

# *Who Is Israel?*

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[This article is from Appendix C, "The Heart of David", published 2006, by Dr. Jeff Hazim]

To know God one must know Israel. When you hear the word "Israel," what do you think of? Do you think of: "the country," "the current nation-state," "the Jews," "the 12 tribes," "Jacob's new name," "the covenant people of the Bible", "the Church." etc.? Maybe you think about volatile politics, conflicts between Jews and Arabs, or wars over ancient borders. This is a confusing subject because "Israel" has come to mean so many things to so many people. In this essay, I will define "Israel" in a way most people have never fully considered. For now, resist the temptation to define Israel with any previous prejudice, whether good or bad, and be open to something new.

Israel is the personality, the purposes, and the process, by which God opens His heart to man. There is no other context through which the world can correspond with God. The world has the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures, written by Israelites. Israel is the sum total of God's will for mankind, past and future. The Scriptures chronicle the only credible history of man and man's relationship with God by detailing the birth and the progressive development of the Nation of Israel. The Bible identifies a single man, who was born some 3500 years ago in what is now Iraq, as the spiritual father of all mankind. These ideas might be easy to dismiss as fantasy storytelling were it not for the overwhelming influence that Judaeo-Christian cultures have on the world. Even such things as how we mark time (which we may take for granted) - the "seven day week" and "yearly reckoning," which are accepted universally, have come from the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures. Even though it is slightly inaccurate, our calendars read 2006. The world counts years since the birth of another Israelite (Jesus Christ). The world is slowly, becoming Israel. The degree, to which the world does not personify Israel today, is the degree to which God has temporarily removed Himself from the affairs of the world.

For many, maybe you, this Israel may seem too big, too un-provable, and too useless to the practical affairs of today. For you, a much smaller religion would be warmer, more friendly and useful. Yes, that may be true, and even needed for a time. But if we were to downsize this Israel, keep truth, but limit it and shape it into something more manageable, accessible, and inviting; it would only be a matter of time before someone would be sure to recognize the limitations in our more friendly religion. He would naturally start another religion (or denomination) to compensate for what he sees as some under-emphasized or overlooked truth. And then someone else would find something else important. Ah, another religion! You can see the point. They may all theoretically be espousing the truth (and with good intentions), while strongly disagreeing with each other, because each has only a piece of the puzzle, and so cannot see the big picture. Righteous wars, if we may call them that, are fought over ideas that are too small - ideas that don't, or can't, harmonize with "all truth."

If spirituality is our goal, the world today offers many assisting voices. Humans are uniquely spiritual creatures. But for most of us, pure individual spirituality, in any flavor, would not satisfy a deep human need to be social. Our spirituality would, quite naturally, lead us to seek out others

of like mind to form some social expression of our spirituality. Utilizing another unique human gift, that of organization and administration, our spiritual evolution might naturally derive doctrine and customs until we create something quite satisfying and enduring – our own religion. Religion meets the needs of man. But why invent your own religion when there are so many established flavors to choose from? Eighty percent of humanity is religious, and would claim to be associated with one of the world's twenty major religious groups. And there are thousands of more specialized religious sub-groups from which one may choose. Even those who profess Jesus are offered an incredible variety of ways to “follow” Him. According to the *New Edition of World Christian Encyclopedia*, there are currently 33,830 specific Christian denominations!

If “religion” is your goal, the world today offers many inviting choices. But are spirituality and religion your primary goal? In religion, you can find community, encouragement, guiding principles, long standing tradition, intellectual stimulation, social action, and even, if desired, a professional career path. Most of us are hugely vested in some religion. Family, friendships, lifestyle, our sense of identity and purpose, social standing and, critically important, affirmation of being in right standing with God, are all wrapped up in our religion. This is the world that most people exist in, spirituality packaged for livability. We create longstanding traditions and the safe institutions that support them. This is what humans do; and at a basic level there is nothing wrong with it – unless we get so caught up that we miss the real God. So, how connected are you with your religion?

Beyond spirituality and religion, we have a paramount, but very abstract reality we'll call “truth”. In fact, truth can be defined as exactly that – “reality”. Knowing truth and seeking truth should be one of the supreme goals of life. It might be assumed that everyone engaged in the discussion about “Israel” is doing so in a quest for truth, but that would not be reality. There are many lesser motivations that foster interest in Israel. Defending one’s personal or institutional position must not be equated with defending or seeking truth. Don't just assume that someone else, long ago, resolved the truth about Israel, and your job now is to defend those long held traditions. The word “tradition” comes from the Latin meaning “the act of handing over”; it is up to us to decide if we want to receive what is handed to us.....or not. Traditions can be wonderful, but there are times when we need to reexamine the basis for long standing beliefs, especially when it comes to something as important as “Who is Israel?”

Knowing truth goes beyond spirituality and even religion. Instinctively, we sense that truth should be the ultimate goal; it is the ultimate blessing, the ultimate gift granted to free and glorify mankind. Only in spirit AND TRUTH can we worship God. Only then, with a mind transformed by truth, we will find God. In this “tent of meeting,” speaking the language of truth, we will commune with God.

Truth seeking is a messy, difficult, and costly process. If you would short-circuit that struggle, and instead hope for peace and safety via some other easier path, then an expedition to find the real Israel may not be for you. You may want to leave it to someone else. And that may be okay for now; not everyone is a pioneer who cares to walk on the “bleeding edge.” But you can at least understand, appreciate, and sympathize with the struggle. If it’s not for you, then please don't

become an obstacle. Let an honest search for truth proceed. Wait for the final report before making your judgment, even if preliminary information you receive sounds like heresy to your religion. Either join in the effort, or keep an open mind and an open ear for developing news. All truth must come; and Israel is the only path we can take to apprehend it.

A very important person once said, "The truth will set you free." It's true! Resolving "all truth," that is, "thinking truthfully" or "knowing reality," is the only path to paradise. God is, in fact, saying to mankind, until you see things the way I see things, I will not release you from your "fallen-ness." Whatever you think the World-to-Come may be like, it will not come until God has adequate, proven partners in its management. You may not have realized that the stakes are so high, or that our participation would be such a determining factor in the world's future. Knowing Israel is not ultimately an academic exercise. Israel's past is the model of the world's future. Only by knowing Israel do we know God, thereby qualifying as legitimate managers of the world's future. Yes, the stakes are this high!

If we institutionalize this relationship, if we define the rules of engagement and extend them to the expanding human family, for endless ages, we would define the embodiment of knowledge and truth. We would define reality. That reality is called "Israel." Religion can satisfy man's needs to a point, even faulty and limited religion appear adequate for a time, but upon closer examination, there is no truly truthful religious experience outside of Israel. For some, that may be a very radical idea. It may provoke strong objection and pluralistic demands. They may say, "God can't be limited to such a narrow and singular idea. God is much more diverse than that."

Israel is difficult to know because knowing Israel is difficult. A comprehensive knowledge of Israel is at the upper level of human capacity to perceive spiritual things. It is for the mature. Why has man not resolved Israel? Because the implications are too staggering, too demanding. Most human hearts and minds will not go to the highest demands of Israel. But the glorious truth is that we, as humans, have been given the right to be sons of God. It is difficult, but rest assured; it is also possible. That is what the story of Israel tells us; a wounded man can prevail.

We haven't made an attempt to define Israel yet, so we should offer a short disclaimer here to avoid unnecessary concern. In some cases we have to separate modern Jewish culture, or even Judaism, from Israel. Every nation or ethnic group has a culture that is a product of collective experiences and traditions. Modern Jewish traditions do not always reflect the Biblical or Godly foundations of Israel. Very often they do, but it should be noted that modern Judaism is not necessarily synonymous with Israel.

Israel in the context portrayed above is a concept - an idea as big as the universe itself. To know Israel, that is where we must start. There was a man named Israel, there is one country on earth called Israel, and they are, most assuredly, connected to the overall concept of Israel, but let's resist the impulse to so quickly connect the spiritual idea of Israel to some physical reality. Doing so would be a mistake if we really want to gain a truthful understanding of Israel. Even the Patriarchs realized this, and did not, in their day, begin to build a material institution. However, it probably can be said that a "truthful" understanding of Israel is not the objective of the majority of

mankind. Israel may be important to you for reasons other than truth. We must get to the genuine physical manifestation(s) of Israel eventually; but there are very strong personal and institutional pressures to kidnap both the idea and the physical existence of Israel, and use it to leverage some sociopolitical advantage.

Abraham, Moses, and Jesus all added flesh to the fabric of Israel. God invites all men to come and walk again with Him, to learn from Him, and to grow in the likeness of Him through the revelation of Israel. Israel has been misunderstood and abused, as it has been easier for mankind, to fight over it (or against it) than it has been to comprehend it. The influence of Israel far exceeds its landmass or the numeric value of those who currently carry its name.

Let us make our first attempt to define “Israel.” It’s a bit abstract, but helpful nonetheless: **Israel is the universal government of God. We are all Israelites; we all live within the territory of Israel and under the laws of Israel, whether we realize it or not, whether we want to or not.** Certainly, we will get much more specific as we go along, as this is not the whole truth, but the first truth about Israel that we need to understand.

What is Israel? Anyone who reads the Bible knows that Israel is the context in which God revealed Himself to the world. But Israel is more than a context; to know God, one must know Israel. There are diverse attitudes concerning Israel and they take on different forms. If Israel is uniquely tied to God and God’s “light” (revelation, purposes and demands) for mankind, it would follow that God’s enemies would uniquely single out Israel for special wrath and disdain. This is a curious and tragic fact of history. From Haman to the Amalakites to Hitler, the world has witnessed extreme hatred for Israel quite often. But there is another form of hostility which should be distinguished from “blind hatred.” This hostility might more accurately be categorized as a type of family rivalry. Those involved actually recognize value in Israel and its blessings, and want to participate in them. Family rivalry, in effect, can be just as deadly and vicious, but it has a different motivational foundation. Take for examples, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his ten brothers. These “family members” actually competed for God’s favor. They saw and accepted that God’s favor does flow through Israel (or Abraham), and so devised theology to bolster their claim. Family infighting started as early as the first two brothers, Cain and Able. Incredibly, there are only about 15 million “Jewish” people on earth today (recognized Jewish blood descendants of Abraham/Isaac/Jacob). One would think that these people would be the most popular, honored culture on earth, but such is not the case. Amazingly, history indicates the opposite. Quite a long time ago it became popular to separate Israel’s favor from Israel’s people. It would have been nice if God had made this issue much clearer, but He didn’t. So the struggle, and the question, continues: Just who is Israel?

In the “family” camp today, we could place Judaism, Christianity, and even Islam. These all claim to be physical or spiritual sons of Abraham. In our search for Israel, we want to be careful to seek truth, as opposed to common perception or sacred tradition. For instance, you might assume that Judaism is Israel, but even that point can be argued. If you know your Bible, you will recall that the kingdom of Solomon, the best picture of national Israel, was split into northern and southern kingdoms. The Bible refers to the much larger northern kingdom as Israel, and the southern

kingdom as Judah. Though mixing occurred both before and after the split, the Jews of today are largely descendants of the southern two tribes, Judah and Benjamin. The northern tribes are often referred to as the “ten lost tribes,” as history does not clearly record what became of them. So Judaism today and the Jews who have formed the modern State of Israel, while unquestionably the genetic sons of Jacob (Israel), technically, may not be the Biblical Israel.

It is an extremely complicated topic, and we cannot possibly even mention all the related issues. Rather, we will try to frame our debate around a single key issue. To set the stage, we will review four common Biblically-based perceptions of Israel held by Judaism and Christianity. The summaries below are written with very broad strokes and are continuing to evolve in the winds of time. We confess beforehand that these generalizations, as all generalizations, are imperfect.

#### **Four views of Israel**

1) Faithful (observant) Judaism sees a nationalistic Israel, restored and peaceful under the rule of a conquering world leader. They see the ancient Davidic/Solomonic kingdom as the prototype of the coming restored Kingdom ruled by an “anointed” (Messiah) human king, a descendant of King David. This Kingdom’s capital will be an expanded Jerusalem, established within a much enlarged territorial Israel (enlarged from the borders of present day Israel). It will have a rebuilt Temple and a functioning Levitical priesthood ministering via a judicial system based on the Mosaic Law. Out of the leadership of this Kingdom (nation), a restored, obedient world will experience peace and paradise forever. This is a natural, physical Israel, whose members are generally blood descendants of Jacob. To distinguish it from other views, we’ll refer to this Kingdom as the, “**Royal House of David.**” For the most part, the views of Faithful Judaism are all legitimate Biblical prophetic ideas.

Faithful Christianity has at least three significant and differing concepts of Israel that are useful for our discussion here.

2) The majority of Christians through the ages have believed in supersessionism, making it the dominate view of Christianity. The more common term for this belief is “**Replacement Theology.**” It’s called “replacement”, because it states that the Church has completely replaced Israel as God’s “chosen” agency on earth. All favor and promises prophesied in the Old Testament are now transferred to the Church. God used an ancient people, the Israelites, and an ancient nation, Israel, to express and demonstrate, in literal terms, the will and revelation of God to man. In this theology, Israel was the “school room” in which God used very “literal” teaching objects to impart “spiritual” principles. With the coming of Jesus, God signaled the end of “school Israel” and the beginning of the “new spiritual Israel.” Now, Judaism could be reprocessed, sort of like putting Judaism into a juicer where all the pure spiritual juice is separated from the physical “pulp.” For instance, replacement theology teaches that we don’t need the Sabbath any longer, because man, through Jesus, fully understands the principle of Sabbath “rest.” The pulp is discarded as useless – no, not useless, worse than useless - pulp Judaism is now considered poisonous to true faith. Paul’s (misunderstood) words, in Galatians 5:2 confirmed this. <sup>NIV</sup> *Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.*

Faith alone is now the new and only way to be reconciled to God, and enter His Kingdom. To

adherents of replacement theology, territorial national Israel, the people in the blood line, the Temple, etc., are no more significant than any other of the world's cultures. To attribute significance to the return of the Jews to the Land and the rebirth of national Israel (which happened in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century), or looking forward to the restoration of the Mosaic Law and the rebuilding of the Temple, is a grave mistake. Interestingly, while replacement theology calls for the purging of all things Jewish, it claims it is exclusively "Israel". Perhaps not intentional in most cases, replacement theology very often elicits subtle or even overt anti-Semitism. At the heart of its systematic theology you will always find the use of an exegetical technique called (hyper) allegorization or spiritualizing of Scripture.

3) Other Christians see the Church as a new and separate entity completely distinct from Israel. This leaves Israel pretty much intact retaining much of its special-ness. By rejecting Jesus, Israel was broken off from the tree and has been set-aside until the "times of the Gentiles" are over. These Christians generally still consider Israel a special nation both in its favor and in its prophetic role at the End-of-the-Age. They see the time when Israel will accept Jesus as the Messiah and will be grafted back into the tree. Here it gets a little fuzzy, but they largely see a Torah-less Christianity eventually merging with, and even taking on some of, Judaism's physical culture, with its capital in Jerusalem, services in the Temple, and an active priesthood. This improved Israel is reshaped by Messiah Jesus as a grace oriented, non-sacrificial blend of Judaism and Christianity under a "new" covenant.

4) For our fourth Israel, we spotlight a new phenomenon in Christianity appearing over the last thirty years - a pro-Torah return to the Jewish (or Hebrew) roots of Christianity. (Many adherents do not even want to be labeled as "Christian"). This group, while numerically small today, is keeping in step with the Spirit, by pioneering important new spiritual ground. They see the shortcomings of the traditional views expressed above and have set about to resolve them. They identify a perfect precedent for a new radical theology - the original "Church". They notice that the founders of the Church - Jesus, Peter, James, John, and Paul, and the community in which they existed, were orthodox Jews living orthodox lifestyles. How could this be? **The founders of the original "Christian" movement had a very specific lifestyle, which if lived today would be heretical by mainstream Christianity.** It's bizarre, but ask any honest Christian scholar and they will explain why you cannot live like Jesus did and still be a good Christian. However, a thorough and sincere reexamination of Scripture does reveal that a Torah-based orthodox lifestyle, as walked-out by the early messianic Jewish community (it wasn't called "Christianity" back then), was not, and is not today, inconsistent with true Christianity

Modern pro-Torah Christians set about to track the history of pagan and anti-Semitic influences that crept into the Church. In their quest they rediscover Torah and its vital and direct connections to the New Testament. They rediscover Sabbath and the Feasts of the LORD. They began to synchronize prophecy to Torah concepts. They acknowledge the value of Judaism and the traditions it has maintained, and some choose to study Judaism's source literature, such as the Talmud. They redesign more authentic worship, as would have been familiar to Jesus and the Apostles, incorporating the use of a Torah scroll, weekly Torah readings, prayer shawls, and established written prayers in the siddur (prayer book). Not afraid of (or antagonistic towards)

physical Israel anymore, they rediscover the truths of the “two houses” (two kingdoms) of Israel. They find evidence that today’s Judaism and Jewish tradition has very likely been handed down to us by a very small remnant of the whole house of Israel. They learn the prophecies which predict the End-of-the-Age and the reuniting of the two houses. Many surmise that this new sense of identity with Israel indicates that they, themselves, are actually physical descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. They reach out to the Jewish people as brothers, in support of their many political struggles for the Land of Israel, and against anti-Semitism.

This phenomenal movement is continuing to get stronger and will (I predict) grow incredibly in the coming years. The natural result of these radical changes is a theology that virtually matches Judaism (after deficiencies on both sides are corrected), except for the identity of Messiah. In fact, there is such a disillusion with Christian tradition and doctrine that an overreaction has developed. The rallying cry of this group is “one house”, the whole house of Israel. They see Israel like Judaism sees Israel – the Royal House of David Restored. All believers are Israelites, even with an inheritance in the Land. Judaism with its Mosaic traditions is the rightful model for all God’s people. Someday, Judaism will see Y’shua (the original, restored name of Jesus) as Messiah. Until then, Christians and Jews have more in common than they have differences. The sentiments and even much of the prophecy of the pro-Torah Christian is good, they are heading in the right direction, but even their doctrine of Israel misses the mark.

### **Israel and Prophetic Leadership**

There are sincere God loving people in all these groups, and there is truth in all of these views of Israel, however, none of them adequately explain the full picture of Israel. Whatever you want to call it, they have all built, and vigorously defend, an incomplete idea of Israel. Each one defines an Israel that is not fully Biblical – and therefore not truly Israel. But understanding Israel is essential to understanding prophecy, which is essential to understanding truth. The difficulty in understanding Israel stems from human issues of both heart and mind, and therefore, the resolution of Israel is indicative of a proper attitude towards God. Whether through the eyes of your heart or through the eyes of your mind, it is given that each will seek the level of Israel to which he is called. The world desperately needs prophetic leadership, and that leadership will be granted to men and women who understand Israel at the highest level. Understanding Israel is a requirement for leadership. The final ranks of Israel, at all levels, are being filled today. Whether you are a Jew by blood or a Christian who believes in eternal security, nothing should be taken for granted. Resting passively and ignorantly in some theological assurance alone will prove to be very unwise, no matter whom you are. Leadership will be bestowed on those that know where we, as a people, are going and what needs to be done to get us there. So, let’s now begin to describe a view of Israel that is fully Biblical, and will give us the tools for wise participation in the prophetic days ahead.

### **Two Israels**

The issue really hinges on one key idea: **Are there one or two Israels?** Taken broadly, you can see two distinct views of Israel from the descriptions above. We don’t want to quibble over words here. Someone might want to label what we’re about to describe as a single Israel with two dimensions, and that would be perfectly fine. But for this dialog, we prefer the clarity of “two

Israels.”

It is no coincidence that God provided this “two Israels” model over and over. Abraham, the father of all the faithful, had two wives and two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Jacob, the man given the name Israel, had a family of sons that eventually excised Joseph from the family. This set the stage for the Judah ~ Ephraim, two house split. Even the pure original form of Christianity (the community of Jewish disciples of Y’shua) was excised from Judaism to form a second house, both claiming rights to Israel. There is a message in all this beyond the obvious family infighting. The message in these patterns is that there really are two distinct concepts of Israel. In their immature state, each perceives the other to be foreign, so they fight one another though the ages.

From the very first verse of the Bible we are exposed to the idea of two centers, or jurisdictions of authority: Heaven and Earth. Gleaning from the whole of Scripture, we can formulate the following conditions. **God rules from heaven by delegating universal stewardship to man on earth.** Immediately, we can see that God has deliberately set limits to His authority and bestowed incredible authority to mankind. God created man to take dominion over the Creation, but it’s not an unlimited license to participate in all activities. Scripture shows God like a Father, training and disciplining His sons toward responsible governance. This is all well and good – this “God in heaven” in a training relationship with “man on earth” – and perhaps many would agree that this is an accurate characterization of the big picture; but how does this apply to two Israels?

The first clue lies in a promise given to Abraham by the Almighty:

- *(Gen 22:17<sup>NIV</sup>) I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.*

Notice those two phrases – the stars and the sand. They represent the heavenly and the earthly. Now, we could not infer from this alone that two groups are in view here. But further study will show this to be a perfect metaphor for the two Israels – a heavenly Israel and an earthly Israel.

What is the evidence for a heavenly Israel? Judaism has parallel concepts, but the Christian Apostolic writers of the New Testament clarified these concepts immensely. First, let’s take note of one fact: Although Abraham was promised the Land of Canaan, neither he, Isaac, Jacob, nor any of the sons of Jacob ever built a permanent dwelling in the Land. They dwelt in tents as foreigners in the Promised Land. There is no clear Biblical explanation for this. One could say that the time hadn’t come yet, but the New Testament writers pick up on this curious fact:

- *(Hebrews 11:9) By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.*
- *(Hebrews 11:13) 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.*



- *(Hebrews 11:10)* For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.
- *(Hebrews 11:16)* 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.
- *(2 Corinthians 5:1)* For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.
- *(Philippians 3:20)* For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is unmistakably clear that Abraham had a dual promise – one directed toward eventual fulfillment on earth, but an even superior promise of citizenship in a heavenly country, and residence in the city of God, a city not made with hands. The Old Testament does not dwell on this heavenly aspect of the promise, giving almost exclusive attention to the earthly fulfillment, eventually known as **the Royal House of David**. Let's expand this idea of heavenly promises with more Scripture:

- *(John 1:12)* But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His Name:
- *(Rom 8:23<sup>NIV</sup>)* Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

These Scriptures reveal the “star” dimension of the promise to Abraham. It is no accident that Christianity has focused on issues of the heart, emphasizing the spiritual and heavenly dimensions. **To put it succinctly, Christianity, through Messiah Jesus, offers the right to participate in the heavenly calling of Abraham.** They have the right to literally be adopted into the family of God, to fulfill the original intent of God as recorded in Genesis 1, for men to become the “image of God” and to “rule” the universe. This is what Christianity boasts, and they should. This is the “good news.” Men can be formed into the likeness of God; they can be sons of God, agents channeling divine energy to the world. By faith, this ministry and all the benefits are available to all men. Stated briefly, mankind’s prophetic history is moving from the hands of “earthly men” into the hands of “heavenly men”.

### **Israel – One Becomes Two**

We can see the conceptual basis for two Israels. But as the curtain went up 2000 years ago, we see Judaism and a Levitical economy functioning as the only Israel the world knew. So, it is out of this vestige of the Royal House of David that a new, heavenly Israel is brought forth. This song sounds familiar to one in our distant past when Eve was taken out of Adam. Apparently, Adam originally embodied both male and female attributes, until those attributes were divided into two distinct bodies. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he

created them” (Gen 1:27 NIV). It’s interesting that Christianity refers to itself as the “bride” of Christ, who is the last Adam. Separated from God by sin, through Christ we are invited back into the family of God.

Israel appears to have been designed likewise, and followed a similar pattern. The Nation of Israel, from its inception, embodied both heavenly and earthly Israels up until the coming of Messiah Jesus. Jesus came preaching the “Kingdom of Heaven” to a people that were anticipating the full restoration of the “Royal House of David.” It would seem that, had Israel accepted Jesus, they would have remained invested with both dimensions of Israel. Jesus essentially made this offer: “I am the king of both Israels, if you accept my heavenly ministry, I am prepared to reestablish the Royal House of David now.” The New Testament amply describes the outcome - *Israel stumbled over the “stumbling stone” (Rom 9:32<sup>NIV</sup>)*. In the larger human terms, it was all for the best. “*Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles” (Rom 11:11<sup>NIV</sup>)*.

The bride was paid for in blood and set apart for a new ministry. At the end of Jesus’ ministry, He dealt with both Israels individually. In both cases He invoked Old Testament prophecy as the basis for His declaration. Dealing with the heavenly Israel, Jesus draws upon the “rejected Joseph” as imagery. Like Joseph’s brothers rejected him, Judaism as builders rejected the capstone (Jesus). *Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’ ‘Therefore I tell you that the **Kingdom of God** will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit’” (Mat 21:42-43<sup>NIV</sup>)*.

The “Kingdom of God” will be “taken away” from the “builders” (Judaism) and opened to others. Messiah becomes the head (capstone) of a body of people who will produce the fruit of the Kingdom of God. As the verse implies, this is a permanent development. We should note that this “renewed Israel” in no way discriminates against individual Jews entering. Jews were the original founders; they are just as welcome as anyone, in fact, all things considered, they are still the “natural branches,” and one would expect they would be more at home than pagans who have no instincts for Israel. Jesus said nothing about the end of Israel, or that this was some new religion that He was starting. The symbolic stones in Jesus’ illustration were stones of a Temple. The New Testament furthered the role of the Temple by developing the concept of building the Spiritual Temple.

So what happens to the builders? Jesus clarifies their fate as well. “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, **your house is left to you desolate** (Mat 23:37-38<sup>NIV</sup>)*. A house left desolate! Jesus once again invokes Old Testament prophecy to show the prophetic expectation of His actions.

- *(Jer 22:5<sup>NIV</sup>) But if you do not obey these commands, declares the LORD, I swear by myself that this palace will become **a ruin**.*
- *(Ezek 21:25-27<sup>NIV</sup>) “O profane and wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose time of*

*punishment has reached its climax, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Take off the turban, remove the crown. It will not be as it was: The lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low. **A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin!** It will not be **restored** until He comes to whom it rightfully belongs; to him I will give it."*

This other Israel, the Royal House of David, would be brought low, ruined, made desolate – but not forever. This judgment was only for a season (2000 yrs), and so is not permanent. But composite Israel had reached a fork in the road, from this day forward there would be a separate path for each Israel. By Jesus' prophetic declaration, one was made two, but we should examine the practical reasons for the split.

### **Christianity – Brilliance and Blindness**

From the very beginning, "Gentile" Christianity (non-Jewish Christianity) misconstrued the lesson to be learned from Judah's failure. Drawing from New Testament Jewish writings, Christianity began to accentuate the spiritual aspects of our relationship to God. It emphasized the internal or heart motivations of a "by grace through faith" based life. It connected deeply to the essence of Abraham's heavenly calling, and then catalogued its theology and articulated it to the world. Christianity devised a simple Gospel, however incomplete, and took on the burden of spreading this "light" of the God of Israel to the farthest corners of the world. Yes, Christianity did many things right, but regrettably, in its ignorance and immaturity, Christianity perceived the source of Judaism's failure to be its legalistic system founded on the Mosaic Law. Christianity could not perceive of the need for all these complex rules and regulations, or a Temple and priesthood centered on archaic blood sacrifices. At best, this Law was a bitter lesson to show us why we need Jesus – and now that He's come, these old "Laws" need to be ruthlessly eliminated, lest they pollute our "newer," much superior system of grace and liberty.

What was wrong with Judaism was not the system of Mosaic Law, but human tendencies. Humans tend to remain within their safe comfort zone, rather than press on to a higher calling. Legalism, hard heartedness, and spiritual dullness are common to all humans and, therefore, all religions.

But knowing of this "heavenly calling" that is offered "free" to imperfect flesh understandably produced some undesirable results – one of them being arrogance. The Gospel message invites an ignorant pagan, who doesn't know the true God in any way, into the King's palace as a son. You can see where this may inspire some very deviant behavior. This is what happened when the original Jewish apostles sent the "good news" out into the world of the Gentiles. In short order, instead of humble gratefulness, Gentile Christianity, now with its superior numbers and superior mandate eventually set about to devise theology that gleaned all the Jewish treasures (promises to Israel) for themselves, while holding up Judaism as an object of contempt and ridicule. Yes, Judaism, as an institution, had legally failed to live up to the "high calling." They had, for a second time, eliminated their strange brother "Joseph" (in this case Jesus) from their family. Yes, Israel throughout history has stumbled under the heavy demands of her calling. In 70 AD, God once again sent Israel (Judaism) into exile, and a new "kid" (Christianity) eagerly picked up the banner of the high calling. Stirred by Judaism's failure, Christianity developed anti-Semitic doctrines that would eventually become cast in stone; in a sense they would become "Christian

tradition.” In many cases they developed proper activities, but for the wrong reasons. Christianity became Law-less, and has remained so for close to 2000 years. In spite of this, the preaching of their simple, incomplete Gospel by the Christian (even the Catholic) church was a blessing for the world, but we cannot continue to operate in such darkness. As “heavenly Israel” moves into its final ministry, these mistakes will have to be corrected.

### **Israel vs. Israel**

You can now understand how we came to our current state of affairs. And more importantly, you can now see the major components of God’s plan to bless humanity and establish an eternal government based upon “His righteousness.” Both aspects of Israel, spiritual and physical, heavenly and earthly, have been utilized to set the stage for the ending drama about to unfold. Truth, like a coin, always comes with two sides. Israel’s lack of faith allowed them to see only what was in front of them. As the original recipient of the covenant of Abraham and the Torah, the embodiment of knowledge and truth, they became totally distracted by the **physical kingdom** that God instructed them to build. They institutionalized an “earth only” kingdom. By the time their Messiah came declaring the “Kingdom of Heaven,” Judaism had become spiritually deaf. In the hardness of their hearts, Jewish leadership had long since forgotten the heavenly calling of Abraham.

We can see the nature of Judaism and Christianity and how each expresses one aspect of the dual call of Abraham. We can now see the need, yes need, for two Israels. Judaism developed the earthly kingdom; while Christianity, dismissive of the Royal House of David, looked for the deeper meaning, the heart of Israel, and developed ideas compatible with the heavenly kingdom. Who’s right and who’s wrong? If we look at the big picture, we will see that in a very real sense they both are! They both are based in truth; however as institutions, they cannot, or will not, make room for ideas they don’t understand. It’s as if they are both “looking in a mirror, darkly.” The higher truth seems so obvious; but the prophetic reality is such that both institutions will remain blind to it. Unless...

### **Working together**

Assuming that we can see two Israels as a single truth designed by God, the next questions are: Why and how do they interact with each other? A clear model on how these two Israels function harmoniously is still missing.

Once again, we can find clues to the answer to that question back in the beginning. Before Abraham’s covenant, even before the promise of an heir, we have a very brief account of Abraham’s encounter with Melchizedek. Very little is said here, but we get a critical insight into the relationship of our two Israels. Melchizedek ministers blessings as from God, and Abraham gives offerings to Melchizedek as unto God. Through other Scriptures, we pick up more information. In the Psalms: *The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4<sup>NIV</sup>)*. Here we see that Melchizedek was not just a single priest, but an “order of priests.” Messiah himself is a priest of this order of Melchizedek. Years later, when the Law is finally given on Sinai, we see a new priestly order established, the “order of Levitical priests.” This is the priesthood of Jewish history, the priesthood of earth, the priesthood

of the Royal House of David. In the New Testament, the Apostle Peter reveals more truth concerning our priesthood picture:

- *(1 Pet 2:4, 9-11<sup>NIV</sup>) As you come to Him, the living Stone ... you also, like living stones, are **being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood**, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ... But you are a chosen people, a **royal** priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as **aliens and strangers in the world**.*

This fits perfectly into our “heavenly Israel” picture, as opposed to the Levitical priesthood, which has only earthly jurisdiction. It’s not a stretch to see that God has designed a special priesthood for each Israel, each with its own responsibilities, functions, and jurisdiction. Speaking of the Messiah, the book of Hebrews says: “If He were on **earth**, He would not be a **priest**, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the Law” (Heb 8:4 NIV). Here’s more evidence of the jurisdictional nature of both Israels and both priesthoods. They each have an important role in the functioning of the whole.

To help clarify the function of our two Israels, we associate a priestly order with each one. The Melchizedek order (royal priesthood) is central to the heavenly priesthood, and the Levitical priesthood is central to the earthly priesthood (Royal House of David).

What did God have in mind when he promised Abraham a city made without hands? Even the Levitical priests typified this spiritual call. They were not given a portion of the Land, God was there portion. The patterns are clear that there is a set-apart calling that does not directly include elements of this material creation. Its highest reward is relational, an identity tied to God himself, the very ministry of God. How can we say this without going science-fiction? God has made a place in His family and He is in the process of bestowing God-likeness on a remnant of humanity who will forgo the immediate pleasures of this beautiful “earth” – and yet bless the people who don’t.

The End-of-the-Age will see these two Israels manifested in two priesthoods, both being refined and activated. The Melchizedek priesthood, especially, has a divine responsibility to rule with Messiah and will begin that rulership before Messiah returns to earth. Levitical Israel will become the head of the nations and has earthly jurisdiction. Melchizedek Israel will speak for and manifest the rule of God over the earth. How exactly these two Israels will interact will become clear over time, but it is through both priesthoods that the earth will enjoy the “stars” and the “sand” blessing of Abraham.

## Conclusion

Thus far, we have only scratched the surface. Space does not permit further discourse at this time. The LORD Almighty willing, we will greatly expand on these ideas in the future. Perhaps the most practical reason to know Israel is that it helps us know ourselves. We will know who we are, the

seeds of Abraham and heirs according to the promise. And we will know who we will be, the sons of God. Understanding our identity just might make it a little easier to *keep on pressing on* toward the upward call in Y'shua the Messiah. Brothers and sisters, press on till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. And even greater works than He will we do.

Blessed be the Holy One of Israel.