

# **WHAT DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT MEAN BY THE TERM “ISRAEL”**

The Greek word for “Israel” is used 70 times, (in 68 verses), in the New Testament:

Matt. 2:6,20-21; 8:10; 9:23; 10:6,23; 15:24,31; 19:28; 27:9,42.

Mark 12:29; 15:32.

Luke 1:16,54,68,80; 2:25,32,34; 4:25,27; 7:9; 22:30; 24:21.

John 1:31,49 (50); 3:10; 12:13.

Acts 1:6; 2:36; 4:8,10,27; 5:21,31; 7:23,37,42; 9:15; 10:36;  
13:17,23-24; 28:20.

Rom. 9:6,27,31; 10:1,19,21; 11:2,7,25-26.

1 Cor.10:18.

2 Cor. 3:7,13. Gal.6:16.

Eph. 2:12.

Phil. 3:5.

Heb. 8:8,10; 11:22.

Rev. 2:14; 7:4; 21:12.

Examination of the Greek text will show that some of these are marginal readings.

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If we accept the statement that all Scripture is inspired by the same Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21) and if we believe that the Holy Spirit is consistent in His use of words (an assumption that we must make if the Bible is to interpret itself without human interpretations and additions), then there is only one possible meaning which fits all the 70 references quoted above: Israel is a collective noun for the Jewish people. Moreover, this meaning is totally in agreement with the consistency of Scripture (a collective noun for both Old and New Testaments e.g. see Luke 24:27 2 Peter 3:16), and further confirms the revelation in both Old and New Testament scriptures that God in all three persons is the same and does not change (e.g. Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:8).

The interpretation that the Church is the New Israel (a term not used in Scripture) is drawn from a few scriptures taken in isolation e.g. Galatians 6:16 where the Greek 'kai' is sometimes translated as 'even' instead of 'and', thus attempting to equate the Church with Israel instead of stating that the Church and Israel exist in parallel. Those who hold this view seem to ignore the fact that this imposed interpretation only works for a few of the references, and then it only works in the same sense that Old Testament promises have an application to the Church.

To check for yourself that Israel must mean the Jewish People (as it does in the Old Testament) and cannot mean the Church, try substituting the Church for Israel in the above references. (If you are short of time, concentrate on Romans 9 to 11). In all cases, 'the Jewish people' is a meaningful and scripturally consistent substitution; on the other hand if one substitutes 'the Church', many of the references become pure nonsense. Thus:

Matt 10:5-6 "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel."

Matt 19:28 "You who have followed me will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

John 3:10 "You are Israel's teacher", said Jesus (to Nicodemus).

Acts 2:36 "Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ".

Acts 4:27 "Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus."

Acts 5:21 "... the Sanhedrin - the full assembly of the elders of Israel."

The teaching that (The New) Israel is the Church would imply that God had faithlessly and inconsistently broken all His promises to the Jewish people. How could we put our trust in a God who gives up on people and goes back on His promises? In fact, God never breaks His promises: "If we are faithless, He will remain faithful" (2 Tim 2:13).

God remains faithful to Israel, and faithful to His Church.

(Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright 1973, 1978 International Bible Society).

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