveals to them that the law applies not only to Jews, but also to followers of Jesus. These revelations often seem to be received entirely without the intervention of others. As a result, people are reconsidering their views on the Sabbath and other biblical holidays, often concluding that they would also be of great value to Christians.

However, this then provokes responses from others who argue that the law does not apply to Christians and that we are, in a sense, 'not under the law'. Reference is often made to Paul's teachings in his epistles to the Romans and the Galatians. On this basis, many Christians claim that Paul's message differs from that of Moses and also of Jesus in the Gospels. Paul is said to have received the gospel for the Gentiles — the so-called gospel of grace — while Jesus is said to have preached the gospel of the Kingdom to the Jews. A common argument is that the law is for Jews, not Gentiles. A common statement is: 'We are not Jews, are we?'

About nine years ago, things started to change for me when I came across teaching on these matters. Initially, I was naturally very cautious because of the warnings Paul gave in this regard, particularly in his Epistle to the Galatians.

Personally, I have had serious questions about many of the activities within the so-called liturgical year. I have had these questions for years. In particular, the origins of the festivities surrounding Christmas have raised serious questions for me for years. We may have added a Christian veneer, but that does not change the fact that they stem from paganism. The birth of Jesus has absolutely nothing to do with 25 December, the day on which the sun-god was born in many different cultures. Although the sun-god is known

by different names in different cultures, the date of 25 December is almost the same everywhere. The first person to be given the title of sun-god was Nimrod, who is known for his involvement in the construction of the Tower of Babel. Many see Nimrod as the first incarnation of the Antichrist. Of course, you are not going to celebrate the birth of Jesus on the day his counterpart was supposedly born.

My thinking has shifted quite a bit. For a considerable time, I have been adhering more and more to biblical festivals such as the Sabbath and the feasts described in Leviticus 23.

As a result of this process, the big question that gradually came to the forefront for me was:

Who is Israel, really? Are the Jewish people Israel, and is the state founded in the Middle East in 1948 the Israel of the Bible or a continuation of it?

What about the fulfillment of many biblical promises?

I intend to address these questions in this book. Once these questions have been answered, they will also provide a basis for further reflection on the Sabbath and the biblical feasts, as well as their relationship to Gentile Christians. First, I will consider the historical perspective:

1. The first Apostolic Church.
2. The Early Church in the Time of the Church Fathers.
3. The great councils of the fourth century.
4. The Reformation.
5. John Nelson Darby's dispensationalism in the mid-19th century.
6. The creation of the State of Israel in the mid-20th century.

Next, I will attempt to answer the question of who Israel is, as set out in the Bible.

The intention is not to provide a comprehensive overview, but rather to contribute to an ongoing discussion.

Historical perspective:

The first apostolic church

When Jesus came to Earth, he came among his Jewish compatriots, and the first disciples were recruited from this group. They were all Jewish. The entire account of the four Gospels is situated on the same piece of land in the Middle East. Jesus' preaching was predominantly addressed to Jews. The only non-Jewish element in the story is that the area referred to in the Bible as Galilee is known as the 'Galilee of the Gentiles'. However, there are a few hints in the Gospels that Gentiles may also share in the Gospel. In Matthew 8, for instance, Jesus praises a Roman centurion for his great faith, allowing him to enter the Kingdom of Heaven alongside Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

*¹¹And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.
(Matthew 8:11)*

Later, in Matthew 15, we encounter a Canaanite woman from the regions of Tyre and Sidon. Jesus praises her in the same way.

*²⁸O woman, great is thy faith
(Matthew 15:28)*

In John 4, Jesus has a conversation with a Samaritan woman. Samaritans are not Jews, but rather pagans from the surrounding countries who were sent there to live after the exile of the northern kingdom of Israel. You can read about this history in 2 Kings 17:24–41. Apart from that, everything is Jewish. The first church in Jerusalem, as described in the Book of Acts, also consists almost exclusively of Jews. However, you will encounter the term 'proselytes' in Acts 2, referring to Gentiles who have converted to Judaism. Years after the great day of Pentecost, the first non-Jewish group appears in Acts 8: the Samaritans, who share some religious practices with Judaism. Even later, in Acts 10, we encounter citizens of Rome, namely Cornelius and his household.

Peter receives a vision showing him that he should not consider Gentiles who believe in God to be unholy.

*What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common
(Acts 10:15)*

The major shift towards the Gentiles only begins in Acts 11, starting in verse 20. Apparently, people were under the impression that the gospel was almost exclusively for Israel, the Jews, and not for the rest of the world. So you can see that the fact that the Gentiles also have a part in the gospel causes quite a bit of tension in the mindset of the Church. This is also reflected in Paul's great attention to this issue in his ministry as an apostle and also in his epistles. The general view, even in the early church, was that the Jewish people should be seen as Israel.

The time of the Church Fathers

Due to the negative reputation that Jews had gained through various confrontations with Roman authorities, and the negative consequences they had to deal with, combined with the fact that many Jews were hostile towards the new Christian community, a movement slowly began to emerge in which non-Jewish Christians distanced themselves from Jews. During this period, various documents written by church fathers reveal the first signs of what some consider to be anti-Semitic tendencies. This phenomenon was particularly prevalent among Christians in Rome and Greece who were oriented towards the West. Western churches quickly began to distance themselves from the Sabbath and biblical feasts, whereas these remained largely intact in the Eastern Church for a long time. The question of who should be seen as the Israel of God in this day and age also began to shift. Ultimately, the influence of the Church of Rome prevailed, partly due to the so-called conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine.

The Councils of the 4th Century

In the fourth century, the Church held the great councils under pressure from Emperor Constantine. Constantine had ensured the Church's acceptance throughout the Roman Empire, but he also used it as a unifying force to prevent its collapse. Clearly, a political agenda was at play here. In this situation, differences of opinion on biblical and ecclesiastical matters could only lead to schism within the Church and jeopardise the unity sought by the

Roman government. It was therefore necessary to take decisive action to ensure theological unity and thus bring everyone into alignment. A number of councils were held during this period at which important decisions were made. During these councils, the first creeds were established, such as the Nicene Creed. These creeds attempted to capture Christian belief in a system of dogma that superseded scripture, meaning that the Bible was to be interpreted only within this framework.

A number of important decisions concerning the so-called liturgical year were also made during this period. By designating Sunday as the Lord's Day and establishing church holidays based on pagan festivals, the Church openly opposed the Jewish Sabbath and festivals. The church leadership was aware that this could be considered unbiblical, but at that time, the church believed it was authorised to make decisions that were not based on the Bible. It should be clear that the Bible refers to what they call the 'Jewish Sabbath' and 'Jewish feasts' as the 'Sabbath of the LORD¹ your God' and the 'Feasts of the LORD'.² By labelling them as Jewish, they justified the decisions they had made. During this period, Jews were obliged to adhere to the church's institutions, and observing the biblical Sabbath and festivals was seen as undermining the church's authority. Ultimately, this led to the first major schism in the Church, with many Jews who continued to conform to these practices being expelled. This laid the foundation for the Church to see itself as the replacement for Israel — the so-called 'replacement theology'. The Jewish people and the Torah had been done away with. The only thing left for us to do was submit to ecclesiastical authority, which had explicitly elevated itself above the Scriptures.

The Reformation

From the fourteenth century onwards, after the dark period known as the Middle Ages, the first signs of change began to appear. The preaching of the Waldensians³, who had withdrawn to the Italian Alps and distanced

¹ Exodus 20:10

² Leviticus 23:1

³ The **Waldensians**, also known as , **Vallenses**, **Valdesi**, or **Vaudois**, are adherents of a church tradition that began as an ascetic movement within Western

themselves from the official Church of Rome and its doctrines, was particularly significant. They observed the Sabbath at that time and can therefore be seen as a small group used by God to preserve the gospel in its original form. Individuals such as John Hus, who was burned at the stake, provided the initial impetus for the Reformation a century later. Martin Luther's action with his 95 theses has, of course, become proverbial and is therefore seen by many as marking the beginning of the Reformation.

Despite the oft-heard motto 'Sola Scriptura' ('Scripture alone'), much of the change has been cosmetic rather than substantive. Despite appealing to Scripture, many traditional church practices have remained in place, albeit in slightly modified forms. Examples of this include infant baptism, the observance of Sunday, and the so-called 'Liturgical Year'.

In particular, the so-called covenant theology of Luther and, later, Calvin has remained intact in Lutheran and Calvinist churches, despite being debated. This doctrine states that the Church of Jesus Christ is the continuation of Old Testament Israel. I am personally struck by the fact that both Luther and Calvin allowed their theology to be greatly influenced by Augustine of Hippo's⁴ teachings, which had a significant impact. Neither of them returned exclusively to the Bible. Augustine was an important figure after the great councils and came from a later generation. Thinking in terms of the covenant alongside national identity meant that faith became more of a national than a personal matter. If you were born in the Netherlands, for example, you were considered part of the chosen people. Church and state were therefore completely intertwined. This ensured that infant baptism, supposedly a substitute for circumcision, remained in place. According to this typical

Christianity before the Reformation. Originally known as the **Poor of Lyon** in the late 12th century, the movement spread to the Cottian Alps in what is today France and Italy. The founding of the Waldensians is attributed to Peter Waldo, a wealthy merchant who gave away his property around 1173, preaching apostolic poverty as the way to perfection.

⁴ **Augustine of Hippo** (13 November 354 – 28 August 430) was a theologian and philosopher, the bishop of Hippo Regius from Thagaste in Numidia Cirtensis, (present-day Souk Ahras, Algeria). His writings deeply influenced the development of Western philosophy and Western Christianity, and he is viewed as one of the most important Church Fathers of the Latin Church in the Patristic Period. His many important works include *The City of God*, *On Christian Doctrine*, and *Confessions*.

covenant mindset, you were chosen simply for being born in the Netherlands, while personal faith and individual choice were considered less significant. Understandably, there was no place for Jews in this concept, nor for specifically Jewish beliefs about the Kingdom of God.

John Nelson Darby⁵

Nineteenth-century theologian John Nelson Darby had a profound influence, particularly within the Western Protestant world, with his theology. In order to incorporate his favourite subject, the so-called 'Rapture of the Church', into what he saw as biblical theology, he gradually developed the doctrine of 'Dispensationalism', also known as 'Dispensational Theology'. According to this doctrine, history is divided into several distinct periods, each with its own system of norms and values established by God. The most significant distinction is between the dispensation of the law and Israel in the Old Testament, and the dispensation of grace and the church in the New Testament. This creates a strict separation between the church and Israel. According to this doctrine, the dispensation of the law has not yet come to an end; the final part must be fulfilled for Israel (i.e. the Jews) after the church has been raptured. This ideology originated in the Plymouth Brethren and has gained many followers in Evangelical and Baptist circles in the West, and, albeit less explicitly, in Reformed and Pentecostal circles too. The church is depicted here not as the ongoing existence of Israel, but rather as a provisional substitute until the rapture. This leaves room for the Jews in the future, but not so much in the present. This can also be seen as a sort of replacement theology.

⁵ **John Nelson Darby** (Westminster, 18 november 1800 - Bournemouth, 29 april 1882) was een geestelijk leider van de Church of Ireland, een zusterkerk van de Kerk van Engeland. Hij werd in 1825 gewijd tot diaken door aartsbisschop Magee. In 1826 werd hij predikant van Calabry. Hij begon echter steeds meer te twijfelen aan de vastgelegde rituelen en dogmatische wetten van de staatskerk. Vooral toen hij tijdens de lange herstelperiode na een ernstige val van zijn paard veel nadacht kwam hij tot de conclusie dat het officiële ambt van voorganger, priester, dominee of andere leider van een geloofsgemeenschap een zonde was.

The main consequence of this is that Israel and the Church are fundamentally separate entities. Israel refers to the Jewish people, a term often used, while the Church consists mainly of Gentiles. The key question is whether this strict separation is biblical. I will address this later in the book.

Israel, a state since 1948

The Zionist movement emerged in the nineteenth century, gradually awakening the desire to return to the ancient land among many Jews. During this period, the first groups of Jews began to settle there again. The process was greatly accelerated by World War II, leading to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the return of large groups of Jews.

This also prompted a seismic shift in theological thinking for many. The notion that Israel refers to the Jewish people has become greatly reinforced in the minds of many. I have the strong impression that, in many circles, more focus is given to events in the Middle East than to Jesus and His Kingdom. Although a new awareness is emerging about the potential role of the Torah, the Sabbath and biblical feasts, even in the lives of Christians, the strict separation resulting from the teachings of John Nelson Darby remains intact for many in one way or another. Israel is God's chosen people, and we Gentiles are permitted to participate to some extent by God's grace. As Gentile Christians, we hardly recognise the enormous riches that have been given to us in Christ anymore. This shift in focus results in a kind of paralysis when it comes to actively proclaiming the gospel, especially in our immediate surroundings where we should first and foremost be seen to fulfil our calling.

The Bible

The big question that has preoccupied me enormously in recent years is: “What does the Bible really have to say about this?” Who is Israel really? Is it only the Jewish people, or is it broader than that? When the Pharisees and Sadducees come to John the Baptist with the statement that they have Abraham as their father, John's response is that God is able to raise up children of Abraham from dead stones. In other words, it seems that John dismisses this claim by these Jewish leaders as a myth.

*and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham
to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones
to raise up children unto Abraham.
(Matthew 3:9)*

Therefore, it seems that we should consider not only the Jewish people, but also the broader Church of Jesus Christ. To find the answer to this question, it is important to delve deeper into the text of the Bible. First, we must examine what and who the Bible means by 'Israel'. Where better to start than Genesis, where the name first appears alongside an explanation of its meaning?

Birthright or Primogeniture

Throughout the book of Genesis, you see that the birthright and the associated double portion of the inheritance, which according to the Bible belongs to the firstborn, almost never goes to the actual firstborn. The most obvious examples are Isaac and Jacob, neither of whom are physically the firstborn. Ishmael was born 14 years before Isaac, but had to make way for Isaac. Jacob and Esau were twins; Esau was born first, but even at birth Esau was made subordinate to Jacob, as evidenced by God's words to their mother Rebekah.

*23And the LORD said unto her,
Two nations are in thy womb,
And two manner of people shall be separated from thy
bowels;
And the one people shall be stronger than the other people;
And **the elder shall serve the younger.**
(Genesis 25:23)*

In Jeremiah 31:9, you find the birthright in relation to Israel and Ephraim:

*9They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I
lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a
straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: **for I am a father
to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.**
(Jeremiah 31:9)*

The birthright is therefore relevant to understanding who Israel is in a biblical sense. The question that must be asked is "why?" Why is Ishmael not allowed to inherit, and why are the sons that Abraham fathered with Keturah sent away with gifts?

*5And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. 6But unto the
sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave
gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet
lived, eastward, unto the east country.
(Genesis 25:5-6)*

*...for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.
(Genesis 21:12, see also Romans 9:7)*

To find the answer to this question, we must look at what is so special and meaningful about Isaac.

*¹¹for there is no respect of persons with God.
(Romans 2:11)*

Therefore, God's decision to choose Isaac cannot be random; there must be a deeper reason for it. In Romans 9:8, Paul distinguishes between children born of the flesh and children born of the promise.

*⁸That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed..
(Romans 9:8)*

Isaac's distinctiveness can be summed up in one word: 'faith'. As the verse below shows, Sarah was no longer fertile:

*¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.
(Genesis 18:11)*

In biology, we know that women are born with a finite number of egg cells, which begin to mature at puberty. During this time, women are fertile. Once this supply is depleted, a woman enters menopause, meaning that there are no more egg cells available for fertilisation and she can no longer have children. Therefore, the fact that Sarah became pregnant at the age of ninety, when it could be expected that she no longer had any egg cells available, must be seen as a supernatural intervention by God. Isaac is therefore a miracle of God. In Genesis 15, God promises Abraham a son, and verse 6 says:

*⁶And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness
(Genesis 15:6)*

The promise of Isaac's birth and the subsequent miracle are linked to Abraham's faith, which is also referenced in various places in the New

Testament. Abraham was a man of great faith and is known as the father of all believers:

¹⁷(as it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. (Romans 4:17).

This means that faith, rather than physical ancestry, is the primary condition for being considered a descendant of Abraham. While Abraham's physical children receive a blessing, the inheritance and birthright belong to the son of faith. I firmly believe that this is the most important key to understanding who is meant to be Israel in the Bible.

Ephraim and Judah

At the end of the Book of Genesis, in chapters 48 and 49, Jacob blesses his sons. This is also something we must consider. At school, we were taught that Reuben was disqualified from the birthright because of his actions. Simeon and Levi were also disqualified due to their involvement in the incident with Dinah and the sons of Shechem. The birthright was therefore given to Judah, who had vouched for Benjamin during the Egyptian famine. However, upon reading the text of the blessings that Jacob pronounces, I conclude that this cannot be correct. First, let's look at the text from Genesis 49 concerning Judah:

8Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise:

Thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies;

Thy father's children shall bow down before thee.

9Judah is a lion's whelp:

From the prey, my son, thou art gone up:

He stooped down, he couched as a lion,

And as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?

10The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,

Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,

Until Shiloh come;

And unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

11Binding his foal unto the vine,

And his ass's colt unto the choice vine;

He washed his garments in wine,

And his clothes in the blood of grapes:

12His eyes shall be red with wine,

And his teeth white with milk.

(Genesis 49:8-12)

Judah is promised the scepter, which is kingship. David is a descendant of Judah, and Jesus is also in this line of descent, as evidenced by the genealogy in Matthew 1. In verse 10, Shiloh is mentioned, referring to the Messiah, namely Jesus Christ. This is confirmed by Paul in Romans 9:

4...who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; ⁵whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.
(Romans 9:4-5)

So the Messiah comes from the tribe of Judah, but does this mean he has the birthright? When we consider what Jacob says about Joseph in Genesis 49, it paints a different picture:

*²²Joseph is a fruitful bough,
Even a fruitful bough by a well;
Whose branches run over the wall:
²³The archers have sorely grieved him,
And shot at him, and hated him:
²⁴But his bow abode in strength,
And the arms of his hands were made strong
By the hands of the mighty God of Jacob;
(From thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:)
²⁵Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee;
And by the Almighty, who shall bless thee
With blessings of heaven above,
Blessings of the deep that lieth under,
Blessings of the breasts, and of the womb:
²⁶**The blessings of thy father
Have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors
Unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills:
They shall be on the head of Joseph,
And on the crown of the head of him that was separate from
his brethren.***
(Genesis 49:22-26)

Clearly, the birthright goes to Joseph. His father's blessings, specifically the blessing that Jacob received from Isaac, are bestowed upon Joseph and not Judah.

But what happens next? To understand this, we need to go back one chapter to chapter 48, when Jacob blesses Joseph's two sons. To gain a good

understanding, it is necessary to read the entire chapter, so I challenge you to do so. There are a number of things to note here:

- The adoption as sons
- The birthright
- The fullness of nations.

In verse 5, Jacob adopts Ephraim and Manasseh as his own sons, in place of Reuben and Simeon.

*5And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, **are mine**; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine.*

(Genesis 48:5)

Paul talks about adoption in Ephesians 1. I will discuss this topic in more detail later in the book:

5having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

(Ephesians 1:5)

When Jacob blesses his adopted sons, he places his right hand on Ephraim, the youngest, thereby granting him the birthright⁶. This corresponds with the text from Jeremiah quoted earlier in the article:

*9...**for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn..***

(Jeremiah 31:9)

When Jacob blesses Ephraim, he indicates that Ephraim will become a multitude of nations.

*19... but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a **multitude of nations**.*

(Genesis 48:19)

⁶ See Genesis 48:14 en 20

The birthright will ultimately go to this future 'multitude of nations'. More on this later.

The naming of Israel

Isaiah 46:9-10

*9Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, 10**declaring the end from the beginning**, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure;*

To gain insight into the names and concepts in the Bible, it is important to go back to the beginning. In theology, this is known as the 'principle of first use'. To understand where we are going, we must look at where we started; we are on our way back to our origins. The 'New Jerusalem' is simply the restored 'Garden of Eden'. The same applies if we want to understand Israel. We must therefore go back to the moment in history when Jacob received the name Israel, considering all the factors involved. The lives of Jacob and his older brother Esau are relevant here; the name did not just appear out of nowhere.

Genesis 25–33 recounts the story of Jacob and his twin brother Esau. At birth, Rebekah, their mother, is told that 'the older will serve the younger'. Jacob and Esau are two very contrasting characters: Esau is rough and indifferent, living for the moment, while Jacob is a kitchen prince and a mama's boy, but who is focused on the future. Much to their parents' dismay, Esau marries two Canaanite women, showing that he does not care about established norms, such as not intermarrying with the Canaanites. This is evident when Eliezer, Abraham's servant, is sent to find a wife for Isaac. He is expressly forbidden to take a wife from among the local population and must pledge an oath to this effect:

2And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: 3and I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: 4but thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred,

and take a wife unto my son Isaac.
(Genesis 24:2-4)

If this applies to Isaac, then it also applies to his two sons. While Esau acts on the spur of the moment, Jacob is focused on the future. When Esau at some point returns from the field tired and hungry, Jacob buys his birthright from him for a bowl of lentil soup. Later, when Isaac wants to bless Esau, Jacob steals his brother's blessing, which is connected to the birthright. This is far from commendable; it is akin to the worst kind of manipulation, ultimately resulting in Jacob having to flee from his brother Esau. Despite Jacob's arbitrary actions, God apparently respects the story, revealing himself to Jacob in a dream in Bethel. When Jacob ends up with his uncle Laban and marries his two daughters, Leah and Rachel, we see how he takes possession of Laban's flocks using principles that still seem to work today. Of course, Laban's actions are far from admirable, but Jacob should also take a look in the mirror. Although he seems to be focused on the future, he appears primarily determined to shape that future according to his own hands. It is only when he leaves Haran and fears confrontation with Esau, who is approaching with 400 men, that he reaches the point where he no longer has control over his own life or that of his family.

We read **Genesis 32:22-32**

*22And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. 23And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had. 24And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. 25And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. 26And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. 27And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. 28And he said, **Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.** 29And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. 30And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is*

preserved. ³¹And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh. ³²Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.

At the end of his ability, Jacob must fight a man who turns out to be God himself. The struggle lasted all night. Eventually, God dislocates Jacob's hip. Jacob in turn clings to God and pleads for a blessing. It is at this moment that Jacob is given the name Israel. He has fought with God and won, not physically, of course, but he has won God's grace through faith. Jacob clings to God in faith. Therefore, the naming is connected to faith. Just as with Abraham, the promise is connected to faith. This illustrates the clear principle that everything in the Bible revolves around faith. When Paul says in Ephesians 2 that we are saved by grace through faith, this is entirely consistent with this narrative. Jacob is permitted to live the rest of his life disabled and totally dependent on God. Hebrews 11 refers to this:

*²¹By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, **leaning upon the top of his staff.** (Hebreeën 11:21)*

The true Israel is a man who has entrusted himself completely to God in faith and has become entirely dependent on Him. It is at this moment that he receives the name Israel, and this surrender should therefore be seen as characteristic of our understanding of who Israel is.

The Exodus from Egypt

The exodus from Egypt is the moment in history when Israel becomes a nation. When Jacob goes to Egypt at the end of Genesis, he goes as the “House of Jacob,” consisting of seventy souls. When Moses is sent to Egypt, the term “ people” is used for the first time.

*¹⁰Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth **my people the children of Israel** out of Egypt.
(Exodus 3:10)*

At the Burning Bush, God calls Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Along with God's severe judgements against Pharaoh and the Egyptians, the Israelites were led out of Egypt and brought into God's presence at Mount Sinai. But who were these people? The answer can be found in Exodus 12:

*³⁷And **the children of Israel** journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children. ³⁸And **a mixed multitude** went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle.
Exodus 12:37-38)*

What you see here is a diverse group of people, consisting mainly of born Israelites, as well as a large crowd of individuals from various other backgrounds. I imagine that rather than being citizens of Egypt, these people were slaves from surrounding countries who, together with the Israelites, were forced to build the cities of Pithom and Raamses. It is clear that the people did not consist exclusively of born Israelites, which would have been almost impossible considering this was the fourth generation since Jacob moved to Egypt. Therefore, the people of Israel cannot be seen as a group consisting exclusively of Jacob's physical descendants. Under strict conditions, others could also become part of the people of Israel.

*⁴⁸And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and **he shall be as one that is born in the land**: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. ⁴⁹One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the*

stranger that sojourneth among you.
(Genesis 12:48-49)

Although physical ancestry is important, it should not be seen as the only criterion for determining who Israel is. The desire to walk in the footsteps of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is more closely related to faith than ancestry.

Ruth

Ruth is an example of someone who was accepted as one of the people. In the Book of Ruth, we read that Elimelech left for Moab with his wife and two sons because there was a famine in Bethlehem at that time. The two sons then marry Moabite women. However, things do not fare well for them, and Elimelech and his two sons die there. Elimelech's wife, Naomi, is left behind with her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. She then decides to return to Bethlehem. We then read about Ruth and how she chooses to go with Naomi. Chapter 1 tells us the following:

*¹⁶And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: **thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:** ¹⁷where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.*
(Ruth 1:16-17)

If you accept the God of Israel, you can also claim to belong to the people. Ruth eventually became the great-grandmother of King David and is also specifically mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1. If that's not an example of integration, then what is? This is what Paul means when he speaks in Romans 11 about being grafted into the noble olive tree.

The biblical feasts

The biblical feasts⁷ are clearly connected to the different stages of the harvest. On the day after the Sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the high priest waves the first fruits of the barley as an offering to God, after which the Israelites are permitted to eat the barley. During the Feast of Pentecost, the high priest waves the first fruits of the wheat harvest as an offering to God. The Feast of Tabernacles is characterised by gratitude for the fruits of the land and the final harvest, for which sacrifices are made and celebrations held. Paul writes about the feasts, among other things, in Colossians 2:

⁷ See Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 16)

*¹⁶Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in **respect of an holyday**, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: ¹⁷**which are a shadow of things to come**; but the body is of Christ.*
(Colossians 2:16-17)

He refers to the feasts as shadows of things yet to come. The Israelites must rehearse these events every year because they refer to the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. The different stages of the harvest can therefore be seen as a model for God's plan of salvation. Jesus tells his disciples about the harvest of people who can be brought into the Kingdom of God⁸.

Returning to the Book of Ruth, we find a reference to the barley harvest:

*²²So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: **and they came to Beth-lehem in the beginning of barley harvest.***
(Ruth 1:22)

From chapter 2 onwards, we see how Ruth and Boaz meet and eventually marry each other, all of which takes place during the barley harvest. You could say that being incorporated into Israel, as in Ruth's case, has a connection with Passover; the door to the Gentiles is, as it were, ajar. As mentioned earlier in this article, the people consisted not only of born-again Israelites but also of others who had joined them. The door to the Gentiles has always been open.

In Acts 2, we find the description of the outpouring of God's Spirit. This takes place during the Feast of Pentecost (Shavuot) while the high priest offers the first fruits of the wheat. Then, throughout the book of Acts, we see slowly but surely that the door to the Gentiles is thrown wide open. From then on, real action is taken to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, with the result that Gentiles who come to faith are grafted onto the Noble Olive Tree and thus become an integral part of the Israel of God. The root of the olive tree is Jesus, the trunk is the Israel of God, the branches are the people, whether or

⁸ See, among others: John 4:35, Matthew 9:37-38

not they are physically descended from Abraham, together Israel. The pattern of God's plan of salvation begins with one man, namely Abraham, then his descendants, the people of Israel. Everything ultimately comes together in Jesus, the seed of Abraham.

*¹⁶Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, **And to thy seed, which is Christ.***
(Galatians 3:16)

Thereafter, the door will be thrown wide open to all those from all nations who are in Christ. This will ultimately culminate in the Feast of Tabernacles, which is clearly connected to the Second Coming of Jesus and the gathering of all the elect worldwide — the great final harvest consisting of the fruits of the land. Israel will continue to grow throughout time, consisting of:

the Jew first, and also to the Greek
(Romans 1:16^b)

The bill of divorce

In Jeremiah 3, we find a reference to a bill of divorce that God gave to the house of Israel:

*6The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. 7And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. 8And I saw, **when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce;** yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also. 9And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks. 10And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD.
(Jeremiah 3:6-10)*

The covenant that God made with His people Israel at Mount Sinai in the time of Moses can be seen as a marriage covenant. God chooses Israel as His bride and sets her apart from the world to be His exclusive possession. Exodus 19 speaks about this:

*3And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; 4ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. 5Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, **then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people:** for all the earth is mine: 6and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.
(Exodus 19:3-6)*

The word for “peculiar treasure” in Hebrew is סִגְלָה (Segullah)⁹, the concept carries the weight of a precious jewel, something that literally no one is allowed to touch, so exclusive is Israel's ownership by God. However, the history in the Bible shows that Israel does not want to comply with these desires of God. This is compared in the Bible to committing adultery, adultery that takes place with the idols of the land, the Baals and their altars, and the Astartes or Asherahs and their sacred poles. Israel does not want to comply with the normal requirements that apply to a marriage; Israel commits adultery, and this is the reason for God to give Israel a bill of divorce and remove her from his house and land. God ends the marriage (covenant) with Israel. In that sense, Israel no longer exists. Jeremiah 3 states the following:

*And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, **and given her a bill of divorce**; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also*
(Jeremiah 3:8)

Also in Hosea 1, we also find a detailed description of this, in which Israel is compared to Lo-Ruchama¹⁰, which means “not loved,” and Lo-Ami¹¹, which

9 סִגְלָה (segûllâh) Strong H5459

BDB Definition:

- 1) possession, property
 - 1a) valued property, peculiar treasure
 - 1b) treasure

Part of Speech: noun feminine passive participle

10 לֹא רַחֲמָהּ (lô' rûchâmâh) Strong H3819

BDB Definition:

Lo-ruhamah = “no mercy”

- 1) (Pual) symbolic name given by the prophet Hosea to his daughter

Part of Speech: noun proper feminine

11 לֹא עַמִּי (lô' 'ammîy) Strong H3818

BDB Definition:

Lo-ammi = “not my people”

- 1) symbolic name given by the prophet Hosea to his second son by Gomer

Part of Speech: noun proper masculine

means “not my people.” The entire book of Hosea is about this affair. God is forced to say goodbye to His people, while at the same time continuing to love them dearly.

However, a problem arises that seems unsolvable. The law of God in Deuteronomy 24 speaks of the bill of divorce:

*1When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. 2And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. 3And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; 4**her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife**, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.*
(Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

To clarify: God is not a despot who imposes rules on others but is not bound by them Himself. This is characteristic of dictators in this world, but it does not apply to God. God is therefore bound by His own laws. After giving Israel the bill of divorce, God may never take her back in accordance with this law. Yet God says other things in Hosea. Hosea declares:

19And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. 20I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD.
(Hosea 2:19-20)

A Related Word by BDB/Strong's Number: from H3808 and H5971 with pronominal suffix

It therefore appears that God is willing to violate His own laws for this purpose. One could refer to this as God's great dilemma. He loves His people so much that He wants them back at any cost.

And what is the solution to this dilemma? For this, we must refer to Paul's Epistle to the Romans:

*1Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? 2For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; **but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.** 3So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.*
(Romans 7:1-3)

God cannot wait for death to put an end to all regulations surrounding marriage; He chooses to die Himself. Jesus' death on the cross is God's answer to this mortal dilemma. His death is her liberation; after His death, Deuteronomy 24 no longer applies. God can and may woo Israel as His bride again. This means that the people of Israel, who in essence no longer exist, can only continue to exist if, after dying, they are born again.

*11He came unto his own, and his own received him not. 12But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: 13**which were born**, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but **of God***
(John 1:11-13)

Israel's right to exist is linked exclusively to Jesus Christ because of God's law. Outside of Him, there is no Israel. When Paul speaks of the "Israel of God," he is referring to the church, consisting of "first the Jew, but also the Greek." More on this later.

Exile and return

Hosea 3:4-5

4For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: 5afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.

The house of Israel will therefore go into exile and cease to be Israel. Israel will therefore be deprived for a long time of those things that are so characteristic of Israel. Only when there is repentance will there be restoration for individual Israelites. David, their king, refers to Jesus Christ, the Son of David. In Deuteronomy 30, we find the same condition in Moses' speech:

*1And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, **and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, 2and shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul;** 3that then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. 4If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: 5and the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. 6**And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.** 7And the LORD thy God*

will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee. ⁸And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD, and do all his commandments which I command thee this day. ⁹And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the LORD will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers: ¹⁰if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. (Deuteronomy 30:1-10)

Repentance is therefore the condition for the restoration of the Israelites. Repentance means returning in faith to a relationship with God and obedience to the commandments. As a result of their repentance, God gives them a circumcised heart. This circumcised heart is connected to Jesus Christ, to his death and resurrection followed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit:

*³For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.
(Philippians 3:3)*

By “we,” Paul means the Church of Jesus Christ. A return that is not connected to this repentance and becoming part of the Church of Jesus Christ is therefore, from a biblical perspective, arbitrary and cannot be considered legitimate. The return of the Jews to Palestine and the establishment of the state of Israel must therefore be judged in light of this. Also among some groups of Orthodox Jews, there is the idea that the current state of Israel is the result of arbitrary action and not the return promised in the Bible, and in their view should be considered Ishmael instead of Isaac. According to these groups, the arrival of their messiah must be awaited before a return is possible.

Jesus' preaching begins with the announcement of a new era:

*¹⁴Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, **preaching the gospel** of the kingdom of God, ¹⁵and saying, **The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye,***

and believe the gospel.

(Mark 1:14-15)

The gospel of the Kingdom is the message of restoration, and therefore also the message that relates to return. We have seen earlier that the death of the Bridegroom is a prerequisite for the restoration of marriage, and thus the restoration of an obedient relationship with God. The coming of the Kingdom of God is the fulfillment of all the promises in the Bible up to that point. Although the majority of Jesus' contemporaries could not accept Him, everyone at that time understood what Jesus was referring to when He proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is the restoration of David's kingship, which is why the term Son of David occurs frequently in the Gospels. The crux of the matter was that many of His contemporaries had an unbiblical expectation of the future; they expected the Messiah to restore David's kingship on a physical level. The thoughts of Jesus, namely that his Kingdom is not of this world¹², did not fit into their minds. In particular, the teaching that is central to the Gospel of John deals with this controversy. Jesus speaks about rebirth, about his word being Spirit and Life, and about his Kingdom not being of this world, etc., all of which were aimed at correcting an unbiblical future expectation that was characteristic of Jesus' contemporaries. Incidentally, this still applies to much of the thinking within contemporary Judaism. Some time ago, I heard a sermon about Judas' motive for betraying Jesus. This sermon suggested that Judas, through his actions, intended to compel Jesus to fulfil Jewish expectations, namely to drive the Romans out of the land and thus restore the kingship of David. It is clear that Jesus had no intention of complying with this. His plan involved restoration through reconciliation by His blood, by dying for His bride, for Israel. The intended restoration is both spiritual and future, and not focused on restoration in the present and the physical.

Return is therefore first and foremost the restoration of a relationship based on reconciliation and repentance, a restoration to renewed obedience, a

¹² Zie John 18:36

return to Jesus and his commandments. Only when this restoration has taken place can there be legitimate talk of a return to the land.

Paul

Before we can discuss the substance of Paul's message, we must first consider who he was as a person. Paul was a Jew. In Acts 22, he explains this:

*3I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city **at the feet of Gamaliel**, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. 4And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. 5As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.*
(Acts 22:3-5)

Paul was a Pharisee, Gamaliel was part of the Sanhedrin. Paul sat at Gamaliel's feet as a student, so you can assume that he was being trained for a future position in the Sanhedrin. In his Epistle to the Philippians, he says this about himself:

5circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; 6concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.
(Philippians 3:5-6)

So if anyone knows what is available in the field of theology — even Jewish theology — it is Paul. Because of his extensive knowledge of the subjects, Paul can therefore speak with authority on these matters. In Romans 10, he attempts to pinpoint the problem:

*1Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. 2For I bear them record **that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.** 3For they being*

ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.
(Romans 10:1-3)

His Jewish compatriots are very zealous for God, but they lack a proper biblical understanding. The problem seems to lie with the Pharisees' eschatology. Their expectations regarding the coming of the Messiah differ from the teachings of Christ. Given his background, Paul, with his new insight after Jesus revealed Himself to him, may be considered capable of explaining that insight, which his 'brethren' lack, in an irrefutable manner.

Paul addresses this subject in various places in his epistles.

- A large part of the **Epistle to the Romans** deals extensively with this matter, particularly in chapters 2, 3 and 4, and 9-11.
- The **Epistle to the Galatians** also deals with this issue in depth against the backdrop of the encroaching Jewish tradition, which wants to assert itself in relation to circumcision.
- The **Epistle to the Ephesians** is mainly addressed to Gentiles and their position in Christ; they are co-heirs of all the promises given to Israel.
- In **Philippians 3**, he addresses the subject in light of his background as a Pharisee.
- Finally, I would like to mention the **Epistle to the Hebrews**, in which the author, whom I believe to be Paul, delves deeply into everything related to the covenant and the associated priesthood, and the change that came about with the coming of Jesus.

In addition to the Bible passages mentioned, there are other passages that are more or less indirectly related to this topic.

For the sake of clarity, I will not reproduce and discuss all the Bible passages in full. My aim is to use a number of selected texts to give an impression of how we should view the various Bible passages, and in this way to challenge you to study Paul's epistles again.

The Epistle to the Romans

Romans 2:28-29

²⁸For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: ²⁹but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

In this passage, being Jewish is not so much a matter of ancestry as it is a matter of the heart.

Romans 3: 23-24

²³for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ²⁴being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

The word “all” clearly shows that there is no distinction here between Jews and Gentiles.

Romans 9:6-13

*⁶Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. **For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.** ⁸That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: **but the children of the promise** are counted for the seed. ⁹For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. ¹⁰And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; ¹¹(for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) ¹²it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. ¹³As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.*

From this, it is evident that there are two perspectives on who Israel is, namely one based on physical descent, or birth, which is what the Jews hold to, and a perspective based on the word “promise,” which is Paul's starting point. We have seen in Genesis that the promise is connected to faith and not to descent.

Romans 11:1-5

*1I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, 3Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. 4But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. 5**Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.***

The denominated remnant, which has not been rejected, is that segment of the Jews who believe in Jesus. This means that also in the case of Israel and the Jews, knowing and following Jesus is the standard.

Romans 11:17-18

*17And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; 18boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, **thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.***

It is clear from this text that ancestry does not matter; unbelief results in being cut off. This applies to both Jews and Gentiles when it comes to unbelief. Faith is the basis on which we share in the sap-filled root of the olive tree. Only on this basis do we become part of the Olive Tree, Israel, and the root, Jesus Christ.

The Epistle to the Galatians

The epistle that Paul wrote to the Galatians is often interpreted as Paul engaging in a dispute with the Jews regarding whether Gentiles should adhere to the law. In recent years, I have become convinced that a completely different issue is at stake here, namely the question of whether and to what extent Christians should conform to Jewish tradition. Jews had come from Jerusalem to convince the Gentiles that it was necessary for them to be circumcised in order to be saved. The background to this is Jewish thought, which assumes that in principle only Jews are eligible for the gospel, and that Gentiles must therefore first become Jews. According to Jewish tradition, to do this, they must go through the prescribed process of becoming a so-called “proselyte.” To do this, they must first be baptized and then circumcised, after which they must follow a number of prescribed procedures and bring their lives into alignment with Jewish tradition.

Galatians 1:14

*¹⁴and profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of **the traditions of my fathers.***

Paul refers here to the Jewish traditions in which he was raised.

Galatians 2:11-14

*¹¹But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. ¹²**For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.** ¹³And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. ¹⁴But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, **If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?***

This passage mentions that Gentiles and Jews are not supposed to sit at the same table, because a Jew would become unclean in this way. If you look for a scripture from the Old Testament on which this would be based, it will be a very long search, because it is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible; it is part of Jewish tradition. A small document, no longer complete, was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Its title is something like: "The most important works of the law." The fact that Jews and Gentiles are not allowed to sit at the same table is explicitly mentioned in this booklet.

Galatians 4:21-28

*21 Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? 22 For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. 24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. 25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and **answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.** 26 **But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.** 27 For it is written,*

*Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not;
Break forth and cry, thou that travailest not:
For the desolate hath many more children than she which hath
an husband.*

28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

Agar represents "the present Jerusalem," with its unbelief and traditions, while we are part of "the heavenly Jerusalem." Agar has nothing to do with the promises given to Abraham, which are fulfilled in both Isaac and Christ. To read this as a controversy between the Old Testament, intended for Israel and the Jews on the one hand, and the New Testament, intended for the Gentiles and the church on the other, does not do justice to the biblical text as a whole.

We are therefore not talking here about "the slavery of God's law," but about the slavery that is the result of Jewish tradition and their interpretation and further elaboration of what they call "the law of Moses."

James 2:10-12

*¹⁰For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. ¹¹For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. ¹²So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by **the law of liberty**.*

James shows that the law, represented here by a few commandments from the law of God that Israel received on Mount Sinai, can be characterized as “**the law of liberty**.” Jesus indicates that the truth sets us free, whereas sin makes us slaves.

Additional passages

Ephesians 1:4-6

*⁴according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵**having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself**, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*

In the same way that Ephraim and Manasseh were adopted by Jacob and would become part of the twelve tribes, we too may be adopted as sons and, as such, become part of Israel.

Ephesians 2:11-22

*¹¹Wherefore remember, **that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh**, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; ¹²that at that time ye were without Christ, **being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no***

*hope, and without God in the world: ¹³but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he is our peace, **who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;** ¹⁵having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; **for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;** ¹⁶and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: ¹⁷and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. ¹⁸For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. ¹⁹**Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;** ²⁰and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; ²¹in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: ²²in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

This passage in particular shows us that Gentiles, who were once not part of Israel, have become part of the one new man in Christ, Jews and Gentiles together. Gentiles therefore inherit fully, and there is no longer any distinction between Jew and Greek.

Romans 10:12-13

*¹²For there is **no difference between the Jew and the Greek:** for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. ¹³For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

Galatians 3:28-29

*²⁸There is **neither Jew nor Greek,** there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

Colossians 3:11

*¹¹where there is **neither Greek nor Jew**, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.*

These scriptures clearly indicate that there is no distinction in the church between Jews on the one hand and Gentiles on the other; yet making any kind of distinction is inconsistent with the scriptures of Paul cited here.

Philippians 3:2-11

*²Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. ³**For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.***

*⁴Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: ⁵circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; ⁶concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. ⁷But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. ⁸Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, ⁹and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, **but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:** ¹⁰that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; ¹¹if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.*

In this passage, Paul expresses himself rather harshly when speaking about the Jews, using terms such as “dogs,” “evil workers,” and “cutting off,” which

seem intended to make a caricature of Jewish identity. It is precisely these kinds of texts that lead some in the circle of the so-called “Hebrew roots” to view Paul as a false apostle. I do not agree with this; I think Paul understood perfectly well what was really important. I am convinced that Paul expresses himself so strongly here in order to counter the constant pressure from Judaism and the Talmudic thought to make us believe that the Jews, together with their traditions, deserve a kind of special status in the world, and therefore also within the churches. In this section, Paul also tries to make it clear that circumcision is not so much a physical thing, comparable to the concision.¹³, in Greek “Kata-tumai,” which means to cut off, but that circumcision, in Greek “Peri-tumai,”¹⁴, has a relationship with the heart that is circumcised in Christ by the Spirit.

Deuteronomy 30:6

6And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

¹³ **κατατομή** (katatomē) Strong G2699

Thayer Definition:

1) to cut up, mutilation

Part of Speech: noun feminine **A Related Word by Thayer's/Strong's Number:** from a compound of G2596 and temno (to cut)

¹⁴ **περιτομή** (peritomē) Strong G4061

Thayer Definition:

1) circumcised

1a) the act or rite of circumcision, “they of the circumcision” is a term used of the Jews

1a1) of Christians gathered from among the Jews

1a2) the state of circumcision

1b) metaphorically

1b1) of Christians separated from the unclean multitude and truly consecrated to God

1b2) the extinction of passions and the removal of spiritual impurity

Part of Speech: noun feminine

A Related Word by Thayer's/Strong's Number: from G4059

The circumcision of the heart is already mentioned in Deuteronomy 30, so Paul is not introducing a new phenomenon that would only apply in the New Testament.

Jesus Christ

Before we delve into the meaning of Jesus' words, we must first acknowledge his position of authority, which is often overlooked. One statement I have encountered in this regard is that Jesus' words would be too radical for us Christians to follow literally. However, Scripture offers a different perspective on this, as can be seen in the passage below.

Deuteronomy 18:15-19

*¹⁵The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; ¹⁶according to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. ¹⁷And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. ¹⁸**I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.** ¹⁹And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.*

In the book of Acts, chapter 3 verse 22, Peter refers to this passage in his speech and declares it applicable to Jesus. Among all other things He is, Jesus is also the “Prophet of whom Moses spoke that He would come.” Our first priority should therefore be to listen to what He has to say to us. We must reconsider everything we proclaim that is not in accordance with the words of Jesus, because only in this way can the unambiguous proclamation of the whole of Scripture remain intact. An example is the doctrine of the rapture of the church, as taught by John Nelson Darby, which is based exclusively on the words of Paul in his Epistle to the Thessalonians. There is no direct statement by Jesus in the Gospels that is consistent with this, so there is no unambiguousness based on the whole of Scripture. At such a moment, we would do well to take another close look at the way we view Paul's words and bring them in line with the words of Jesus. Paul also proclaims in other places that it is about the “doctrine of Christ”.

1 Timotheüs 6:3-5

*3If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, **even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;** 4he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, 5perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.*

When we consider the Israel of God, it must also be in accordance with the teachings of Jesus. When we look at the breadth of the Gospels, we see that Jesus' teachings brought with them a constant confrontation with the Jewish culture of that time. Jesus continually confronts them with the fact that their traditions conflict with God's law in important areas. One such example is found in Matthew 15.

Matheus 15:1-9

*1Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, 2Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. 3But he answered and said unto them, **Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?** 4For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. 5But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; 6and honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. 7Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying,*

*8This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips;
But their heart is far from me.*

*„But in vain they do worship me,
Teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

The question that concerns me is the extent to which the teaching about Israel in our churches is based on Jewish thought rather than the Bible. Our teaching on Israel must also explicitly align with Jesus' teachings. If we rely exclusively on Old Testament texts that are not interpreted in line with Jesus' teachings, we risk teaching something that is not in accordance with Scripture as a whole. Psalm 119:160 tells us that the word is true in its entirety. The English Standard Version translates this as “The sum of your word is truth”, meaning the word in its entirety. Individual verses can often lead to an incorrect interpretation of Scripture. Therefore, there must be agreement between the Old and New Testaments, as well as between Jesus and the apostles. If we encounter contradictions, we must take a step back, pray, and reflect again. In the following section, we will consider parts of the Gospel of John to reflect on Israel.

Gospel of John

The Gospel of John seems to be a continuous confrontation between Jesus and, in particular, the scribes and Pharisees. The confrontation seems to be mainly about the way they deal with the Scriptures and their conceptions of the Kingdom of God. This confrontation is evident right from the start.

John 1:11

¹¹He came unto his own^(his people), and his own received him not.

John begins with Jesus' perspective right from the start, placing it in a spiritual rather than physical framework. The latter framework was embraced by the Jews of that time. To make this clear, he goes back to the beginning, but not to the beginning of our physical reality, described in Genesis 1, but to the spiritual reality that precedes it.

John 1:1-5

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²The same was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life; and the life was the light of men. ⁵And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

God is Spirit, says the Bible,¹⁵ the creation of heaven and earth is first born in the heart of God, and John tries to make it clear that the Word¹⁶ concerns Jesus. Jesus, the Word, was with God before creation, and He was God. In verse 2, John shows that this is the initial situation, the starting point as such. Our physical reality has its origin in spiritual reality, in the heart of God. The physical reality is nothing more than a reflection of the spiritual. In various places in the New Testament, there is talk of a shadow; a shadow is not the essence of things but a reflection or image of them. This insight is necessary

¹⁵ John 4:24

¹⁶ or the wisdom of Proverbs 8:22-31

for a correct understanding of the Kingdom of God and therefore also of Israel. With God, it is primarily about the spiritual and not about the physical. To make this clear, we will consider a number of things that the Gospel of John presents to us. Here is a brief overview:

- The body of Jesus is the temple (chapter 2)
- To live in the kingdom, you must be born of the Spirit (chapters 1 and 3)
- The place of worship is in Spirit and Truth, not in Jerusalem (chapter 4)
- Jesus is the one sent by God (chapter 5)
- His words are Spirit and Life (chapter 6)
- Jesus comes to die, not to reign (chapters 3 and 12)
- His Kingdom is not of this world (chapter 18)

We will now examine these matters in greater depth in order to gain insight into how we should view the Kingdom of God and Israel based on Jesus' teachings in the Gospel of John.

Zooming in on John's text

John 1:12-13

¹²But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: ¹³which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

To be part of Jesus and His Kingdom, physical birth is not enough; we are flesh, and flesh can only produce flesh. We must believe in God and be born of Him. Being born an Israelite is not enough to be counted as part of the Israel of God.

John 2:13-22

¹³And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, ¹⁴and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: ¹⁵and when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; ¹⁶and said unto

*them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. ¹⁷And his disciples remembered that it was written, **The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.***

*¹⁸Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? ¹⁹Jesus answered and said unto them, **Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.** ²⁰Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? ²¹**But he spake of the temple of his body.** ²²When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; **and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.***

This whole affair takes place in the temple courtyard, just before Passover. Jesus cleans house here, driven by a deep passion for the house of God. When asked about the base of his authority, he refers to his own body as being the Temple. The temple in Jerusalem is intended as the place of encounter with God, the place of worship and reconciliation, and also the place of fellowship with one another. All these things are a foreshadowing of the true Temple that is in heaven, which has descended to us as the incarnate Word. The physical is the shadow here, while the reality is Christ (Colossians 2:17). Jesus, specifically His body, is the temple. He is the place of encounter and worship. In Him we find reconciliation and forgiveness, and through Him we are also connected to one another. In this way, as a church, connected in Him, we constitute the true Israel of God. Here too, faith is the determining factor.

John 3:1-21

*¹There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: ²the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, **except God be with him.** ³Jesus answered and said unto him, **Verily, verily, I say unto***

thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

*4Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 5Jesus answered, **Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. 8The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.***

*9Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? 10Jesus answered and said unto him, **Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?** 11Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. 12**If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?** 13And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. 14And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 16For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 17For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. 18He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. 21But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

This section is the conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus. Nicodemus is described as a ruler of the Jews, a leader from Israel. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin at that time. To gain a good understanding of the confrontation between Jesus and Nicodemus, it is important to understand that he was not just an ordinary guy, but a leader. From his repeated responses to Jesus' statements, you can deduce how people thought at that time, especially among the Pharisees. Nicodemus begins by declaring that he sees Jesus as someone sent by God, that is, as a prophet. The mere fact that he calls Him Rabbi speaks volumes. In Jewish culture, you can only be called Rabbi if you have been officially trained by a Rabbi and recognized by the other Rabbis. The fact that he comes to Jesus makes it clear that he is considering the question of whether this Jesus might be the Messiah.

Jesus' response is that He immediately begins to talk to him about the Kingdom of God and what is necessary to be part of it. Nicodemus then responds from his physical mindset. This becomes clear from his question about whether a man would have to return to the womb to be born again¹⁷. At first, he could not hear what Jesus was presenting to him. He did not see that the Kingdom is first and foremost spiritual and has nothing to do with the throne of David in Jerusalem. Jesus makes it plain that you must partake of the spiritual first by being born of the Spirit, otherwise you will have no part in the Kingdom of God. The reproach that he, as a leader in Israel¹⁸, does not understand these things clearly shows the fundamental difference in approach between the viewpoint of Jesus and that of Nicodemus, and with him, of course, the rest of the leadership at that time, about how to regard the Kingdom. What is also important here is that Jesus is addressing a Jew, so this message applies not only to Gentiles but also to Jews. What becomes clear here is that the Jewish leaders' perception of the Kingdom is incorrect. The reason why the Jewish leaders of that time believed that the Messiah would come at some point and set things straight for them, let's say their eschatology, clearly did not correspond with Jesus' teachings. Personally, I believe that this was the primary reason why they did not acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. When Jesus indicates that He did not come to judge but to

¹⁷ John 3:4

¹⁸ John 3:10

save¹⁹, this does not correspond with Jewish expectations for the future. The Jews see a restoration of David's kingship connected to present-day Jerusalem, while Jesus, like Paul, refers to the new, heavenly Jerusalem. In order to correctly understand the question of who or what Israel is, it is very important to understand this difference in insight. Even today, people within our churches cherish the idea that there will be a future kingship in Jerusalem when Jesus returns, often completely ignoring the fact that the Kingdom of God is first and foremost a present, spiritual, heavenly reality. Jesus is seated at the right hand of God today, so He reigns now, today. Much of the eschatology in our churches is Jewish in nature and not as Jesus and the apostles taught it. The Jews had a physical mindset, but we should have a spiritual mindset. How we view Israel is fundamentally influenced by this same way of thinking. The Israel of God today is first and foremost a spiritual reality.

John 4: 4-26

4And he must needs go through Samaria.

5Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. 6Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour.

7There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. 8(For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)

9Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. 10Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. 11The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? 12Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us

¹⁹ John 3:17

the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? ¹³Jesus answered and said unto her, **Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: ¹⁴but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.** ¹⁵The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw. ¹⁶Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. ¹⁷The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: ¹⁸for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. ¹⁹The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. ²⁰Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

²¹Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. ²²Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. ²³**But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.** ²⁴**God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.** ²⁵The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. ²⁶Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.

Jesus becomes involved in a conversation with a woman from Sychar, ancient Shechem, at the foot of Mount Gerizim. Mount Gerizim is the central sanctuary for the Samaritans, so He penetrates to the heart of Samaritan worship.

The first thing Jesus says to this woman is an invitation to drink from the living water. The living water is not physical water, but spiritual, heavenly water. It is also clear here that the true reality of God's Kingdom is spiritual.

As the conversation continues, the place of worship is discussed. On the one hand, Jesus makes it clear that it is not this mountain, Mount Gerizim, that is the chosen place, but Jerusalem. Yet Jesus does not linger here, but speaks of another, future reality to which worship is connected. The phrase “the time is coming and is now” shows that with the coming of the Messiah, a new era is dawning, in which even Jerusalem is no longer the place of worship, but “spirit and truth” is the reality in which true worship takes place. This apparently refers to a transition from the physical, namely Jerusalem and the temple, to the spiritual.

To fully comprehend this, we must understand the distinction between Jerusalem and the temple, and in contrast, “spirit and truth.” In Genesis 3, after the fall of man, humanity is expelled from the Garden of Eden to prevent access to the tree of life.

*²²And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: ²³therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. ²⁴So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.
(Genesis 3:22-24)*

The disaster would have been incalculable if man, in his sinful state, would still have eaten from the tree of life. Man would then have been eternally trapped in the consequences of sin, separated from God. The tree of life in paradise represents the living relationship with the eternal God. Before this relationship can truly be restored, reconciliation is first necessary. The coming of Jesus is therefore a necessary condition for restoration. In Hebrews 10, the apostle points out how we can regain access to God.

*¹⁹Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh
(Hebrews 10:19-20)*

Jesus' sacrifice gives us access to the heavenly sanctuary and therefore renders the earthly sanctuary in Jerusalem obsolete. When we come to faith, we receive the Holy Spirit, as promised:

*37Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 38Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. 39For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.
(Acts 2:37-39)*

Jesus is now in heaven, at the right hand of the Father, and we have direct access to Him in heaven without the mediation of temple ceremonies, which were necessary at a time when the Spirit of God had not yet been poured out. Whenever we, as people who have received the Spirit of God, reach out to worship God the Father, in prayer alone or together as a congregation, we are in His presence and He is in our midst. The people of Israel and all their ceremonies surrounding the tabernacle and temple are only a shadow of the much greater thing that we have received after Passover and Pentecost. By clinging to the old, we remain deprived of the new, much greater thing that God has in store for us. Jesus is the fulfillment of everything that the people of Israel stood for, and that is the reality in which we are allowed to walk.

John 5:1-18

1After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. 3In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. 4For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. 5And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight

years. ⁶When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? ⁷The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. ⁸Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. ⁹And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: **and on the same day was the sabbath.**

¹⁰The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed. ¹¹He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. ¹²Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk? ¹³And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place. ¹⁴Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. ¹⁵The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole. ¹⁶**And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.**

¹⁷**But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.** ¹⁸**Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.**

This is yet another passage in the Gospel of John in which the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders becomes apparent. Jesus deliberately does things on the Sabbath that go against the established opinion of the Jewish leaders. This is just one of many examples that we encounter in the Gospels. Once again, we see the great controversy in the way of thinking, the “mindset.” The way both parties view the Sabbath is characteristic of the great difference in thinking. Here it concerns the Sabbath, but it is only one of many subjects on which Jesus and the Jewish leaders have a difference of opinion.

In Mark 2, Jesus shows that the Sabbath is being viewed incorrectly:

*27And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: 28therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.
(Mark 2:27-28)*

In the Torah, in Exodus 31, the Sabbath is called a sign:

*16Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. 17**It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever:** for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.
(Exodus 31:16-17)*

A sign always points to something greater. Above the highway, there are signs everywhere indicating the direction we need to take to reach our destination. All the signs in the Bible have a similar function. All the ceremonies surrounding the worship of God, both around Moses' Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple, point to a much greater future. In the same way, we should view Israel in the Old Testament. The people of Israel, and all the laws imposed on them, point to the future, namely the coming Kingdom of God, which ultimately came when Jesus came to earth. This Kingdom was the central message of that time and was preached by John the Baptist, Jesus and later his apostles. The people of Israel are called to mirror the Kingdom of God. The people of Israel are not the Kingdom itself, but serve as a sign in the world to show the nations around them how God intended life to be and what it will look like in the future when God has restored all things.

As we continue reading in John 5, Jesus presents himself as the one sent by God:

*24Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth **my word**, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. 25Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear **the voice of the Son of God**: and they that hear shall live. 26For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; 27and hath*

*given him authority to execute judgment also, because **he is the Son of man.** ²⁸Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, ²⁹and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.
(John 5:24-29)*

Jesus presents himself as the fulfillment of biblical expectations for the future. Paul also shows this in Romans 10:

*¹Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. ²For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. ³For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. ⁴**For Christ is the end of the law** for righteousness to every one that believeth.
(Romans 10:1-4)*

This should not be understood to mean that the law ends here, but that Christ is the final destination. The law of God is thus presented here as the route by which we ultimately reach our destination, namely the Kingdom of God, which has come with Christ.

We could, of course, go through this chapter in much more detail and gain more insight into Jesus and what He stands for and why He came, but my main concern in this book is to point out that there is a big difference between the Jewish leaders and Jesus in the way they view all matters connected with God's Kingdom.

John 6:11-15; 48-66

John 6 recounts the so-called “feeding of the five thousand” and Jesus' subsequent presentation of himself as “the bread of life,” as well as the reaction of the people around him. First, a few quotations from the text:

¹¹And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were

set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.
¹²When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. ¹³Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. ¹⁴Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.

¹⁵**When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king,** he departed again into a mountain himself alone.

⁴⁸**I am that bread of life.** ⁴⁹Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. ⁵⁰This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

⁵²**The Jews therefore strove among themselves,** saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? ⁵³Then Jesus said unto them, **Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.** ⁵⁴**Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.** ⁵⁵For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. ⁵⁸This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. ⁵⁹These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum.

*⁶⁰Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? ⁶¹When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? ⁶²What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? ⁶³It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: **the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.** ⁶⁴But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. ⁶⁵And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.*

*⁶⁶**From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.***

As long as Jesus fills their bellies with bread and fish, the people are happy with Him. They see Him as the fulfillment of the promises concerning the coming of the Messiah. They want Him as their King, so that He can deal with the Romans who cause them so much trouble.

This shows once again that the future expectations of the Jews, in this case the Galilean disciples, are focused on a physical Kingdom of God with the Son of David on the throne in Jerusalem. When Jesus then shifts the focus to the Kingdom as a spiritual reality, the people become confused. As a result, they no longer follow Him. The people are focused on a future in which all their needs will be met in the way they envision. A Messiah who distributes bread and fish fits their picture. When Jesus then has a completely different message, the people realize that He apparently does not intend to fulfill this expectation for them, so they walk away. This is the picture throughout the Bible: as long as it serves our interests, we are quite willing to serve God, but when God shows us something else, something that comes with a price tag, we tend to drop out. Jesus says this in Mark 8:

*³⁴And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, **Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.**
(Mark 8:34)*

There is obviously a price to pay for following Jesus and participating in the Kingdom of God. For many people, perhaps even the vast majority, this is too much to ask, so they drop out and no longer participate.

What does this have to do with how we view Israel? To understand these things correctly, we must understand that the true reality of things is spiritual and not physical. Against this backdrop, the Israel of God is also first and foremost a spiritual reality.

John 8:31-47

*³¹Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; ³²and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. ³³They answered him, **We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?** ³⁴Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. ³⁵And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. ³⁶If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. ³⁷**I know that ye are Abraham's seed;** but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. ³⁸I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. ³⁹They answered and said unto him, **Abraham is our father.** Jesus saith unto them, **If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.** ⁴⁰But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. ⁴¹Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.*

*⁴²Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. ⁴³Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. ⁴⁴**Ye are***

of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. ⁴⁵And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. ⁴⁶Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? ⁴⁷He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.

This text is another example of this; we are encouraged to see with spiritual eyes. In this passage, being Abraham's descendants is not so much about being physically descended from Abraham, as if that were enough in itself, but is first and foremost connected to Abraham's lifestyle and whether or not we share that very same lifestyle. Physically, the Pharisees and scribes are indeed descendants of Abraham, but spiritually, given their attitude, they are descendants of the devil. The devil resists the word of Jesus and tries to kill Him, and this is also the attitude of the Jewish leaders; they hate Him because He confronts them with the truth, and so they try to kill Him. The faith of Abraham is the standard, not just his physical existence.

John 10:11-18

*¹¹I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. ¹²But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. ¹³The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. ¹⁵As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶**And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.** ¹⁷Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. ¹⁸No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.*

Jesus presents himself as the Shepherd from Psalm 23, but also as the One Shepherd from Ezekiel 34 and 37:

*¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want....
(Psalm 23:1)*

*²³And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. ²⁴And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it.
(Ezekiel 34:23-24)*

*²⁴And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them.
(Ezekiel 37:24)*

The flock is not primarily linked to the fact that we are descended from Israel, but rather to whether “My servant David,” namely Jesus, is our Shepherd. By dedicating our lives to following Jesus and hearing His voice, we become part of the flock, and thus part of the Israel of God. The pitfall is that in the passages from Ezekiel, we look at the physical nation of Israel. Paul also urges us to look at it in a different way.

*²²What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: ²³and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, ²⁴**even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?** ²⁵As he saith also in Osee,*

*I will call them my people, which were not my people;
And her beloved, which was not beloved.*

*²⁶And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people;
(Romans 9:22-26)*

The flock therefore consists of people from all nations, Jews and Gentiles together, and together they are the people of God. Paul's interpretation of the verse from Hosea 1 is that Gentiles who are described as "not my people" are seen by Paul as the people of God through faith.

John 12:23-25

*²³And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. ²⁴Verily, verily, I say unto you, **Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.** ²⁵He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.*

Jesus explains something very crucial here, namely that we cannot bear fruit without dying ourselves. Jesus is, of course, the one who laid down his life in order to bear fruit in the world in this way. He died for us on the cross so that we could be reconciled with God. Verse 25 also refers to us, saying that we too must hate our own lives, our physical lives, in order to bear fruit for God in our lives.

In Matthew 2, a number of verses from the Old Testament are quoted that relate to the people of Israel and are connected to Jesus now. I will mention verses 14 and 15:

*¹⁴When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: ¹⁵and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.
(Matthew 2:14-15)*

The prophet who speaks of this in the Old Testament refers to the people of Israel, Matthew uses the same scripture and refers it to Jesus. Jesus is clearly the fulfillment of Israel, therefore all the promises made to Israel find their fulfillment in Him. This also means that Israel's calling, namely to be a kingdom of priests, finds its fulfillment in Christ.

Back to the text from John 12; Israel can only bear fruit for God if Israel dies. Paul speaks of the fact that we died with Christ and rose with Him. This also applies to the people of Israel. The old Israel according to the flesh dies in Christ, and with Christ a new Israel arises, consisting of Jews and Gentiles together. Together they form that one flock of which Jesus is the high priest and the King of Kings.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul speaks of two bodies:

*44it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body
(1 Korintiërs 15:44)*

The people of Israel in the Old Testament are connected to that natural body, and that is sown in Christ. The church of Christ is that new, spiritual body that rises with Christ.

John 18:33-37

*33Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? 34Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? 35Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? 36Jesus answered, **My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.** 37Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.*

When Jesus is questioned by Pilate, after the Jews had handed Him over, Jesus also makes it clear to Pilate that the Kingdom of which He is King is not of this world. If it had been, no one would have been able to take Jesus prisoner, His disciples would have fought, and we know from the Bible that large crowds of enemies repeatedly had to yield to often small minorities

among the Israelites. Jesus is King of a heavenly kingdom, and that is spiritual. We have therefore been given other, namely spiritual weapons to fight against people in their thinking through the proclamation of the gospel and not to use physical weapons to conquer territory.

So much for the Gospel of John.

In conclusion

The passages quoted from the Gospel of John, as well as Paul's epistles, are only a selection from the wide range of topics related to this subject that we find in the teachings of Jesus and his apostles. God's Kingdom is not of this world, so it is not physical in nature. It is a heavenly kingdom, which is spiritual. Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father and reigns today. We as the church of Christ, and also as individual Christians, have received the Holy Spirit and have thus become part of the spiritual Kingdom of God. What began with Abraham and continued with the people of Israel after they were led out of physical Egypt finds its fulfillment in Christ and His church. We too have been led out of our spiritual Egypt and have received a share in the freedom that is in Christ. The people of Israel physically and we spiritually.

I would like to quote a few more passages from Isaiah. Immediately after the famous passage from Isaiah 53 about the suffering servant, like a lamb led to the slaughter, we read the following in Isaiah 54:

*1Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD. 2Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; 3for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; **and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles**, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.*
(Isaiah 54:1-3)

Jesus has died; He is the Lamb that was slain. Immediately after this we find this promise, which refers to expansion towards the Gentiles. The death and resurrection of Jesus opens the door to the nations completely. We, the church, are the offspring of the Lamb; we are called to take possession of the nations with the preaching of the gospel. Isaiah 56 also speaks about the nations:

1Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed. 2Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil.

3Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. 4For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; 5even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.

6Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; 7even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people. 8The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him.

(Isaiah 56:1-8)

In my opinion, the eunuch and the stranger are one and the same person. At these times, it was customary for people who entered government service, for example as ambassadors, to be castrated upon taking office, and this also happened to Daniel and his friends. The eunuch stranger is therefore the representative of the king and the people who had sent him to act as ambassador in Jerusalem. This promise therefore opens the door 100% to the entire people with their king, who was represented by this ambassador. Jesus referred to this passage during the so-called cleansing of the temple. In this way, He declared that all nations may be part of the Israel of God, the church of Jesus Christ.

God's great plan of salvation comprises three stages:

1. One man, namely Abraham
2. One people, namely Israel
3. All peoples, namely the church of Jesus Christ

If we focus our attention again on the physical Jewish people, a large part of whom have now settled back in the Middle East, in the nation of Israel, our attention is diverted from Jesus and His great plan of salvation. We then find ourselves looking at a physical land and people, while the entire New Testament points us in the direction of the spiritual, the Kingdom of God and Jesus as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Adam and Eve in the garden were clothed with the glory of God until they fell into sin and then found themselves naked. When Jesus returns, thanks to the resurrection of the dead, we will be given a glorious resurrection body. Jesus is the firstborn; if we remain in Him, we may also follow Him in the resurrection when He comes. John writes about this in his first epistle:

*1Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. 2Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: **but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.***
(1 John 3:1-2)

I will finish with the words of Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews:

*1Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2**looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith**; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds*
(Hebrews 12:1-3)

We can only be ready for God's future if we focus exclusively on Jesus. He is the fulfillment of all the promises made to Abraham, intended for Israel. Only in Him do we become part of the Israel of God.