

Cornerstone Bible Church
Great Falls, Montana

Elders' Convictions on Israel and the Church

At the April 25, 2010 business meeting, we elders were asked about our convictions on the relationship between Israel and the church. We hope this brief statement clarifies our beliefs.

THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST

All biblical doctrine must focus on Christ (**Colossians 1:18; 2:2-3**). We find in Scripture that Christ is the focus of Israel's hopes because He is her Messiah King (**Luke 24:21; Acts 2:26; 23:6; 26:6-7; 28:20**). He is Abraham's Seed and Heir of the promises (**Galatians 3:16; Matthew 21:38; Hebrews 1:1-4**). As a result, all the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ alone (**2 Corinthians 1:20**). He is the embodiment of the New Covenant (**Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:20; Hebrews 12:24**). Justification, sanctification, regeneration, covenant fulfillments and spiritual relationships are all found through union with Christ (**John 16:15; Romans 8:32; 2 Peter 1:3**). The only blessings either a Jew or non-Jew receive are through union with Messiah King. Union with Him leads to a second kind of union.

ONE NEW COVENANT PEOPLE

In numerous places the Bible describes the unity of all believers, Jewish and non-Jewish, in one community of faith. God made the First Covenant obsolete for Israel (**Hebrews 8:13**). His New Covenant in **Jeremiah 31:31-34** is only for Israel. Through Christ's death the New Covenant is now in force (**Hebrews 8:6-10:31; especially 9:15-17**). Yet we find that non-Jews receive the blessings of this New Covenant (**1 Corinthians 11:23-25; 2 Corinthians 3:6**).

The key words to describe this amazing relationship are "*engrafted*," "*one new man*," "*sons and heirs of Abraham*" and "*the Israel of God*."

In **Romans 11:7-25**, Paul explains how non-Jews receive these blessings—they are actually grafted into the one covenant people of God. They become "*a partaker of the root and fatness*" of the Jews.

The means of this engrafting is described in **Ephesians 2:11-16**—God has actually created a new humanity by the union of Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Christ as one new man. This body of Christ is the one "*commonwealth*" of God.

All believers have the privileges of sons and heirs of Abraham (**Romans 4:13-16; Galatians 3:7-9,29**). His promised blessings have and will be poured out on all Christians through Jesus the Messiah.

Finally, this unity can be described with the term "*Israel*." The New Testament uses the term for both the ethnic people (the Jews as the Israel "*according to the flesh*" [**Romans 9:3-4; Galatians 4:23,29**]) and the spiritual people (citizens of "*the Jerusalem above*" and "*the Israel of God*" [**Galatians 4:26; 6:16**] who are "*the circumcision*" [**Philippians 3:3**]). In fact, non-Jews ("*wild branches*") are engrafted into Israel ("*the olive tree*") in **Romans 11:7-25**.

In light of this unity, all believers enter into the full promises given to God's people—including spiritual and physical blessings. The Lord has only one covenant community throughout history.

HOW TO USE THE WORD “CHURCH”

The gathering of God’s people both under the Old Covenant and under the New Covenant can be called the “church.” The Greek translation of the Old Testament—used by all first century Jewish communities outside the Holy Land—uses “church” constantly in its text. Jesus taught His disciples about the church without acting like they would treat it as a new idea (**Matthew 16:18 and 18:17**). In the Greek text, Stephen the martyr (**Acts 7:38**—“*congregation*”) and **Hebrews 2:21** (“*assembly*”) use the word “church” to refer to Old Testament Israel’s gatherings.

The church was not a new reality in New Testament times. On the contrary, the church entered a new phase with three distinctions from the Old Testament—(1) it is now the saints gathered under the New Covenant (**Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25**); (2) it is now built by Christ on His person and work (**Matthew 16:18**); and (3) non-Jews are now grafted into the church without becoming Jews in lifestyle (**Acts 15:1-29; Ephesians 2:15; 3:4-6**). Therefore, we use the term to describe God’s New Covenant people gathered for worship and witness. That witness gives special honor to the Jewish people.

“TO THE JEW FIRST”

God has a continuing plan for the *Israel “according to the flesh.”* As a result, it continues as a reality throughout history. Paul emphasized that God’s people must give priority to ethnic Jews in global missions (**Romans 1:16**). He illustrated this evangelistic emphasis in the book of Acts (**for example, 13:5 and 17:1-4**). We therefore desire that Westside support mission work to the Jews. This results in a long term vision.

ISRAEL’S FUTURE BLESSING

Romans 11:25-29 is plain to us. At the end of history, God will do a marvelous work of conversion among the Jews. They will be re-grafted into the New Covenant people, which include non-Jews. “*And so all Israel will be saved.*” **Revelation 20:9** also indicates that during the Millennium Jerusalem will have special honor. We think these texts imply that God will give believing Jews a renewed political state in the Holy Land.

ANTI-SEMITISM

Obviously, in light of everything written above, anti-Semitism (which means hostility toward Jews) is unacceptable. It is immoral and contradicts God’s promise to bless Israel. He honors the Jews in a special way (**Romans 3:1-2; 11:16,29**). Many Christians who held convictions like ours happened to be guilty of this sin. However, concluding that there is only one covenant people of God does not make one guilty of anti-Semitism. Likewise, this conclusion does not inherently lead to anti-Semitism. The only way it leads to that horrible sin is if someone thinks that we should not share the Good News with Jews or that Jews do not deserve our respect and love. That person is guilty of anti-Semitism.

DOCTRINAL CHARITY IN OUR CONGREGATION

We are convinced that the people of Westside can disagree on the relationship between Israel and the church. We can also disagree in our understanding of the end of history. In our church we should not divide over these issues.

However, the people of our church cannot disagree on how we treat people. For instance, no one has the right to be hostile to Jews or anyone due to race. We also must not condemn people's doctrinal convictions because we think their beliefs imply something immoral. We must only condemn what Holy Scripture specifically condemns.

By God's amazing grace we will all keep growing in our understanding of His truth. As we grow we will work to love and honor one another along the way. We elders want to grow too. Therefore, we welcome your input from God's Word to correct and clarify our convictions.