Who Are The Israel Of God?

I. Both Israel And The Church Derive Their Inheritance By Descent From Abraham
   A. Israel—Gen. 17:7–8, 15–21
   B. Church—Rom. 4:9–17; Gal. 3:7–9, 25–29

II. Picture Abraham, As A Friend Of God
   A. 2 Chron. 20:7; Is. 41:8; James 2:23
   B. Not primarily “religious”

III. God Made Two Covenants with Abraham
   A. Gen. 15:8–18—First covenant: fulfilled by the Law (under Joshua)
   B. Gen. 17:1–8, 9–14—Second covenant: fulfilled in the Messiah
   C. Note the differences
      "A" covenant       "My" covenant
      No Provision for Abraham Provision for Abraham first
      Not everlasting    Everlasting
      Blood of animals   Blood of Abraham and his seed
   D. If God had only made the first covenant, He would now have no further obligation to Abraham.

IV. Three Pictures Of Abraham’s Seed
   A. Gen. 13:16; 28:14—Dust of the earth: physical descent only—regardless of faith (perhaps includes Ishmael)
   B. Gen. 22:17—Sand of the sea: through Isaac—Heb. 11:12, i.e., Israel. Features of sand:
      1. Resists ceaseless pounding of the waves
      2. Divides between sea and dry land
   C. Gen. 22:17—Stars of heaven: i.e., the church—Heb. 11:12, to fulfill the function allotted to them in Gen. 1:16–18 (Note again: “Divide” [Phil. 2:14–16])

V. Israel And The Church Are Two Distinct Entities
   A. (See list of occurrences of “Israel/Israelite” in the New Testament):
      “Israel”—69 times; “Israelite”—5 times. Total: 74
B. Note the following:
   1. In at least 71 cases, no reasonable doubt that New Testament use of “Israel” is same as Old Testament use. Percentage = 96%
   2. 9 cases are direct quotations from Old Testament
      a. In each case use of “Israel” is same as in Old Testament
      b. This sets a New Testament pattern for interpreting “Israel” throughout Old Testament

VI. Possible Exceptions
A. No. 52/3: Rom. 9:6—Occurs twice:
   1. Once same as Old Testament—once limited to those who believe God’s promises and acknowledge their Messiah.
   2. This does not extend, but restricts, the use of “Israel.”
   3. It does not include Gentiles, but it excludes some Israelites.
B. No. 66: Gal. 6:16—Who are “the Israel of God”? Same as restricted use in Rom 9:6; only true Jewish believers in the Messiah. Paul refers to two groups:
   1. “Those who walk” = believing Gentiles
   2. “Israel of God” = believing Israelites (compare Rom. 3:30—The same two groups (in opposite order)
      a. “The circumcision by (on basis of) faith” = believing Jews
      b. “The uncircumcision through faith” = believing Gentiles
   3. No. 73—Rev. 7:4—144,000 of all tribes of Israel. Depends on how Revelation is to be interpreted—but in the two other cases in Rev. “Israel” has same meaning as in Old Testament.
C. Even if the above explanation is not accepted, the total number of possible exceptions is 3 out of 74.

VII. Other Related Uses (indicated by †)
A. No. 63: 1 Cor. 10:18—”Israel according to the flesh” = Those who are Israelites by natural descent only, but lack faith (and so did not enter the promised land)—corresponds to distinction in Rom. 9:6.
B. No. 67: Eph 2:12—”Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,” i.e., Gentiles without Christ. Through faith in Christ they become members of the commonwealth, but not Israelites.
   1. Contemporary examples: Arab citizens of Israel; New Zealand and Australia in British Commonwealth.
   2. Compare: Abraham is a father of many nations (Gentiles)—not merely of Israelites. Gen. 17:5; Rom. 4:16–17; Gal. 3:26–29.
   3. Gentiles can be “Abraham’s descendants” without becoming Israelites.
C. Rom 2:28–29—Similar to Rom. 9:6—Reducing, not extending, the number of those to whom Jews should be applied.
   1. “Jew” occurs nearly 200 times in New Testament (26 times in writings of Paul)
   2. It is never used as a synonym for “Christian”—to interpret in this way would make nonsense of most of these passages (e.g. 1 Cor 10:32).
VIII. Inheritors In Christ

A. Eph. 2:14–16—*In Christ*, the *dividing wall* between Jews and Gentiles has been *abolished*, But:

B. Num. 23:9—Outside of Christ, the separation remains

C. Gal. 3:26–29—*In Christ*, Jews and Gentiles share equally in Abraham’s inheritance. But this does *not obliterate* all distinctions of race, any more than all distinctions of sex. Nor does it mean that *all Gentiles become Jews*. Compare:

D. Acts 16:1–3—Paul had Timothy circumcised because his mother was Jewish.

E. Gal. 2:2–5—Paul *refused* to have Titus circumcised because he was a Greek.

IX. Israelites Distinguished From Christians

In four passages in Romans Paul uses “Israel” to distinguish unbelieving Israelites from believing Gentiles

A. Rom. 9:30–31—Gentiles attained . . . but Israel did not . . .

B. Rom. 10:19–21—Same principle as above

C. Rom. 11:7, 11—Same as above

D. Rom. 11:25–26—Same as above

X. Practical Application Of The Above

A. Old Testament prophecies about Israel still refer to Israel and mean exactly what they appear to mean.

1. There is no other way to make sense of many such prophecies: e.g. Lev. 26:32–33, 36–39; Hos. 3:4–5; Zech. chs. 12, 13, 14 (esp. 14:3–4).

2. At the same time, such prophecies contain many *principles* and *examples* that are important for the church.

B. We may expect unfulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament to be fulfilled in just the same way as those which were fulfilled in the New Testament. *Examples of fulfilled prophecies from the life of Jesus:*

1. He was born of a *virgin* (Is. 7:14 + Matt. 1:24–25)

2. He was born in *Bethlehem* (Micah 5:2 + Luke 2:4–7)

3. He taught in *parables* (Ps. 78:2 + Matt. 13:34–35)

4. He was *betrayed* by a friend (Ps. 41:9 + John 13:18)

5. He was *hated* without a cause (Ps. 35:19, 69:4 + John 15:25)

6. He was condemned with *criminals* (Is. 53:12 + Luke 22:37)

7. His garments were *divided* by *lot* (Ps. 22:18 + Matt. 27:35)

8. He was offered *vinegar* to drink (Ps. 69:21 + Matt. 27:48)

9. His body was *pierced* without His bones being broken (Ps. 34:20 + John 19:36 & Zech. 12:10 + John 19:37)

10. He was *buried* in the tomb of a *rich man* (Is. 53:9 + Matt. 27:57–60)

11. He *rose* from the dead on the *third day* (Hos. 6:2 + 1 Cor. 15:4)

C. Fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in the New Testament makes it *even more sure* that the remaining prophecies will be *fulfilled likewise* (2 Pet. 1:16–21). They therefore require our *earnest attention.*

XI. Israel’s Destiny Is Based On God’s Sovereign Election, Not On Israel’s Merits
A. Rom. 9:10–16, 11:28–29 (compare Is. 41:8–9, 44:1–3)
B. But the same is equally true of the church (Eph. 1:3–6, 2:8–10; 2 Tim. 1:9)
C. Rom. 8:29–30; 1 Pet. 1:1–2
  1. He foreknew us
  2. Having foreknown us He chose us
  3. Having chosen us he predestined us
  4. In time He called us
  5. When we accepted, He justified us
  6. He glorified us—not future but past (1 Cor. 2:6–7)

XII. Uniqueness And “Newness” Of The Church
A. The church is a “mystery” never previously revealed (Eph. 3:2–10)
B. Also, a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 6:15)
C. Also, a one new man (Eph. 2:11–16)
D. On the other hand, Israel had already existed for 15 centuries

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XIII. Differing Destinies
If Israel and the church are not identical, then how do their destinies differ?
A. Gen. 22:17—As stars, the destiny of the Church is heavenly
B. Heb. 11:12—As sand, the destiny of Israel is earthly
C. Is. 51:16—The two together will “take over” (for God) both the heavens and the earth

XIV. Aspects Of The Church That Are Heavenly
A. 1 Pet. 1:3–4—Born from above to a heavenly inheritance
B. Phil. 3:20—Citizenship in heaven
C. Eph. 1:3—Blessings in the heavenlies
D. Eph. 1:20–23—Headquarters in the heavenlies
E. Eph. 2:6—Enthronement (i.e. place of authority) in the heavenlies
F. Eph. 3:10—Reveals God’s wisdom in the heavenlies
G. Eph. 6:12—Wages war in the heavenlies
H. Heb. 3:1—Calling is heavenly
I. Heb. 6:4–5—Has tasted a heavenly gift and the powers of the age to come
J. Heb. 12:22—Assembles in the heavenly Jerusalem (The Bible speaks of a heavenly Jerusalem and Zion but not of a heavenly Israel)
  1. From its heavenly position, the church is called to play a decisive role in earth’s affairs (Ps. 103:19; Col. 1:12–13; Rev. 1:6; 5:10)
  2. Specifically, to pray for the coming of God’s kingdom on earth (Matt. 6:10)

XV. By contrast, Israel’s Inheritance Is Earthly (Gen. 17:7–8, Ps. 105:8–11)

XVI. Both Israel And The Church Will Have To Gain Their Inheritance By Fighting (After The Pattern Of Joshua And Canaan)
B. The Church—2 Cor. 10:3–5; Eph. 6:12; Rev. 12:7–11

Angels also will share in the conflict (Dan. 12:1; Rev. 12:7, 10)

C. Final victory will come through the personal intervention of the Lord Jesus (Ps. 110:5–6; Zech. 14:3–5; 1 Thess. 4:16–17; 2 Thess. 1:6–10)

XVII. Setting Up God’s Kingdom On Earth

A. The restoration of Israel to their land must prepare the way for the setting up of the kingdom—and will indicate the approach of the close of the age (Jer. 30:1–7; Luke 21:24–28)

B. A “remnant” of Israel, preserved through great tribulation, will form the nucleus of the kingdom (Rom. 9:26–29 & 11:26; Joel 2:32, Micah 4:7–8)

C. Its center for worship and administration will be Jerusalem (Is. 2:1–4; Micah 4:1–4; Zech. 8:20–23, 14:16–17)

D. The returned Messiah will be king (Is. 24:23; Zech. 14:8–9)

E. Israelites will be its priests (Is. 61:4–6; compare Ex. 19:3–6)

F. The earth will at last know true peace (Is. 9:6–7; Ps. 72:1–11) and will celebrate its long-awaited sabbath (Heb. 4:9)

G. Nations will be admitted, or excluded, on the basis of their treatment of “the brothers of Jesus” (Joel 3:1–3; Matt. 25:31–46)

H. Those who have served Jesus in this age will be the heavenly administrators of His kingdom on earth (Matt. 19:27–30; Luke 22:29–30; 1 Cor. 6:2–3, Rev. 2:26–28)

XVIII. However, The Kingdom Thus Established On Earth Will Not Be The Final Phase Of God’s Purposes (Rev. 21:1–5)

Use of “Israel” and “Israelite” in the New Testament

1. Matt. 2:6 “... a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.” (cited from Mic. 5:2)

2. Matt. 2:20 “... the land of Israel . . .”

3. Matt. 2:21 ... the land of Israel.

4. Matt. 8:10 “... not found such great faith, not even in Israel!”

5. Matt. 9:33 “... never seen like this in Israel!”

6. Matt. 10:6 “... to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

7. Matt. 10:23 “... not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”

8. Matt. 15:24 “... except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

9. Matt. 15:31 ... they glorified the God of Israel.

10. Matt. 19:28 “... will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

*11. Matt. 27:9 ... whom they of the children of Israel priced ... (cited from Zech. 11:12–13)

12. Matt. 27:42 “If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down . . .”

14. Mark 15:32  “Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross . . .”
15. Luke 1:16  “And he will turn many of the children of Israel . . .”
*16. Luke 1:54  “He has helped His servant Israel . . .” (cited [approx.] from Is. 41:8)
18. Luke 1:80  . . . till the day of his manifestation to Israel.
21. Luke 2:34  “. . . the fall and rising of many in Israel . . .”
22. Luke 4:25  “. . . many widows were in Israel . . .”
23. Luke 4:27  “. . . many lepers were in Israel . . .”
24. Luke 7:9  “. . . not found such great faith, not even in Israel!”
25. Luke 22:30  “. . . sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”
26. Luke 24:21  “. . . He who was going to redeem Israel.”
27. John 1:31  “. . . that He should be revealed to Israel . . .”
29. John 1:49  “You are the King of Israel!”
30. John 3:10  “Are you the teacher of Israel . . .”
31. John 12:13  “Blessed is . . . the King of Israel!”
32. Acts 1:6  “. . . many lepers were in Israel . . .”
34. Acts 2:36  “. . . let all the house of Israel know . . .”
35. Acts 3:12  “Men of Israel . . .” (literally, Israelites)
36. Acts 4:10  “. . . let it be known to . . . all the people of Israel . . .”
37. Acts 4:27  “. . . with the Gentiles and the people of Israel . . .”
38. Acts 5:21  “. . . all the elders of the children of Israel . . .”
39. Acts 5:31  “. . . to give repentance to Israel . . .”
40. Acts 5:35  “Men of Israel . . .” (literally, Israelites)
41. Acts 7:23  “. . . to visit his brethren, the children of Israel.”
42. Acts 7:37  “. . . Moses who said to the children of Israel . . .”
*43. Acts 7:42  “Did you offer Me . . . O house of Israel?” (cited from Amos 5:25–27)
44. Acts 9:15  “. . . to bear My name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel.”
45. Acts 10:36  “The word which God sent to the children of Israel.”
47. Acts 13:17  “The God of this people Israel . . .”
49. Acts 13:24  “. . . the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.”
51. Acts 28:20  “. . . for the hope of Israel I am bound . . .”
52/3. Rom. 9:6  . . . they are not all Israel who are of Israel . . .
54. Rom. 9:27  Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel . . .
55. Rom. 9:27  “Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand . . .” (cited from Is. 10:22–23)
56. Rom. 9:31  . . . but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness . . .
57. Rom. 10:19  . . . did Israel not know?
58. Rom. 10:21  But to Israel he says . . .
59. Rom. 11:1  . . . I also am an Israelite . . .
60. Rom. 11:7  Israel has not obtained what it seeks . . .
61. Rom. 11:25  . . . hardening in part has happened to Israel . . .
62. Rom. 11:26  And so all Israel will be saved . . .
†63. 1 Cor. 10:18  Observe Israel after the flesh . . .
64. 2 Cor. 3:7  . . . the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses . . .
65. 2 Cor. 3:13  . . . the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end . . .
66. Gal. 6:15–16  . . . peace and mercy . . . an upon the Israel of God. (Rom. 3:30)
†67. Eph. 2:12  . . . aliens from the commonwealth of Israel . . .
68. Phil. 3:5  . . . of the stock of Israel . . .
*69. Heb. 8:8  “. . . I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel . . .”
*70. Heb. 8:10  “. . . the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel . . .” (Heb. 8:8, 8:10 both cited from Jer. 31:31–34)
73. Rev. 7:4  One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel . . .
74. Rev. 21:12  . . . the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel . . .

*Cited from the Old Testament
†other related uses

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