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B0549 – December 18, 2005 – Major Bible Themes
Chapter 34 – The Church: Her Members

Missing in Dispensational Systematic Theologies are distinct sections related to Israel. To Recent scholar Dr Arnold Fruchtenbaum has written a recent tome entitled “Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology”. In this tome of over 1,000 pages, he develops a dispensational Israelology involving Israel past, present, and future. Dispensationalists are the only ones who really pay any attention to Israel and so, although absent from this book, hopefully future dispensational books will include this missing link. Because our book doesn’t have a distinct section on Israel our treatment of Israel will be spotty, a little bit here a little bit there. What is included is a very well-written section on the Church. Theologically this area of Systematic Theology is known as Ecclesiology.

I. THREE DIVISIONS OF HUMANITY

The Bible recognizes three divisions of humanity; Gentiles, Jews, and the Church. Understanding these distinctions is crucial to understanding God’s present purpose with the Church.

1 Corinthians 10:32 Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God;

A. GENTILESⁱ

History began with the creation of the first Gentile.

Acts 17:26 and He made *from one man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth,

The Gentile peoples were the only peoples for the first ~ 2,000 years of world history recorded in Gen 1-11. All the Gentiles shared a common language until the Tower of Babel in Gen 11 when God judged man by confusing the languages which forced them to scatter and fill the earth. Due to the depravity of man, when the people dispersed, the truths of Gen 1-11, including the Creation, the Fall, and the Flood, were gradually distorted and over time truth became legend and legend became myth. These myths are still present in many forms all over the world and they often contain remnants of biblical truth. For example, “the Wijot in northern California...say: ‘The Old Man Above did not use earth and sticks to make men. He simply thought, and there they were.’” In India, the Santal people have an oral tradition about “Thakur Jiu (translated = “Genuine God”). Thakur Jiu created the world and the first human pair Haram and Ayo who fell into sin.”ⁱⁱ God tried the general approach of working with all people but this approach led only to a twisting of truth. If God had continued to work in this way all truth would have been lost forever. Therefore, in Gen 12 God graciously chose one Gentile, Abram, a man from Ur of the Chaldees (Neh 9:7), and set him apart to be a father of the nation of Israel and to generate a nation through which God would propagate His truth.ⁱⁱⁱ Everyone else however, remained a part of the Gentile nations. So, God in effect peeled off one man to begin a distinct people to preserve the truth and witness of God in the world.^{iv}

B. HEBREWS/ISRAEL/JEWS

These three designations were virtually identical by the time of the NT (Phil 3:5; Acts 21:39; Rom 9:3-4) but they had quite different meanings originally.

The first **Hebrew** was Abram (Gen 14:13), probably because he was a descendant of Eber^v (cf *Ibri* Gen 10:21). The designation continued to refer to his descendants through Isaac and Jacob (Gen 40:15).^{vi}

The first **Israelite** was Jacob whose name was changed to Israel by God (cf Gen 32:28). The twelve tribes were known as the Israelites. Later, when the Kingdom was divided, Israel referred specifically to the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom.

The first **Jew** was Judah, a son of Israel. The designation originally applied to all the descendants of Judah. Later, when the kingdom was divided, the Jews were composed of the 2 tribes who made up the Southern Kingdom.^{vii}

By NT times the designations Hebrew, Israel and Jew all referred to the same people, namely, the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob.^{viii} However, there are also

some exclusive senses of the words Israel and Jew. For example, “they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel” (Rom 9:6) and “he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. ²⁹ But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart” (Rom 2:28-29) which is to say in both instances that the true Israel and a true Jew are those of the believing remnant.

In conclusion, the nation of Israel is God’s chosen earthly people (Dt 14:2; Rom 11:28). They are a nation whether gathered in the land of Israel or scattered outside of it. No matter what the Gentile nations do they will never be able to destroy the national identity of Israel (Jer 31:36-37; Matt 24:34). God made unconditional covenants His people which will be fulfilled exclusively to the believing remnant. This will take place at Christ’s Second Coming when He will raise the remnant of Israel from the dead (Ezek 37:1-14; Dan 12:1-2, 13). These covenants include a Promised Land, a Promised Throne, a Promised King and His Kingdom. At this time Israel will take their place as the chief nation on earth (Isa 62:1-12).

C. CHURCH

When we open the NT, we find that Christ was sent only to the house of Israel.

Matthew 15:24 I was sent only to the lost sheep *of the house of Israel*."

And Jesus called Gentiles “dogs” and gave His twelve apostles the commission...

Matthew 10:5-6 "Do not go in *the* way of *the* Gentiles, and do not enter *any* city of the Samaritans; ⁶ but rather go to the lost sheep *of the house of Israel*."

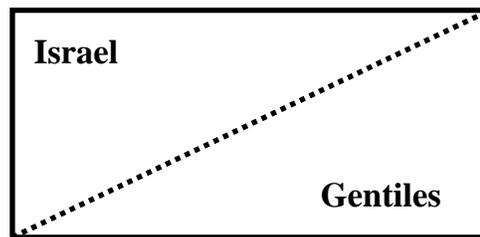
However, when the nation of Israel rejected the Messiahship of Jesus in Matt 12 that generation of Israel was condemned by Christ (Matt 12:41, 42, 45; 23:36). Israel, as a nation, was set aside temporarily for her unbelief. As a result, the kingdom was delayed and Christ began to announce a new program when He said “I will build My church” (Matt 16:18). Up to this point the church was a mystery. A mystery is something totally unknown in the OT because unrevealed. The OT prophets revealed nothing about the church; they were looking solely for the Messiah and His kingdom. When Christ revealed a new program called the church it must have been quite a surprise to His apostles and closest disciples. The story of Christ building His church begins in Acts 1:8

Acts 1:8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

No longer were the apostles limited to the house of Israel but now they were to be Christ's witnesses "even to the remotest part of the earth". Corresponding to this was Christ's great commission...

Matthew 28:19-20 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The Book of Acts goes on to describe how God providentially spread their witness from Jerusalem (Acts 2) to Samaria (Acts 8) and to the Gentiles (Acts 10).



Modern missionaries are still trying to fulfill this commission by reaching the remotest parts of the earth. But this mystery program began to be fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. The Book of Acts explains that the Church began on Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem and was exclusively Jewish at that time. By the end of Acts the emphasis is on the Gentiles (Acts 28:28). This shift in God's dealings was very difficult for the Jews to understand. They had difficulty understanding that their covenants were set aside for a time but not abrogated (Rom 9-11). In general, throughout the church age the Jews are blinded in part until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (Rom 11:25). This does not mean that Jews cannot be saved during the present age, they certainly can and Paul declares that God always has a remnant (Rom 11:2-5).

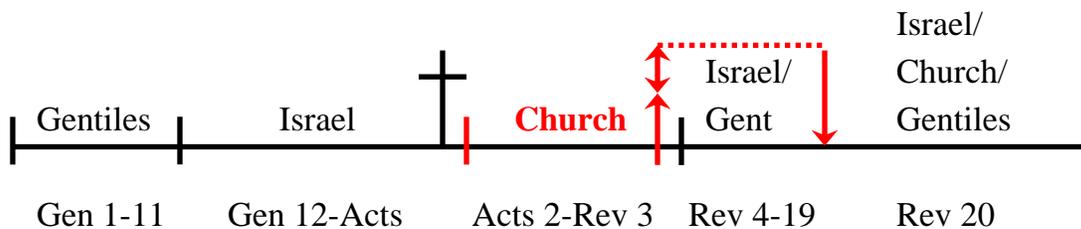
From here we can define the church. The church is the Greek word *ekklesia* which literally means "called out ones". It was a common word in the Greek OT (LXX) and simply meant "to gather, to congregate". It is used this way in the NT a couple of times. Once by Stephen in his speech where he spoke of Israel as the "congregation in the

wilderness” (Acts 7:38) and of a great “assembly” that rioted at Ephesus (Acts 19:32). However, besides these two uses the word takes on a technical sense of “those called out of the world and joined together with a living union in Christ”.

ekklesia often refers to the entire group of those saved in the present age whether on earth or in heaven. We stand in living union with every believer from the day of Pentecost to the present. The church will be complete at the pre-trib Rapture and will then be united with her head, Jesus Christ. When “the Christ” is complete she will become the bride of Christ and we will enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb. So, the church is composed of both Jews and Gentiles who believe in the gospel and become a part of the body of Christ, also known as the church. The church began on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and not in the OT. Thus, the Church is not Israel.

1. The church was yet future in Matt 16:18
2. Christ had to die before the church could be built on Him (Matt 16:18; 1 Cor 3:11)
3. Christ had not sent the Spirit in Acts 1:5 but it was “not many days from now”.
4. Christ had to ascend to heaven before He could send the Spirit (John 14:25-26; 15:26)
5. Spirit baptism is required to enter the church (1 Cor 12:13)
6. The church is Christ’s body (Eph 1:22-23)
7. Spirit baptism began in Acts 2 (Acts 1:4, 5; 11:17, 18)

The crucial distinction between Israel and the Church is Spirit baptism. Spirit baptism places a believer “in Christ”. Only church saints are ever said to be “in Christ”. Neither OT saints, Tribulation saints, nor Millennial saints are ever said to be “in Christ”. So, the church is a distinct body of saints composed of Jews and Gentiles who have believed in Christ between Pentecost and the Rapture.



In terms of spiritual position and spiritual privileges in the Church there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile (Gal 3:28). The application is that we should never let our national or racial identity supersede our spiritual identity in Christ. The Book of Ephesians is written for the purpose of promoting unity and if there’s anything that fights against unity it’s our national and racial identity. But Paul is saying in Ephesians that we ought to make every effort to preserve the unity that Christ established on the cross by

making our spiritual identity the foremost thing. There are some movements such as the Messianic Congregations and many of the Korean Christian groups who place a higher degree of loyalty to their national identity than they do to their spiritual identity in Christ. Paul's point was that if you do this you will cause division and it is causing division in the body of Christ and it's very sad. We also have black churches and yellow churches and red churches and white churches and there is this racial division that is so apparent and so contrary to Scripture it must make Christ sick. Christ died to bring peace between believers of all nationalities and races.

Ephesians 4:3 make every effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The primary use of the word church is as a living organism. Each member is a vital part of the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:15-16 we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Also there is what is often called the local church. There was the church at Philippi, the church at Ephesus, the church at Smyrna, etc...A church is not just any gathering of believers. A church has a definite structure in the NT. Ryrie defines a local church as "an assembly of professing believers in Christ who have been baptized and who are organized to carry out God's will." He mentions baptized because the NT knows nothing of un-baptized members. He mentions organized because there must be some form of church government. Further organization includes, observing the ordinances, evangelizing, building up believers, giving, ministering to all age groups, etc...

II. THE CHURCH: A MYSTERY IN THE OT

III. THE CHURCH: IT'S ORIGIN

IV. THE CHURCH: LOCAL AND UNIVERSAL

A mystery was something totally unrevealed in the OT now made known by God through the NT apostles and prophets (Eph 3:5-6). There are 12 such mysteries in the NT.

V. THE CHURCH COMPOSED OF JEWS AND GENTILES IN ONE BODY

VI. GOD'S PRESENT PURPOSE

The church is revealed to be the central purpose of God in the present dispensation. Parachurch ministries are not central. I repeat, parachurch ministries, those that are independent from the local church are not God's central instrument during the present dispensation. Supposedly they work alongside the church (*para* – alongside). Today everybody and their dog has a ministry independent of the local church and I think this is a part of the apostasy. I have no problem with ministries or seminaries that grow out of local churches but I fear that God's central instrument for the propagation of truth will one day be eclipsed. Historically, parachurch ministries have proven to be ecumenical. The most recent example of this was the Evangelicals and Catholics Together Phenomena. In 1994 leading Protestant and Catholic leaders signed a document on justification by faith. Not one pastor signed the document! All the Protestant signers were leaders of parachurch ministries. Time and again parachurch ministries apostatize and yet people from local churches continue to give them all sorts of money because "oh, they're just such a great person and they really are charming and articulate and they have such a big following it must be of God and all that!" I don't care about all that and you shouldn't care about all that. God says the local church is His instrument for truth and it is from there that missionaries should be sent out and schools started, etc. I will tell you that once a group takes themselves out from under the God-ordained authority structure of the local church they always tend to apostatize. So, no matter where I minister, wherever God takes me I will always tell people that God's ordained institution in the present age is the local church and they better first support their local church. Satan is against the local church. He hates her and he wants to destroy her. It is a real temptation for many pastors to leave the pastorate today. The reasons are several: 1) many smaller local churches can't support a pastor, 2) the pastor has to pay back loans he took out for seminary, 3) higher paying positions are available in academia, 4) academia is so prestigious many leave pastorates to pay back loans and to gain recognition among scholars, 5) it's easier because you don't have all the people problems to deal with.

VII. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

ⁱ It is probably proper to define a Gentile as a non-Jew.

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- ii Charles Clough, *A Biblical Framework For Worship and Obedience in an Age of Global Deception: Part II: The Buried Truths of Origins* (unpublished).
- iii Abram is also *the* father of all who have faith in the Messiah (Rom 4:11, 16).
- iv The prophecies of the OT predict great earthly blessings for the Gentiles in the coming Messianic Kingdom. In the present age Gentiles partake alike with the Jews in the privileges of the Gospel.
- v Shem was the father of Eber and it is from Shem's name that the designation "Semites" comes from. Historically speaking, the word "Semite" has applied only to the descendants of Jacob or Israel and not to all the descendants of Shem which would also include the Arabs.
- vi If the NT Book of Hebrews is written to genuine Hebrew Christians (which seems most likely) then there is also a sense in which there may be such a thing as a 'true' Hebrew that is limited to the remnant. Of course, the title for the Book of Hebrews is not inspired.
- vii Unger's Bible Dictionary.
- viii By faith Abraham becomes a person's father (Rom 4:12, 16) but Jacob can never become the father of person who is not his physical descendant. Thus, no person who is not a physical descendant of Jacob can ever be called an "Israelite".

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