

# Israel and the Church — The Short Version

*Paper 6 in a 12 Part Series*

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*A plain-language companion to Paper 6. Everything here is worked out at length there, with the Greek, the objections, and the sources.*

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Paul once asked a question that a lot of churches have quietly answered the other way: "has God cast away His people?" His answer was two words: "Certainly not!" (Rom. 11:1).

He was writing to a church full of Gentiles, and he was talking about Israel, the nation. If the Church were just Israel with a new name, that question wouldn't make sense. Paul is speaking to one people about another.

So who is Israel, who is the Church, and how do they stand toward each other? The answer here is that they're **two peoples** with a place in **one kingdom**, and that kingdom has **two portions**, a heavenly one and an earthly one. Israel was offered both. She refused the heavenly portion, and it went to the Church. The earthly portion was never hers by offer alone; God swore it to her, and it's still hers.

One idea carries everything else. **What God offers can be refused. What God swears can't be lost.** Paul puts it this way: "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

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## The story told ahead of time

Jesus told the whole story before it happened, in one parable:

"The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come."  
(Matt. 22:2-3)

The king didn't give up. He sent other servants with a second invitation, "all things are ready," and this time the guests made light of it, and some of them seized the servants and killed them (Matt. 22:4-6). So the king "sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city" (Matt. 22:7). Then his servants went out into the highways and gathered everyone they found, "and the wedding hall was filled with guests" (Matt. 22:10).

Hold on to those four steps: **invited and refused, invited again and refused again, the city burned, and the invitation carried out to the highways**. That's Israel's history from the day Jesus began to preach until now, and each section below is one of those steps.

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## Offered, and sworn

When John the Baptist and then Jesus began to preach, the message was short: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). Matthew's phrase is literally "the kingdom of the heavens." It means rule from the heavens over the earth, the government Satan and his angels hold now from "the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12), which Christ will take from them.

Israel already had the earthly side by promise. When God made His covenant with Abram, Abram cut the animals in two, and then God put him into a deep sleep. In that world the one who walked between the halves was the one binding himself (Jer. 34:18). And only God walked between them: "a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces" (Gen. 15:17). God took the whole obligation on Himself, and Paul says the Law given at Sinai "four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant" (Gal. 3:17).

The heavenly side came a different way. It came as an **offer**: "at hand," come in if you will. Think of the difference between a will and a dinner invitation. A son can disgrace the family and the will still stands; he may not enjoy the estate while he's in disgrace, but it hasn't been written over to anyone else. An invitation is different. It can be turned down, and when it is, the host gives the seat to someone else.

That's what Jesus said would happen:

"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it." (Matt. 21:43)

Israel had seen this before. At Kadesh Barnea, the generation God brought out of Egypt stood at the edge of the promised land, heard the spies' report, and refused to go in. That generation died in the wilderness. But the oath to their fathers stood, and forty years later their children crossed the Jordan (Num. 14:23). **A generation can lose its own share. It can't cancel the oath.**

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## Offered to people who were already God's

It matters who the offer went to. Every household in Israel had come out of Egypt under the blood of a lamb, and every generation since had kept the Passover (Exod. 12:13, 24-27). Jesus wasn't offering the kingdom to strangers. He came to a nation that already belonged to God, a **disobedient** one, and He called it to repent and receive its King.

That's why He could say what He did to Nicodemus, "a ruler of the Jews": "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:1, 3). The word translated "again" is the word John uses elsewhere for "from above" (John 3:31; 19:11). Jesus was telling a man of a redeemed nation what it would take, from God's side, for him to see and enter the kingdom being offered. And He expected him to know it already: "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?" (John 3:10). Ezekiel had promised Israel clean water and God's own Spirit for the day of her restoration (Ezek. 36:25-27).

## Refused, and refused again

The first refusal ended at a cross. Pilate brought Jesus out and asked, "Shall I crucify your King?" and the chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!" (John 19:15). Israel didn't put Jesus to death as the Passover Lamb. She put Him to death as a **rejected King**, and God brought redemption out of the very act that condemned her (Acts 2:23).

Then God did what the king in the parable did. He sent His servants again. Not long after Pentecost, Peter stood in the temple and made the offer a second time:

"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things..." (Acts 3:19-21)

If the nation repented, the King would come back. For about thirty years the apostles carried that offer "for the Jew first" (Rom. 1:16), going to the synagogue first in town after town. And God added a spur. He let Israel watch Gentiles receive what she was refusing, and Paul says why: "through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:11).

It didn't move her. The offer closed in Rome around A.D. 62, when Paul told the Jewish leaders there, "the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" (Acts 28:28). Less than ten years later, in A.D. 70, Roman armies burned Jerusalem and its temple. That's the parable's third step: the king "sent out his armies... and burned up their city" (Matt. 22:7).

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## Something new: one new man

Meanwhile, at Pentecost, something had begun that the Old Testament never described: the Church (Acts 2:47). Its first members were Jews who believed Jesus was their Messiah. Soon Gentiles were added, and Paul explains what God did with the two:

"...so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross." (Eph. 2:15-16)

This **one new man** isn't Israel under a new name. Even after the Church existed, Paul still sorted people into three groups: "Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God" (1 Cor. 10:32). Inside the Church, a believing Gentile stands on exactly the same ground as a believing Jew. The line this paper draws is between the Church and the nation of Israel, never between Jew and Gentile within the Church.

Paul's picture for it is an olive tree. Israel's natural branches were broken off "because of unbelief," and Gentile branches were grafted in among them (Rom. 11:17, 20). But it's still Israel's tree. Paul says the natural branches will one day be grafted "into their own olive tree" (Rom. 11:24), and he warns the Gentiles, "do not boast against the branches... the root supports you" (Rom. 11:18).

## Set aside, not thrown away

Since A.D. 70, Israel has been exactly what Hosea said she would be:

"For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king." (Hos. 3:4-5)

No king. No temple. No sacrifice. And still a people, waiting for "**afterward**." A little later Hosea says how long the wait would be:

"I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense... After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight." (Hos. 5:15; 6:2)

Peter supplies the measure: "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years" (2 Pet. 3:8). **Two days** of being set aside, two thousand years, and then **the third day**, the kingdom. That gives the order of events and the general span. It doesn't give anyone a date, and Jesus told His disciples the times and seasons were "not for you to know" (Acts 1:7).

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## Meanwhile, a bride

What is God doing while Israel waits? James answered that at the council in Jerusalem: "God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name," and "after this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David" (Acts 15:14, 16). **First** a people taken from the Gentiles; **then** Israel again.

Genesis acts it out. After Sarah died, Abraham sent his oldest servant on one errand: "go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac" (Gen. 24:4). The servant went to a far country, found the bride at a well, and brought her home. Today the Spirit is out on that errand, finding a **bride for the Son**. And notice that the bride came from the father's own family, but she wasn't the whole family. One woman went back with the servant. Who the Bride is will be settled at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 19:7-8).

Joseph and Moses follow the same order. Israel refused each of them the first time and received him the second (Acts 7:13, 35). And in between, each took a Gentile bride: Joseph married Asenath, an Egyptian (Gen. 41:45), and Moses married Zipporah, a Midianite (Exod. 2:21).

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## The second time

When the Bride is complete, the Church will be caught up "to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17), and God will take up Israel again. Seven years are still owed on her account (Dan. 9:24-27), and Jeremiah gives them their name: "it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it" (Jer. 30:7). Those years are the affliction Hosea spoke of, the pressure that finally brings the nation to "earnestly seek Me" (Hos. 5:15).

Then comes the moment Zechariah saw:

"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced." (Zech. 12:10)

The nation that once cried "We have no king but Caesar!" will say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!" (Matt. 23:39). And Paul ends his explanation with the promise: "And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob'" (Rom. 11:26). The **Deliverer** is Jesus, coming back to the people who pierced Him. Like Joseph, He'll be made known to His brothers **the second time**.

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## What this is not

**This is not replacement.** The Church hasn't taken Israel's place, her land, her city, or her restoration. It received the heavenly portion she refused, and that's all. God hasn't cast away His people (Rom. 11:1).

**This is not two ways of being saved.** Anyone who comes to life with God, Jew or Gentile, comes the same way, by believing on the Lamb who died in his place (Acts 16:31; 1 Cor. 5:7). What separates Israel and the Church is their **calling**, not how anyone is saved.

**This is not a split God built in from the start.** Some teachers say God always meant to keep two peoples on two tracks. Scripture shows the split coming by **forfeiture**. The heavenly portion was offered to Israel for real, and Jesus grieved that she wouldn't take it: "How often I wanted to gather your children together... but you were not willing!" (Matt. 23:37).

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## Why this matters

It keeps the Bible straight. A Christian doesn't have to turn Israel's land into heaven or her restoration into church growth to make the prophets fit. And he can't look down on the Jewish people; Paul's warning stands: "do not boast against the branches" (Rom. 11:18).

It also bears on you. The heavenly portion now offered to the Church comes with the same terms Jesus attached when He took it from Israel: it went "to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matt. 21:43). Paul tells Gentile believers to look at the broken branches and take warning: "Do not be haughty, but fear" (Rom. 11:20). That isn't a threat to anyone's salvation. The generation at Kadesh didn't lose their redemption; they lost the land they'd been redeemed to inherit (1 Cor. 10:1-12).

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## Where that leaves us

The King came to His own, and His own refused Him. The offer came again, and they refused it again. The city burned, and the nation was set aside.

Now the invitation has gone out to the highways, and the servant is nearly done finding a bride for the Son.

And the nation that was set aside is still waiting for "afterward."

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*Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.*