



Is the Church Now Israel?

By Steve Cohen

Copyright © 2015 The Apple of His Eye Mission Society, Inc. All rights reserved.



The Apple of His Eye Mission Society

Is the Church Now Israel?

There is an old saying, “Ask three Jewish people a question on one issue and you will get five opinions!” This one question brings much heat and sometimes little light because of historic positions, attitudes and sadly, anti-Semitism.

Israel

Perhaps to untangle this question it would be best to go back a bit in history. Israel, the people, are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the twelve tribes.

Israel is not defined by religious practices (i.e. today that would be Reform, Conservative or Orthodox Judaism) but by the covenant God established: Genesis 12:1-3 and Jeremiah 31:35-37.

God set apart a people for a specific mission, we were chosen to be a light to the gentiles. We are to declare to those lost in paganism, heathenism, polytheism, and any other “ism” you might think of, that there is just one God revealed in three persons. Israel is a people in mission. But not all of Israel have been faithful to that mission. Still God is faithful to His call.

The Church

The Church (body of believer in Jesus) is that mysterious new entity comprised of two groups of people: Jewish Believers in Jesus and Gentile (non-Jewish) believers in Jesus.

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. – Ephesians 3:6

The early church was clearly Jewish in nature, culture and percentage of believers. Gradually, more and more gentiles were gathered into the Body of Christ and some zealous for the way things were, contended that gentiles had to become Jewish in order to be a proper follower of Jesus.

Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.” The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.” – Acts 15:5

This was good news! Gentiles did not have to become Jewish to believe in Jesus, and Jewish people do not have to become gentile-ish. So it was for the early church. But changes came swiftly over the next couple of centuries as the church leadership shifted away from Jerusalem and took on those who espoused secular anti-Semitic attitudes.



The Apple of His Eye Mission Society

We could also rehearse some of the anti-Jewish statements of the early Church Fathers, but space does not allow. Sad enough to say that by the 5th century a Jewish person who wanted to confess Jesus as the Savior had to renounce everything Jewish:

I renounce all customs, rites, legalisms, unleavened breads and sacrifices of lambs of the Hebrews, and all other feasts of the Hebrews, sacrifices, prayers, aspersions, purifications, sanctifications and propitiations and fasts, and new moons, and Sabbaths, and superstitions, and hymns and chants and observances and Synagogues, and the food and drink of the Hebrews; in one word, I renounce everything Jewish, every law, rite and custom and if afterwards I shall wish to deny and return to Jewish superstition, or shall be found eating with the Jews, or feasting with them, or secretly conversing and condemning the Christian religion instead of openly confuting them and condemning their vain faith, then let the trembling of Gehazi cleave to me, as well as the legal punishments to which I acknowledge myself liable. And may I be anathema in the world to come, and may my soul...

The net result is that what began as a Jewish movement with gentiles being grafted in took a detour to claim that the remnants of Jewishness in the church now had to be eradicated. They claimed that the Church replaced Israel and inherited the blessings once promised to the Jewish people.

The Church has not Replaced Israel

Today people toss terms about which tend to muddy the waters, i.e. replacement theology, supercessionism, millennialism, and other eschatological concepts. There have been huge debates and many discourses over the ages, but they seem to ignore some very basic biblical facts:

1. The continuing existence of Israel, the nation, today does not imply a millennialistic approach to the end times. Rather this is a realization of God's promise to keep the people throughout the ages.
2. The church is comprised of Jewish believers in Jesus and gentile believers. One has not replaced the other but both are gathered into a new body and receive salvation in the same way: by grace through faith. This is the work of God, not the work of man.

The unique phrase "Israel of God" is listed in just one place in the Bible:

But far be it from me to boast, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. -- Galatians 6:14-16

Martin Luther comments on this:

"Walk," that is, go, by this rule. By what rule? It is this rule, that they are new creatures in Christ, that they shine with the true righteousness and holiness which come from faith, and that they do not deceive themselves and others with the hypo-critical righteousness and holiness which come



The Apple of His Eye Mission Society

from the Law. Upon the latter there will be wrath and tribulation, and upon the former will rest peace and mercy. Paul adds the words "upon the Israel of God." He distinguishes this Israel from the Israel after the flesh, just as in 1 Cor. 10:18 he speaks of those who are the Israel of the flesh, not the Israel of God. Therefore peace is upon Gen- tiles and Jews, provided that they go by the rule of faith and the Spirit. -- Lectures on Galatians, 1519. - Dr. Martin Luther

So, is the church now Israel? Well, yes - grafted in, and no - not replaced it! Consider what the Apostle Paul writes:

Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. -- Romans 11:11-14



The Apple of His Eye Mission Society

For More Information

For more information about this resource, please feel free to contact us at:

The Apple of His Eye Mission Society
PO Box 1649
Brentwood, TN 37024-1649
(888) 512-7753
info@appleofhiseye.org

For additional resources, please visit our website at www.appleofhiseye.org.