Israel and the Church

Paper 6 in a 12 Part Series

by Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

Most Christians have been taught to read the Old Testament's promises to Israel as promises to the Church. Zion becomes the congregation, the land becomes heaven, and "Israel" becomes a name for everyone who believes. Then they come to Romans 11, where Paul, writing to a church full of Gentiles, asks, "has God cast away His people?" and answers, "Certainly not!" (Rom. 11:1). He tells those same Gentile readers that "blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in," and that "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:25-26). If the Church were simply Israel under a new name, those sentences would make little sense. Paul is speaking to one people about another.

So the question this paper takes up is an old one. Who is Israel, who is the Church, and how do the two stand toward each other? It isn't a side issue. The answer decides which promises in Scripture belong to whom, what Jesus was offering when He came announcing "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17), what Paul meant when he called the Church a "mystery" hidden until his own day (Eph. 3:3-6), and whether the Jewish nation has any future in God's plan as a nation. It's the fault line between covenant theology, which reads the Church as Israel continued, and dispensationalism, which keeps the two apart.

The answer taught here is that Israel and the Church are two distinct peoples, each with its own portion in one coming kingdom. The heavenly portion of that kingdom, a place with Christ in the government that rules from the heavens, was offered to Israel first, when her King came. The nation refused Him and crucified Him, and refused again when the apostles carried the same offer back to her after the cross. That portion was taken from her and given to a new people, "one new man" formed at Pentecost out of Jews and Gentiles in Christ (Matt. 21:43; Eph. 2:15). The earthly portion, her land, her throne and her restoration as a nation, was never hers by offer alone. God swore it, and it remains hers (Gen. 15:17-18; Rom. 11:28-29). Israel has been set aside, not cast away. When the Church's present calling is complete, God will take Israel up again, bring her to repentance, and send her the Deliverer she pierced (Rom. 11:25-27; Zech. 12:10).

One distinction governs everything below. What God *offers* to a generation can be refused, and what is refused can be taken and given to another. What God has *sworn* can't be lost by anyone's refusal: "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). Earlier papers in this series have spoken of the coming kingdom as both heavenly and earthly without

stopping to show how that division came about. This paper shows it, and shows who stands in each portion.

The Mainstream Landscape

Every Christian tradition has to answer the same pair of questions. Is the Church the continuation of Israel, the same people of God under a new arrangement, or something else? And does the nation of Israel, as a nation, still have a future in God's plan, and if so, what kind of future? This series normally sets its subject beside three traditions: Reformed, Wesleyan/Arminian, and Catholic. This paper adds a fourth, dispensationalism, because it's the one mainstream school built around keeping Israel and the Church apart, and a reader meeting this paper's position will fairly wonder whether it's dispensationalism under another name.

One term needs defining at the outset. *Supersessionism*, which its critics call replacement theology, is the view that the Church has succeeded Israel as the people of God and inherited her promises. Many who hold some form of it prefer to say the promises were fulfilled in Christ rather than taken from Israel. Where each tradition stands on that question is the substance of the survey that follows.

Reformed: one covenant, one people

Reformed theology is often called *covenant theology*, and the name tells you where it starts. It reads the whole Bible through a single "covenant of grace," God's one arrangement for redeeming sinners, administered one way before Christ came and another way after. The Westminster Confession, the standard Presbyterian statement, says so in so many words. Under the law the covenant was administered "by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews"; under the gospel, by "the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments"; and then it draws the conclusion: "There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations" (WCF 7.5-6).

If there's one covenant of grace, there's one people under it. Louis Berkhof, whose *Systematic Theology* trained generations of Reformed pastors, puts it directly: "In essence Israel constituted the Church of God in the Old Testament, though its external institution differed vastly from that of the Church in the New Testament." He names the opposing view in the same passage and rejects it: "we cannot agree with those Premillenarians who, under the influence of a divisive dispensationalism, claim that the Church is exclusively a New Testament institution, which did not come into existence until the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost." What changed at Pentecost, on this reading, was the reach of the one church, which is now "not confined to one nation, as before under the law" (WCF 25.2).

That raises the obvious question about Romans 11:26, "And so all Israel will be saved." Reformed writers answer it two ways. Calvin read "Israel" as the whole people of God, Jew and

Gentile together: "I extend the word Israel to all the people of God," and so "shall be completed the salvation of the whole Israel of God, which must be gathered from both" (Calvin, *Romans*, on 11:26). Berkhof read it as the believing Jews of every generation added up: "not of the whole nation, but of the whole number of the elect out of the ancient covenant people." A third group, represented by John Murray, expects a large-scale turning of ethnic Jews to Christ before the end: "it is the salvation of the mass of Israel that the apostle affirms" (Murray, *Romans*, 2:98).

What happens to Israel's national promises in this system? Their fulfillment is found in Christ and in the one people gathered to Him. Berkhof applies the promise of Romans 11 "not to Israel according to the flesh, but to the spiritual Israel." Where Reformed writers do expect many Jews to believe in the last days, the expectation is that they'll be gathered into the one church, which is "not confined to one nation" (WCF 25.2). Nothing in the system waits on a restored Jewish nation ruling in its land.

Wesleyan/Arminian: the Church is the Israel of God, with a conversion of the Jews still ahead

John Wesley never wrote a systematic theology, so his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (1755) are the closest thing to a standard Methodist reading of these texts. Wesley agrees with the Reformed on the main point: the Church is Israel now. On Galatians 6:16 he writes, "Peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel, that is, the Church, of God – Which consists of all those, and those only, of every nation and kindred, who walk by this rule." On Romans 9:8, the children of God are "not the children of the flesh, the lineal descendants of Abraham, but the children of the promise... that is, believers."

But Wesley was emphatic that the Jewish people have a future. On Romans 11:12 he calls their coming "full conversion" a "grand event" and adds, "So many prophecies refer to this grand event, that it is surprising any Christian can doubt of it," pointing to "the wonderful preservation of the Jews as a distinct people to this day." On 11:25 he concludes that "Israel therefore is neither totally nor finally rejected," and on 11:26 that after "all Israel is come in" there will be "a still larger harvest among the gentiles."

The Wesleyan picture, then, holds two things together: the Church is the Israel of God, and a mass conversion of the Jews is still coming. That conversion brings Jews into the Church. It doesn't restore Israel as a separate nation with its own throne and land in God's purpose, and Wesley's notes look for no such thing.

Catholic: the new Israel, with "all Israel" tied to Christ's return

The Second Vatican Council used the language of "the new Israel" outright: "Israel according to the flesh, which wandered as an exile in the desert, was already called the Church of God. So likewise the new Israel which while living in this present age goes in search of a future and

abiding city is called the Church of Christ" (*Lumen Gentium* 9). The Catechism traces the same line. God "chose the Israelite race to be his own people," but all of that "happened as a preparation for and figure of that new and perfect covenant which was to be ratified in Christ," in which He "called together a race made up of Jews and Gentiles which would be one, not according to the flesh, but in the Spirit" (CCC 781).

Catholic teaching since the Council has also guarded against reading the Jews as cast off. *Nostra Aetate* says, "Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God," and that "God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers" (*Nostra Aetate* 4). The Catechism quotes Romans 9:4 and 11:29 of the Jewish people, "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (CCC 839).

Most striking, the Catechism ties Christ's return to Israel's recognition of Him: "The glorious Messiah's coming is suspended at every moment of history until his recognition by 'all Israel,'" and it supports this from Peter's words in Acts 3:19-21, "that he may send the Christ appointed for you" (CCC 674). But the recognition it expects is Israel's "full inclusion" in the one People of God (CCC 674), and the Catechism rejects the expectation of an earthly messianic kingdom within history, "even modified forms" of it, under the name of millenarianism (CCC 676). So the Catholic position expects Israel to turn and the Church to be completed by it, without a restored national kingdom.

Dispensationalism: two peoples, two purposes

Dispensationalism came to most American Christians through the notes of the *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909; revised 1917). Scofield divided history into seven dispensations and defined each as a test: "A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God. Seven such dispensations are distinguished in Scripture" (note on Gen. 1:28).

What sets dispensationalism apart from the three traditions above is that it refuses to merge Israel and the Church. Scofield, comparing the two, wrote that "in origin, calling, promise, worship, principles of conduct, and future destiny, all is contrast," and "Just as Israel is connected with earthly and temporal things, so is the Church connected with spiritual and heavenly things" (*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*). Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, made it a definition: "The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved, which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity" (*Dispensationalism*, 107). Charles Ryrie later made it the first mark of the system: "A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the church distinct," and "The essence of dispensationalism, then, is the distinction between Israel and the church" (*Dispensationalism*, 39, 41).

On this view the Church is a new thing, unrevealed before Paul. Scofield's note on Ephesians 3:6 calls the mystery "the divine purpose to make of Jew and Gentile a wholly new thing — 'the church, which is his [Christ's] body.'" The Church begins at Pentecost and is removed from the earth before the Tribulation, after which God resumes His dealings with Israel and restores her nationally. Classic dispensationalists also teach that Jesus really did offer Israel the kingdom and that its establishment was postponed when she refused. Chafer called it "a bona fide offer," adding, "God knew they would not; still it was through their own choice that the blessing was postponed" (*The Kingdom in History and Prophecy*, 56).

Two later branches pull in opposite directions. *Progressive dispensationalism* (Blaising and Bock, 1993) keeps a distinction between Israel and the Church but says the Church is not "an anthropological category in the same class as terms like Israel"; it is "redeemed humanity itself (both Jews and Gentiles)" in this dispensation, already sharing in blessings of the new covenant now begun (Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 49). At the other end, the school linked to E. W. Bullinger, sometimes called *ultradispensationalism*, holds that the Church Paul calls the Body of Christ didn't begin at Pentecost at all. Bullinger taught that Acts records "the final offer to the children of Israel of national restoration and blessing, on condition of national repentance," and that "the great secret" concerning the Church "was not revealed until after the close of that dispensation covered by 'Acts'" (*Companion Bible*, Apps. 181, 193).

For classic dispensationalism, the separation of the two peoples is part of God's design from the start: an earthly people and a heavenly people, with two sets of promises that were never meant to overlap. Whether that separation was the design, or the outcome of something that happened in history, will matter a great deal later in this paper.

The Word of the Kingdom Position

Of the four positions above, Word of the Kingdom theology stands nearest to dispensationalism, because it keeps Israel and the Church distinct from beginning to end. It parts company with it at three places, and each will come up as the story is told. First, the heavenly portion of the kingdom was offered to Israel before it was ever given to the Church, so the division between an earthly people and a heavenly people came about through Israel's refusal, not through an original design. Second, the Church began at Pentecost, as most dispensationalists hold, but the offer of the kingdom to Israel didn't end there; it was made again through the Church for nearly thirty years, until the nation refused it a final time in Rome. Third, a *dispensation* is a stewardship, a household placed under a particular manager (Luke 16:2; Eph. 3:2), not an age or a test of obedience, and Scripture divides mankind into three groups: "the Jews... the Greeks... the church of God" (1 Cor. 10:32).

The story told ahead of time

Jesus told the parable below in the temple courts during the last week before His crucifixion. The chief priests and elders had just demanded to know by what authority He was doing these

things (Matt. 21:23). He'd answered with two parables already, one about a son who said he would work in his father's vineyard and never went, and one about vinedressers who killed the owner's son to seize the inheritance, and the leaders "perceived that He was speaking of them" (Matt. 21:45). They wanted to arrest Him, but they feared the crowd (Matt. 21:46). So He told them one more.

> *"And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: 'The kingdom of heaven [the heavens] 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. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, "Tell those who are invited, 'See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.'" But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, "The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding." So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.'" (Matt. 22:1-10)*

Every stage of that parable has its counterpart in what followed. Israel, the nation already invited (Exod. 19:5-6; Rom. 9:4), was called to the kingdom by John the Baptist, by Jesus, and by the Twelve, and "they were not willing to come" (Matt. 22:3; cf. Matt. 23:37). After the cross, once the sacrifice had been made and "all things are ready," the apostles carried the same invitation back to the same nation for nearly thirty years, and the nation's leaders answered by stoning Stephen, approving Herod's execution of James, and driving Paul from city to city (Acts 7:58-60; 12:1-3; 13:45-50). In A.D. 70 Roman armies burned Jerusalem. And all the while the invitation was going out to those on the highways, the Gentiles, who had never been on the guest list (Acts 13:46; 28:28). The rest of this section follows those stages in order, beginning with what Israel had been called for in the first place.

What Israel was called for

The story starts with what man was made for. "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion" (Gen. 1:26). Man was created to rule. When God later chose one family out of the nations, He chose it for the same purpose, and the promises He swore to Abraham describe a people placed over others:

> *"By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son — blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the*

> *sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." (Gen. 22:16-18)*

The gate of an ancient city was where its government sat, so to "possess the gate" of an enemy is to rule over him. And notice the two images God used for Abraham's descendants: the stars of the heaven and the sand of the seashore. Scripture gives other glimpses of the same doubleness, like Joseph's two dreams, one of sheaves in a field bowing to his sheaf and one of "the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars" bowing to him (Gen. 37:7, 9). These are pictures, and nothing in this paper rests on them alone. But they fit what the rest of Scripture shows: the promises given to Abraham's line reached into the heavens as well as across the earth.

At Sinai God stated the nation's calling outright, with a condition attached: "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:5-6). He had already given the nation a title no other nation would ever hold. Before the Exodus He sent Moses to Pharaoh with a message: "Thus says the LORD: 'Israel is My son, My firstborn'" (Exod. 4:22). In the ancient world the firstborn son inherited the father's authority, received "a double portion of all that he has," and stood as priest and judge for the household (Gen. 49:3; Deut. 21:17; Num. 3:12-13). Israel was made God's son by a special act of creation in Jacob, "thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel" (Isa. 43:1), and then placed as firstborn by adoption [literally, "son-placement"]. Paul lists that adoption first among the nation's privileges: "who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption [son-placement], the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises" (Rom. 9:4).

Scripture shows three firstborn sons. Christ is the first, "when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: 'Let all the angels of God worship Him'" (Heb. 1:6). Israel is the second (Exod. 4:22). The third is still waiting. Christians groan within themselves, "eagerly waiting for the adoption [son-placement], the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23), and that placement as firstborn sons belongs to those found faithful at the Judgment Seat of Christ, where every Christian gives account of his life (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10), not to every Christian by default. That case is made at length in Papers 1 and 2. What matters here is that Israel already holds, by adoption, a standing no Christian yet holds, and that only those found faithful will receive.

That standing set Israel apart from every other nation. Balaam, a prophet hired to curse her, looked down from the mountain and saw "a people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations" (Num. 23:9). Daniel gives the reason in terms of the unseen government of the world. The nations are ruled from the heavens by angelic princes ("the prince of the kingdom of Persia," "the prince of Greece," Dan. 10:13, 20), under Satan. God set him over the world's government at the beginning ("I established you," Ezek. 28:14), and though his rebellion disqualified him, he hasn't yet been removed, which is why he could show Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world" and offer them to Him (Luke 4:5-6) and why Jesus called him "the ruler

of this world" (John 14:30). He is the disqualified incumbent. But Israel's prince is Michael, "the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people" (Dan. 12:1), an angel who never joined Satan's rebellion and fights against him (Rev. 12:7). Israel alone was not placed under one of Satan's princes. Every other nation could share in her blessing only by coming to her, as Noah's prophecy had already said: "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem... May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem" (Gen. 9:26-27). Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, is a direct descendant of Shem (1 Chron. 1:4-27).

The promises given to the nation reached into the heavens from the start, and the faithful in Israel knew it. Hebrews says of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the rest: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth... But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them" (Heb. 11:13, 16). What the patriarchs desired, the nation would be offered.

The offer: "the kingdom of heaven is at hand"

When John the Baptist appeared in the Judean wilderness, his message was short: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matt. 3:2). Jesus took up the same words when He began to preach (Matt. 4:17), and He sent the Twelve out with them, under orders that fixed the audience: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matt. 10:5-7). When a Gentile woman begged Him for help, He said it again: "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). John sums up the whole ministry in one line: "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11).

The phrase Matthew uses is literally "the kingdom of the heavens," and it means the same as "the kingdom of God" in the other Gospels, as Jesus shows by using the two side by side (Matt. 19:23-24). It does not mean God's rule over everything, which no one needs to repent to enter, since everyone is already under it. It means rule from the heavens over the earth, the government Satan and his angels now hold from "the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12), which Christ will take from them. Israel had been promised an earthly kingdom since Abraham, by a covenant God bound Himself to alone (Gen. 15:17-18), and the Law given at Sinai "four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ" (Gal. 3:17). What Sinai set out were the terms on which each generation would enjoy it. What was "at hand" now was a place in the heavenly sphere of that coming rule, and it was being offered to the nation first.

It was offered to a people already redeemed. Every household in Israel had been brought out of Egypt under the blood of a lamb, and every generation since had kept the Passover (Exod. 12:13, 24-27); Paul says the whole nation "drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and

that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4). A man without spiritual life can't receive spiritual things, "nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). That's why the message to Israel centered on *repentance*, a change of mind and a turning back: "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15), the good news that the kingdom had drawn near. It wasn't the call to initial salvation that a Gentile jailer would hear years later (Acts 16:30-31). It was addressed to a redeemed nation that had drifted from its God, asking it to receive its King.

And the offer was real. Jesus said of John the Baptist, "if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come" (Matt. 11:14), which makes no sense unless the outcome hung on the nation's answer. Near the end He wept over the city: "How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Matt. 23:37). God knew what Israel would do. That didn't make the offer a pretense, any more than His foreknowledge made Israel's refusal anything other than her own choice.

Born from above

John opens his Gospel with the nation's refusal, and then with those who didn't refuse: "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who 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). The two uses of "His own" differ in the Greek. The first is neuter, "His own things," what belonged to Him as the One "who has been born King of the Jews" (Matt. 2:2). The second is masculine, "His own people." He came to His own throne and kingdom, and His own nation refused Him. Those who did receive Him were Israelites, members of the nation God had called "My son, My firstborn" (Exod. 4:22). What they were given was a birth "of God," and what they believed was who He was.

Two chapters later a ruler of that nation came to Jesus by night. Nicodemus was "a man of the Pharisees... a ruler of the Jews," and he began with the signs: "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (John 3:1-2). Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Nicodemus took the word to mean "a second time" and asked whether a man could "enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born" (John 3:4). But the word is *anothen*, and every other time John uses it, it means "from above": "He who comes from above is above all" (John 3:31), and "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11). The birth Jesus named is identified by where it comes from. It's the same birth "of God" that John described in his first chapter (John 1:13).

Everything in the conversation belongs to Israel and the kingdom. Nicodemus came about signs, and signs belonged to Israel (1 Cor. 1:22). The healings Jesus did showed the nation what it could have if it repented, and Hosea had said where its healing would come from: "He has torn, but He will heal us" (Hos. 6:1). Jesus' subject was seeing and entering "the kingdom of God"

(John 3:3, 5). And when Nicodemus asked, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?" (John 3:9-10). He expected a teacher of Israel to recognize it from Israel's own Scriptures, and Ezekiel had promised it in so many words, to a nation that belonged to God yet had defiled its own land "by their own ways and deeds" (Ezek. 36:17). God told that nation, "I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went" (Ezek. 36:22), and then He promised:

> *"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them." (Ezek. 36:25-27)*

Clean water and God's own Spirit, promised to Israel for the day of her restoration: that's what Jesus set before the teacher of Israel. "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Israel's history had already acted out the pair. Paul says that "all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Cor. 10:1-2). A people already redeemed by the blood of the lamb went down into the sea and came up on the other side, then followed the cloud toward the land. The water and the Spirit came after the Passover, and both led toward an inheritance.

So the man Jesus told he must be born from above belonged to a redeemed nation, and so did the people he spoke for. Nicodemus had said "we know," and the "you" in "You must be born again" (John 3:7) is plural. Each Israelite had to receive this birth for himself ("unless one is born"), and the nation as a whole had to repent (Matt. 3:2). What Jesus described was God's work from above in a redeemed Israelite, the work that would fit him to see and enter the kingdom now being offered to him. Then Jesus used the two words that run through the whole offer: "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (John 3:12). He said it to the teacher of the nation to whom the heavenly was being held out.

The Gospels show what this birth from above looks like in practice, in a passage that doesn't use the word. When Jesus asked His disciples who they said He was, Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," and Jesus said, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 16:15-17). Flesh and blood on one side and the Father in heaven on the other is the line John drew: "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh... but of God" (John 1:13), and "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). What Peter confessed is what John says marks the one born of God: "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1). Peter was already a disciple, and the kingdom followed in the next breath: "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19). A few verses later the same

man spoke from the other direction, the one Jesus set against "from above" when He told His opponents, "You are from beneath; I am from above" (John 8:23). When Jesus began to show them that He must suffer and be killed, Peter took Him aside and rebuked Him, and Jesus answered, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Matt. 16:21-23). James names both sources with John's word: there's "the wisdom that is from above," and there's a wisdom that "does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic" (Jas. 3:15, 17). One man, in one conversation, spoke from each.

The same work goes on in the Church, which has received the offer Israel refused. Peter writes to Christians that God "has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:3-4). A few verses later he writes, "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit... love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever" (1 Pet. 1:22-23). Peter's word, "begotten again," isn't John's, but it's tied to the same things: a hope, an inheritance, the soul, and the word. James uses John's *anothen* in the verse just before his own birth word: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights... Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth" (Jas. 1:17-18). How an unredeemed person first receives life is the subject of Paper 1; these passages describe what God goes on doing in redeemed people who already have life, with the kingdom in view.

The turn

Matthew's Gospel turns on a single day in chapter 12. A man who was blind, mute, and demon-possessed was brought to Jesus, "and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, 'Could this be the Son of David?'" (Matt. 12:22-23). That was the right question; "Son of David" was the King's title. The Pharisees answered it for the crowd: "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons" (Matt. 12:24). They watched the Spirit of God at work and credited the work to Satan, in front of the very people who were beginning to believe.

Jesus' reply drew a line that ran forward into the coming age: "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matt. 12:32). When they then asked Him for a sign, He gave them only one, and it pointed to His death: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:39-40). It's the first sign He gives that points to His own death.

That same day He went out by the sea and began to teach in parables (Matt. 13:1-3). When the disciples asked why, His answer divided His hearers into two groups:

> *"Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." (Matt. 13:11-13)*

He quoted Isaiah's commission over the nation, "the hearts of this people have grown dull" (Matt. 13:15; Isa. 6:9-10), and Matthew adds that this fulfilled the psalm: "I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 13:35). From this point on there are *mysteries*, truths about the kingdom that had been hidden and were now being disclosed, but only to those with ears to hear.

Matthew marks two "from that time" moments in Jesus' ministry. The first opens it: "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matt. 4:17). The second comes right after Peter confessed Him as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16): "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day" (Matt. 16:21). Between Peter's confession and that second turning point stands the first time the word *church* appears in the Gospels, and it's in the future tense: "on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Something new was coming, and it had not begun yet.

In the temple during His last week, Jesus told the leaders what was about to happen by way of a parable. A landowner planted a vineyard, leased it to vinedressers, and sent servant after servant to collect its fruit; the vinedressers beat one, killed one, and stoned another. "Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him" (Matt. 21:37-39). Then He gave the verdict:

> *"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)*

"The chief priests and Pharisees... perceived that He was speaking of them" (Matt. 21:45). Within days they had Him crucified. Pilate brought Him out and said to them, "Behold your King!" and they answered, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" When Pilate asked, "Shall I crucify your King?" the chief priests said, "We have no king but Caesar!" (John 19:14-15). Over His head Pilate posted the charge: "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (John 19:19).

This raises a hard question. God had commanded Israel to kill the Passover lamb (Exod. 12:6), and "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). Only Israel had been given the lamb to slay. Peter says Jesus was "delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). How, then, could the nation be guilty for doing what God had determined? Peter answers in the same breath: "you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death." Israel didn't put Jesus to death as the Passover Lamb. She put Him to death as a rejected King. The charge was kingship, the crowd's cry was "we have no king but Caesar," and the sin was the refusal of the King. In refusing Him, she also slew the Lamb, and God brought redemption out of the very act that condemned her. Peter held both together when he spoke of "His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate... and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead" (Acts 3:13-15).

What was taken, and what could not be

What did Israel lose? Jesus' words in Matthew 21:43 say what: "the kingdom of God will be taken from you." The kingdom of God in Matthew is the kingdom of the heavens, the very thing that had been announced as "at hand." That was what the nation forfeited: the heavenly portion of the coming kingdom, the place offered to her alongside her King in the government that rules from the heavens. And it was "given to a nation bearing the fruits of it." Moses had foretold the people God would use: "I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation" (Deut. 32:21; Rom. 10:19).

What Israel did not lose, and could not lose, was the earthly kingdom sworn to Abraham. The reason lies in how each was given. The heavenly portion came to Israel as an *offer* ("Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"), and an offer refused can be withdrawn and given to someone else. The land and the nation's future came to Israel by an *oath*, and God bound Himself to it in a way that left nothing to the nation's performance. When God covenanted the land to Abram, Abram had cut the animals in two as God told him, and then God put him into a deep sleep. "And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: 'To your descendants I have given this land'" (Gen. 15:17-18). Only God passed between the pieces. He took the whole obligation on Himself. Later God confirmed His promises to Abraham with an oath, "By Myself I have sworn" (Gen. 22:16), and Hebrews explains why that settles the matter: "when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself" (Heb. 6:13). The heavenly side of what was sworn to Abraham reaches its fulfillment in his one Seed, Christ, and in those who are in Him (Gal. 3:16, 29); the nation's own share in it came to her as an offer, and she refused it. The land and the nation's future came to her by oath, and nothing she did could undo that.

The prophets hold the same line, even in the act of announcing judgment. Leviticus lists every curse that would fall on a disobedient Israel, then ends with this: "Yet for all that, when they

are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God" (Lev. 26:44). Jeremiah ties the nation's survival to the sun and the moon:

> *"Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night... 'If those ordinances depart from before Me, says the LORD, then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever.' Thus says the LORD: 'If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says the LORD.'" (Jer. 31:35-37)*

"For all that they have done" covers the rejection of the King too. And Paul, in the very chapter where he explains Israel's present blindness, says it in two: "Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:28-29).

Israel had seen this pattern before, at Kadesh Barnea. Eighteen months out of Egypt, the generation God had redeemed stood at the edge of the land, heard the spies' report, and refused to go in. God's sentence was severe: "they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it" (Num. 14:23). That generation died in the wilderness. Yet the oath to the fathers stood untouched, and forty years later their children crossed the Jordan. A generation can forfeit its own share in what God has sworn. It cannot cancel the oath.

The forfeiture was national. It fell on the nation that refused the offer when Jesus came, and on the nation as it went on refusing afterward. It didn't strip the faithful in Israel of their place. Jesus said that "many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out" (Matt. 8:11-12). Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are inside; "the sons of the kingdom," the nation to whom it belonged by promise, are outside. The patriarchs and the faithful of Hebrews 11, who "desire a better, that is, a heavenly country," will receive it, though "they should not be made perfect apart from us" (Heb. 11:16, 40). The apostles, who left everything to follow their King, will "sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). And every Jew who believed Jesus was the Messiah during the years that followed became part of the Church, the very people receiving what the nation refused.

The one new man

Fifty days after the resurrection, the Spirit came on the disciples gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-4), and Luke records the result in a single line: "the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). The saving in view is the one Peter had just urged on his hearers, "Be saved from this perverse generation" (Acts 2:40), deliverance from the judgment coming on the nation that crucified its King. The church Jesus had promised to build (Matt.

16:18) now existed. Its first members were Jews, men and women of a redeemed nation who now believed that Jesus was their Messiah, and their walk changed with that belief. They had lived under the Law; now they were learning to "serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7:6). Within a few years Samaritans were added (Acts 8:14-17), and then Gentiles, beginning with Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44-48). Gentiles had to start where Israel had started in Egypt: with the blood of the Lamb, believed on for themselves (Acts 16:31; 1 Cor. 5:7).

What were these Gentiles joined to? Paul answers in Ephesians, writing to Gentile Christians about where they had been and where they now stood:

> *"Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh... that at that time you 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. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, 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. 2:11-16)*

Notice what Paul does *not* say. He does not say the Gentiles were brought into the commonwealth of Israel and made Israelites, and he does not say the Jews who believed were turned into Gentiles. He says Christ took the two and created "one new man" out of them, a third thing that hadn't existed before. When he goes on to describe their new standing, he calls them "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19), not citizens of Israel. And he uses the same new-creation language of every man in Christ (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17). The Church is not Israel enlarged. It's something God made new, out of Jews and Gentiles both, to receive what the nation had refused.

Paul calls this "the mystery," and he's careful to say what was hidden and what wasn't:

> *"...by revelation He made known to me the mystery... which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel." (Eph. 3:3, 5-6)*

That the Gentiles would be blessed was never hidden. Paul himself quotes God's word to Abraham as proof that "the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed'" (Gal. 3:8; Gen. 12:3). The prophets said it repeatedly. What no prophet had seen was the shape it would take: Gentiles as *fellow heirs*, members "of the same body" on equal footing with believing Jews, receiving the heavenly inheritance while the nation that had been offered it

stood blinded. In Colossians Paul names the content of that inheritance: "the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). And in Romans he names the other side of the same mystery, the condition of Israel during the time it lasts: "blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25).

The calling of this new people is heavenly. Its members are "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1). God has "raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). "Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). And Paul says the Church's very existence is a message aimed upward, "to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10). Those principalities are the rulers who hold the heavens now, under Satan (Eph. 6:12). The people being prepared to take their place is announcing to them that their time is short.

How does a Gentile come to be an heir of promises God made to Abraham? Not by becoming Jewish, and not because the promises were transferred from one people to another. Paul's answer runs through one Person. "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). Then: "if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). Christ is the Seed. Whoever is in Him is counted Abraham's seed through Him and made an heir of what is His to give. That leaves Israel's own promises exactly where God put them, with "the fathers" and their natural descendants (Rom. 11:28), while the heavenly portion Israel refused passes to those who are in Christ.

This is what a change of *dispensation* means. The Greek word is *oikonomia*, "household management," and Jesus uses it of a steward put in charge of his master's goods and then called to account: "Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward" (Luke 16:2). Israel had been God's steward, entrusted with "the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2) and with carrying His name to the nations. When she refused her King, the household stayed the same and God's purpose for it stayed the same, but the stewardship passed to a new manager. Paul calls his own commission "the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you" (Eph. 3:2). The age goes on; the steward has changed.

Grafted in

Paul's fullest picture of how Gentile Christians relate to Israel is an olive tree. Here are the central verses:

> *"And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast,*

> *remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you... Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?" (Rom. 11:17-18, 20-24)*

Three details in the passage decide how to read it. The first is the root. Paul has just said, "if the root is holy, so are the branches" (Rom. 11:16), and he names the root a few verses later, when he says Israel is "beloved for the sake of the fathers" (Rom. 11:28). The root is the patriarchs and the promises God made to them. The second is ownership. Paul calls the cultivated tree the natural branches' "own olive tree" (Rom. 11:24). It's still theirs, even while some of them are broken off. The Gentile branches are grafted in "among them" and become partakers of "the root and fatness" (Rom. 11:17), sharing the richness of a tree that is still Israel's own. Paul names that richness elsewhere: Christ redeemed us "that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:14). It's the blessing that comes through Abraham's one Seed, not the land and throne promised to the nation. And inside the one body, believing Jews and believing Gentiles stand level, "fellow heirs" (Eph. 3:6). The ownership of the tree concerns the nation's own promises, not rank among Christians. Noah's prophecy is already taking shape here: Japheth dwelling "in the tents of Shem" (Gen. 9:27), blessed by coming to the one who has God, without becoming Shem.

The third detail is the warning. Paul tells the Gentile Christian, one branch at a time (the "you" is singular throughout), that the same severity which broke off the natural branches can fall on him: "you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear... Otherwise you also will be cut off" (Rom. 11:20, 22). The branches are not cut off from life. Paul says in this same chapter that God's gifts are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29), and the gift of life given at initial salvation is one of them. What a branch loses is its place in the tree: its share in the blessing that grows from the root, the inheritance attached to the offer. The natural branches lost exactly that when they refused the King, and they remained God's people (Rom. 11:1-2, 28). A Gentile Christian who doesn't "continue in His goodness" can lose the same thing for the same reason, which is unbelief, the refusal to keep trusting what God has said.

The offer made again

On the day He ascended, the disciples asked Jesus one question: "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). He didn't tell them the question was mistaken. He told them the timing wasn't theirs to know: "It is not for you to know times or seasons which

the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7). Then He sent them out to preach, beginning in Jerusalem.

Their message to the nation was the same offer, now made after the cross. In the parable of the wedding feast, the second invitation went out after the oxen and fatted cattle were killed and "all things are ready" (Matt. 22:4), and that's exactly where Peter stood. To the crowd at Pentecost he said, "let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). In the temple a few days later he set the offer before the nation in so many words:

> *"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, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:19-21)*

Peter was telling the nation that its repentance would bring the King back from heaven and with Him "the restoration of all things" the prophets had foretold. It was the kingdom, offered again to the people who had just crucified its King. Jesus had pictured this second chance before the cross, in a parable about a fig tree, Scripture's emblem of Israel (Hos. 9:10; Jer. 24:1-7), that had borne no fruit for three years. The owner wanted it cut down, but the keeper of the vineyard pleaded, "Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down" (Luke 13:8-9).

God didn't leave the nation without witnesses during that extra season. The signs that had marked Jesus' ministry continued through the apostles, and Paul says why: "Jews request a sign" (1 Cor. 1:22). Signs belonged to Israel and to the kingdom offer, and Paul applied that even to the tongues being spoken in the Gentile church at Corinth. Quoting Isaiah, he said they were a sign aimed at Israel: "In the law it is written: 'With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; and yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,' says the LORD. Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers" (1 Cor. 14:21-22; Isa. 28:11-12). "This people" in Isaiah is Israel.

There was a second purpose running alongside, and Moses had foretold it. "I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation; I will move them to anger by a foolish nation" (Deut. 32:21). Paul quotes that verse (Rom. 10:19) and then explains what God was doing through his own ministry to the Gentiles:

> *"I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles... For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them." (Rom. 11:11, 13-14)*

God let the nation watch Gentiles, a people they counted as nothing, receiving the Spirit, the signs, and the heavenly portion that had been held out to Israel first. Everywhere Paul went he took the message "for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Rom. 1:16), going to the synagogue before anyone else (Acts 13:14; 14:1; 17:1-2). And everywhere the pattern repeated. In Pisidian Antioch, "when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting [age-lasting] life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles'" (Acts 13:45-46). In Corinth: "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6).

The offer closed in Rome, about A.D. 62, nearly thirty years after Pentecost. Paul, a prisoner awaiting trial, called the leaders of the Jews to his lodging and told them, "for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain" (Acts 28:20). They set a day, and many came:

> *"...to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: 'The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, "Go to this people and say: 'Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull...'" Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!'" (Acts 28:23-28)*

The subject was "the kingdom of God," the same subject as the Gospels. And Paul closed it with the same words from Isaiah 6 that Jesus had spoken on the day He began to teach in parables (Matt. 13:14-15). The nation's answer had been given twice, once to the King and once to His messengers, and the same prophecy marks both.

Why did the offer close then? It had always been made to a redeemed people. The generation that heard Jesus, and heard the apostles after Pentecost, had been born under the Passover; its households had kept the feast year by year, as God commanded (Exod. 12:24-27). Refusing the King didn't undo what the blood of the lamb had done for them, any more than the refusal at Kadesh undid the redemption of the generation that came out of Egypt. But the Passover lambs had always pointed ahead to one Lamb, and once "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7), the Law that required them had only ever held "a shadow of the good things to come" (Heb. 10:1), and the substance had come. Lambs were still slain in the temple until A.D. 70, but they pointed to a death that had already taken place. A Jew born after the cross could come to life only the way a Gentile could, by believing on the Lamb whose offering was made "once for all" (Heb. 10:10; Acts 16:31). So as the generation that refused its King passed from the scene, the redeemed nation to which the offer could be made passed with it. Jesus had laid the

judgment on that same generation: "Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation" (Matt. 23:36).

Letters written while the offer was open

Most of the New Testament letters were written during those thirty years or at their very close. James, Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, Corinthians and Galatians, and Romans come from the years when the offer to Israel was still standing, and Hebrews and 1 Peter belong to the same period. So do John's Gospel and his first letter. Most scholars date them a generation later, but their subject belongs to the offer. John wrote his Gospel "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31), the very thing Israel was being called to believe; he built it around signs, which belonged to Israel (1 Cor. 1:22); and his first letter holds out the same belief in the same terms (1 John 5:1, 5). Paul's prison letters (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon) were written from Rome as that period came to its end. That's why they carry two kinds of material side by side. Some of it belongs to the new man and will hold for the Church to the end. Some of it belongs to Israel and the kingdom offer, like the sign gifts, which disappear from the record after Acts 28. In Paul's later letters he leaves a co-worker sick at Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20) and tells Timothy to take a little wine for his frequent ailments (1 Tim. 5:23). The healings that marked the offer to Israel had ended with it. A great deal of confusion in the churches today comes from reading both kinds of material as if they were one undifferentiated rule for the Church.

The same letters were written to congregations made of two kinds of people. The Jewish believers already knew the Law and needed to learn that the Spirit, not the Law, now governed their walk. The Gentile believers had never known the Law at all. So Paul regularly divides a subject, speaks to one group and then the other, and sometimes to both at once. Romans shows the pattern clearly. Paul introduces his readers as being among "all nations" (Rom. 1:5-6), and he speaks to Gentiles directly: "For I speak to you Gentiles" (Rom. 11:13), and through the whole olive-tree warning (Rom. 11:17-24). But at 2:17 he turns to address a Jew ("Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law"), and at 7:1 he speaks "to those who know the law." In other places he addresses both together: God is "also the God of the Gentiles" (Rom. 3:29), Abraham is father both to the circumcised and the uncircumcised (Rom. 4:9-12), "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek" (Rom. 10:12), and Christ became "a servant to the circumcision... and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy" (Rom. 15:8-9). Reading these letters well starts with a simple question asked paragraph by paragraph: who is the "you" here?

The language of the *new covenant* in these letters belongs to the offer as well. The new covenant was never promised to the Church. Jeremiah names its parties: "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31), and Hebrews quotes the promise with the same parties named (Heb. 8:8). Jesus spoke of it at the Last Supper, at a table with the Twelve, the men who will judge Israel's tribes: "This cup is the new

covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:20; Matt. 19:28). When Paul calls the apostles "ministers of the new covenant" (2 Cor. 3:6), he's describing apostles who went to the Jew first and offered the nation the covenant her King had come to make. In the same passage he describes the veil that still lay over Israel "when Moses is read," and says, "when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away" (2 Cor. 3:15-16).

Hebrews calls Jesus "the Mediator of the new covenant" (Heb. 9:15; 12:24). That does not mean the covenant is already in force and He's now administering it to the Church. *Mediator of the new covenant* is His title, as *Christ* and *King* are titles. He holds them now, though He hasn't yet taken the throne and Israel hasn't yet received the new covenant. The Christian calls Him Christ, Israel's Anointed One, and benefits from His shed blood and from the access to God it has already opened (Heb. 10:19-20), because he is in the Seed to whom the promises were made. At the Lord's table the Church remembers the covenant cup in the same forward-looking way: "as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). The covenant itself comes with Him. Hebrews does say the better covenant "was established on better promises" (Heb. 8:6), and the death that ratifies it has taken place (Heb. 9:15). What hasn't yet happened is its making with the parties Jeremiah named, the day God writes His law on Israel's hearts (Jer. 31:33). The writer says the old covenant was "becoming obsolete" and "ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:13), not that the new had already taken its place in Israel.

The letter to the Hebrews was written to Jewish believers who knew the Law thoroughly, and chapters 7 through 10 answer a question they were bound to ask. The Law gave the priesthood to Levi, and "our Lord arose from Judah" (Heb. 7:14). How can He serve as High Priest now without overturning what the Law taught? The writer shows that the Scriptures had already looked ahead to a priest "according to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 7:11, 17; Ps. 110:4), so that Christ's priesthood fulfills what was foretold, and he brings the whole argument to its point in a sentence about the Church's present access to God: "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh" (Heb. 10:19-20). The word translated "new" there is *prosphatos*, "freshly made," not *kainos*, the word used for the new covenant at 8:8, 8:13 and 9:15. The verb "consecrated," *enekainisen*, does come from the *kain-* root, and Hebrews uses the same verb for the dedication of the first covenant with blood (Heb. 9:18), so the difference in words supports the distinction without settling it. What the passage gives the Church is a way of access to God, opened now. Israel's covenant waits for Israel.

The city burned

In the parable, the king's answer to the second refusal came swiftly: "he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city" (Matt. 22:7). Jesus had already wept over that city on the road down from the Mount of Olives:

> *"If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation." (Luke 19:42-44)*

In the temple He told the leaders, "See! Your house is left to you desolate" (Matt. 23:38), and He told His disciples what the desolation would look like: "when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near... And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:20, 24).

In A.D. 70, less than a decade after Paul's last appeal in Rome, Roman legions surrounded Jerusalem, burned the temple, and leveled the city. The nation was scattered among the Gentiles, as Jesus had said, and it has never since been restored as God's nation in its land. The Jews who have returned to the land since 1948 have returned without having received their King, still without temple, sacrifice or priesthood; that return is not the regathering the prophets describe, which follows the nation's repentance (Lev. 26:40-42; Deut. 30:1-5). Every stage of the parable has come to pass: an invitation refused, a second invitation refused and its messengers killed, armies sent and the city burned, and the invitation carried out to the highways.

Israel set aside, and the two days

The setting aside of Israel was foretold long before it happened, and so was its end. Hosea, speaking of the nation's unfaithfulness in terms of a marriage, said:

> *"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. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days." (Hos. 3:4-5)*

That's an exact description of Israel since A.D. 70: no king, no prince, no sacrifice, no priesthood, and yet still a people, waiting. And it ends with "afterward." A little later in the same book God speaks of withdrawing from the nation Himself, and of what will bring Him back:

> *"I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me. Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. 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)*

Every New Testament statement about Israel's present condition has the same shape: a setting aside with a limit on it. "Blindness in part has happened to Israel *until* the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25). "Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles *until* the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). "You shall see Me no more *till* you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" (Matt. 23:39). God has returned to His place, and He's waiting for the nation to acknowledge its offense.

How long is "two days"? Scripture supplies the measure itself. Peter, answering scoffers who asked where the promise of Christ's coming had gone, said, "do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8). Set beside the pattern God laid down in Genesis, six days of work and a seventh of rest (Gen. 2:2-3; Heb. 4:4, 9), that measure gives the outline of all of Scripture's history: two thousand years from Adam to Abraham, two thousand years of God's dealings with Israel, two thousand years of God's dealings with the Church, and a seventh thousand, the kingdom, the Sabbath rest. Israel's own two thousand years stopped seven years short. Daniel was told that "seventy weeks," literally "seventy sevens," sevens of years, were "determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression" (Dan. 9:24). Sixty-nine of those sevens ran their course up to the time "Messiah shall be cut off" (Dan. 9:26). The seventieth seven is still owed. When Israel was set aside, the clock stopped with seven years left on it.

On that measure, Hosea's "two days" are the two thousand years during which the nation is set aside, and "the third day" on which God raises her up is the kingdom age that follows. Scripture gives other pictures of the same span, and they're offered here as pictures, not proof. When the Samaritans believed, Jesus "stayed there two days," and "after the two days He departed from there and went to Galilee," where He gave His next sign among His own people (John 4:40, 43, 46-54). When word came that Lazarus was sick, "He stayed two more days in the place where He was," and only then said, "Let us go to Judea again," and raised a dead man out of his tomb (John 11:6-7, 43-44). And there's Jonah. Jesus made Jonah a sign of His own death and resurrection (Matt. 12:40), but the prophet's story is also the story of Israel: a man commissioned to carry God's word to the nations, who ran the other way, was thrown into the sea, and was kept alive in the belly of the fish "three days and three nights" (Jonah 1:17). Jesus applied those words to His own burial (Matt. 12:40), yet He also said, "the third day He will rise again" (Luke 18:33), so the two expressions measure one span: after two days, raised on the third. Then "the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land" (Jonah 2:10), and "the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time" (Jonah 3:1). Jonah can picture both of God's firstborn sons because Scripture does this more than once: "out of Egypt I called My son" was said of Israel (Hos. 11:1) and fulfilled in Christ (Matt. 2:15).

One caution belongs here. The measure tells us the order of events and the general span. It doesn't tell anyone the day. When the disciples asked about times and seasons, Jesus told them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7). The end of the present two thousand years is near, though the year they began from

can't be fixed closely enough to count to a date. That's as far as Scripture's arithmetic goes, and it's as far as this paper will go.

The search for the Bride

What is God doing while Israel is set aside? James answered that question at the council in Jerusalem, and his answer puts the whole sequence in order:

> *"Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 'After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name.'" (Acts 15:14-17)*

First God takes a people out of the Gentiles for His name. "After this" He returns and rebuilds the fallen house of David, Israel's kingdom. Then the rest of the nations seek the Lord.

Genesis acts out the same order in the life of Abraham. Chapter 23 opens with a death: "Sarah died... and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her" (Gen. 23:2). In chapter 24 Abraham sends "the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had," on a single errand: "you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac" (Gen. 24:2, 4). The servant goes to a far country, finds the bride at a well, brings her back, and Isaac takes her as his wife. Then chapter 25 opens: "Abraham again took a wife, and her name was Keturah" (Gen. 25:1), and the children are listed. The father's first wife set aside in death; the servant sent out to find a bride for the son; the father's household filled again afterward. It's the same sequence James gave: God's dealings with Israel suspended, the Spirit sent into the world to take out a people, and from them a bride for the Son, then the restoration of Israel. And the servant's instructions add a detail: the bride comes from the father's own family, but she isn't the whole family (Gen. 24:4). One woman went back with the servant.

Paul runs this kind of type himself. He quotes Genesis 2:24 about the first man and his wife, then says, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:31-32). And he describes the Bride's preparation as a present, unfinished work: "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. 5:25-27). At the end, "His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev. 19:7-8). The Bride is taken from the body of Christ as Eve was taken from Adam, and who she is, and how she's chosen at the Judgment Seat, is worked out in Paper 2.

The book of Ruth tells the same story from the Gentile side. Ruth was a Moabitess, outside the covenant people, who attached herself to Naomi's God and Naomi's people, worked in the

fields, and prepared herself to meet the kinsman-redeemer. When Boaz redeemed the family's land, he redeemed the bride with it: "Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance" (Ruth 4:10). The inheritance and the bride were bought in the same transaction. Christ's Bride is likewise bound up with the inheritance He will redeem.

The search has an end. When "the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25), the Church will be removed from the earth: "the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:16-17). The servant's search will be over. Who the Bride is will be settled at the Judgment Seat.

Brought to her knees, and the Deliverer sent

With the Church removed, God takes up again the seven years still owed on Israel's account. Jeremiah calls them by their own name, and it isn't a name that belongs to the Church: "Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it" (Jer. 30:7). Their purpose is stated in Daniel's prophecy: "Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness" (Dan. 9:24). The "weeks" are sevens of years, and only the last seven is still to run (Dan. 9:27). Those seven years are the "affliction" Hosea spoke of, the pressure that will finally bring the nation to "earnestly seek Me" (Hos. 5:15).

Moses described the turning centuries in advance, with the promise God would answer it with:

> *"But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, and that they also have walked contrary to Me, and that I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt — then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; I will remember the land." (Lev. 26:40-42)*

Stephen, on trial before the council, told Israel's history in a way that made the pattern unmistakable. Joseph was rejected by his brothers and sold, yet "the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers" (Acts 7:13). Moses was rejected by his own people when he first came to them, and then "this Moses whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer" (Acts 7:35). Both were refused by Israel the first time and received the second. Stephen ended by telling the council, "You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you," and they stoned him (Acts 7:51, 58).

And between the first rejection and the second coming, each of them took a Gentile bride. Pharaoh gave Joseph "Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On" (Gen. 41:45), and she

bore him two sons "before the years of famine came" (Gen. 41:50), before his brothers ever came down to Egypt. Moses fled to Midian and "sat down by a well," as Abraham's servant had stood by a well to find Isaac's bride (Gen. 24:11-13), and he was given Zipporah as his wife (Exod. 2:15, 21), long before he returned to deliver his people. It's the order James gave the council: first God "visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name," and after that the return to Israel (Acts 15:14-16).

The One the nation refused the first time will be received the second. Zechariah describes the moment:

> *"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. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn." (Zech. 12:10)*

Isaiah may be describing the same day in the language of birth: "Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion was in labor, she gave birth to her children" (Isa. 66:8). If so, the nation is born in a single day, at the end of the labor Jeremiah describes in the verse before he names the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:6-7).

Israel will at last apply to herself the blood of the Lamb she slew. Then the words Jesus said would come will be said: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!" (Matt. 23:39). And Paul, finishing his explanation of the mystery, quotes Isaiah: "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; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins'" (Rom. 11:26-27; Isa. 59:20-21; 27:9). The Deliverer is Jesus, returning to the nation that pierced Him. Then the new covenant is made with "the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31), the nation is regathered and judged in the wilderness before entering its kingdom (Ezek. 20:34-38, worked out in Paper 2), and "the tabernacle of David" is raised up again (Acts 15:16).

The book of Esther pictures this part of the story. God's name never appears in it, which fits a time when He has put the nation away and is working unseen. A queen is set aside for refusing the king's summons (Esth. 1:19). Later a Jewish woman is crowned in her place: "he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti" (Esth. 2:17). The nation is brought under sentence of death by an enemy who has the king's ear, it fasts and mourns, and it's delivered, its enemy hanged on his own gallows and its champion raised to honor (Esth. 3:8-13; 4:1-3, 16; 7:10; 10:3). The royal position the first queen refused goes to a daughter of Israel, who wears the same crown. In the type it isn't a foreign people who take Israel's place; it's Israel received again, as God promised: "I will betroth you to Me forever" (Hos. 2:19).

And Jonah, recommissioned, goes to the Gentiles at last. When the word of the Lord came to him the second time, he preached in Nineveh, and "the people of Nineveh believed God... from the greatest to the least of them" (Jonah 3:5). The calling Israel ran from will be carried out

after her restoration. "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you"'" (Zech. 8:23). The promise to Abraham, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3), will be fulfilled in full through the nation it was first given to.

One kingdom, two portions

When the story is told in order, the coming kingdom has two parts, under one King. The earthly part belongs to Israel. Restored to her land, reconciled to the God she was unfaithful to, and ruled by "David their king" (Hos. 3:5), she takes her place at the head of the nations, as God swore to Abraham. The heavenly part belongs to Christ and His Bride. Those found faithful from the present dispensation rule with Him from the heavens, together with the faithful of old who desired "a heavenly country" (Heb. 11:16, 40; Matt. 8:11), in the place Satan and his angels hold now: "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne" (Rev. 3:21). There are two marriages, not one. God takes back the wife He put away (Hos. 2:19-20; Isa. 54:5-8), and the Son marries the Bride the Spirit has gone out to find (Rev. 19:7). Neither replaces the other.

Paul names the goal that both portions serve: "that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth — in Him" (Eph. 1:10). Things in heaven and things on earth: one King over both, with a people in each.

Where They Align

Set the position back alongside the four positions in the landscape (Reformed, Wesleyan/Arminian, Catholic, and dispensational) and the common ground is wider than the disagreements suggest. Four points:

- **Gentiles are fully included.** Every position affirms that Gentiles who believe stand on equal footing with believing Jews, by grace through faith, with no second rank: "you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 3:6). The distinction this paper draws is between the Church and the nation of Israel, never between Jew and Gentile within the Church.
- **Something hidden was disclosed.** All four agree that Paul's "mystery" was a real disclosure of something not made known "in other ages" (Eph. 3:5). The disagreement is over what it disclosed.
- **The Jewish people have a future.** Wesley wrote that "Israel therefore is neither totally nor finally rejected"; Calvin expected the Jews to "return from their defection to the obedience of faith"; Murray read Romans 11:26 as "the salvation of the mass of Israel"; the Catechism ties Christ's return to His recognition by "all Israel" (CCC 674); and dispensationalism builds its whole future on Israel's restoration. Berkhof, who reads "all Israel" as the elect Jews of every generation, is the exception among these writers.

- **The crucifixion was both foreknown and culpable.** Every position holds both halves of Acts 2:23 together: Jesus was "delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God," and those who crucified Him did it "by lawless hands."

Where They Diverge, and Why

The disagreements come down to two questions. Against the Reformed, Wesleyan and Catholic positions, the question is whether there are one people of God or two. Against dispensationalism, the question is how the two came to be.

One people, or two. The Reformed, Wesleyan and Catholic traditions read the Church as Israel continued and widened, "the new Israel" (*Lumen Gentium* 9), "the Israel, that is, the Church, of God" (Wesley on Gal. 6:16). This paper reads the Church as a new creation standing beside Israel, and the difference turns on what each side does with Israel's national promises. If the Church is Israel, those promises must be fulfilled in the Church, spiritually and in Christ, and the promises of land, throne and nation become types that have found their substance. But the texts that make those promises won't release them that easily. Jeremiah didn't tie the survival of a spiritual people to the sun and moon; he tied "the seed of Israel" to them, so that it would not "cease from being a nation before Me forever" (Jer. 31:36). Leviticus promises to "remember the land" (Lev. 26:42). Paul says the natural branches will be grafted "into their own olive tree" (Rom. 11:24), which assumes the tree still has owners distinct from the guests grafted in.

Romans 11 shows the difficulty inside a single sentence. Calvin read "all Israel" in 11:26 as "all the people of God," Jew and Gentile together. But the verse before it reads, "blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25). In that sentence "Israel" and "the Gentiles" are two different groups, one blinded and one coming in. For "all Israel" in the next breath to mean both groups together, the word would have to change its meaning between one verse and the next with no signal from Paul. Berkhof's reading (the elect of Israel across all generations) keeps the word's meaning, but it can't account for Paul's "until": a blindness that lifts when the Gentiles' fullness has come in describes an event at the end, not a total collected through history.

The Catholic position adds a further point of divergence. The Catechism expects Israel's recognition of her Messiah, but it rejects any earthly messianic kingdom within history, "even modified forms" of it (CCC 676). This paper holds that the prophets promised exactly that, as the earthly portion of a kingdom that is heavenly as well: a restored nation under "David their king... in the latter days" (Hos. 3:5), and the fallen tabernacle of David rebuilt "after this" (Acts 15:16).

Design, or forfeiture. With dispensationalism the disagreement is narrower and goes deeper. Both keep Israel and the Church distinct. But Chafer described the distinction as two purposes God pursues "throughout the ages," one earthly and one heavenly, and Scofield, comparing the

two peoples, wrote that "all is contrast." On that reading the Church's heavenly calling and Israel's earthly calling were separate tracks from the beginning, never meant to overlap.

This paper reads the separation as the result of what happened. The heavenly portion was offered to Israel first: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). The faithful in Israel had long desired it, "a heavenly country" (Heb. 11:16). It was taken from the nation because she refused it, and given to another (Matt. 21:43). Paul ties the Church's present blessing directly to Israel's fall: "through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:11). And Jesus' own words describe a transfer: the kingdom would be "taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matt. 21:43). Something can be taken from a people only if it was first held out to them. The heavenly portion was Israel's to receive before it was ever the Church's.

The definition of a *dispensation* matters here too. Scofield made it "a period of time during which man is tested," and a scheme of seven successive tests lent itself to being read as though "Law" and "Grace" were two different ways of being saved. Scripture's own word, *oikonomia*, is a stewardship: who manages God's household at a given time (Luke 16:2; Eph. 3:2). The ground of a man's standing before God has never changed, from the skins God made for Adam to the Lamb slain for Israel to the Lamb believed on today (Gen. 3:21; Exod. 12:13; 1 Pet. 1:19-20). What changes from one dispensation to the next is the steward.

The two branches of later dispensationalism diverge from this paper in opposite directions. Progressive dispensationalism has the Church already sharing in the new covenant, now begun; this paper holds that the new covenant belongs to Israel and waits for her repentance (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:8). Bullinger's school puts the Church's beginning after Acts 28; this paper holds that it began at Pentecost (Acts 2:47), and Paul was already writing of the Body before Acts was over: "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — whether Jews or Greeks," and "you are the body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:13, 27; cf. Rom. 12:4-5). What ended at Acts 28 was the offer to Israel, not the absence of the Church.

Answering the Objections

"One new man" means one people

The charge. Paul says Christ "has made both one" and created "one new man from the two" (Eph. 2:14-15), and "there is neither Jew nor Greek... for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). If the distinction between Jew and Gentile is gone, there's no room for a separate future for Israel.

The answer. Paul is describing what happens to Jews and Gentiles who are *in Christ*. The one new man is made "from the two": believing Jews and believing Gentiles, reconciled "to God in one body through the cross" (Eph. 2:16). It doesn't absorb the nation that refused its King, which has not been joined to that body. Galatians 3:28 says the same of standing, not of every

category: the same verse says "there is neither male nor female," and Paul goes on giving husbands and wives different instructions (Eph. 5:22-33). Writing to a church in which Jews and Gentiles were already one body, Paul still sorted mankind into three groups: "Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God" (1 Cor. 10:32). The Church's existence did not end the other two.

"The Israel of God"

The charge. Paul closes Galatians with a blessing "upon the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). Wesley's reading is the common one: "the Israel, that is, the Church, of God." So the New Testament calls the Church Israel.

The answer. The verse reads, "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). The word "and" can join two groups or explain one, and Greek grammar allows either. But the letter itself tips the balance. Galatians was written against men who were pressing circumcision on Gentile Christians, and Paul has just said that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation" (Gal. 6:15). Having blessed everyone who walks by that rule, he adds a blessing on the Israelites who are God's Israel, the believing Jews, as against the circumcision party troubling the churches. That's the natural sense of "and," and it matches the way Paul uses the word "Israel" everywhere else in his letters, of the Jewish people. This paper doesn't rest any part of its case on Galatians 6:16. But a reading that turns one ambiguous "and" into the New Testament's only renaming of the Church as Israel is a thin foundation for merging two peoples that the rest of Scripture keeps distinct.

The olive tree is one tree

The charge. Romans 11 has one olive tree, with Jewish and Gentile branches growing from one root. Berkhof cites the passage as proof of "the spiritual unity of Israel and the Church." Jeremiah even calls Israel by that name: "The LORD called your name, Green Olive Tree" (Jer. 11:16). If the tree is Israel and the Gentiles are grafted into it, they've become part of Israel.

The answer. Jeremiah's verse supports the reading given in this paper. The tree is Israel's, and Paul says so: the natural branches will be grafted "into their own olive tree" (Rom. 11:24). Gentiles grafted in "contrary to nature" are still "you Gentiles" to Paul (Rom. 11:13, 24). They share the blessing that comes to the Gentiles through Abraham's one Seed (Gal. 3:14) without becoming the nation that owns the tree, as set out above under "Grafted in." And the chapter's whole argument runs toward the natural branches being grafted in *again* (Rom. 11:23-24), which would make no sense if Israel had already been folded into the Church. The warning that a Gentile branch can be "cut off" (Rom. 11:22) concerns its place in that blessing, the inheritance tied to the offer, and not the life God gave, since the same chapter calls His gifts irrevocable (Rom. 11:29). Israel lost that place without ceasing to be God's people (Rom. 11:1-2), and a Christian can lose it without ceasing to be God's child.

Israel has been redefined as believers

The charge. "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly... but he is a Jew who is one inwardly" (Rom. 2:28-29). "They are not all Israel who are of Israel" (Rom. 9:6). "Only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7). Paul redefines Israel by faith rather than by birth, and that opens the name to believing Gentiles.

The answer. Each of these verses narrows *within* Israel; none of them widens Israel to take in Gentiles. Romans 2 is addressed to a Jew ("Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law," Rom. 2:17), and it tells him that being born a Jew doesn't make a man what a Jew was meant to be. Romans 9:6 says that not every Israelite is part of the faithful Israel within Israel, which Paul then calls "the remnant" (Rom. 9:27); it doesn't say that non-Israelites are. And Galatians 3:7 speaks of sons of *Abraham*, who was promised that he'd be "a father of many nations" (Rom. 4:17), not of Israel, which descends from Jacob. Gentiles who believe become Abraham's seed through Christ, the one Seed (Gal. 3:16, 29). Paul never calls them Israel.

The offer of the kingdom was never real

The charge. The cross was God's plan from before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:19-20; Acts 2:23). Jesus had to die. To say He offered Israel a kingdom that God knew she would refuse, when her refusal was the very means of the cross, turns the offer into a charade.

The answer. Jesus spoke of the offer as real: "if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come" (Matt. 11:14), and "how often I wanted to gather your children together... but you were not willing!" (Matt. 23:37). After the cross Peter made it again, telling the nation that its repentance would bring God to "send Jesus Christ" (Acts 3:19-21). Even classic dispensationalists, who otherwise read the Church's calling very differently, call it "a bona fide offer" that was postponed "through their own choice" (Chafer, *The Kingdom in History and Prophecy*, 56). God's foreknowledge of a refusal doesn't make an offer false. He brought the redeemed generation to Kadesh Barnea knowing what they would do, and their refusal was still theirs (Num. 14:11, 22-23). And as shown above, Israel's guilt lay in refusing her King; the Lamb's death came through that refusal, "by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God" and "by lawless hands" (Acts 2:23). How God's purpose and man's choice fit together in that one act lies beyond anyone's full understanding: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD (Isa. 55:8). Scripture affirms both, and so does this paper.

"You must be born again"

The charge. Jesus told Nicodemus, a ruler of Israel, "You must be born again" (John 3:7). Generations of preachers have read that as the new birth by which a sinner is first saved. If a leader of Israel needed it, Israel wasn't a redeemed nation at all, and the kingdom Jesus offered was simply salvation offered to the unsaved.

The answer. The conversation is about the kingdom from start to finish, seeing it and entering it (John 3:3, 5), and Jesus expected "the teacher of Israel" to recognize what He meant (John 3:10). That places it in Israel's Scriptures, where clean water and God's own Spirit are promised to a nation that already belonged to Him, disobedient as it was (Ezek. 36:22-27). Nicodemus had kept the Passover all his life, and so had the people he spoke for (Exod. 12:24-27). The word Jesus used means "from above," and the birth He named is the birth "of God" that John describes in the Israelites who received their King (John 1:12-13), as set out above under "Born from above." It's God's work in people who already have life, and it fits them for the kingdom. None of this makes a person's first coming to life any less a work from above. Every work of God in man comes from Him, beginning with the God "who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts" (2 Cor. 4:6). Preaching John 3 to someone who has never believed is a true secondary use of the passage, because the source of life is the same. But its first sense belongs to Israel and her King, and it gives no ground for saying the nation Jesus came to had never been redeemed.

The Church is under the new covenant now

The charge. Jesus said at the Last Supper, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:20). Paul calls the apostles "ministers of the new covenant" (2 Cor. 3:6), and Hebrews calls Jesus "the Mediator of the new covenant" (Heb. 9:15; 12:24). The Church must be under it already.

The answer. The covenant's parties are named every time it's promised: "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:8). The Church drinks the cup looking forward, proclaiming "the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). The answer in full, including 2 Corinthians 3:6, Jesus' title as Mediator, and Hebrews 8:6, is set out above under "Letters written while the offer was open."

"One will be taken and the other left"

The charge. In the Olivet Discourse Jesus said, "Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left" (Matt. 24:40-41). Popular teaching reads this as the rapture: believers snatched away, unbelievers left behind. And since the verses follow a description of the Son of Man's coming "immediately after the tribulation of those days" (Matt. 24:29-31), many conclude that the Church is caught up only at the end of the Tribulation. If that's right, the Church goes through Israel's seven years, and the line this paper draws between the Church's removal and Israel's time of trouble disappears.

The answer. The verses don't describe the rapture, and the verbs show it. Here is the passage with the two verses before it:

> *"For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming." (Matt. 24:38-42)*

English uses "took" in verse 39 and "taken" in verse 40, and a reader naturally hears the same action twice. Matthew used two different verbs. The flood "took them all away" with *airo*, to lift up and carry off, the sweeping away of judgment. The one in the field "will be taken" with *paralambano*, to take someone along with oneself. That word takes its color from who is doing the taking: the devil "took" Jesus up to the holy city (Matt. 4:5), and the soldiers "took" Him into the Praetorium (Matt. 27:27). But when the Lord is the one taking, it's the word for Jesus taking Peter, James and John up the mountain with Him (Matt. 17:1), and the word He used when He promised, "I will come again and receive you to Myself" (John 14:3). Here the Lord is the one coming (Matt. 24:42), and the one taken isn't swept away like the flood's victims. He's received by the Lord. The one "left" is *aphiemi*, to let go or leave behind, the word for leaving nets on the shore (Matt. 4:20). The contrast is between two people dealt with by the same Lord: one received to Himself, and one let go.

The verses that follow show who the two are and when this happens. The next words are "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming" (Matt. 24:42). They're addressed to servants who belong to that Lord, and they lead straight into the parable of the faithful and evil servant, whom "the master of that servant will come" to reckon with (Matt. 24:45-51). These are the Lord's own servants, received or turned away when He settles accounts with them. That reckoning takes place at the Judgment Seat of Christ, after the Church has been caught up, and the catching up itself includes every Christian: "we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them" (1 Thess. 4:17). Nobody belonging to Christ is left on the earth at the rapture.

Luke records Jesus saying the same thing on another occasion, and Luke's setting removes any doubt about what's at stake:

> *"Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left." (Luke 17:32-35)*

Lot's wife was brought out of Sodom before the fire fell (Gen. 19:16). Her deliverance from Sodom's judgment stood; she was outside the city when the fire came. But she looked back, and she lost her life (Gen. 19:26), the very thing Jesus sets beside her name: "Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it" (Luke 17:33). Then He gives the same pair of verbs, one taken and one

left. Both people in each pair have already been delivered. What divides them is what they were living for when the Lord came, and the field and the mill show exactly that: where each one was found and what each one was doing. The taking and the leaving name the outcome.

So Matthew 24:40-41 doesn't place the rapture at the end of the Tribulation, and it doesn't teach that only some Christians are caught up. It describes Christ receiving some of His servants to Himself and turning others away, which is the Judgment Seat seen from the side of the outcome. The Church's removal before Israel's seven years stands untouched.

Why It Matters

The story bears on the Christian reading it, as a secondary application, along one line: the kingdom was offered to Israel, refused, and is now offered to the Church. Israel's land, her throne, her city, and her restoration remain hers, and nothing here hands them to the Church. What carries over is the offer, and what it takes to receive it or lose it.

It starts with reading the Bible rightly. When the stewards are kept straight, which promises belong to whom stops being a puzzle. A Christian doesn't have to spiritualize Israel's land into heaven or turn her restoration into the Church's growth to make the prophets fit. Nor does he have to conclude that God has finished with the Jewish people, a conclusion that has fed centuries of Christian contempt for them. Paul's warning to the Gentile branches stands against it: "do not boast against the branches... you do not support the root, but the root supports you" (Rom. 11:18). And Paul's own posture toward his people is the right one: "my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved" (Rom. 10:1).

Then there's the offer itself. The heavenly portion the Church is now offered is the portion Israel refused, and it comes with the same requirement Jesus attached when He took it from her: it was given "to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matt. 21:43). Paul tells the Gentile Christian to look at the broken branches and fear: "Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear" (Rom. 11:20). He said the same about Israel's history in the wilderness: "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:11-12). The generation at Kadesh had been redeemed by the blood of the lamb and had walked through the sea. They didn't lose their redemption. They lost the land they'd been brought out to inherit.

What hardened Israel can harden a Christian. The nation saw the signs and credited them to the wrong source; it heard the King and wouldn't come; it watched the Gentiles receive the Spirit and grew envious instead of repentant. Jesus' diagnosis was a dull heart and closed eyes, "lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn" (Matt. 13:15). The remedy is what it was for Israel: to hear, to understand, to turn, and to bear fruit.

And the time is short. The servant sent out to find a bride for the son is nearly done with his errand, and the Bride is making herself ready (Rev. 19:7). Each Christian answers the same question the nation did, whether he'll come when he's called.

Conclusion

Jesus told the whole story in one parable before it happened. A king arranged a marriage for his son and sent his servants to call the invited guests, and they wouldn't come. He sent again, after the dinner was prepared and the oxen were killed, and they mistreated and killed his servants. He sent his armies and burned their city. Then his servants went out to the highways and gathered everyone they found, "and the wedding hall was filled with guests" (Matt. 22:10).

Israel was the nation invited. She was offered the kingdom of the heavens when her King came, and she refused Him and crucified Him; she was offered it again for nearly thirty years after the cross, and refused it again. The heavenly portion was taken from her and given to a new people, "one new man" made of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, who are now its heirs through the one Seed of Abraham. Her city was burned and her people scattered, and she has been set aside, "without king or prince," for the two days of Hosea's prophecy (Hos. 3:4; 6:2). In the meantime the Spirit is taking out of the Gentiles a people for His name, and from that people a Bride for the Son.

But the earthly kingdom was never hers by offer alone. Each generation's enjoyment of it hung on obedience; the nation's possession of it was sworn, and God passed between the pieces alone. When the hall is full and the Church has been removed, God will take up Israel's last seven years, bring the nation to the end of herself, and send the Deliverer she pierced. She will look on Him and mourn, and say at last, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!" (Matt. 23:39). Then the tabernacle of David will be rebuilt, Jonah will go to the nations, and one King will reign over things in heaven and things on earth, with the Son's Bride beside Him in the heavens and God's restored wife, Israel, on the earth below. "For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

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