

True Israel

by

Hershel Lee Harvell Jr.

(www.reformedontheweb.com)



Copyright statement.

(Anyone is at liberty to use material from this article with or without credit. I believe that the material set forth herein to be a true statement of Scripture teaching, and my desire is to further, not to restrict its use.)

I believe that the reading of Old Testament passages in a literalistic way is the result of a wrong hermeneutic. To be sure, one must be literal in their approach to the Bible, but not literalistic. To read scripture in a literal way is to read it in the genre of which it was written. For example, the Bible is written in many genres, such as: narrative, poetry, proverbs, didactic, apocalyptic, etc...., but just as no one reads a comic book the way they do a newspaper, even so apocalyptic literature should not be read as narrative or didactic scripture should.

For example: The book of Proverbs contain many truths, but are not to be taken as absolutes. For instance, Proverbs 22:6 states that we are to train up a child in the way he should go and when he gets old he will not depart from it. Yet we have known many a child that was brought up in the Christian faith, who never followed it as an adult. This is because, though the Proverb is a good principle to live by, nevertheless it is not an absolute. Election belongs to the Lord and unless God regenerates that child, then it will be lost forever. Therefore, Proverbs should not be read as didactic scripture.

The book of Revelation is not to be read in a literalistic way, but in a literal way. If we take everything in Revelation, in a literalistic way, then the beast in Revelation 13 would be a Godzilla type creature. Instead, however, we recognize that the book of Revelation is apocalyptic and is expressing an idea rather than a series of literal, actual events. It is replete with symbolism and figurative language.

The didactic or instructional passages, such as Paul's epistles, are to interpret the rest of scripture. This is because the Apostles have the greater light. They have been given the mysteries and revelations and are unfolding these things through their writings. Therefore, the scriptures that instruct are the scriptures that should interpret all else, while using the method known as 'the analogy of faith.' This method is the method of interpreting scripture with scripture.

My purpose in stating all this is to show that the Bible is to be read literally, but not in a literalistic way. We interpret scripture in the genre in which it was written. Old Testament Jews did not follow this approach. They missed Christ and his kingdom because they were reading scripture in a literalistic way. This is why the apostles were having a hard time understanding Christ's death, resurrection, and kingdom. This is why they asked whether the kingdom would now be restored to Israel. Christ certainly restored it and did so above and beyond what they expected. For instance, many today are looking for the restoration of the fallen tabernacle of David, but Peter is plain that God is restoring it within the Church age. Let's read Acts 15:14-17.

“Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.”

So this is a matter of hermeneutics. Those who divide Israel and the Church hold to an Israel-centered hermeneutic and are interpreting scripture in a literalistic way, instead of in a literal way. Those who see a continuation of Israel in the Church, hold to a Christ-centered hermeneutic. Remember, Christ himself stated that the Old Testament spoke of him, not Israel. We read about things in the Old Testament that seem to suggest that certain things would happen to natural Israel, but if we read the New Testament and allow the apostles to throw light on these things, we see that God was speaking of true Israel, which is Christ and his seed.

Jesus told the people of his day, "Search the scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life and they are they who testify of me" John 5:39. This was because the scriptures testified of Christ, not Israel. Again Jesus took two of his disciples and began at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them all things concerning himself Luke 24:27. We see that the greater fulfillment of God calling Israel out of Egypt was fulfilled in Christ, Matthew 2:15 "...Out of Egypt have I called my son." This was a quote from Hosea 11:1 and though it pertained to Old Testament Israel, nevertheless the greater fulfillment was in Christ.

Most who hold to an Israel-centered hermeneutic have little to say about typology in scripture. They simply ignore it all together. They do not take Christ with them and interpret the Old Testament, in light of the New. Therefore, when we interpret scripture we must remember that it all pertains to Christ and his people. It is not about Israel per se, but about establishing an eternal kingdom through Christ. When God scattered the nations at the Tower of Babel, there was no Israel present. The reason God called Abraham out was to bring all these nations back to himself. This is why God told Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. Upon calling Abraham out, God began revealing spiritual and eternal things through types and shadows.

Let's look at some typology in scripture.

When Jacob wrestled with an angel, God gave Jacob his own name. Say what? I said God gave Jacob his own name. The name 'Israel' is Christ's name. He is the true Israel. Notice these scriptures:

Nu. 6:27 "My people... are called by My name.." 2 Chr. 6:14 "Thy people are called by Thy name. "
Dan. 9:19 "Thou (Israel) art called by the name of the Lord." Exodus 4:22 "...Israel is my son, even my firstborn." Hos 11:1 "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt."
Matthew 2:15 "And was there 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."

The term Israel means 'a Prince of God' and is Christ name, though it is used of two separate groups throughout scripture. It is used of national Israel or those born within Israel, but is also used for 'spiritual Israel' or those who are God's elect. Most people harp on the nation Israel being chosen of

God, but this is not the fullest sense of the term. The name 'Israel' points primarily to the spiritual seed of God or to those whom God calls out of darkness, into Christ. Notice these scriptures. They speak of 'spiritual Israel':

Psalm 73:1 Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.

Isaiah 45:17 But Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end.

Isaiah 49:3 And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

John 1:47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!

Romans 9:6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:

Romans 11:26 And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

Taken with Romans 2:28-29:

“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.”

We see that only those who have a clean heart, who are born again, in Christ, are the true Israelites.

God declared that he is taking Jews and Gentiles and making one new man. Ephesians 2:11-19 declares:

Eph 2:11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

Eph 2:12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

Eph 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Eph 2:14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

Eph 2:15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

Eph 2:16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

Eph 2:17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

Eph 2:18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

Eph 2:19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

Jesus told the Pharisees of his day that he had sheep, who were not of the fold of national Israel, that he would take and bring into the fold and there would be one fold and one Shepherd.

John 10:16 And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

Therefore, Jesus and his people are the true Israelites. He is the 'seed' to whom the promises were made Galatians 3:16. All the typology in the OT pointed to him and his people. Notice that Israel consisted of twelve tribes. Christ called out twelve apostles. Notice that Israel wandered in the wilderness. Christ went into the wilderness. Israel wandered for forty years and Christ fasted forty days. And so forth. The typology is so great, that it simply cannot be ignored.

Next we see that the land and kingdom belong to God and not national Israel.

Psalms 22:28 For the kingdom is the LORD'S: and he is the governor among the nations.

Matthew 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Also when Paul declared that 'all Israel will be saved,' he certainly did not mean every individual who was born into national Israel. This is found in Romans 11:26:

Rom 11:26 And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

but just two chapters earlier Paul declared:

Rom 9:27 Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved:

Christ even stated:

Mat 8:11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

Mat 8:12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Therefore the term 'all Israel shall be saved' deals with all those of whom God calls into his kingdom, through Jesus Christ, Jews and Gentiles. It does not mean every particular national Israelite.

God is still saving Jews. It don't matter if they come in today or a thousand years from now, they are still part of the Church. There is no separate group. There is only one fold and one Shepherd.

Therefore in conclusion, if one will listen to the apostles, while taking Christ with them through the scriptures, then they will not get the view that there are two peoples of God throughout scripture. There is one people of God. All those in Christ are the true Israelites.