

“The Israel of God”
Galatians 6:15-16
(Preached at Trinity, September 22, 2013)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Paul has been arguing powerfully in defense of the Gospel of Christ. Now as he brings the letter to a close he makes a powerful statement; one that has been a matter of hot debate. Is Paul referring to the entire church as the “Israel of God?”
 - A. Remember the main purpose of the Book of Galatians. A group of Jewish Christians had arrived from Jerusalem teaching strongly to the Gentiles that in order to be a Christian you had to first become a Jew—you had to be circumcised.
 - B. This was a false teaching that plagued the early church. The church finally held an ecclesiastical council to deal with the matter. Luke records it in **Acts 15**.
Acts 15:1-2 NAU - "Some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." ² And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue."
2. The conclusion of the Council was that circumcision was not to be added to the work of Christ. Paul words in **Verse 14** are a clear declaration of the perfection of the atonement of Christ upon the cross.
Galatians 6:14 NAU - "But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"
3. The essential element in being one of God’s people is not whether or not you have been circumcised; it isn’t whether or not you have become a Jew. It is whether or not you have received God’s transforming grace through the cross of Christ. Paul states it clearly:
Galatians 6:15 NAU - "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."
4. Then Paul makes his pronouncement that has caused many to stumble:
Galatians 6:16 NAU - "And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God."
 - A. Paul pronounces peace and mercy to a select group—to those who “walk by this rule.”
 1. What rule is Paul talking about. It is the rule of the previous verse: "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."
 2. This is the heart of Christianity. It is God’s transforming grace through the cross of Christ. It is NOT a matter of becoming a Jew through circumcision.

- B. Then Paul adds: "and upon the Israel of God."
1. Is Paul adding the "Israel of God" as a distinct group of Christians separate from the first group, those who "walk by this rule?"
Is Paul maintaining a distinction between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians? This is the position of Dispensationalists.
 2. This would seem in conflict to his previous statement:
"For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."
5. It would also appear inconsistent with the rest of the Book of Galatians as well as the teaching of the whole of Scripture.
6. This is a huge issue of great importance. Does God have two distinct people on the earth today—Christians and Israel? Does God still have promises to ethnic Israel or do these promises find their fulfillment in the Church? This subject not only impacts our theology, it even impacts international policies. Do the Jews have a God-given right to possess present day Israel?
This morning I want to look into this issue.
- I. In the Old Covenant the Jewish nation of Israel was the Kingdom of God
- A. God inhabited Israel
 1. He ruled through Israel, He spoke through Israel
 2. The promises of God were given to Israel.
Romans 3:1-2 NAS - "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? ² Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God."
 - B. The Old Covenant was a conditional covenant to national Israel
 1. God's promises to Israel demanded obedience – in this sense they were conditional
Exodus 19:5 – "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine."
Deuteronomy 7:12 NAS - "Then it shall come about, because you listen to these judgments and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep with you His covenant and His lovingkindness which He swore to your forefathers."
 2. But Israel's disobedience would not make void God's promise to Abraham. It was a covenant of faith that would find its fulfillment in Christ.
 - a. The physical descendents of Abraham were not the ultimate heirs of the promise
 - b. God would always have a remnant of His elect people
Romans 9:27 NAS - "And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved;"
Romans 11:5 NAS - "In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice."
 - c. Paul wrote of the children of promise back in **Chapter 4 Galatians 4:28 NAS** - "And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise."

3. National Israel did not keep covenant
 - a. Both the Northern and Southern tribes rebelled against God.
 - b. The Southern tribe of Judah was judged and carried off into the Babylonian captivity, but would later be restored.
 - c. The Northern tribes were judged, conquered by the Assyrians and forever scattered.
 - d. This was the beginning of the Kingdom being stripped from ethnic Israel
- C. This was predicted in the Book of Hosea with the birth of his children.
Hosea 1:8-9 – “Now when she had weaned Loruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son. ⁹Then said *God*, Call his name Loammi: for ye *are* not my people, and I will not be your *God*.”
 Loruhamah - לֹרְחָמָה "no mercy"
 Loammi - לֹא-עַמִּי - "not my people"
1. Because of their failure to repent, Israel was thrown back into the Gentile world. The ten northern tribes were absorbed and lost their identity.
 2. Clearly, being a physical descendant of Abraham carried no guarantee that a person would remain among God’s covenant people without consideration of his faith and faithfulness to God.
Romans 9:6-8 NAS - "But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; ⁷ neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac your descendants will be named."
⁸ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants."
 3. But the Exile did not end the Old Covenant.
2. Israel was not cast off completely
Hosea 1:9-11 – “Then said *God*, Call his name Loammi: for ye *are* not my people, and I will not be your *God*. ¹⁰ Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, *that* in the place where it was said unto them, Ye *are* not my people, *there* it shall be said unto them, Ye *are* the sons of the living God. ¹¹ Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great *shall be* the day of Jezreel.”
3. This has been interpreted in various ways
 - a. Some see the fulfillment when Judah returned from Babylon and many of the 10 tribes of Israel joined with them.
 - b. Some see the fulfillment during a general conversion of the Jews in the latter days.

- c. But Paul quoted Hosea as referring to God's inclusion of the Gentiles
Romans 9:22-26 NAS - "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? ²³ And *He did* so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴ *even us*, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. ²⁵ As He says also in Hosea, "I will call those who were not My people, 'My people,' And her who was not beloved, 'beloved.'" ²⁶ "And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'you are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God."
- d. Matthew Henry – "It is certain that this promise had its accomplishment in the setting up of the kingdom of Christ, by the preaching of the gospel, and the bringing in both of Jews and Gentiles to it, for to this these words are applied by St. Paul (Rom. 9:25-26) and by St. Peter when he writes to the Jews of the dispersion (1 Pet. 2:10). Israel here is the gospel church, the spiritual Israel (Gal 6:16), all believers who follow the steps, and inherit the blessing of faithful Abraham, who is the father of all that believe, whether Jews or Gentiles, (Rom. 4:11-12).
4. Jesus alluded to the Hosea passage in **John 1**
Hosea 1:10 NAS - "Yet the number of the sons of Israel Will be like the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered; And it will come about that, in the place Where it is said to them, "You are not My people," It will be said to them, "You are the sons of the living God."
John 1:11-13 – "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. ¹² But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name: ¹³ Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. "
a. Jesus later indicated that the Kingdom would be taken from Israel
Matthew 21:43 NAS - "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it."
b. Yet, God has not cast off Israel altogether.
Romans 11:1-5 NAS - "I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in *the passage about Elijah*, how he pleads with God against Israel? ³ "Lord, they have killed Thy prophets, they have torn down Thine altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life." ⁴ But what is the divine response to him? "I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." ⁵ In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice."

- c. Paul made it clear that the natural branches that had been broken off might be grafted in again removing any cause of boasting among the Gentiles.
Romans 11:20-21 NAS - "Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; ²¹ for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you."
Romans 11:23 NAS - "And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again."
- d. Any Jew being "grafted back in" will occur the same way as any other believer – according to God election of individuals.
Romans 11:5 – "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace."

II. The New Testament makes it clear God has but one covenant people

- A. There is no division between Jew and Gentile today
Ephesians 2:11-14 NAS - "Therefore remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision " by the so-called "Circumcision," *which* is performed in the flesh by human hands-- ¹² *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into one*, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,"
1. The true sons of Abraham are the children of faith.
Galatians 3:7-9 NAS - "Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, "All the nations shall be blessed in you." ⁹ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."
Galatians 3:28-29 NAU - "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."
2. This has always been the case, even in the Old Covenant
- a. Jesus spoke to this:
John 8:39 NAS - "They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham."
 What are the deeds of Abraham? It is the obedience of faith.
- b. The Old Covenant always looked forward to the New
Deuteronomy 30:6 NAS - "Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live."

- c. The true Jew was always one inwardly, in the heart, not outwardly by circumcision.
Romans 2:28-29 NAS - "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither 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, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God."
- d. The deciding factor is not being the blood heir of Abraham, but of being a new creature in Christ.
Galatians 6:15 NAS - "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."
3. Paul declares that God's elect people who follow Christ in faith are the true Israel of God.
Galatians 6:16 NAS - "And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God."
- B. Many make the charge that we are teaching what is called "Replacement Theology"—that the church has replaced Israel. The charge also goes forth that any claim that the church is the Israel of God demands "spiritualizing" Scripture.
1. The truth is that God has always had but one single people. He has always had an elect remnant. This has always been the church. And this doesn't require spiritualizing Scripture. It is the clear literal teaching of Scripture
 2. The church hasn't *replaced* Israel. The church *is* Israel, and always has been.
 3. But it is true that God's promises to ethnic Israel have found their full expression in the church. It is a NEW covenant, signifying that the old has passed away.
 4. Notice the wording of the New Covenant
Jeremiah 31:31-33 NAS - "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. ³³ "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."
Hosea 2:23 NAS - "And I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they will say, '*Thou art my God!*'"
Romans 9:26 NAS - "And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'you are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God."

Conclusion:

1. God's promises to Abraham have all ultimately fulfilled in Christ and delivered unto the church, the true Israel.
2. The wonderful thing about God's covenant is He invites you to enter in. This is God's offer of grace to all men. Remember, Jesus Christ has met every requirement, every demand – He is the surety, the Guarantor.
John 1:12 NAS - "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name,"
3. Have you been forgiven? Are you resting in Christ? Are you a part of His covenant blessings? Are you a part of the Israel of God? God has but one people of promise, one way of salvation.
4. Do you understand the blessings of being a child of promise—of being the true Israel of God? All the promises to Israel, are ours since we are united to Christ, the true seed of Abraham. We are joined to a great nation, innumerable people
1 Peter 2:9-10 NAS - "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God's* own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;
¹⁰ for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."