

The Jew, the Greek and The Ecclesia of God

By Gerry Watts

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There is a lot of confusion today in relation to the question as to what constitutes being a true Jew or Israelite. Due to the long history of Israel, and the emergence and growth of the modern State of Israel, there are all sorts of opinions and differing views in this matter. For instance, a modern Israeli, who belongs to the country of Israel may not be Jewish. And amongst the Jews themselves, some are religious and therefore adhere to Judaism in one form or another, while others are totally secular. Then there is the Gentile proselyte to Judaism who is not racially Jewish, as well as numerous others who are ancestors of peoples who were forcibly converted to Judaism, such as the Khazars, who are not actually descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob/Israel. It goes on and on!

The important question to ask in regard to this is 'How does God view this subject.' Well, God's view of all of this turns out to be a lot simpler than man's theories, divisions and interpretations. So let us take a look at what Scripture clearly teaches on this subject. The Apostle Paul is the one who gives us the most details in regard to this.

Firstly, let us establish if Jacob/Israel and the Jews are one and the same people.

"Hear this, **house of Jacob**, called by the name of **Israel**, and those who fare forth from the waters of **Judah**, those swearing by the name of Yahweh, and are mentioning the God of Israel, not in truth, and not in righteousness, for they are called from the holy city, and they are supported by the God of Israel."

(Isaiah 48:1-2)

Isaiah states clearly here that the house of Jacob is the same as the house of Israel and the Jews. He is addressing the whole nation of Israel in relation to the God of Israel, making reference to the holy city, Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. It is true that the prophets often specifically addressed the northern **kingdom of Israel** or the southern **kingdom of Judah**, and there is a distinction between these two kingdoms or houses within the actual messages of the prophets, but ultimately the Jews represent Israel, who is also Jacob.

The original fathers or patriarchs of the descendants of Israel were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Jacob was renamed Israel. The two names of Jacob/Israel may be significant in that Jacob (the supplanter) became Israel (upright with God)

after his wrestle with God, but they are obviously still describing the same man. It is the same with his descendants. The house of Jacob is one and the same as the house of Israel. Subsequently, after the Babylonian captivity in the 6th century BC, the Jewish (or Judahite) nation became the representatives of the whole nation. Ezekiel clearly prophesied this in Ezekiel 37:15-28.

"...say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am going to take the stick of Joseph—which is in Ephraim's hand—and of the Israelite tribes associated with him, **and join it to Judah's stick, making them a single stick of wood, and they will become one in my hand.**... I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms."
(verses 19, 21-22 NIV)

At the time of this prophecy, both Israel and Judah were in exile, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, the land was desolate, and all hope of Israel being restored was virtually gone. Yet God promised that He was going to restore a remnant from the northern kingdom of Israel (Joseph/Ephraim) and join them to the remnant from the southern kingdom of Judah, so that the whole nation of Israel would once more dwell in the land as one nation with one governor/king (of David's line), with the city of Jerusalem as their capital. Zechariah and others also prophesied a similar thing (Zechariah 10:6-12). These things were fulfilled during the centuries following the restoration from Babylon, as Israelite exiles gradually returned from all over the world under the headship of Judah - leading to the time of Christ.

This can be further established simply by looking at a few key texts in the New Testament.

Paul himself was a Jew and an Israelite.

"...of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews..."

(Philippians 3:5)

"For I also am an Israelite, out of Abraham's seed, Benjamin's tribe."

(Romans 11:1)

Jesus states that salvation is of the Jews, yet we know that this salvation of God is through Israel.

"...for salvation is of the Jews."

(John 4:22)

"For my eyes perceived Thy Salvation, which Thou dost make ready suiting the face of all the peoples, a Light for the revelation of nations, and the Glory of Thy people Israel."

(Luke 2:30-32)

Jesus is the King of the Jews and the King of Israel.

"Now it was written, "Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews."

(John 19:19)

"Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God! Thou art the King of Israel!"

(John 1:49)

So already it should be very evident that the Jews are representative of the whole nation of Jacob/Israel in fulfillment of prophecy concerning the restoration of the whole house of Israel under the headship of Judah, and this fact is further confirmed by Paul. This deals a death blow to the whole British Israel/Identity doctrines concerning 'the lost tribes of Israel.'

Now in his letters Paul divides the whole of humanity into 3 groups:

- 1) The Jew
- 2) The Greek
- 3) The Ecclesia of God

"And become not a stumbling block to **Jews** as well as to **Greeks** and to the **ecclesia of God**..."

(1 Corinthians 10:32)

It becomes clear as to who these groups represent in Romans 2-3. Firstly, the whole human race, in relation to the universal judgment of God, is defined as Jew and Greek.

"...on every human soul which is effecting evil, **both of the Jew first and of the Greek**, yet glory and honour and peace to every worker of good, **both to the Jew first, and to the Greek**."

(Romans 2:9-10)

"...we previously charge both Jews and Greeks to be all under sin..."

(Romans 3:9)

So Paul is saying that the Jew is representing Israel, and the Greek is representing the rest of the nations. He uses these as representatives for the following reasons:

A) The Jewish people are the only distinct nation in the flesh that are clearly descendants of Israel, and the religion of Judaism was the only continuation of the Law of Moses;

B) The Greek language and culture was predominant throughout the world, even to the point where some Jews were labeled as Hellenistic Jews because they were so influenced by Greek culture and language.

Then Paul defines the Jew according to the flesh as one who is circumcised and who belongs to the descendants of Israel, those who were entrusted with God's written Word.

"What, then, is the prerogative of the Jew, or what the benefit of circumcision? Much in every manner. For first, indeed, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God."

(Romans 3:1-2)

He clarifies this later in the same letter.

"...my sorrow is great...for my brethren, my relatives according to the flesh, **who are Israelites**, whose is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the legislation and the divine service and the promises; whose are the fathers, and out of whom is the Christ according to the flesh..."

(Romans 9:2-5)

A Gentile proselyte of Judaism was always viewed as being distinct from Israel, even by the apostles. It was only when the Gentile fully identified himself with the Jewish people by being circumcised and obeying the law that he was classed as being Jewish, even though he wasn't an actual descendant of Israel.

"Men, Israelites, and those who are fearing God, hear!"

(Acts 13:16)

So a Jew or Israelite is one who is descended from the nation of Israel by race and is circumcised in accordance with the law. Yet a Gentile who fully identifies himself with Israel and their religion, becoming circumcised, is also classed as a Jew or Israelite. The same applies to a female or Jewess, apart from circumcision, of course! Ruth was a descendant of Moab but she identified herself with the family of Israel and their religion, and she became the great-grandmother of David, whose genealogy brought forth the Messiah according to the flesh (Book of Ruth and Matthew 1:5-6).

In Acts 26:5-8, Paul stated clearly that the twelve tribes of Israel were earnestly serving God via the religion of Judaism in his own generation, in the first century, waiting for the promise to be fulfilled.

"And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night.

O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me."
(verses 6-7 NIV)

He is talking about Israel according to the flesh or natural Israel, that is, all twelve tribes under the headship of Judah.

Yet Paul also makes it very clear that the true Jew or Israelite is the one who is circumcised in the heart by the Spirit, who walks in the Spirit and observes the elements by the Spirit - one who accepts the Father and the Son. These spiritual ones are the true Israel of God. All others are false and belong to the synagogue of Satan.

"For not that which is apparent is the Jew, nor yet that which is apparent in flesh is circumcision; but that which is hidden is the Jew, and circumcision is of the heart, in spirit, not in letter, whose applause is not of men, but of God."

(Romans 2:28-29)

"...the synagogue of Satan, (who are saying that they themselves are Jews, and are not, but are lying)..."

(Revelation 3:9)

"...for not all those out of Israel, are Israel..."

(Romans 9:6)

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but a new creation. And whoever shall observe the elements by this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, also on the Israel of God."

(Galatians 6:15-16)

It is these spiritual ones called out of both Israel and the nations that together form the Ecclesia of God, the Joint-Body of Christ (the Greek word ***ecclesia*** means **called out**, often rendered **Church**).

"Wherefore, remember that once you, the nations in flesh - who are termed "**Uncircumcision**" by those termed "**Circumcision**," in flesh, made by hands - that you were, in that era, apart from Christ, being alienated from the citizenship of Israel, and the guests of the promise covenants, having no expectation, and without God in the world.

Yet now, in Christ Jesus, you, who once are far off, are become near by the blood of Christ. For He is our Peace, Who makes both one, and razes the central wall of the barrier (the enmity in His flesh), nullifying the law of precepts in decrees, that He should be creating the two, in Himself, into one new humanity, making peace; and should be reconciling both in one body to God through the cross, killing the enmity in it. And, coming, He brings the evangel of peace to you,

those afar, and peace to those near, for through Him we both have had the access, in one Spirit, to the Father."

(Ephesians 2:11-18)

So to summarise, here is what we have as defined by Paul,

- 1) **Jew** = Israel = Circumcision = those under Law
- 2) **Greek** = Nations = Uncircumcision = those not under Law
- 3) **Ecclesia of God** = Body of Christ = spiritual Jews and 'Gentiles' in One New Humanity under Christ. The remnant of Israel chosen by grace are the true Israel of God, the true Jews, together with all true disciples of Messiah Jesus.

It needs to be emphasised though that, in the flesh, there is still the distinction of Circumcision and Uncircumcision, Jew and Gentile, Israel and the nations. We all belong to one or the other in flesh. But ultimately, in Spirit, those who belong to Christ Jesus are the Ecclesia of God, the Body of Christ, the Celestial Israel, the Firstfruits of the New Humanity, the New Jerusalem.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the Concordant Version unless stated otherwise.

Appendix: The Scattered Israelites

Here is some extra information to consider in relation to this subject and the so called 'lost tribes of Israel.'

The majority of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were deported by the Assyrians in 721 BC. They were resettled in the eastern portion of the Assyrian Empire in Halah, in Gozan by the Habor River, and in the cities of the Medes (2 Kings 18:10-11). This not only involved those Israelites dwelling in Samaria and its vicinity, but it also included the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh who dwelt on the east side of the Jordan (1 Chronicles 5:26).

Also, some of the Simeonites escaped the deportation because they had resettled in the land of Edom (Seir) in the south and they were also closely allied to Judah (1 Chronicles 4:38-43).

It must be noted that the division of Israel and Judah was primarily **religious** and **territorial** rather than merely tribal. For instance, Rehoboam, king of Judah, still ruled over some of the Israelites who dwelt in Judah (2 Chronicles 10:17). Also, during the reign of Asa, king of Judah, many Israelites from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon joined with Judah and Benjamin in Asa's religious reforms, and they settled in Judah (2 Chronicles 15:9). There was still a remnant of Israel living in the land after the captivity and some of these also joined Hezekiah's reforms in Jerusalem, Jerusalem being the capital of all Israel, the city where God had placed His Name (2 Chronicles 30:6-14; 31:4-8).

The same thing occurred during the religious revival under king Josiah. In fact, Josiah's reforms encompassed the territory of Israel as far as Naphtali in the north (2 Chronicles 34:6-7, 9, 21, 33). Nevertheless, as a kingdom, Israel was no more - its royal dynasty having been exiled without any promise of restoration.

The majority of the Southern Kingdom of Judah were deported to Babylon by the Babylonians, beginning in about 605 BC. This also included some of the Israelites who had joined with Judah and Benjamin (2 Kings 24). After 70 years, they began to return to Jerusalem and Judah, primarily from Babylon. The initial proclamation to return, given by Cyrus of Persia, was addressed to all the Israelite exiles in his kingdom, not only Judah (Ezra 1:1-5). These Israelites became known as Jews or Judahites from this time onwards because the initial return was predominantly composed of those from Judah, Benjamin and Levi resettling in Jerusalem and Judah.

Yet throughout the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which gives details of the first two major returns of the exiles, these Jews are also called Israelites because they also included some of those from Ephraim, Manasseh, Simeon, Naphtali, as well as a remnant from *all* the tribes of Israel (1 Chronicles 9:1-3; Ezra 2:70; 6:16-17, 21; 7:13, 18; Nehemiah 8:1, 17; 11:3-4). This had been prophesied by Ezekiel and others, as mentioned in the above article.

The promised restoration of all Israel from all the countries where they'd been scattered occurred in a number of stages over a few centuries. And it was promised

that Judah's royal dynasty through the house of David would also be restored, which was (and is) ultimately fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah.

In the New Testament, Anna the prophetess, who saw Jesus as a baby, was from the tribe of Asher, yet she was also a part of the Jewish remnant in the land (Luke 2:36-38).

The majority of the exiles of Israel *and* Judah, though, chose to remain in their new homelands, particularly in Babylon, Persia and Media in the East, and Egypt in the south. They also migrated into the western areas of the later Roman Empire, particularly in Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

The Apostles Peter and James addressed their first century letters to Jewish Christians in the dispersion. James addresses **'the twelve tribes in the dispersion'** (James 1:1), while Peter writes to those in Asia Minor (1 Peter 1:1). He also mentions the Jewish Christian ecclesia in Babylon, though it is possible that this was a cryptic description for Jerusalem itself (1 Peter 5:13). Peter also mentions that Paul had previously written to these Jewish believers in Asia Minor (2 Peter 3:1, 15-16). This was most probably his letter to the Galatians.

Some of the scattered Israelites, both of Israel and Judah, have lost their identity, becoming mingled with the other nations. Those who have kept, or are rediscovering, their Hebrew identity are known as Jews as well as Israelites. The tribe of Judah was originally given the rulership, while the tribe of Joseph, through Ephraim and Manasseh, was given the birthright (1 Chronicles 5:1-2; Genesis 49:8-12).

A remnant of these tribes continues to exist in the Jewish nation so as to fulfill all prophecy. Messiah Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, ultimately fulfills the role of Ruler and King, as well as fulfilling the blessings of the Birthright for the whole spiritual Israel of God.

The prophets reveal that there is to be a restoration of all the tribes of Israel as a saved, believing remnant leading to, and including, the era of the Messiah (Ezekiel 37; 48; Jeremiah 31; 33; Romans 11:25-32). This has been literally fulfilled in the past through the physical restoration of all Israel after the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, as well as through the spiritual restoration of the Israel of God through the New Covenant in Messiah Jesus. Yet we are also witnessing another restoration (physical and spiritual) of all Israel in our own day, just before Christ returns.