

# Who is Israel?

April 28, 2019

## Introduction

Gal 6:12-16 It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. (13) For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. (14) But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (15) For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. (16) And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the **Israel of God**.

From 2007 Shepherds Conference: “Why Every Self-Respecting Calvinist is a Premillennialist” concerning this passage:

*“The Bible calls God ‘the God of Israel’ over 200 times—the God of Israel. There are over 2000 references to Israel in Scripture. Not one of them means anything but Israel. Not one of them, including Romans 9:6 and Galatians 6:16, which are the only two passages that Amillennialists go to, to try to convince us that these passages cancel out the other 2000. There is no difficulty in interpreting those as simply meaning Jews who were believers, ‘the Israel of God’. Israel always means Israel; it never means anything but Israel. Seventy-three New Testament uses of Israel always mean Israel.”* – John MacArthur

Today, we will consider two things related to Israel:

- What is meant when Scripture uses the word “Israel”?
- In Galatians 6:16, is “the Israel of God” a separate group of people from “all who walk by this rule” – i.e. is the church separate from Israel?

**First, let’s consider the statement “Israel always means Israel; it never means anything but Israel”.**

### Israel is a Person

Gen 32:22-30 The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. (23) He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. (24) And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. (25) When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. (26) Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." (27) And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." (28) Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." (29) Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. (30) So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered."

### Israel is a Physical Nation Comprised of 12 Tribes

1Ki 4:1 King Solomon was king over all Israel,

### Israel is a Physical Nation Comprised of FEWER than 12 tribes

1Ki 11:11-13 Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. (12) Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. (13) However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen."

1Ki 14:21 Now Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city that the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonite.

Isa 7:1 In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it.

### **Israelites (those of Israel) are of the flesh**

Rom 9:3-4 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. (4) They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.

### **Israelites (those of Israel) are children of the promise**

Rom 9:6-8 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, (7) and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." (8) This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

**Question: If not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, then what does the first Israel mean? And what does the second Israel mean? And is the statement "Israel always means Israel" of value in answer either question?**

Answer: Israel means different things in different places, and we must consider both context and the analogy of faith (Scripture interpreting Scripture) to discern what is meant in each place.

**Now, let's consider Scripture to determine what is meant by the Israel of God in Galatians 6:16 and the Israel of Romans 9 to which not all descended from Israel belong.**

### **Consider the logical progression of Romans 9:**

- Paul has great sorrow for his kinsmen – fellow ethnic Jews
- His sorrow is due to their lack of faith in Christ
- But the fact that they lack faith even though they have all of the advantages of being Israelites does not mean that the word of God has failed.
- That's because physical heritage does not determine the children of Abraham – the promise to Abraham does.

Consider the terminology in verse 7 – children of Abraham. Given the logic of the passage, we see that Paul's ethnic Israelite kinsmen are not children of Abraham. They are Israelites, who in many passages are called the children of God, but are not called children of Abraham. Are children of God different than children of Abraham?

Mat 3:7-9 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (8) Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. (9) And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

**Are children of God a brood of vipers?**

Joh 8:39-44 They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, (40) but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. (41) You are doing the works your father did." They said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father--even God." (42) Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. (43) Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. (44) You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

**Consider what Jesus is saying here:**

- **These Jews are not Abraham's children**
- **These Jews are not God's children**
- **These Jews' father is the devil**

**This is consistent with Romans 9 – not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel – true Israel is made up of believers – those who do the works that Abraham did – those who believe God and obey him.**

**Consider the oneness in Scripture that describes believers**

Gal 3:28-29 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (29) And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Eph 2:11-16 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands-- (12) remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated 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 once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (14) For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility (15) by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, (16) and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

**In light of this oneness – the combining of what was previously two groups into one – let's go back to Galatians 6:12-16**

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- Galatians is written to condemn the false gospel that works (circumcision) must be added to faith in order for one to be saved.
- In Romans 4, Paul stresses that Abraham was justified by faith – not circumcision. The same way that believers in Christ are saved.
- This truth points to a commonality between OT believers and NT believers – salvation by grace, through faith.
- Israel has been, and always will be, believers – God's children = Abraham's children

- The use of the Greek word kai – translated “and” in most translations, could point to two groups – the church and Israel. But consider:
  - The whole context of Galatians is condemning those who consider themselves separate because of physical circumcision.
  - The preceding verse stresses that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything – but a new creation – and in Christ, we are all new creations – both Jew and Greek.
  - The analogy of faith points to one children of the promise – not two
  - The use of kai can just as easily be used to add emphasis to the first group mentioned such that we can understand the verse to mean: And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them – that is – the Israel of God.

## **Israel is the People of God: All Believers of all Time**

*“The Church is really the continuation of Israel.”* – Dr. Sam Waldron

- The church does not replace Israel. We do not hold to what is called “Replacement Theology” or “Secessionism”

## **Who is the “All Israel” of Romans 11?**

From “The Bible and the Future” by Anthony Hoekema, there are 3 Amillennial positions:

- The future national conversion of ethnic Israel
- All the elect from both Gentiles and Jews – i.e. spiritual Israel
- The total number of elect from ethnic Israel (Hoekema’s position)

Recommended Reading:

*The Bible and the Future:* Anthony A. Hoekema

*MacArthur’s Millennial Manifesto: a Friendly Response* by Samuel E. Waldron