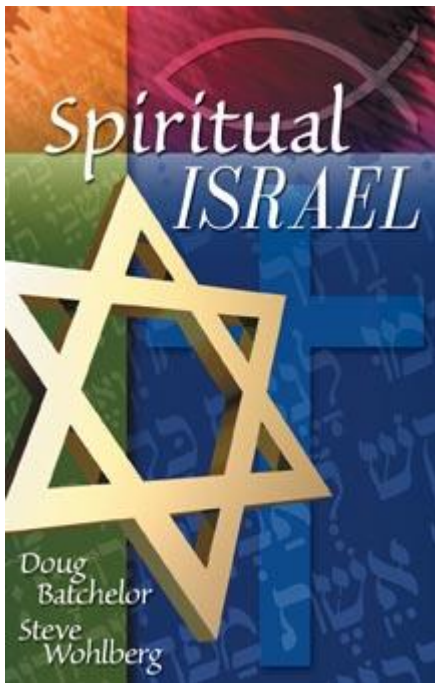


Spiritual-Israel



An Amazing Fact: *The European cuckoo is known as a “brood parasite.” The females lay their eggs in the nests of smaller bird species—like the reed warbler. In turn, these unsuspecting mothers unwittingly incubate, feed, and raise the young impostors, typically at the expense of their very own offspring.*

One of the most sorrowful tragedies of nature is watching a reed warbler working herself to death to satisfy the voracious hunger of a greedy cuckoo chick while her own young, already weak with starvation, are pushed out of the nest.

Another Brood Parasite

The devil has successfully planted a dangerous lie in modern Christian theology, and it has been unwittingly hatched, adopted and nurtured by most evangelical churches—and now this parasite is

pushing out Bible truth with a bigger-than-life-deception. Sadly, this adopted falsehood is growing fat with attention while true interpretations of prophecy are starving with neglect. Today around the globe, millions interested in Bible prophecy have their eyes fixed on Jerusalem. To be fair, it is really not all that difficult with the legitimate news value that comes from that never-ending quagmire of strife and bloodshed between Palestinians and Israelites. Christians are constantly speculating about the modern state of Israel, a rebuilt Jewish temple, and a Middle East Armageddon. These subjects are being discussed through magazines, books, radio, television, the Internet, the pulpit and at Bible prophecy conferences.

It is amazing how many Christians fully buy into this connection of end-time Bible prophecies concerning the nation of Israel. For example, best-selling author Dave Hunt echoes these views on the back cover of his popular book, *A Cup of Trembling*. He writes: “Fast-moving events in the Middle East point almost daily toward the grand finale—the time of greatest suffering for the Jewish people worldwide, which will climax in the terrifying battle of Armageddon and the glorious return of Messiah to rescue Israel and reign over the world from David’s reestablished throne in Jerusalem.”

A Foundation of Sand

This “Middle East” approach to prophecy became popular among mainline churches in the 1980s with a series of books from Hal Lindsey. In his bestsellers, including *The Late Great Planet Earth* and *Countdown to Armageddon*, Lindsey employed this very literal dispensational approach to prophecy, making several very specific, and very errant, predictions. He wrote that a secret rapture of the church would occur in 1981,

which would be followed by the building of a new Jewish temple, the advent of the Antichrist, the great tribulation, the invasion of Israel, the battle of Armageddon and the millennium—all by 1988.

Despite every single one of these predictions falling flat, his books continue to sell, making for most a standard that all end-time prophecy is viewable only when filtered through “nation of Israel glasses.” Worse, the seeds of error they contain have sprouted and become firmly rooted in many churches. Now millions of Christians are vigilantly guarding a styrofoam monument with no prophetic veracity, and building on the crumbling sand of popular evangelical trends. What are the primary pillars holding up this diversionary doctrine? While there remain some differences of opinion among these evangelicals regarding the role of modern Israel in the end-times, the majority agrees on the following five events as core prophecies:

1. The rebirth of the state of Israel in 1948.
2. A soon-coming seven years of “Great Tribulation.”
3. The rebuilding of the Jewish temple on Jerusalem’s Temple Mount.
4. The Antichrist’s rise during the tribulation; He’ll enter the temple to proclaim Godhood.
5. A final war against Israel, which will result in Armageddon.

It’s Happened Before!

Here is the big question: Are all of these end-time prophecies in Scripture regarding Israel and the temple speaking of the literal nation of Jews and a physical building, or is there a deeper spiritual application?

Do you remember when Jesus came the first time? His people misunderstood and misapplied the prophecies regarding His kingdom. They eagerly waited and watched for Him to establish a literal, earthly kingdom. Jesus constantly explained that His first coming was to establish a spiritual kingdom. He said, *“The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you”* (Luke 17:20, 21).

But because the persistent and popular teachings of the day focused on a muscular messiah who would overthrow the Romans and seat himself on David’s throne, the disciples brushed aside or simply ignored Jesus’ comments regarding His spiritual kingdom. They tried to make these spiritual prophecies literal, and the crucifixion crushed their expectations of an Israel with dominion over all the Earth. Longing for freedom from political oppression, they lamented, *“But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel”* (Luke 24:21 NKJV).

Even after His resurrection, the disciples still clung to these popular views that had ingrained themselves in their minds, hoping still for an imminent, literal kingdom. *“When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”* (Acts 1:6). They wanted so much to believe their own view that the devil was able to blind them to the plain truth.

Is it possible that today’s church at large is making the same mistake by misapplying prophecies regarding spiritual Israel and the temple—interpreting them in a literal sense without basis? If so, they could be preparing to embrace a diabolical deception—not to mention experience a devastating disappointment!

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Revelation 2:7). We hope this study of end-time prophecy will clear the muddled understanding of prophecy so prevalent in today’s Christian faith.

The Name “Israel”

It is impossible to clearly understand the subject of Israel apart from a careful study of the Old Testament. The first time the name “Israel” appears in Scripture is when it was spoken to Jacob after his long night of wrestling with a powerful opponent. The heavenly stranger finally 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). Thus the name “Israel” was at first a name of heavenly origin applied to Jacob alone. It represented his spiritual victory over sin, through wrestling in prayer and claiming God’s grace.

Jacob had 12 sons who later moved into Egypt. The descendants of these sons eventually multiplied into the 12 tribes, which were later forced into slavery by the Egyptians until the time of Moses. Then God told Pharaoh through Moses, *“Israel is my son, even my firstborn ... Let my son go”* (Exodus 4:22, 23). Note here that the name “Israel” is expanded to include Jacob’s descendants. Therefore, the name “Israel” first applied to a victorious man, then to his people. You’ll soon see why this is a very important point!

Israel, God’s Son

About 800 B.C., the Lord spoke through the prophet Hosea, saying, *“When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt”* (Hosea 11:1). Yet by this time, the nation of Israel had failed to live up to the spiritual meaning of its name. You see this verse in Hosea explodes with tremendous importance, when we look at the New Testament.

Approximately 800 years after Hosea’s prophecy, we learn, *“Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king”* (Matthew 2:1). Because Herod felt threatened by this new child king, he sent soldiers who *“slew all the children that were in Bethlehem”* (v.16). Joseph was warned of the impending crisis in advance when *“The angel of the Lord appeareth to [him] in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word”* (v. 13). So the family arose and *“departed into Egypt”* (v. 14).

Matthew writes that the child Jesus remained in Egypt *“until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son”* (v. 15). Notice that Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1—which originally referred to the nation of Israel coming out of Egypt—and actually declares it more perfectly “fulfilled” in Jesus Christ! (Please don’t miss this important point that a prophecy in the Bible can have a dual application with both a literal and spiritual fulfillment.)

Here, Matthew has only touched the surface of a truly shocking principle developed throughout his gospel.

Matthew’s Amazing Revelation

A careful study of Matthew reveals even further that Christ’s story actually repeats the history of ancient Israel, point by point—but He overcame where they had failed. Notice the following amazing parallels between the history of ancient Israel and Jesus Christ:

- In the Old Testament, a man named Joseph has dreams and goes into Egypt to preserve his family (Genesis 45:5). In the New Testament, another Joseph likewise had dreams and goes into Egypt to preserve his family (Matthew 2:13).
- When the young nation of Israel comes out of Egypt, God calls it *“my son”* (Exodus 4:22). When Jesus comes out of Egypt, God says *“Out of Egypt have I*

called my son" (Matthew 2:15).

- When Israel leaves Egypt, her people go through the Red Sea. The apostle Paul says they were "*baptized unto Moses ... in the sea*" (1 Corinthians 10:2). Jesus is also baptized "*to fulfill all righteousness,*" and immediately afterward God proclaims Him, "*my beloved Son*" (Matthew 3:15-17)
- After the Red Sea crossing, the Israelites spend 40 years in the wilderness—led by the pillar of fire, God's Spirit. Immediately after baptism, Jesus is "*led up of the Spirit into the wilderness*" for 40 days (Matthew 4:1, 2).
- At the end of the 40 years, Moses writes **Deuteronomy**. At the end of Jesus' 40 days, He resists Satan's temptations by quoting three Scriptures—all from **Deuteronomy!**
- In Psalm 80:8, God calls Israel a "*vine*" that He brought "*out of Egypt.*" Jesus later declares, "*I am the true vine*" (John 15:1).
- In the Old Testament, the name "*Israel*" first applied to one man: Jacob—representing his spiritual victory over sin. Even so, in the New Testament, Jesus Christ is the Israel who came "*out of Egypt.*" He is the one victorious man who overcame all sin!

More Striking Evidence!

The list of parallels between Jesus and Israel goes on but consider just a few more points.

For example, after healing a group of people, Jesus modestly "*charged them that they should not make him known: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias [Greek for Isaiah] the prophet, saying, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets*" (Matthew 12:16-19). Here the writer quotes Isaiah 42:1-3, a passage that originally applied to "*Israel, ... my servant*" (Isaiah 41:8). Yet Matthew again tells us it is "*fulfilled*" in Jesus Christ!

The apostle Paul also follows the principle in his letters of applying statements originally made about the nation of Israel to Jesus Christ. God called Israel "*my firstborn*" in Exodus 4:22. Yet Paul said it was Jesus Christ who is "*the firstborn of every creature*" (Colossians 1:15).

The clearest example is when God calls Israel "*the seed of Abraham*" (Isaiah 41:8). However, Paul later writes that Abraham's seed does not refer to "*many,*" but to "*one, ... which is Christ*" (Galatians 3:16). Thus we discover that repeatedly in the New Testament, statements that once applied to the nation of Israel are now applied to Jesus Christ. The Messiah is now "the seed." Therefore, Jesus is the very essence of Israel! This is an explosive truth, and it cannot be ignored if we are to truly understand the role and identity of modern Israel.

A New Nation

Yet there is more. Remember that the name "Israel" not only referred to Jacob, but also to his descendants—who became Israel. The same principle is seen in the New Testament.

For example, the Lord told the ancient Israelites, "*And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation*" (Exodus 19:6). In the New Testament, Peter applies these exact words to the church: "*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people*" (1 Peter 2:9).

Likewise, immediately after Paul's statement in Galatians 3 about Jesus being "the seed," he then tells his Gentile (a non- Jew) converts, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29). Thus in the New Testament, the name Israel not only applies to Jesus Christ, but also to those who are born in Christ—His Church! In other words, all true Christians are now God's spiritual Israel.

The church is called the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27), which is one reason why James, when writing to the church, addresses it as the 12 tribes that are scattered abroad (James 1:1). From the very beginning, the church has understood Israel to mean a spiritual body of Christ.

Double Vision

Have you ever been hit so hard on the head that you start seeing double? Well, from what we have studied together, the Christian world needs a loving "bonk" on the head with this New Testament truth, so that more people start "seeing double" about the subject of Israel! According to the New Testament, there are now two Israels. One group is composed of literal Israelites "according to the flesh" (Romans 9:3, 4). The other is "spiritual Israel," composed of Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus Christ.

Paul writes, "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Romans 9:6). How's that for proof! That is, not all are part of God's spiritual Israel who are of the literal nation of Israel. Paul continues: "That is, They which are the children of the flesh [physical descendants of Abraham], these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed" (v. 8). The children of the flesh are only natural descendants of Abraham, but the children of the promise are counted as the true seed. Today, any person—Jew or Gentile—can become part of this spiritual nation of Israel through faith in Jesus Christ.

God Looks on the Heart

Just as there are two Israels, there are also two kinds of Jews. First, there are the Jews who are only natural, physical descendants of Abraham. Second, there are the Jews in Spirit who believe in Jesus Christ. Paul writes, "Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest on the law, and makest thy boast of God ... For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision [Gentiles] keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? ... For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Romans 2:17, 25, 26, 28, 29).

Did you catch that? The implications are staggering! Someone who is "called a Jew" because he is a physical descendant of Abraham, and yet who lives as a lawbreaker, "is not a Jew"—at least, not in God's eyes. His "circumcision is made uncircumcision." It is revoked. Thus to God, he is a Gentile. And a believing Gentile, who through faith keeps "the righteousness of the law," his uncircumcision is counted for circumcision. Thus to God, he is a Jew.

John the Baptist paved the way for this principle when he warned the Jews not to trust their literal ancestry for salvation. "Bring forth therefore fruits meet [worthy] for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matthew 3:8, 9).

Later, Jesus echoed this same principle in a showdown with the religious leaders. *“They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham . . . Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do”* (John 8:39, 44).

Paul also writes, *“Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham”* (Galatians 3:7). *“For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh”* (Philippians 3:3). Thus, according to Paul, a real Jew in the sight of God is anybody—Jew or Gentile—who has personal faith in Jesus Christ!

Eventually, this truth hit Peter between the eyes, and he told a room full of Gentile converts, *“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him”* (Acts 10:34, 35).

Eating with the Patriarchs

Remember also when Jesus marveled at the faith of a Gentile soldier. He said, *“Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness”* (Matthew 8:10-12).

Jesus’ declaration stunned the listening crowd. The idea of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob sitting and eating with Gentiles was taboo, unless they had been converted to the Jewish faith! (Acts 10:28).

This is also an underlying theme in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The Jews feast on the Word, but they do not share it with the Gentiles starving for truth. Therefore, they are cast out of the kingdom. But Lazarus [the Gentiles], the one who lay outside the gate hungering for the crumbs of truth, abides in Abraham’s bosom (See Luke 16:19-31).

The Road to Building a New Temple

Let’s now follow a brief but directly related tangent.

If we want the fog to clear from around the subject of prophetic Israel, we must also consider the Jewish temple. Many who have focused their attention on a literal nation fulfillment are also expecting the ancient Jewish temple to be rebuilt.

Some of the contemporary so-called Christian “Zionists” who have written on this rebuilding include Thomas Ice, Randall Price, Grant Jeffrey, Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye, Dave Hunt, and John Hagee. Their combined published book sales exceed 70 million in more than 50 languages. This shows their views to be extremely influential, and therefore they cannot be simply dismissed. A significant proportion of evangelical, Charismatic, Pentecostal, and fundamentalist Christians worldwide endorse this view.

In the same way the devil has misdirected focus from spiritual Israel to the literal headlines concerning the Middle East today, he has also confused people on the subject of the temple. Oddly, most of the speculation and hopes for a rebuilt temple spring from one vague ethereal reference in the New Testament dealing with the antichrist power. In 2 Thessalonians 2:3,4, we read, *“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that **he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God”*** (emphasis ours).

Since the Romans destroyed the last Jewish temple in AD 70, many naturally assume that in order for this antichrist being, a specific person in their view, to sit in the temple, it will have to be rebuilt. But let us follow the Biblical clues.

A Spiritual House

Just before King David died, he wanted to build a permanent temple in Jerusalem. Nathan the prophet told David that he would not be able to build this house for God, but that his son Solomon would do it.

First Chronicles 17:11, 12 recounts, *“And it shall come to pass, when thy days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build me an house, and I will establish his throne for ever.”*

Later, David said the Lord told him *“Solomon thy son, he shall build my house and my courts”* (1 Chronicles 28:6).

But this is one of the clearest examples in Scripture of prophecy having dual applications. Yes, history records do show that Solomon was the son of David and that he built a physical temple, but the New Testament says that Jesus was the true *“Son of David,”* who was to build a temple and kingdom that was to last forever. Jesus clearly taught that He had come to transfer the attention from a physical building of worship to something greater: His body, the church.

John 2:19-21, says, *“Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body.”* Jesus’ prophecy concerning the pride of the Jewish nation and the destruction of the temple inspired the most intense rejection of His teaching. Here are some high points of this truth:

- *“Behold, your house is left unto you desolate”* (Matthew 23:38).
- *“And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down”* (Matthew 24:1, 2).
- *“We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands”* (Mark 14:58).
- *“And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom”* (Mark 15:38).

And even as Jesus hung on the cross, His mockers reminded Him of His teachings. *“Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross”* (Matthew 27:40). But of course, Jesus was not speaking of rebuilding the physical temple. He meant to build a spiritual one.

The New Testament Perspective

After the veil in the temple ripped from top to bottom and the early disciples were excommunicated, we find an unusual indifference among the early believers, nearly all Jews, regarding the Jewish temple. Because they knew Jesus to be the true Lamb of God, and that the Jewish temple was designed to accommodate animal sacrifices, the New Testament writers saw the temple as irrelevant. They recognized the establishment of a new spiritual temple and priesthood. See some amazing Biblical

evidence for this below, with our emphasis in bold:

- *“If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; **for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.** And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people”* (1 Corinthians 3:17, 16).
- *“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom **ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit”*** (Ephesians 2:19-22).
- *“**Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house,** an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”* (1 Peter 2:5).

Sadly, even after God provides all this clear biblical evidence that His temple today is a spiritual one, the church, many Christians are waiting for the Jews to rebuild a physical temple on the site where the mosque of Omar (Dome of the Rock) now sits—also known as the Temple Mount. Yet there is no prophecy, promise, or commandment in the Bible that says the temple would be rebuilt again after the Romans destroyed it. Though it might very well be rebuilt, Jesus’ prophecy that not one stone would sit upon another seemed to be of an extremely final tone.

So what does the verse in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 mean? Simply this: This antichrist power would seat itself over the church of God claiming the worship that belongs only to Jesus Christ. Historically, Protestant scholars have consistently applied Paul’s words to the papal power, and to its influence within Christianity.*

But now, let’s return to the “nation” of Israel.

*For more information about this prophecy, order Steve Wohlberg’s book, *The Antichrist Chronicles: What Prophecy Teachers Aren’t Telling You!*

All Israel Saved?

Since we’ve gone this far, we might as well go all the way! Only Jews will be saved. Furthermore, all Jews will be saved! Now after you pick yourself up from the floor, allow us to explain these bold statements.

We all know that people are saved under the new covenant, right? Now notice the wording of this new covenant: *“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah”* (Jeremiah 31:31).

And in the book of Hebrews, Paul expands on this concept: *“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ... For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more”* (Hebrews 8:8, 10-12). The new covenant is made “with the house of Israel”! God never makes a salvation covenant with Gentiles. In fact, nowhere in Scripture do

you find any saving covenant made with anyone but Israelites! So if you want to be saved, you must be born again as a spiritual Jew. This is not to say that all Christians must now be circumcised and sacrifice lambs, but we must have the spiritual equivalent of these things—Jesus, the Lamb of God (the final sacrifice), and circumcision of the heart.

God does not have one method of salvation for Jews and a different one for non-Jews. Everyone is saved the same way under the same program—by grace through faith. Paul uses the analogy of an olive tree to explain that all Gentiles who are saved are grafted into the stock of Israel. *“And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root [supports] thee”* (Romans 11:17, 18).

The Christian religion is based on a Jewish manual called the Bible. (In this light, it is difficult to understand how any professed Christian could be anti-Semitic.) Christianity is not a new religion, but rather the completion of the Jewish faith. So with this in mind, we can now better understand what Paul meant when he said, *“And so all Israel shall be saved”* (Romans 11:26). Some take this verse to mean that God will ultimately save all literal Jews. If this were true, it would contradict every principle of God’s dealings with humans throughout history and Scripture. God is not a racist. In Jesus’ eyes, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek”* (Galatians 3:28).

We are saved based on choices we make regarding God’s provision, not on national status or physical citizenship. But if, when Paul says that *“all Israel will be saved,”* he is speaking of spiritual Israel, and if we understand that we become a “true Jew” only by a choice, then it all makes sense.

Israel’s Purpose

The primary functions for the Jewish nation were to preserve Scriptures and introduce the Messiah to the world, which was accomplished at Pentecost. We read, *“Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God”* (Romans 3:2). And in Acts 2:5, *“And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.”* These converted Jews then took the truth back to their respective countries.

Jesus was also very concerned that the early ministry of His apostles was to focus specifically on the literal house of Israel. *“These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”* (Matthew 10:5, 6).

But after Jesus’ death, the Jewish Sanhedrin (supreme court) officially rejected the message of the gospel through the Spirit-filled preaching of Stephen. They even executed him. From that point on (AD 34), God opened the doors to the Gentiles.

- *“Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles”* (Acts 13:46).
- *“For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth”* (Acts 13:47).

Prophetic Applications

How does all of this apply to prophecy? The greatest book about prophecy, the book

of Revelation, talks about Mount Zion, Israel, Jerusalem, the temple, the Euphrates, Babylon and Armageddon. Thus it is clear that Revelation uses the terminology of the Middle East in its prophecies. But sincere Christians all over the earth are applying these prophecies to literal places in the Middle East and to the modern nation of Jews. Yet once we grasp the New Testament principles discussed in this study, we are able to finally see that there is something wrong with that picture. We should be seeing error messages all over the place!

Remember that when Jesus came the first time, the devil had bamboozled God's people into making the spiritual prophecies about the Messiah carnal and physical. Satan is doing the same thing today with the subject of Israel. Yet the plain, biblical truth is that Revelation centers on Jesus Christ and God's Israel in the Spirit, not the Israel of the flesh. And with this correct understanding of spiritual Israel, suddenly other prophecies in the New Testament take on a whole new meaning! It's now easy to see that the 144,000 of Revelation 7 and 14 are not literal Jews and the new temple will not be earthly, but rather the Body of Jesus and the church (John 2:19, 20).

An Amazing Fact: *"Fools Gold," or iron pyrites, a mineral composed of iron sulfide, actually contains no gold at all. The mineral is brass yellow and has a metallic luster. The resemblance of pyrite to gold caused many prospectors to mistake it for gold, which is how it became known as fool's gold. Even though it is often found in the vicinity of gold, it is easily distinguished from the real thing by its brittleness.*

Conclusion

This "counterfeit gold" dynamic is also found prevalent in the area of spiritual truth. The Bible teaches that even gold comes in varying degrees of purity: *"And the gold of that land is good"* (Genesis 2:12). Millions are toting around heavy bags bulging with spiritual "fool's gold." They are rejoicing, believing they have discovered something to make them rich. It sparkles on the outside, but when they get to the bank of heaven, they discover this currency is worthless.

Furthermore, the tragic fact is that the popular literal focus miserably fails to grasp the true power of God's promise. And this failure to recognize this principle will result in false Middle East interpretations and ultimate deception.

Don't forget that *"they are not all Israel, which are of Israel"* (Romans 9:6). And remember, *"For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh"* (Philippians 3:3). Share with others the truth that now *"there is neither Jew nor Greek, ... for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (Galatians 3:28, 29).

Let us not live in the flesh or accept popular, convoluted teachings that focus on an earthly state. Rather, let us live in the Spirit. Like Jacob of old, let us wrestle in prayer and cling to Jesus until by faith we hear Him say, *"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).

Shalom.