

Israel and the Church

By Pastor Doug Baker, D.Min.

© Copyright 2020 by Doug Baker
All Rights Reserved

Introduction

Closely related to belief in the secret rapture is the teaching that the last-day Jewish people, as a whole, will eventually fulfill their original divine mission and be gloriously restored to God's favor in Jerusalem and the remaining territories first promised to Israel by God. This restoration will allegedly include both religious and political glory. This view is based on the very literal interpretation that all the Old Testament promises of restoration made to Israel must eventually be fulfilled to literal Israel, which means it will fulfill the Gospel Commission too. But the fact that Jesus gave the Gospel Commission to the Christian Church requires the conclusion that the Church Age must be a parenthesis lasting from the Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah until shortly before its acceptance of Him because it is recognized as axiomatic that God would not have two different groups with the same mission operating simultaneously in the world. Therefore, the Church must be removed from the earth so God can use Israel once again.

Because the New Testament clearly teaches a visible, audible Second Coming of Jesus, the Church must be removed (raptured) in a sudden and secret event so that those left behind will wonder in amazement how so many people could suddenly disappear. In the meantime, the prophetic clock regarding Israel has been on hold, and it will not resume ticking until after the secret rapture of the Church. In this way, consistency with the interpretation that literal Israel will resume its divine standing and mission requires the teaching of a secret rapture of the Church.

The sixteenth century Protestant Reformation identified the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church as the Antichrist of the apocalyptic prophecies. So a Jesuit priest named Francisco Ribera (died 1591) took some pressure off the Papacy by developing the theory that the Antichrist would not arise until near the end of the age in the far future. He said the Antichrist would be an evil person opposed to Christianity who would rebuild Jerusalem and persecute Christians as the world's dictator for a period of 3 ½ literal years. This Catholic teaching, which helped to counteract the successes of the new Protestant movement, foreshadowed at least a major part of the modern popular teaching about Israel, the Church, and the secret rapture, although Ribera himself did not teach a secret rapture.

So completely did Protestant Christianity hold to its roots on this matter—that the Papacy was the Antichrist—that it became known as *the* Protestant position, which it remained for more than 300 years. Then in the nineteenth century, a leader in the Brethern movement in England named John Nelson Darby developed a dispensational view of history. Darby taught the essence of the modern popular view, that the Antichrist would be a charismatic, atheistic individual who would arrive on the world scene only after the rapture of the Church; he would make, then break, a treaty (or covenant) with the Jews, who would then be converted to Christianity. In turn, 144,000 Jews would evangelize the world, giving people a second chance at salvation. After that, Jesus would return in His visible, audible Second Coming, defeat the Antichrist, and establish His millennial kingdom on earth. At some point during this time of great tribulation, the Temple would be rebuilt in Jerusalem.

An American preacher and teacher, Cyrus I. Scofield, first published his Scofield Reference Bible in 1909, which made this dispensational perspective increasingly popular among American evangelical Protestant Christians. Then the creation of the modern nation of Israel in 1948 and Jewish control over the old portion of Jerusalem after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War were seen as confirmation of this popular teaching and of the imminent occurrence of the secret rapture. Since then, belief in a dispensational interpretation of the end-time prophecies, including the secret rapture and the role of modern Israel in those prophecies, has become quite dominant, although not universal, among conservative evangelical believers and even popular among most Protestants in general. In addition, these believers have increasingly sought to influence American policies toward an even stronger pro-Israeli position in the Middle East.

In a previous paper we discovered that there is no support in Scripture for a secret rapture. The positive relationship between that teaching and the doctrine that literal Israel will be restored to her divine standing and mission before the audible, visible Second Coming of Jesus suggests that the latter may also be inaccurate. Nevertheless, in this paper we examine that evidence, which will revolve around the significance of the name *Israel*, the relationship of the nation of Israel and the Messiah, the covenant context within which God's promises were made to Israel, the 70th week of Daniel 9's 70 Weeks prophecy, and the testimony of the New Testament regarding the relationship of Israel and the Christian Church.

The Name Israel

The name Israel was first applied to Abraham's grandson Jacob after he had wrestled all night with the Lord. The story, recorded in Genesis 32, is set in the context of Jacob's return (with his large family and flocks) from his Uncle Laban's home near Haran in the north to his own land in Canaan. Jacob had fled to Uncle Laban after deceiving his brother Esau in order to obtain the special

blessing from his father Isaac. Then after working for his uncle for 20 years, Jacob was returning home, although he was worried that his brother Esau might kill him. The passage says that Jacob wrestled with an unknown person *until the breaking of day* (Genesis 32:24). As dawn approached, Jacob refused to end his struggle until the man blessed him. At that point, he was told that he had been struggling with God Himself. It was then that the Lord changed Jacob's name to Israel *for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed* (v. 28).

The name Israel is derived from two Hebrew words: *el* [God] and *sarah* [to prevail or to have power (as a prince)]. Thus, Israel means *he contends [prevails, has power] with God*. In this way, it is clearly seen that Israel is primarily a spiritual name given to someone who is a spiritual overcomer.

Jesus Christ (Messiah) is the Ultimate Israel

It is both interesting and significant that the Old Testament uses references to God's *servant* and to God's *son* interchangeably with both the nation of Israel (the descendants of Jacob/Israel) and the Messiah.

Representative examples of the term *servant* are shown below; the verses in parenthesis are those that specifically contain the reference to Messiah as Israel:

Nation of Israel

Isaiah 41:8-9
Isaiah 42:18-25 (19)
Isaiah 43:10
Isaiah 44:1-2, 21, 26
Isaiah 45:4
Isaiah 48:20
Jeremiah 30:10
Jeremiah 46:27-28
Ezekiel 28:25
Ezekiel 37:25

Messiah

Isaiah 42:1-9 (1)
Isaiah 49:1-13 (3, 5, 6, 7)
Isaiah 50:4-11 (10)
Isaiah 52:13 (13)-53:12 (11)
Ezekiel 34:23-24
Zechariah 3:8

A thorough check of the context in each of the above passages demonstrates that God's *servant* is referring either to the nation of Israel or to the Messiah. Someone may object to Ezekiel 34:23-24, which refers to David as God's servant. However, King David had long been dead when Ezekiel lived and wrote his prophetic book. But the Messiah would sit on David's throne, whose

kingdom would never end (Isaiah 9:6-7). In fact, Jeremiah 30:9 calls this future king David. Therefore, Ezekiel 34:23-24 is indeed speaking about the Messiah.

Now please note the following references to the nation of Israel and the Messiah as God's son:

Nation of Israel

Messiah

Exodus 4:22

Matthew 3:17

Matthew 3:17 is God's voice directed toward Jesus the Messiah at the latter's baptism by John the Baptist. This text echoes both Psalm 2:7 (*You are My Son*) and Isaiah 42:1 (*My Elect One in whom My soul delights!*).

This Biblical usage of interchangeably referring to the nation of Israel and the Messiah as God's *servant* and His *Son* strongly suggests that the Messiah is ultimate Israel Himself, a fact that naturally follows from the realization that the name *Israel* is primarily a spiritual name. Does this tentative conclusion find any support in the New Testament? Yes, it clearly does. In Galatians 3, the apostle Paul wrote about the promises made to Abraham and his seed (descendants). In verse 16 Paul alludes to Genesis 12:7, 13:15, and 24:7, in which God promised Abraham and his seed that they would inherit the land of Canaan. But the apostle takes great pains to emphasize that God did not say, *And to seeds, as of many, but as of one, And to your Seed, who is Christ*. Thus, Galatians 3 teaches that Jesus was *the Seed* (singular) of Abraham, that He is the ultimate One in whom the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob find their complete fulfillment.

He made essentially the same point in II Corinthians 1:20: *For all the promises of God in Him [Christ] are Yes*. In other words, Christ is the fulfillment of all the promises of God. So if Jesus is the spiritual connection to Abraham as *the Seed*, then He must also be the spiritual connection to Jacob as *the Israel*. Therefore, Jesus is the ultimate Israel, which is why anyone in Christ is an Israelite and an heir according to the promise made to Abraham, a conclusion the apostle explicitly declares in Galatians 3:29: *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*. This understanding is confirmed in Romans 2:28-29: *For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly...but he is a Jew who is one inwardly*. See also Romans 4:16, where Abraham is called the spiritual father of all who accept Christ; and those who have the faith of Abraham are also called *the seed*.

The Covenant Context

The word for *covenant* essentially means a *promise*, which may be one-way (unconditional) or

two-way (conditional). At the formal covenant ceremony with the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai, the people answered with one voice and said, *'All the words which the Lord has said we will do'* (Exodus 24:3). This was the equivalent of the bride saying, *'I do'* at her wedding. Thus, the concept of a covenant between God and His people is spiritually analogous to a marriage between a husband and wife. This is the reason that Israel is often referred to as the Lord's bride and the reason that He accused them of spiritual adultery in going after other lovers when they rebelled against Him (Isaiah 1:21; 49:18; 62:5; Jeremiah 2:32; 3:1-10; Ezekiel 16:15, 20-22, 26, 28; 32-34; chapter 23; Hosea 1:2; 3:1; 4:11-12; and 5:4). As with the analogy of marriage, God's covenant relationship with Israel represented a two-way agreement, with each "partner" promising love and loyalty. But unlike a literal marriage, this covenant was not made between equal partners. Instead, God was clearly the superior partner, and thus Israel was required to promise obedience to God in recognition of His supreme authority.

The Old Testament plainly teaches that the continuation of God's covenant with Israel was conditional upon her continued faithfulness to Him as reflected in obedience to His revealed will. The following texts explicitly demonstrate the conditionality of God's promises to Israel:

- Exodus 19:5—*If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people.*
- Isaiah 1:19—*If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land.*
- Jeremiah 7:23—*Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people* (cf. Jeremiah 11:4).
- Jeremiah 17:24-25—*If you heed Me carefully...this city [Jerusalem] shall remain forever* (cf. Jeremiah 26:3).
- Zechariah 1:3—*Return to Me...and I will return to you.*
- Zechariah 6:15—*And this [the glories of a restored Temple] shall come to pass if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God.*

The book of Deuteronomy consists mostly of Moses' farewell speech to the nation of Israel before his death and their subsequent entrance into the promised land of Canaan. Chapter 28, near the end of his address, consists entirely of a list of God's promised blessings if Israel as a whole remained faithful and obedient to Him and a list of His promised curses if the nation turned its back on Him. Perhaps it is significant that the promised blessings are contained only within the

first 14 verses, while the promised curses occupy the remaining 54 verses. Was God trying to tell Israel something about its future history through Moses? Indeed, common sense suggests that if this covenant was in fact conditional upon Israel's obedience, then it must be possible that someday Israel could go beyond the point of national return away from the covenant relationship with God, in which case they would be divorced from God.

This is precisely what happened with the northern kingdom of Israel, reflected in her complete annihilation as a nation by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Note the Lord's own words spoken by the prophet Jeremiah about the northern kingdom of Israel: *Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce* (Jeremiah 3:8). Since this tragic spiritual divorce from God's covenant happened to Israel, then it must have been possible for the same tragic divorce to take place between God and the southern kingdom of Judah, despite her repeated cycles of leaving Him and then returning to Him in Old Testament history.

Despite these facts, there are well-meaning scholars, both Jewish and Christian, who believe that God chose to deal differently with Judah, and therefore the modern nation of Israel as her descendant nation is immune to a divorce from God. Often this is based on the statement of Jeremiah 32:39-40, which promised that nation a new, everlasting covenant in which God *will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me*. The immediate context of this passage concerns the return of the Jewish captives from Babylon, as a check of verses 28 and 44 make particularly clear. Advocates of the "literal Israel" thesis believe that this promise was not completely fulfilled at the end of the Babylonian Captivity, but they assert that it will be fulfilled someday in the near future. However, the language and literary structure of the passage closely associates the everlasting covenant with its promise of the Jews not departing from God with the restoration of the Jews to the land of Israel:

I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely (v. 37).

They shall be My people, and I will be their God (v. 38).

I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever (v. 39)

I will make an everlasting covenant with them...I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me (v. 40).

for I will cause their captives to return (v. 44).

The literary structure above reveals that God's promise of the everlasting covenant that would change the Jewish people so that they would not depart from Him (vv. 38-40) is sandwiched between the repeated promise that they would return to Jerusalem from their Babylonian Captivity (vv. 37, 42-44). Thus, the only viable conclusion is that just as God did indeed return them to Jerusalem after the end of that captivity, He also began His everlasting covenant with them at the same time. Although part of God's promise was that Judah would *dwell safely* (v. 37) in their former homeland, yet the Greeks and then the Romans later conquered their land in Palestine, ultimately leading to another Jewish diaspora to foreign lands in A.D. 70. Furthermore, the Jewish people as a whole did indeed eventually depart from God and reject the Messiah. Therefore, we must either conclude that God is fickle and broke His promise to preserve them faithful to Him or that Jewish disobedience altered His promises so that they could not be fulfilled while allowing God to remain just at the same time. We prefer to conclude that the latter is the case, especially when it is consistent with Biblical language referring to God's covenant promises as conditional.

Not coincidentally, the conditional statements of God's blessings in both Zechariah 1:3 and 6:15, shown above, were given to the Jewish people who had already returned to Jerusalem following the end of the Babylonian Captivity, proving conclusively that the promises of the new, everlasting covenant in Jeremiah 32 were in fact conditional upon the people's willingness to let God give them a new heart and to let Him keep it within them.

Furthermore, Ezra, the scribe who led many Jews back to Jerusalem at the close of the Babylonian Captivity, did not understand Jeremiah's prophecy as guaranteeing their covenant status with God regardless of what they did. In His public prayer before the people after he learned about their widespread marriages to heathen women, Ezra said the following: *should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people of these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor* (Ezra 9:14). His inspired prayer implies that the Jewish nation would no longer be God's covenant community if it proved to be disloyal to Him after the end of the Babylonian Captivity. In other words, it was possible for the nation to pass beyond the boundaries of their national probation.

The end result of our study of Jeremiah 32-39-40 is that Judah was not an exception in how God deals with His people. Therefore, what happened to the northern kingdom of Israel (divorce from God) *could* possibly happen to the southern kingdom of Judah as well. In fact, to say otherwise is to accuse God of playing favorites (Judah over Israel), and thereby abandoning His attribute of perfect justice. While God is certainly also perfect love personified, His love cannot be properly used to diminish His justice, or any other attribute for that matter. In fact, God proves His infinite justice and love by informing us that His promises of blessings and curses are conditionally given to *any* nation, as Jeremiah 18:7-10 testifies:

The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to

pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.

The 70th Week of Daniel 9's 70 Weeks Prophecy

The 70 Weeks prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 is the prophetic example most commonly used to defend the Church Age gap in prophetic history. We agree with these scholars that this prophecy pointed forward to the first coming of Jesus as the Messiah (see our paper entitled “The 70 Weeks Prophecy of Daniel 9”). However, we cannot agree with the assertion that the 70th week is cut off from the previous 69 weeks of the prophecy and that it applies to a period of seven years immediately after the rapture of the church, at the end of which is the audible, visible Second Coming of Jesus. This popular view says, then, that the 70 Weeks prophecy skips the entire Christian Era (Church Age) by moving directly from the crucifixion of Jesus the Messiah to the final great tribulation. This approach to the prophecy is known as dispensational futurism and represents the most popular view among conservative evangelical Christians today.

This view is based partly on the interpretation that the pronoun *he* in verse 27 refers to the Antichrist, who is allegedly the same as *the prince who is to come* (v. 26). He is considered to be the Antichrist because he is associated with ending sacrifices and offerings and with abominations...[that] makes desolate (v. 27). He also allegedly will make a covenant (or treaty) with Israel and then will break it before his final end at the hands of Jesus.

However, several lines of evidence contradict this modern, popular interpretation. First, there is a major difficulty in identifying the *he* of verse 27 with the *prince* of verse 26. In verse 26, the emphasis is on *the people of the prince* rather than on the prince himself. Thus, it would be awkward to make *he* refer to *prince*. Furthermore, the phrase *the people of the prince* implies that the people somehow belonged to this prince. These *people* are said to *destroy the city [Jerusalem] and the sanctuary*. Because that event occurred in A.D. 70, the prince to whom they belonged must have lived at that time. So how could this prince, therefore, live more than 1,900 years and become the end-time Antichrist?

Rather than viewing the *he* as a reference to the *prince*, it would seem more natural to see it as referring to the last-mentioned person who had been specifically emphasized. That person was the Messiah. If this interpretation is correct, then the prophecy is emphasizing that the Jewish people as a whole were guilty of destroying their own city because of their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.

Our interpretation is confirmed by the following literary pattern of verses 25-27, in which the prophecy alternates between a focus on the city of Jerusalem and on the Messiah:

- A to restore and build Jerusalem
- B until Messiah the Prince
- A shall be 7 weeks
- B and 62 weeks
- A the street shall be built again...
- B and after 62 weeks Messiah shall be cut off...
- A the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary
- B he shall confirm a covenant with many for 1 week

In the pattern above, each A line is specifically associated with the city of Jerusalem, while each B line is specifically associated with the Messiah. That requires the conclusion that the *he* in the last B line (v. 27) is none other than the Messiah, not the Antichrist.

Second, the crucifixion of Jesus brought an end to the significance of sacrifices and offerings in the Hebrew sanctuary system, as taught by the book of Hebrews, the statement that He was the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36), and the fact that the Temple veil between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place was torn in half from top to bottom at the moment He died (Matthew 27:50-51).

Third, the Hebrew verb for *shall confirm* in verse 27 means *to be strong*. Some modern translators interpret it as *he shall make a strong covenant* rather than *he shall confirm a covenant*. But as a verb, *shall make strong* does not naturally modify the noun *covenant*; an adjective would be needed instead. Thus, the accurate literal translation is *he shall make strong a covenant*, which means that *he shall confirm a covenant*. Furthermore, the Old Testament consistently uses the idiom *to cut a covenant* when describing the making of a covenant, as in Genesis 15:18. Such an idiom is entirely absent from this passage. On the other hand, Jesus' earthly ministry confirmed that God is a covenant-keeping God, who kept His promise to send the divine-human Messiah to redeem anyone who chooses to follow Him from his sins.

Finally, there is no compelling reason to separate the 70th week from the other 69 weeks any more than there is a reason to separate the 7 weeks and the 62 weeks. Therefore, the entire 70 weeks is a single unit of time, and the attempt to split the last week off from the other weeks in this prophecy is a purely arbitrary act that defies the contextual evidence.

The New Testament on Israel and the Church

The Christian Church is the New Israel

In a conversation with some Jewish religious leaders recorded in Matthew 21, Jesus predicted that *the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it* (v. 43). According to I Peter 2:9, the new nation to whom the kingdom of God was given is the Christian Church. Specifically, Peter paraphrased part of the Lord's words to ancient Israel given through Moses at the time that God sealed the covenant with them at Mt. Sinai. On that occasion, God had declared that Israel was *a kingdom of priests and a holy nation* (Exodus 19:6). Peter applied those words and Jesus' own statement that God's kingdom would be given to another nation, namely the Christian Church, by telling Christians that *you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation*. Therefore, the church is God's *holy nation* since the rejection of Jesus and the gospel by the Jewish nation as a whole. It is not a political nation, of course, but a religious nation. The fact that the Christian Church is the New Israel naturally follows from Paul's statements about individual Christian believers being Jews (spiritual Jews—Romans 2:28-29; 4:16), for if individual Christians are the *Jews* who count as the true people of God, then it follows that the Christian Church as a whole would be the New Israel.

Amos 9:11-12 contains a prophecy of the restored dynasty of King David at the time of Israel's future restoration: *On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages...and rebuild it as in the days of old* (v. 11). Remember that David's son Solomon, not David, built the First Temple. Thus, the expression *the tabernacle of David* refers to the restoration of his dynasty. During the first Christian Church Council, held in Jerusalem, the apostle James quoted that prophecy from Amos 9 and directly applied its prediction of the restored Davidic kingdom to the Christian Church. Note James' statement below:

And after they [Paul & Barnabas] had become silent, James answered, saying, 'Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:

After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things' (Acts 15:13-17).

The Christian Church is the Permanent New Israel

The New Testament evidence briefly outlined in the previous few paragraphs clearly teach that the

Christian Church constitutes spiritual Israel, or New Israel. The supporters of the dispensational secret rapture theory agree that the Christian Church is *now* spiritual Israel, but they argue that this is only temporary until the rapture, after which will come the final tribulation and then the restoration of literal Israel in the Messianic millennial kingdom of Christ on earth. However, there are at least three lines of evidence from Scripture which refute the “temporary New Israel” theory and establish the reality that the Christian Church is the permanent New Israel.

First, in Old Testament history, God never made a covenant with any other nation during any of the times that Israel wandered from Him, as she did many times in her history. Of course, we have seen that God finally divorced the northern kingdom of Israel by at least 722 B.C. Then God attempted to work His spiritual marriage out with the southern kingdom of Judah for several more centuries. But the fact that God eventually made a covenant with the Christian Church in calling it to be His chosen instrument in the world strongly implies that God recognized that the nation of Judah had become divorced from Him around the time of her rejection of Jesus as the Messiah or shortly thereafter.

Because God’s covenant with His people is like a marriage, God must have been divorced from Judah before He “married” the Christian Church. This would account for Jesus’ tearful statement in Matthew 23:37-38 that because Jerusalem had rejected His loving care, therefore, *Your house is left to you desolate*. Although remarriage to the same partner is possible after a divorce, the fact that this spiritual divorce took place after centuries of a mostly stormy “marriage” implies that this divorce may have been final and irrevocable. This reasoning seems confirmed by the historical analogy that after God divorced the northern kingdom of Israel, He never “remarried” her. Besides, if and when God finally gives up on a nation, which has already given up on Him first, His outstanding character and foreknowledge of the future automatically means that He knows any further efforts to revitalize the relationship would prove fruitless.

Second, the teaching of Revelation 5:5 that Jesus is *the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David* is very significant for our discussion here. Obviously, this is a reference to Jesus because verses 6-10, 12-14 tell how the Lamb who was slain was worthy to open the scroll described in that chapter, and verse 5 had made the point that *the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll*. Of course, Jesus is the Lamb, according to John 1:29, 36. Since both metaphors apply to the same being, then that being is Jesus. Reference to the *Lion of the tribe of Judah* is based on the promise of rulership for the tribe of Judah, with a strong indication that this would culminate in the kingdom of the Messiah (Genesis 49:9-10). The *Root of David* is drawn from Isaiah 11:1, 10, where the prophecy foretells that a *Root of Jesse* will reign in righteousness over the entire earth (vv. 4, 9). This literal, physical reign of the Messiah on earth will begin at the end of the millennium, which will be 1,000 years after the Second Coming of Jesus. That Isaiah 11's prophecy refers to this literal reign is proved in two ways: (1) verse 4 says this king will *strike the earth with the rod of His mouth*, which is what Jesus will do at His Second

Coming (Revelation 19:15); and (2) verse 4 also declares that *with the breath of His lips He [this king] shall slay the wicked*, which II Thessalonians 2:8 says Jesus will do at His return to the Antichrist. Jesse was the father of the Israelite King David (I Samuel 16:10-13; Matthew 1:5-6), and Jesus was a descendant of both Judah and David (Matthew 1:3-16). See also Romans 15:12, where the apostle Paul quotes from Isaiah 11:10 and applies the prophetic *root of Jesse* to Jesus (Romans 15:8). Therefore, Jesus is the *Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David* whose literal kingdom will constitute the rebuilding of the literal dynasty of King David because Jesus is a literal human descendant of David.

Third, the Lord had promised King David in II Samuel 7:12-17 and I Chronicles 17:11-15 that his kingdom and throne would be established forever through his descendants. Although it did not literally last forever—which in itself is evidence supporting the conditionality of God’s promises to Old Testament Israel—the prophet Amos predicted that it would eventually be re-established (Amos 9:11, quoted above). A careful reading of Revelation 5:9-10, just a few verses after Jesus was introduced as the *Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David*, reveals that He re-established that kingdom as a result of His victory at the cross. Note that the best Greek manuscripts for verse 10 read *a kingdom* rather than *kings*. A check of Revelation 1:5-6 removes all doubt about the fact that Jesus’ kingdom was already established when the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation; and earthly Christian believers were already in that kingdom. Therefore, this kingdom is the spiritual kingdom called the Christian Church. And because chapter 5 refers to Jesus as the *Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David*, it is evident that the Christian Church constitutes the re-establishment of the Davidic kingdom. Of course, the literal, physical Davidic kingdom will be restored after the millennium, as stated in the previous paragraph. Certainly it would be contrary to all logic to admit this fact and then maintain that between the spiritual phase and the literal phase of the re-established Davidic kingdom, God will re-establish the Davidic kingdom of literal Judah because when Jesus establishes His kingdom, it will exist throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity, and not be interrupted by another alleged Davidic kingdom.

For all the reasons outlined above, we conclude that the Christian Church is the permanent New Israel.

New Testament Israel Passages Confirm Loss of Prophetic Significance

Belief that the Jewish nation would someday be restored as God’s organized covenant community, rebuild its Temple, and be the intended victim of the Antichrist has been buttressed by the interpretations given to at least six specific major passages in the New Testament. These passages are briefly addressed here in the chronological order in which they appear in Scripture.

Matthew 24:15

In Jesus' discourse on the Mount of Olives shortly before His crucifixion, He answered His apostles' questions about the destruction of Jerusalem and *the end of the age* (Matthew 24:3). Of course, the destruction of Jerusalem predicted by Jesus in Matthew 23:38-24:2 occurred in A.D. 70 at the hands of the Romans, while *the end of the age* has not yet arrived early in the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, He mingled a discussion of both events in His discourse.

Matthew 24:15 reads as follows: *Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place.* This text is seized upon to prove that the Temple [*holy place*] will be rebuilt in Jerusalem, an event which is in turn understood to imply the restoration of Israel to *covenant community* status with God. However, this text does not prove that Jerusalem will regain prophetic significance or that the Temple will be rebuilt before the return of Jesus.

One standard rule of interpretation for any literature is to check if there is a parallel passage to help explain the one you are studying. Actually, there are two parallel passages to Matthew 24:15: (1) Mark 13:14 and (2) Luke 21:20. While Mark 13:14 is a close restatement of the Matthew passage, Luke 21:20 provides a clearer explanation by mentioning the [Roman] armies which destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70 at the very point where Matthew has *abomination of desolation*. In the context of Matthew 24 about the end of the world and the return of Jesus, the *abomination of desolation* would clearly be a type of a later idolatrous power that would arise long after the Romans of A.D. 66-70. But according to the parallel of Luke 21:20, the primary meaning is to Jerusalem's destruction in the first century A.D., not the end of time. In any case, because the destruction of Jerusalem in the first century is here used as a type of the destruction of the world at the end-time, Jerusalem represents the entire world in its end-time application. Therefore, whatever the end-time application of the *abomination of desolation* is, it says nothing about the literal city itself or a restored Temple.

Luke 21:24

Luke 21:24 says in part that *Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*. Many conservative scholars have taken this to mean that in 1948 (the creation of the modern nation of Israel), or 1967 (when Israel began occupying the old portion of Jerusalem), the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled. But did either of those events actually mark the end of the times of the Gentiles? Concerning the Israeli occupation of old Jerusalem in 1967, it must be remembered that, just as in modern times, cities in the Bible often represent the entire ethnic people of a nation, such as the frequent references to the city of Babylon as representing the entire Babylonian kingdom, with its ethnic people. It is also a historical fact that Jews everywhere, not just those in the city of Jerusalem, were persecuted by the Romans about the time of that city's

destruction in A.D. 70, which verse 20 is universally recognized as predicting. Note also that verse 21 warns all those who live in *Judea*, and verse 23 refers to *great distress in the land and wrath upon this people*. Thus, the clause *Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles* refers to a time of trouble for the Jewish people as a whole, not exclusively for the Jews in Jerusalem itself.

But what about the 1948 establishment of Israel? Verse 24 refers to Jews being *led away captive into all nations* as well as Jerusalem being *trampled by Gentiles*. Does this mean that the dispersion of the Jews resulting from the Roman persecution of the first century A.D. had ended in 1948, thus fulfilling the *times of the Gentiles*? It is of great significance to note that even more than 70 years after the 1948 creation of modern Israel, the vast majority of Jews live outside Israel in other nations. Thus, it is not necessary to conclude that the existence of modern Israel has ended *the times of the Gentiles*.

Even more importantly, the Greek text literally reads that this persecution would last *until times of Gentiles are fulfilled*, without the definite article *the* before either the word *times* or *Gentiles*. According to New Testament Greek grammar, the significance of this is that the period of time designated to Gentiles is not a definite one. It has a definite beginning, of course, in A.D. 70, but thus it has no definite end until the Second Coming of Jesus, which is the culminating event in Jesus' prophecy here (Luke 21:25-28). This means that Jesus was predicting that the Jewish people as a whole would suffer persecution from the time near Jerusalem's destruction by the Romans in A.D. 70 until the Second Coming of Jesus. Besides, surely no one can successfully argue that Gentile harassment and/or persecution of the Jewish people ended in 1948, 1967, or even in our current day. Therefore, neither the creation of the modern nation of Israel in 1948 nor the Israeli occupation of the old part of the city of Jerusalem since 1967 has fulfilled the end of *times of Gentiles*.

Romans 11:26

The statement in Romans 11:26, *and so all Israel will be saved* is often interpreted as a prediction that literal Israel will be restored to God's "Most Favored Nation" status before Jesus returns. But is it? Paul argues in Romans chapters 9-11 that literal Israel's rejection of the gospel proved beneficial to the Gentiles because it allowed Christians to bring the gospel to them. In chapter 11 he specifically insists that God is not through with Israel. But remember that we have already seen that God must have been divorced from Judah before He "married" the Christian Church. This fact suggests that, while God had divorced the *nation* of Judah (representing Israel), He had not abandoned the Jewish *people* as *individuals*.

Our tentative conclusion is confirmed by the fact that Paul uses the metaphor of an olive tree to explain the eventual resurgence of the Jewish people. Both Gentiles and Jews are grafted onto the one olive tree so that together they constitute the olive tree as representing the entire people of

God, both Gentile and Jewish Christians. Therefore, while Romans 11:26 does imply that the major portion of Jews will accept Jesus as the Messiah-Savior in the end-time, it says nothing about the restoration of the political nation of Israel. Instead, the apostle echoes the same bottom line that he makes in Ephesians 2, where he declared that Jesus' death on the cross *has made both [Jews and Gentiles] one, ...has broken down the middle wall of division between us, ...and...reconcile[d] them both to God in one body [Christian Church]* (Ephesians 2:14, 16).

II Thessalonians 2:3-4

II Thessalonians 2:3-4's reference to the *man of sin sitting in the temple of God* has often been interpreted to mean that the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt before the end-time and have end-time significance in God's plan. However, very good evidence exists which contradicts that conclusion. The man of lawlessness (literal Greek), also called *the son of perdition*, is widely and correctly understood to be the Antichrist. Reference is also made to *the falling away*, a term translated from a Greek word from which the English word *apostasy* is derived. This Greek word is used in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) to refer to a rebellion against God among God's own professed people. And the title *son of perdition* appears elsewhere in Scripture only in John 17:12, where it refers to Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus from within His own ranks. Finally, the word *lawlessness* may certainly be applied to a rebellion. Therefore, the designations of *the man of sin [lawlessness]* and the *son of perdition* clearly identify the Antichrist here as the leader of this spiritual rebellion.

Since Paul is speaking to Christians, the rebellion must be within the Christian Church. A literal Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, even if it were rebuilt, would hardly be the headquarters for an apostate Christian leader, for how would he lead other Christians to follow him from such a headquarters? However, I Corinthians 3:16-17 applies the word *temple* to the Christian Church, which must be its meaning here because of the context we have just outlined. By the way, please note that Paul is saying in II Thessalonians 2:1-4 that the return of Jesus and the *gathering together to Him* (v. 1, the rapture) will not occur until after the Antichrist makes his appearance first, thus providing additional evidence that the pre-tribulation rapture theory is false.

Even if a Third Temple is built it would have no spiritual significance for Christians and could not properly be called the temple of God because all earthly temples lost their significance when Jesus died as the Lamb of God and the veil between the Holy and Most Holy Place was torn by an unseen hand from top to bottom (Matthew 27:50-51). Therefore, the question of any rebuilt Third Temple is a mute one because it would not have any standing with God.

Revelation 7 and 14

References to 144,000 Israelites in Revelation 7 and 14 are interpreted by many conservative

scholars as representing 144,000 literal Jews (or Israelites) who fulfill God's plan for the end-time, either as evangelists who convert others to Jesus or who fulfill God's plan in some other way. But it is significant to note that John only *heard* the number 144,000 sealed (Revelation 7:4), whereas when he *looked* (v. 9), he saw *a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues* (v. 9). Of greater importance is the conversation (in vision) which John had with one of heaven's elders, recorded in verses 13-17. The elder asked John for the identity of those who were *arrayed in white robes* (v. 13), whom John had already seen in vision as the great multitude (v. 9). Of course, the elder already knew who they were because he lived in heaven, as indicated by John's reply, *Sir, you know* (v. 14). This first part of their conversation tells us that the elder was attempting to get John to see something so obvious that he had missed it.

When the elder told the apostle that these people *are the ones who come out of the great tribulation* he obviously meant that they were those who survive the final great tribulation at the end-time, for surely *the great tribulation* in Revelation refers to the last one at the end-time. A check of Revelation 6:17-7:4 shows that the 144,000 *Israelites* were sealed precisely in order to spare them from God's wrath at the end-time. Therefore, they are the ones who survive the end-time tribulation on God's side and are thus saved at the Second Coming of Jesus. In other words, the 144,000 and the *great multitude* are the same people seen from two different perspectives so that the latter is a literal description of the former. Among other things, this shows that the number 144,000 is symbolic rather than literal.

This conclusion is reinforced by the description of the 144,000 in chapter 14. While this same group is said to have the seal of God on their foreheads in Revelation 7:2-3, they are described as having the name of God the Father on their foreheads in Revelation 14:1. Revelation 14:4 further describes the 144,000 as *not defiled with women...virgins...who follow the Lamb [Christ] wherever He goes*. Because chapter 7 identifies the 144,000 as those who are sealed in order to be preserved through the final great tribulation, a literal interpretation would require the conclusion that God will have only and exactly 144,000 Jewish male virgins living to be saved when Jesus returns at His Second Coming. Moreover, they would consist of exactly 12,000 from each tribe, most of whom no longer exist [the 10 lost tribes of Israel are not lost in the sense that we do not know where they are, but in the sense that they have disappeared in history through intermarriage with other peoples]. Because such a conclusion is ludicrous, we are compelled to view their description as Jewish male virgins to actually mean that they are *spiritual* Jews (Christians) who have not committed spiritual fornication with the end-time spiritual harlot known in Revelation as Babylon (Revelation 14:8; 17:2; 18:3, 9; 19:2).

Revelation 11:1-2

Revelation 11:1-2 mentions *the temple of God* and states that *Gentiles...will tread the holy city under foot for forty-two months*. This passage is often understood by conservative scholars to

mean that the Temple will be rebuilt and that Jerusalem will regain prophetic significance before or during the end-time. What is the Biblical evidence? Excluding Revelation 11:1-2, the Greek word for *temple* used here appears 14 times in 11 verses in Revelation: (1) as the Christian Church (3:12) because every believer is a pillar in the temple; (2) as the sanctuary in heaven (7:15; 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5-6, 8; 16:1; 16:17); and (3) as God and Christ (21:22). Significantly, it never refers to the Jerusalem Temple on earth.

The expression *holy city* appears 3 times in Revelation outside 11:2 (21:2; the Greek text of 21:10; 22:19), where the context (in light of 21:2) makes it the New Jerusalem, not the earthly Jerusalem. Note also the related expression, *the city of My God* (3:12), is specifically called New Jerusalem, meaning that earthly Jerusalem is no longer God's city. Consistent with this evidence, the *beloved city* in 20:9 should also be interpreted as the New Jerusalem.

The usages of the words for *temple* and *holy city* in the book of Revelation, then, require the conclusion that Revelation 11:1-2 is definitely not speaking about either the Middle Eastern city of Jerusalem or a rebuilt Temple there. So what do those terms mean in 11:1-2? It is clear that only wicked forces could be portrayed as treading *the holy city* underfoot. Indeed, references to both the 42 months, with its parallel periods of 3 ½ times and 1,260 days, and to *treading* language are applied by the Scriptures to military conquest or to persecution of God's faithful people, according to a check of Revelation 11:3, 12:6, 14, 13:5, Daniel 7:7, 19, 21, 23-25, and 8:7, 10, 12-13, 23-25. Since the wicked cannot possibly tread underfoot the New Jerusalem, that city must represent God's faithful *people* here instead, as cities often do represent entire groups of people.

Conclusion on Israel

The New Testament's conclusion regarding Israel and the Church is perhaps best summed up in the apostle Paul's testimony in Ephesians 2:11-16. Discussing the relationship between Gentiles and Jews, Paul declared that Jesus *has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation* [metaphorical reference to the literal wall in the Jerusalem Temple which kept Gentile worshipers separate from Jews],...*so as to create in Himself one new man from the two...and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body [the Church] through the cross*. Therefore, to assert that God will once again treat Jews and Gentiles as distinct and different peoples—by teaching that literal Israel will once again be His special people—is to violate one of the purposes of the cross of Christ.

This popular teaching about modern Israel allows Satan to invent counterfeit scenarios in the Middle East, such as a counterfeit Armageddon, for example. It also detracts attention and draws off energy away from the true, spiritual Israel toward various sensational theories which vary with current events. All of this has implications for misidentifying the end-time Antichrist and being lost through deception. Note the ominous words of the apostle Paul in the very context of Satanic

deception concerning the end-times:

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (II Thessalonians 2:9-12).

Final Conclusion

The popular view today among conservative evangelical Protestant Christians is that there will be a secret rapture of the Church followed by the final tribulation. This last tribulation period will feature the emergence of the Antichrist and a restored Temple in Jerusalem. At the end of seven years, Jesus will return in glory in His visible, audible Second Coming to defeat the Antichrist and establish His millennial reign on earth. While arising in the nineteenth century, part of this view's roots lie in the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation's effort to divert focus from the Papacy as the historical Antichrist. The 1948 creation of modern Israel and the 1967 Jewish military occupation of the old part of Jerusalem have both been seen as confirmation of this prophetic interpretation. However, we have discovered that there is no Biblical support for this position, as illustrated in the following summary of the major evidence:

- God invented the name *Israel* and gave it primarily as a spiritual name.
- Jesus as the Messiah is the ultimate Israel in whom all the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), and their spiritual descendants will be fulfilled. Therefore, everyone who is truly in Christ is an Israelite and an heir to the promises made originally to Abraham.
- God's promises to literal Israel were conditional upon their faithfulness to Him in the covenant (spiritual marriage) context.
- Literal Israel failed their national probation period in the 70 Weeks Prophecy by its rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and His gospel.
- The Christian Church is the permanent New Israel of the New Testament because literal Israel's rejection of the Messiah and His gospel constitute a divorce from God.
- The popular teaching must represent an attempt by Satan to deceive Christians into

being unprepared for the final events in human history.

- It is imperative that all Christians study and understand the major issues involved in Satan's end-time deceptions, including the subject of the mark of the beast (Revelation 13).

Please understand that nothing written in this paper is meant to encourage or justify anti-Semitism. God loves the Jewish people as much as He loves the rest of the world, and He will save individual Jews by grace just as readily as any other ethnic group. We should remember that Jesus was a Jew, that His original apostles were all Jews, that the first Christian Church consisted of nothing but Jews, and that the church's very first Holy Scriptures were the Jewish Scriptures (Old Testament). In other words, Biblical Judaism is the foundation for the Christian Church. And only because Rabbinical Judaism departed from its own Scriptures in rejecting the Messiah was the Christian Church established in the first place. Therefore, the fact that the Bible predicts the widespread persecution of the Jewish people from the first century A.D. until the Second Coming of Jesus cannot and does not give any Gentile Christian the moral right to persecute, or support the persecution of, Jews. Far too many Christians have committed horrible atrocities against Jews in the alleged name of fulfilling God's prophetic Word. But there is a big difference between God's foreknowledge of the future and His will, to say nothing about the difference between what God *allows* and what He *commands* His own people to do. Therefore, there is absolutely no Biblical or moral sanction available to anyone to defend anti-Semitism for any reason.