

Rethinking Israel's Identity in Light of Christ

Romans 9:6–8

“Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.”

Understanding God's Covenant People Through Scripture

Many Christians today have been taught—often without question—that modern ethnic Jews and the nation of Israel are the unchanged, literal continuation of biblical Israel.¹ This view, popularized largely by dispensationalist theology, suggests that God's covenant people are still defined by physical descent from Abraham and that God's promises must be fulfilled through a present-day geopolitical state.²

Yet a deeper reading of Scripture challenges that framework. It prompts questions not only of theology, but of genealogy and covenant identity. For instance: Was the line through which Christ came ethnically pure all the way back to Jacob? And if so, does that make Christ the only one truly qualified to carry the name “Israel”? More importantly, what defines God's people under the New Covenant? Are they defined by race or by faith?

These questions reveal an important truth: God's covenant

people³ are no longer defined by lineage or nationality. The name Israel, as used in redemptive history, is redefined around **Jesus Christ, the true Israelite**⁴, the faithful Son, the seed of Abraham.

Judah and Tamar: God's Sovereign Preservation of the Messianic Line

Genesis 38 records that Judah took a Canaanite wife named Shuah, who bore him three sons. Yet none of these sons would carry on the covenant line. Instead, it was through Tamar—Judah's daughter-in-law, who bore twins by him—that the lineage continued through Pharez. Some traditions, like the **Book of Jasher**⁵, describe Tamar as a descendant of Shem, which may suggest God's providence in preserving a pure Semitic line despite the surrounding Canaanite culture.

This was not accidental. The line through Pharez leads directly to David, and then ultimately to Christ. God orchestrated the preservation of the messianic line in a way that superseded human error and societal compromise.

Mary's Lineage and the Legal Right of Kingship

The genealogy of Jesus through Mary⁶, recorded in Luke 3, bypasses the cursed royal line of Jeconiah by tracing descent through Nathan, another son of David. This ensures that Christ's physical lineage remains intact and fulfills the promise of a righteous king from David's house (Luke 1:32–33). Joseph's lineage, shown in Matthew 1, gives Jesus the legal right to David's throne.

Christ is thus both biologically and legally qualified to

inherit the throne of David and to represent Israel in its fullness.

Ephraim and Manasseh: A Foreshadow of Gentile Inclusion

Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were born of an Egyptian mother and thus only half-Israelite by blood⁷. Yet Jacob adopted⁸ them as his own, granting them full tribal inheritance:

*"Ephraim and Manasseh... are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine."
– Genesis 48:5*

This adoption is not just a family act—it is prophetic. It anticipates the inclusion of Gentiles into the family of God⁸. Paul later affirms this in Ephesians:

*"That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel..."
– Ephesians 3:6*

As Ephraim and Manasseh were adopted in and made full heirs, so too are believing Gentiles brought into the covenant by faith.

Jesus: The True Israel

Matthew 2:15 applies Hosea's words—"Out of Egypt have I called my son"—to Christ, not merely to national Israel. Jesus recapitulates the story of Israel: He comes out of Egypt,

passes through the water, is tested in the wilderness, and remains obedient where the nation failed.

At His baptism, the Father declares:

“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

– Matthew 3:17

Christ is the true Servant of God, the true Israel⁹. He fulfills the calling and mission that national Israel could not. In Him, the promises made to Abraham and David are fulfilled—not through political restoration, but through redemptive accomplishment.

What Became of the Ten Tribes?

In 722 B.C., the northern kingdom (Ephraim/Israel) was conquered by Assyria (2 Kings 17). Many were exiled or killed; others intermarried, resulting in the rise of the Samaritans. Over time, tribal purity—and with it, **covenant identity grounded in genealogy—effectively disappeared¹⁰**.

This scattering, known as the dispersion of the “**lost tribes**”,¹¹ meant that many descendants of Jacob were no longer identifiable by tribe, if at all¹¹.

“Ye Are Not My People” – Hosea’s Prophetic Judgment and Hope

Hosea 1:9–10 contains both judgment and promise:

“Call his name Loammi: for ye are not my people...

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand

of the sea...”

Paul quotes this in Romans 9:25–26 to apply it not just to dispersed Israelites, but also to believing Gentiles. Those who were “*not My people*” will become “*sons of the living God.*” The fulfillment is spiritual and covenantal—**not ethnic or political**¹².

Ezekiel’s Dry Bones and the Joining of the Two Sticks

In Ezekiel 37, God shows a valley of dry bones coming to life—a picture of spiritual resurrection. This is followed by a vision of two sticks (Judah and Ephraim) becoming one in God’s hand.

“And I will make them one nation... and one king shall be king to them all...”
– Ezekiel 37:22

This foreshadows unity in Christ, who brings together Jew and Gentile into one body (Ephesians 2:14–16). These prophecies do not point to two separate peoples, but to a unified covenant people in Christ.

Redefining the Name “Israel” in the New Covenant

Jesus said:

“Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep... My sheep hear my voice...”
– John 10:26–27

Only those who follow Christ are counted as His flock. Paul affirms:

“They are not all Israel, which are of Israel...”

– Romans 9:6

And again:

“If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed...”

– Galatians 3:29

The name “Israel” now applies to those who are in Christ¹³. Apart from Him, neither genealogy nor geography defines covenant status.

Conclusion: The Israel of God

The prophets foresaw a time when God’s people would be reconstituted not by ethnicity, but by faith. Jesus—the true Israelite—gathers into Himself all who believe, **whether they come from Judah or from the nations¹⁴**. The Church, His body, becomes the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham: one people, united under one Shepherd.

“And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” – Galatians 6:16

Footnotes