Who Truly Has The Right to Bear The Name Israel?

Introduction

In today's religious and political landscape, few words carry more weight and controversy than the name *Israel*. For many, it conjures images of a modern nation in the Middle East, established in 1948 and fiercely defended as the homeland of the Jewish people. For others, particularly within Christian theology, *Israel* represents something far deeper—an identity rooted in divine calling, covenant, and spiritual transformation. Yet amidst strong nationalistic sentiment and theological confusion, one critical question often goes unexamined: *Who truly has the right to bear the name Israel?*

This question is not only theological but prophetic, for it draws a direct line from the patriarch Jacob—whose name was changed to *Israel* after a personal struggle with God—to the current state which claims divine legitimacy by using the same name. But does the name *Israel*, as applied to a modern political entity, bear the same meaning as when it was first given by God? Or has its use today become a carnal attempt to grasp what only God can bestow?

This essay will explore the spiritual significance of the name *Israel*, the moral tension in Jacob's initial deception to obtain the blessing, and how that episode serves as a prophetic pattern exposing the presumptuous claims of the modern state. By comparing Jacob's transformation with the modern state's assumption of the name, we will show that divine favor is not conferred by politics, ethnicity, or lineage—but by faith and covenant obedience. Only those who are in Christ, the promised Seed, are counted as the true *Israel of God*.

Israel: A Name Not Claimed by Flesh, but Given by God

The name *Israel* holds profound spiritual meaning, rooted not in man's striving but in divine appointment. It is a name first given to Jacob—not at birth, and not when he deceived his father—but after a transformative encounter with God in which he wrestled, repented, and prevailed. — *"And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."*—Genesis 32:28

This renaming reflects not merely a change of name, but a change of nature. Jacob's journey illustrates that God's favor and covenantal blessing cannot be seized through fleshly schemes, but must be received through humility, perseverance, and surrender to God.

Jacob's Deception and Rebekah's Role: A Cautionary Parallel

The background of Jacob's story is filled with tension and moral complexity. In Genesis 27, Jacob, at the urging of his mother Rebekah, deceives his blind father Isaac into granting him the blessing intended for Esau. Jacob hesitated, saying: — *"Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man: My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing."*—Genesis 27:11–12 — Rebekah replied with the striking words: — *"Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me them."*—Genesis 27:13

This exchange reveals a layered moral dilemma. Jacob did

question the deception but ultimately obeyed his mother. Rebekah's statement indicates her full assumption of responsibility. She knowingly directed Jacob into a course of deceit, perhaps believing she was helping fulfill God's earlier prophecy (Genesis 25:23) that "the elder shall serve the younger."

But this is no justification. Scripture does not condone the method of deception, even when God uses it to accomplish His sovereign plan. Jacob suffered years of exile and family turmoil following this act. God's blessing does not rest upon human manipulation, but upon His own covenantal grace—revealed when Jacob later wrestled with God, refused to let go, and sought a blessing not through trickery but through submission (Genesis 32:26).

This distinction is critical: Jacob *received* the blessing in Genesis 27 through deceit, but he *earned* the name *Israel* through a struggle marked by vulnerability, prayer, and transformation.

Political Zionism and the Hijacking of Divine Identity

The modern state of Israel, established in 1948, assumed the ancient and holy name *Israel*—yet it did so through political declaration, not through covenant faithfulness. While many interpret the establishment of the modern state as a fulfillment of prophecy, the Bible makes clear that divine blessing and identity are never merely about national claims or fleshly descent.

"For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children… 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."—Romans 9:6–8

To claim the name *Israel* apart from the spiritual requirements of repentance, faith, and obedience to God is to repeat the early error of Jacob—claiming a blessing through human means. Modern Israel has not turned to Christ, the promised Seed (Galatians 3:16), nor has it embraced the New Covenant established in His blood. Therefore, the assumption of the name *Israel* by the modern political entity does not, in itself, reflect divine endorsement.

Just as Jacob's fleshly attempt to gain blessing brought temporal success but also chastening, so too the state of Israel may function on the world stage, but its existence does not mean it walks in covenant favor with God. The blessing of God cannot be hijacked by political strategy or international approval.

Clarifying the Term "Jew"

Note on term Jew

It is crucial to understand that the term *Jew*—as used in modern discourse—does not always equate to an ethnic descendant of the biblical patriarch Jacob (Israel). In the Old Testament, the word *Jew* (from *Yẃhûdîy*, Strong's H3064) originally referred to a member of the tribe of Judah or an inhabitant of the kingdom of Judah. Over time, especially by the post-exilic period, the term became broader, sometimes referring to anyone living in Judea or adhering to the Judean religion.

However, by the time of Christ, and especially into the modern era, the meaning of *Jew* had shifted significantly. Several historical records indicate that many who identified as Jews were not of pure Israelite descent. For instance, **Flavius**

Josephus records that the **Edomites (Idumaeans)** were forcibly converted to Judaism by John Hyrcanus in the 2nd century B.C. and thereafter *"were hereafter no other than Jews"* (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 13, Chapter 9, Section 1). This means **many ruling elites in Judea** during the time of Jesus were **not ethnically of Jacob but were assimilated Edomites**.

Later, during the medieval period, entire populations such as the **Khazars**, a Turkic people from the Caucasus region, adopted Judaism in the 8th–9th centuries. This event is widely acknowledged by secular historians and Jewish scholars alike. **Shlomo Sand**, a Jewish historian and professor at Tel Aviv University, writes: – *"The conversion of the Khazars to Judaism… had a considerable impact on the Jewish world. The Khazar kingdom became one of the major centers of Judaism, and large numbers of its population identified as Jews."* – Shlomo Sand, The Invention of the Jewish People (Verso Books, 2009), page 221.

In addition, the **Jewish Encyclopedia** (1906 edition) confirms this phenomenon: – *"A fair proportion of the Khazar people adopted Judaism… The theory that a considerable part, if not the majority, of Eastern European Jews—and hence of world Jewry—are of Khazar, and not Semitic origin, was once widely accepted."* –Jewish Encyclopedia, vol. 7, page 460.

These facts dismantle the common assumption that modern Jews, particularly those forming or populating the state of Israel, are direct physical descendants of the ancient Israelites. Ethnic Israel was dispersed, absorbed, or intermarried with foreign populations across centuries of exile and conquest.

Moreover, the **religion of modern Judaism** is not the faith once delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai, but a rabbinical system largely codified in the **Babylonian Talmud**, developed centuries after the destruction of the Second Temple. Jesus Himself rebuked the Pharisees for following "*the tradition of the elders*" (Mark 7:5–9), which evolved into what is now **Rabbinic**

Judaism.

Therefore, it is inaccurate to equate today's *Jews*—whether by religion or cultural identity—with the ancient covenant people of Israel. Any claim to the land based solely on the term *Jew* or a religious adherence to Judaism lacks both **biblical covenant continuity** and **verifiable ethnic lineage**. Only those who are in Christ—the promised Seed (Galatians 3:16)—are considered the true heirs of Abraham and partakers of the covenant promises.

Spiritual Israel: The Heirs of the Promise

The true *Israel of God* (Galatians 6:16) consists of those—Jew and Gentile—who are in Christ. Just as Jacob became Israel only after a personal transformation through divine encounter, so too must all who would be counted as Israel experience spiritual rebirth.

Peter writes to believers: — *"Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people…"* —1 Peter 2:9

Paul echoes: — *"If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."*
—Galatians 3:29

The inheritance of God is not given through birthright or political identity, but through the faith of Abraham—manifested in Christ, the true Seed. As such, believers in Christ become the continuation and fulfillment of the promise once symbolized in the man Jacob, and now realized in the body of Christ.

Conclusion: The Blessing Is Spiritual, Not Political

Jacob's story is not just an ancient narrative; it is a prophetic mirror. His life reveals that God's blessing must not be pursued by carnal means. Deception and manipulation, even when cloaked in religious or national language, do not draw down divine favor. Instead, it is through faith, wrestling with God, and surrender that the name *Israel* is truly bestowed.

The modern use of the name *Israel* by a secular state without covenantal submission to Christ stands in contrast to the biblical meaning of the name. The spiritual heirs of Abraham are not determined by passports, borders, or bloodlines—but by faith in the crucified and risen Messiah.

Bibliography

- Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews*. Translated by William Whiston. Book 13, Chapter 9, Section 1.
- Sand, Shlomo. *The Invention of the Jewish People*. London: Verso Books, 2009.
- *Jewish Encyclopedia*. Vol. 7. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1906.
- The Holy Bible, King James Version.
- Strong, James. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Entry H3064, "Yẃhûdîy."