

Israel and the Church

Galatians 3:29

With Study Questions

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Galatians 3:29

And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29).

God Speaking

Although I briefly touched on this verse last week, I would like to re-examine it in more detail this morning. I don't believe God speaks to people immediately any longer, as He did to Samuel or Isaiah. He now speaks through His inspired Word, the Scriptures.

In a secondary sense God also speaks through providence. If God providentially has someone say "good morning" to me, I believe God would want me to say "good morning" or something similar back to him. So I learn of God's absolute and authoritative message to mankind through the Holy Scriptures and I learn of how I am to respond to that message by virtue of how God works things out in my life.

Rebuke, Exhort

In 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul exhorts Timothy (and all pastors) to "**Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.**" Through God's providence I, as a pastor, must decide when and where this is to be done. I must also decide what I am going to address. If I am going to rebuke or correct something in a sermon, what does God want me to talk about?

Dispensational Confusion

It just so happens that this week I was providentially inundated with subjects revolving around Galatians 3:29. For some it was just the matter of clearing up a little confusion. But I also found myself driving behind an inordinate number of cars which sported the bumper sticker "**In Case of Rapture, This Car Will Be Unmanned!**"

¹ I do believe there will be a rapture. I generally call it the resurrection. I don't think it will be a secret, but that all will be resurrected—both the good and evil at the same time (John 5:28, 29). At the resurrection there will not be anyone on earth to read the bumper sticker.

Money for Israel

I usually don't allow these types of things to alter the path I take in giving sermons. But then God raised the providential ante. A local radio host was promoting his prophecy conference and his books regarding the role of modern day Israel in prophecy. He had a pastor from San Diego in the studio with him who was raising money to support the nation of Israel?²

What I found extremely disturbing, however, is how these religious leaders pushed their dispensationalism to its logical conclusion and then didn't recognize its theologically unacceptable consequences. They had a representative from Israel with them in the booth. They gave the microphone to this man who proceeded to affirm his Judaism. He said he had always been a Jew; he is a Jew now and will always be a Jew. This man was not an ethnic Jew who had become a Christian.

Light of the World

The man then proceeded to proclaim that the Jews were the light of the world. I waited for the two Christian leaders to gently correct their guest, for the Christian believes that it is Jesus who is the light of the World. No correction was forthcoming. Instead, the pastor from San Diego held hands (literally – and actually announcing this holding of hands) with the man who had rejected Christ as the Messiah. He then said that it was a time in history to lay aside theological differences for God was doing a work in Israel that we must support. After all, God will *bless those who bless Israel and curse those who curse Israel*.

In the Name of...

They finally closed in prayer at which time the radio host prayed in the name of Christ, then added, "and in the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob;" this, no doubt, for the benefit of his Jewish brother.

This Morning's Goal

What we are dealing with here is a thing called dispensationalism. It is currently the most popular brand of Christianity in the west and though I don't think its proponents all fall outside the scope of Christianity, I most certainly believe it is a destructive way of looking at the Scriptures.

I wish to do three things here: 1) show the theological error of this, and similar encounters; 2) teach what I believe the Bible actually says regarding Israel

² I am not against raising money and sending it to nations in need—no matter what ethnicity. What I am about to suggest is attacked by some as being anti-Semitic. To accuse someone of being racist because they view all ethnic groups as being equal in the sight of God is, of course, absurd.

and the church; and, 3) demonstrate why it is important for us to know this. I will only be addressing a small portion of Dispensationalism; but I think the errors will be easily spotted.

Some Errors

Many of the errors revolve around the following questions:

Dispensationalists believe Israelites have a divine right to the land of Israel. Who owns that land known as Israel? As R.J. Rushdoony said, Jesus owns it. He owns everything. He is **“the ruler over the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1:5)**. Notice not a heavenly king only but an earthly king as well.

How should it be determined who gets that land? By the same factors that determine who should be allowed to inhabit any land.

Dispensationalists believe that the crisis in the Middle East will culminate with the Battle of Armageddon. Millions of Hebrews will be slaughtered by (probably Russia???) thus ushering in the return of Christ and the thousand-year millennium.

How will the crisis in the Middle East come to an end? By acknowledging the Lordship of Jesus Christ, i.e. by the fulfilling of the Great Commission. This is not to say that there will ever be absolute perfect peace in the world. But it is to say that there will most assuredly never be peace until the nations of the world bow before the King of kings. **“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9)**.

Who is the light of the world? Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12).

Do Jews believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? No! Jesus, speaking to Jews, said, **“You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also” (John 8:19)**.

Should people be considered to be the recipients of the Abrahamic Covenant – the chosen people of God – by virtue of their ethnicity? No! Galatians 3:29 teaches us that those who believe in Christ are the seed of Abraham. Jesus taught that ethnic Jews who didn't believe in Him were not Jews at all (Revelation 2:9; 3:9).

When the Jews said they had Abraham and God as their father, Jesus said: **“You are of *your* father the devil” (John 8:44)**.

John the Baptist addressed those who took comfort in their own ethnicity when he preached, **“Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as *our* father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones” (Luke 3:8)**.

Again hear Paul in Romans 9:6, 7, **“For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel,⁷ nor *are* they all children because they are the seed of Abraham.”**

Are we to understand God's divorce of Israel (Jeremiah 3:8) to be God going back on His promise? After all, the covenant made with Abraham was an

everlasting covenant. This is a very common dispensational accusation against covenant theologians. The answer is a resounding “no!” God’s promise was made to the descendants of Abraham who were descendants by faith – not ethnicity. In Romans 11, Paul anticipates this question when he asks, **“I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (Romans 11:1)**. But notice that Paul is not finished with his description of himself. He doesn’t appeal to his being the recipient of God’s promise based upon his ethnicity or mere external citizenship. He doesn’t take refuge in the nation of Israel but compares himself to the faithful remnant. **“God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, ³ “Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life”? ⁴ But what does the divine response say to him? “I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” ⁵ Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:2-5)**. God’s covenant was always dependant upon His promise and the attending God-given faith of its recipients. God has kept His promise. The dispensationalist is just confused about who the recipients happen to be.

What about the land promises given to Abraham? They have been kept by God. Read what Joshua’s record about whether or not the land promises were kept. **“So the Lord gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. ⁴⁴And the Lord gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the Lord gave all their enemies into their hand. ⁴⁵Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass” (Joshua 21:43-45)**. What we must realize is that the land promises given to Israel had, as their primary design, the preservation of the Seed who was Christ. When Christ was born there was no longer any need to preserve the physical seed.

This is not anti-Israel. Israel now takes rank with all others. If Israelites, or any others, repent they will be grafted into God’s covenant promise.

Has the church replaced Israel? Is this “Replacement Theology”? The Bible does not teach that the church replaced Israel, it teaches that the church is Israel, the true Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). Circumcision was replaced by baptism, the Passover was replaced by the Lord’s Supper, the priesthood was replaced by Christ the true High Priest, etc. In all this we must understand that Israel was the church in the old covenant and the church is Israel in the new. They are the same. They always have been.

What About Israel and the Church?

Your dispensational friends will have many more questions than I can deal with in this one sermon. But hopefully you can begin to see in what way these questions need to be answered. Let us now move on to our second question. What does the Bible actually say about Israel and the church?

This is really quite simple if we allow the New Testament to help us interpret the Old Testament. Let us look at the covenant made with Abraham and see if we can let the New Testament authors explain it for us.

Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. ² I will make you a great nation" (Genesis 12:1, 2a).

What is the great nation? Is it the ethnic nation of Israel or is it those who faithfully believe in the God of Abraham and the person of Christ? The great nation is not Israel but the church. Peter describes the church as **"a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people" (1 Peter 2:9)**. One might think these terms unique to the Israelite in the Old Testament. No, they are used to describe, not ethnic Israel, but the church.

But can't we understand that this nation also includes the ethnic descendants of Abraham? No! Paul writes, **"Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham" (Galatians 3:7).**

"I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12: 2, 3).

What is the blessing of Abraham? And in what respect will all the families of the earth be blessed? The blessing was justification by faith. Paul writes in Galatians, **"And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed."⁹ So then those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham" (Galatians 3:8, 9).**

Curse and Bless

So the nation is the church, the blessing is justification by faith in Christ. So what do we make of cursing those who curse you and blessing those who bless you? I must argue here that this has nothing to do with present political activity in the Middle East.

The notion that this applies to ethnic Israel is fraught with difficulties. How Jewish does one have to be in order to be a recipient? What if you're a gentile and married to a Jew? What of all the Jews in history who died without receiving the promise? If it is an everlasting covenant, does that mean that the Israelites will be living in Canaan and separated from gentile Christians forever in heaven?

It shouldn't be too hard to understand that if the nation is the church and the blessing is justification by faith the attending curses and blessings are upon those who curse or bless the church.

In other words, the gates of hell will not prevail against the church. Worldly kingdoms will come and go but Christ's kingdom on earth will prevail until He comes again.

Why is this Important?

Finally, why is it important for us to know this? In the United States churches and Christians are affluent and successful. Until recently there has been little fear in our hearts that the church will someday be extinct. But this has not always been the case.

The Persecuted Church

Jesus had the Apostle John write a letter to seven churches. It is called The Revelation. These seven churches existed at a time when both the Jews and the Roman Empire combined their dark efforts to persecute and put to death thousands of Christians. There was much doubt as to whether or not the church would make it out of the first century.

It was to these churches that John wrote, **"Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth" (Revelation 1:4, 5).** They needed to know that their King was King, both in eternity and in history. The remainder of Revelation was a prophecy of God judging the enemies, not of Israel, but of the church.

What About Us?

Perhaps you can see now why, historically speaking, it was so important for the church to know that God would see them through history. But what about us? What comfort can we take in Galatians 3:29? What comfort is there for us in knowing that we have the protective custody of Christ Himself?

Maybe the church isn't in danger of extinction, but it surely is in danger of perversion. Should I set my sights on the rapture and consign my posterity to

a future of dismal failure? May it never be! We must be encouraged to know that the church will survive throughout history and therefore we should never grow weary of doing good – not to earn salvation but to leave a heritage of godliness.

We must pursue truth and dedicate our lives to being faithful husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, obedient children, and conscientious citizens. All this knowing that every word of truth we speak, every act of sacrifice we make for our brothers, sisters, and neighbors will hit its mark. It will not be snatched away by Satan, nor will it be consumed or absorbed into an ungodly culture. It is the ungodly culture that will be dashed with Christ's rod of iron.

When dispensationalists assign God's promises to people on account of ethnicity they grant these people a false sense of peace with God. But not only that, they also rob from Christ's church the precious promises He has made and for which He died. The Apostle Paul could not make it clearer, "**And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29).**"

Questions for Study

1. What would be the proper response to someone who claimed that someone or something other than Jesus was the light of the world (page 2)?
2. Who owns the land known as Israel (page 3)?
3. How will the crisis in the Middle East eventually be resolved (page 3)?
4. Do people who reject Jesus still believe in the true God (page 3)?
5. Who are the recipients of the Abrahamic Covenant (page 3)?
6. Since Israel is no longer the nation of God, are we to understand that God doesn't keep His promises (pages 3, 4)?
7. Are there still land promises for the ethnic nation of Israel (page 4)?
8. What is misleading about the term "Replacement Theology" (page 4)?
9. What is the "great nation" in Genesis 12:2 (page 5)?
10. What is the "blessing" of Abraham in Genesis 12:2 (page 5)?
11. Who are the objects of God's cursing and blessing in Genesis 12:3 (pages 5 6)?
12. Why is it important to understand the truth concerning being the seed of Abraham (pages 6, 7)?