

## **Study Guide #3: Israel and the Church**

### **Introduction**

The theological foundation for the popular secret rapture thesis is their view of Israel. Although these dispensational futurists recognize that the Church has replaced literal Israel as God's "chosen people" with a special mission in the world, they insist that this replacement is only temporary. When the Church is raptured to heaven, Israel will once again resume its status as God's "most favored nation" status. This Study Guide examines this "literal Israel" thesis and the relationship of Israel to the Church.

### **Question #1: What does the name "Israel" mean, and what is its significance for the relationship between Israel and the Messiah?**

**Answer:** *First*, the name "Israel" was 1<sup>st</sup> given to Jacob, a grandson of Abraham, in Genesis 32, as a result of his all-night physical struggle with the pre-incarnate Jesus. The name comes from 2 Hebrew words meaning "God" and "to prevail or have power (as a prince)." Thus, "Israel" means "he prevails with God." Genesis 32:28 gives the reason for his new name as **"for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed"** (NKJV). This fact means that Israel is first and foremost a spiritual name.



Jacob wrestles with the Lord

*Second*, it's noteworthy that the Old Testament applies the terms "servant" and "son" to both the nation of Israel and to the Messiah: (a) "Servant" is applied to the *nation* of Israel in Isaiah 41:8-9; 42:19; 43:10; 44:1-2, 21, 26; 45:4; 48:20; Jeremiah 30:10; 46:27-28; Ezekiel 28:25; and Ezekiel 37:25; and it's applied to the *Messiah* in Isaiah 42:1; 49:3, 5-7; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11; Ezekiel 34:23-24; and Zechariah 2:7-12; and (b) "Son" is applied to the nation of Israel in Exodus 4:22 and to the Messiah in Psalm 2:7-12.

This use of "servant" and "son" interchangeably with the nation of Israel and the Messiah means that the Messiah Himself is the Ultimate Israel. It also helps explain the apostle Paul's claim that **"all the promises of God in Him [Christ] are Yes"** (II Corinthians 1:20, NKJV). In other words, all the promises made to literal Israel in the Old Testament are literally fulfilled in Jesus. That's the reason Paul could say that anyone who belongs to Jesus **"are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"** (Galatians 3:29, NKJV), and that **"he is not a Jew who is one outwardly...but he is a Jew who is one inwardly"** (Romans 2:28-29, NKJV). All this means that, although the promises made to Israel will be fulfilled, they may be fulfilled in a different, spiritual way through Jesus to His followers.

## Question #2: Then what is the relationship between Israel and the Church?

**Answer:** In Matthew 21:43, Jesus told some Jewish leaders that **“the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it”** (NKJV). According to I Peter 2:9, that **“nation”** is the Christian Church. Of course, the Church is a *spiritual* nation rather than a *political* nation. This makes the Church spiritual Israel or New Israel. This is confirmed by James’ statement at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:13-17 in which he applied the prophecy in Amos 9:11-12 of the restoration of the Davidic dynasty to the Church. Again, it’s the Church through Jesus the Messiah that the promises to Israel will be fulfilled, albeit in a different way since the Church is not identical to literal Israel. [NOTE: In answer to the idea that the Church is only *temporarily* the New Israel, why would there be a literal Davidic dynasty restored since the New Testament teaches that the Davidic dynasty has been restored as the Church? Once that dynasty has been restored, it seems more than a bit odd that it still needs to be restored.]



## Question #3: How is the covenant context important to the issue of God’s promises to Israel?

**Answer:** The word “covenant” essentially means a “promise.” Covenants can be one-way (unconditional) or two-way (conditional). For example, God made a covenant promise to Noah that He would never again destroy the entire earth with water (Genesis 9:8-17). This was a one-way, or unconditional, covenant promise, which means that it doesn’t depend on anyone’s response to God. However, the covenant God made with Israel was conditional and thus depended upon Israel’s relationship with God. This was highlighted by Moses’ farewell address in Deuteronomy 28. There he outlined the blessings of the covenant that would come to Israel if the nation as a whole obeyed God and the curses of the covenant that would come to Israel if the nation as a whole rebelled against Him. This idea is confirmed in numerous other places in Israel’s ancient history—see Exodus 19:5; Isaiah 1:19; Jeremiah 7:23; 17:24-25; Zechariah 1:3, and Zechariah 6:15. [NOTE: This principle of conditional promises also applied to all the other nations as well, even though they weren’t in any formal covenant relationship with God. Jeremiah 18:7-10 explicitly teaches that God won’t deliver a promise of glory to a nation who turns *away* from Him and won’t deliver a promise of doom to a nation who turns *toward* Him. That means that the conditionality doesn’t have to be explicitly stated in order to be present.]

## Question #4: But doesn’t Paul’s statement that “all Israel will be saved” in Romans 11:26 imply an end-time restoration of Israel to God’s “most favored nation” status?

**Answer:** No. In Romans 11, the apostle Paul uses the symbol of an olive tree to represent God’s people. Although he says that the Jews are the natural branches of that olive tree, they must be grafted in just like the Gentiles (vv. 21-24) if they believe in Jesus. In verses 25-26, he declares that **“blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved”** (NKJV). Please note 2 significant points. *First*, it was common in Jewish literature to speak of “all Israel”

being saved, but then listing all of the exceptions to that. In other words, Paul doesn't here mean that every single Jew will be saved at the last hour of human history, although apparently, he *does* mean that the large majority of Jews will accept Jesus at that time. *Second*, he says nothing about this constituting a final dispensation of the Jews (with the Church having been raptured just prior to this). Both Jews and Gentiles are grafted onto the *same* olive tree. Don't miss that point! Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus belong to the same organized people of God—the same olive tree—not to separate organizations. [NOTE: Some interpret the expression “**all Israel**” to mean both literal and spiritual Jews. But in the context of going back and forth between talking about Jews and Gentiles, it's extremely difficult to understand the term “Israel” in this entire passage to be anything other than literal Israel.]



Olive Trees

### Question #5: How does the rise of the modern state of Israel fit into prophecy?

**Answer:** The restoration of the Jewish state of Israel in 1948 is viewed as a fulfillment of Bible prophecy in a way that greatly strengthened the dispensational futurist interpretation of end-time prophecies in general. Moreover, Israel's victory in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, in which Israel achieved its present occupation of Old (East) Jerusalem, thus occupying the *whole* city for the 1<sup>st</sup> time since antiquity, was viewed as yet another fulfillment of prophecy. Specifically, it's commonly believed that the 1967 war fulfilled Jesus' words in Luke 21:24: “**And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled**” (NKJV). However, the Greek text in that verse has no definite article (“the”), so that it reads “until times of Gentiles are fulfilled.” This suggests it's an *indefinite* time period. In what sense has the Gentile domination of the Jewish people as a whole ended? They are still under siege even in modern Israel, to say nothing about the rest of the world. In this context (of Luke 21:25-28), this indefinite period of the Gentiles extends to the very 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus. The bottom line is that the only theocracy (government ruled by God) left to be formed is the one that Jesus will physically rule as king when He recreates the New Earth (Revelation 21:1-5). Therefore, the modern nation of Israel has no special prophetic significance. [NOTE: This, of course, does not justify anti-Semitism whatsoever!]

### Question #6: Do the 144,000 Israelites in Revelation prove the Jews will be God's special people in the end-time?

**Answer:** The 144,000 are mentioned only in Revelation 7 and 14. From the evidence in those chapters, we deduce that it's a symbolic number, not a literal one. *First*, most of the 12 tribes listed in chapter 7 no longer exist, having been scattered and intermarried with foreigners as a result of the Assyrian devastation of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. These were the so-called Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. *Second*, if the number were literal, then everything else must also be literal, because logic works like algebra—what you do on one side of the equation, you must do on the other side of the same equation. That would mean that the 144,000 would have to *all* be male virgins (14:4). Furthermore, on the basis of chapter 7, it would mean there would have to be exactly 12,000 male virgins from mostly non-existent tribes of Israel that will be saved at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus. [NOTE: The question in Revelation 6:17, at the time of Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming (see vv. 14-16), “**...who is able to stand?**” (NKJV) is answered in chapter 7 as the 144,000, who are sealed for God by heaven's angels (Revelation 7:1-4).]

Finally, the evidence in Revelation 7 proves that the number is symbolic. In verse 4, John *heard* the number of those sealed as 144,000. But when he turns and looks (in vision), he *saw* **“a great multitude which no one could number”** (v. 9, NKJV). Note that they are all clothed in white robes (v. 9). When an elder in heaven asks John who they are, John replies that the elder knew (vv. 13-14). This suggests the elder was trying to get John to see something there. So the elder finally tells John that they are the ones who are coming out of **“the great tribulation”** (v. 14, NKJV). In Revelation **“the great tribulation”** is the final tribulation at the end-time. In other words, the great multitude are the living saved at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus, which is the same group as the 144,000. Thus, the great multitude is the *literal* explanation of the *symbolic* 144,000. And since the great multitude is said to consist of people from **“all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues”** (v. 9, NKJV), we see that the Jews aren’t even mentioned as a separate people in this prophecy of the 144,000. [NOTE: The number 144,000 is a multiple of 12, long recognized as the kingdom number because there were 12 tribes of Israel and 12 apostles in the Church. The reference to **“virgins”** would then indicate loyal believers who were not defiled by the great *harlot* Babylon—see Revelation 14:8; 17:1-5; 18:2-3, 9.]

### Question #7: Does Matthew 24:15 mean that the Temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem in the end-time?

**Answer:** In Matthew 24:15, Jesus said the following: **“Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place...”** (NKJV). Futurists interpret the **“holy place”** as the Temple, thus believing that it will someday be rebuilt, which in turn is said to imply that Israel will be restored to its special status with God. But the parallel passage in Luke 21:20 mentions the armies that would destroy Jerusalem at the point that Matthew’s and Mark’s gospels mentions **“the abomination of desolation.”** Therefore, the *primary* application of this prophecy is Jerusalem’s destruction by the Romans in A.D. 70. In a *secondary* end-time application, Jerusalem symbolically represents the wicked of the whole world and therefore says nothing about the restoration of Israel or its Temple at the end-time. [NOTE: Therefore, the **“holy place”** is a reference to Jerusalem as a city.]



Ancient Jerusalem

### Question #8: Does the statement in II Thessalonians 2:3-4 about the “man of sin” sitting in “the temple of God” imply a rebuilt Temple in end-time Jerusalem?

**Answer:** No. *First*, even if the Temple were rebuilt, it shouldn’t be called **“the temple of God”** because the earthly sanctuary’s significance ended with the death of Jesus, the Lamb of God. Thus, the entire sacrificial system became void at that point. *Second*, this **“man of sin”** (v. 3, NKJV, or “lawlessness”) is also called the **“son of perdition”** (v. 3, NKJV). The only other person in Scripture designated as the **“son of perdition”** is Judas Iscariot (John 17:12), who betrayed Jesus. The context in II Thessalonians 2 tells us that this person will be the leader of **“the falling away”** (v. 3, NKJV). The Greek word for **“falling away”** is a word from which the English word “apostasy” is derived. That word is used to describe political or religious rebellions in the Bible. Note also that this **“falling away”** is called **“the falling away,”** indicating

that it will be one specific and very significant apostasy within the Church. This apostasy will be led by someone who, like Judas, represents an Antichrist from *within* the Church—with “anti” meaning in the sense of “in place of” rather than one who is openly hostile to the Church. Therefore, the reference to “**the temple of God**” here refers to the Church (see I Corinthians 3:16-17).

### **Question #9: What does Revelation 11:1-2 mean when it refers to “the temple of God”?**

**Answer:** Excluding Revelation 11:1-2, the Greek word for “temple” appears 14 times in 11 different verses in the book of Revelation, where it’s used (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, 17); and (3) as God and Christ themselves (21:22). Significantly, it never refers to a literal temple on *earth* in the book of Revelation. Here it doesn’t represent the Church because those who worship in it are listed separately (11:1). Therefore, by a process of elimination, “**the temple of God**” in Revelation 11:1-2 is the sanctuary in heaven. The worshipers are only there symbolically as per the description of God’s people sitting in heavenly places in Christ in Ephesians 2:6.

### **Question #10: What does Revelation 11:2 mean when it refers to “the holy city”?**

**Answer:** The expression “**the holy city**” appears 3 times in Revelation outside of 11:2: (a) 21:2; (b) the Greek text of 21:10; and (c) 22:19. The context for all 3 occurrences makes it the New Jerusalem, not the earthly Jerusalem. The “**city of My God**” (3:12) is explicitly called the New Jerusalem, and the context of 20:9 makes “**the beloved city**” also New Jerusalem. Of course, “**the holy city**” in 11:2 is not literally Jerusalem. Thus, it must be a metaphor for God’s followers of Jesus, who would be persecuted (cf. the *treading* or *trampling* language to the persecution of God’s people as in Revelation 11:2-3; 12:6, 14; 13:5-7; Daniel 7:7, 19, 21, 23-25; and 8:7, 10, 12-13, 23-25). It’s clear that God has only 1 special city in the book of Revelation, and there’s nothing uniquely Jewish about it except in the sense of it being a *spiritually* Jewish city (New Jerusalem).



### **Question #11: What Biblical support is there for the idea that there will be 7 years between the Rapture and the visible Second Coming of Jesus?**

**Answer:** There really isn’t any Biblical support for that concept. But supporters of the popular Rapture teaching interpret Daniel 9:27’s 70<sup>th</sup> week in the 70-Week prophecy as applying to the end-time. Since a week consists of 7 days, that’s understood to be 7 years. The major lines of interpretation are (1) the pronoun “**he**” in that verse is interpreted as the Antichrist; (2) the reference to ending sacrifices is interpreted to mean that the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem; (3) the reference to a “**covenant**” in that verse is usually viewed as the Antichrist *making* a covenant with the Jews; and (4) the ending of the sacrifices by the Antichrist is viewed as him turning against the Jews. For a thorough exposition of the entire 70-Weeks prophecy, including verse 27, please see Explorer III, Study Guide #4, where we show that *none* of these lines of interpretation is correct.