

## God's Covenant: with Israel or the Church?

Has God permanently rejected Israel and, instead, embraced the Church of believers in Jesus Christ as His chosen people? There are many Christians who feel this way, supposing that Christendom has “superseded” or “replaced” Israel as the chosen people of God. This point of view is known as “replacement theology.” or “supersessionism.” Generally speaking, here is their thinking about this, much of which is correct:

- God made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the latter also known as *Israel*.
- The descendants of Israel disobeyed God's laws, breaking the covenant He had established with them at Mount Sinai.
- Thus, God “put on hold” His covenant with Israel and the Jews, and God was the only one who could reinstate that covenant.
- Yeshua/Jesus, a Jew (from the tribe of Judah), was a descendant, offspring, or “seed” of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; he atoned for Israel's sin of spiritual infidelity against God and offered Israel the means by which their broken covenant with God could be reinstated.
- The Jews at the time of Jesus (*Yeshua* or *Yahshua* in Hebrew) did not believe that He was their Messiah (Christ), nor did they accept His blood sacrifice as atonement for their sin of breaking the covenant with God.
- As a result, since Gentile Christians have embraced Jesus as Messiah and Savior, and have accepted His shed blood as the permanent atonement for their sins, then God has established a *brand new covenant* with Christians, having abandoned non-believing Israel and the Jews altogether.

All of the points above are valid *except* for the last one. Now, let's go through each valid point and then see what logical conclusions can be reached.

It is a fact that God made a covenant with Abraham, who initially was named Abram (Genesis 17:1-4, 22:15-17). Furthermore, God made it clear that this would be an *everlasting covenant* and that it would be established with Abraham's second-born son Isaac, not with his first-born son Ishmael (17:18-21).

Isaac had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. God Himself foretold to their mother, Rachel, that two nations would come from them and that the older would serve the younger (Genesis 25:23). The elder brother, Esau, forfeited his birthright by selling it to the younger brother, Jacob, for some bread and lentil stew (25:29-34). So the birthright, along with God's covenant, went to Jacob, who was renamed *Israel* by God (32:28).

For centuries, the fact that God's covenant was *not* established with Ishmael or with Esau, understandably, has been problematic for Arabs in that region of the world, most of whom embrace Islam. Many of them are descendants of either Ishmael (Abraham's firstborn) or Esau (Isaac's firstborn), and they have desired the eradication of Isaac's and Jacob's descendants from the land of Israel, up to this day.

Nevertheless, God *twice* referred to Isaac as Abraham's “only son” (Genesis 22:2,16), which is from a spiritual perspective. Isaac was the son of promise and covenant, while Ishmael was not. Moreover, when Isaac's son Esau forfeited his birthright, he relinquished possession of the land of Israel by his descendants.

At a later time, Israel entered into a covenant with God by agreeing to do everything the Lord had commanded them to do in the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 24:3,7). The latter, which includes the Ten Commandments, consists of all the laws and regulations that God had spoken to Moses and to the people at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20–23). The covenant into which they had entered with God was, in essence, a covenant of marriage (Isaiah 54:5,6). It was an obligation that both sides had vowed to keep, forever.

The Book of the Covenant consisted of the basic directives, decrees, and regulations of the Torah or Law—the commandments on how to interact with God, Israel's spiritual “husband,” and with each other. It is worthy of note that *no sin offerings* were included in the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20–23), as Israel had not broken their covenant with God and did not yet require the shedding of (animal) blood for the remission of their sins.

However, the Israelites broke the covenant through disobedience and by spiritual unfaithfulness in following other gods (Judges 2:11-13; Jeremiah 11:10-13). The “last straw” of this was when the great King Solomon of Israel turned his back on God to follow the gods of his foreign wives, which displeased God greatly (1 Kings 11:9-11). Once a covenant is broken by one party, the covenant becomes null and void—unless someone, somehow, makes amends or compensation for the failure of one side to commit to the covenant.

After Israel broke the covenant, God issued her a “certificate of divorce” (Jeremiah 3:8), as a husband would do to an unfaithful wife. There was nothing the Israelites could do, nor any ransom they could pay, that would enable them to redeem themselves from their acts of infidelity toward God. They had committed “adultery” by worshiping other gods and idols made of wood and stone (3:9), which is what had caused the covenant to be broken. As such, *God Himself* had to become Israel’s Redeemer (Isaiah 44:6). *He alone* would pay the price for their disobedience and unfaithfulness.

It is important to differentiate, historically, between **Israelites** and **Jews**, and also between **Ephraim** (son of Joseph) and **Judah**. Jacob/Israel had 12 sons, by four different mothers (Genesis 35:22b-26), and their descendants are known as the “twelve tribes of Israel.” **Leah** and **Rachel** were sisters, and Zilpah and Bilhah were their respective handmaidens.

### Twelve Sons of Jacob Original Tribes of Israel

1) <sup>L</sup> Reuben	4) <sup>L</sup> <b>Judah</b>	7) <sup>Z</sup> Gad	10) <sup>L</sup> Zebulun
2) <sup>L</sup> Simeon	5) <sup>B</sup> Dan	8) <sup>Z</sup> Asher	11) <sup>R</sup> <b>Joseph</b>
3) <sup>L</sup> Levi	6) <sup>B</sup> Naphtali	9) <sup>L</sup> Issachar	12) <sup>R</sup> Benjamin

<sup>L</sup>mother: **Leah** | <sup>B</sup>mother: Bilhah | <sup>Z</sup>mother: Zilpah | <sup>R</sup>mother: **Rachel**

Israel includes *all* the descendants of Jacob within the twelve tribes. Jews, however, are a much more limited group. Specifically, Jews are from the tribe of **Judah** *only*. Although it is common to refer to descendants of Jacob within the eleven tribes outside of Judah as “Jews,” this is a misnomer.

The legal inheritance of Jacob naturally went to **Reuben**, the first son of Jacob’s *first* wife, **Leah**. However, Reuben slept with Jacob’s concubine, Bilhah (Genesis 35:22). This sin disqualified him to be the family’s legal heir; so Reuben’s firstborn rights passed to **Joseph**, the first son of Jacob’s *second* wife, **Rachel** (1 Chronicles 5:1,2).

God had appeared to Jacob/Israel and had promised him the land of Canaan as an *everlasting possession* to his descendants (Genesis 48:3,4). That phrase “everlasting possession” lets us know that God has not permanently abandoned His covenant with and promises to Israel. Before Jacob died, he declared Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, to be his own sons (48:5), bestowing the blessings of Abraham and Isaac upon them (48:16). In doing this, Jacob conferred upon Joseph a *double* blessing.

More importantly, Jacob imparted the blessing of the firstborn upon **Ephraim**, Joseph’s *younger* son, thus putting him ahead of Manasseh, the *older* son (Genesis 48:13,17-20). Interestingly, this continued the blessing of the spiritual birthright to the “second born,” just as it had been conferred upon Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

Furthermore, when prophesying about his son **Judah** (Genesis 49:8-12), Jacob affirmed that the *scepter* of rulership would continue from Judah to the One to whom the nations would give their obedience (49:10). This was a reference to the Messiah, Jesus, whose genealogy shows that he descended from Judah (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-33). Jesus will “rule with an iron scepter” over all the nations (Psalm 2:8,9; Revelation 2:27, 19:15) during the Millennium.

As noted before, God was greatly displeased with Israel's King Solomon when he was led astray by his foreign wives and worshiped their false gods, thus falling out of covenant with God (1 Kings 11:9-11). As a result, after Solomon died, God stripped away all but two of the tribes, **Judah** and Benjamin, from Solomon's son, King Rehoboam (12:21-24).

An Ephraimite, Jeroboam, became king over the house of Israel (1 Kings 12:20), which also came to be called **Ephraim**. From that point forward, the house of Judah (also known as the house of David) and the house of Israel/Ephraim were separated from each other.

Around 722 B.C., during the reign of Hoshea (the last king of Israel), the Assyrians took **Israel** into captivity and deported the people of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria (2 Kings 17:5,6). In about 586 B.C., during the reign of Zedekiah (the last king of Judah), the Babylonians, burned down most of Jerusalem and exiled the people of the Southern Kingdom, mostly **Judah**, to Babylon (2 Kings 25:1-11; Jeremiah 52:28-30).

It should be pointed out that there were not absolute, exclusive divisions between the Northern Kingdom of **Israel** and the Southern Kingdom of **Judah**, prior to their respective banishments and exiles to Assyria and Babylon. There was some overlapping of tribes in both places, due to marriage, migration, and location.

For instance, Levites sided with Rehoboam (king of Judah) and came to Judah because Jeroboam (king of Israel) had rejected them (2 Chronicles 11:13,14). Many from every tribe of Israel followed the Levites to Jerusalem, supporting Rehoboam after they got there (11:16,17). Some members of Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon settled in Judah (15:9). The whole territory of Simeon was located within the territory of Judah (Joshua 19:1,9).

Most of the Israelites, after being taken captive by the Assyrians, did not return to the land of Israel, though. They fled, migrated, and were exiled to other places, eventually being scattered among the nations of the world, where they remain today.

Many exiles from the Babylonian captivity returned to Jerusalem and Judah (Nehemiah 7:6). This was in accordance with a prophecy made by Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon (Jeremiah 29:1-13), in which he stated that after seventy years, the people would return to Jerusalem (29:10). However, not all of Judah returned; many of their descendants were scattered all over the earth. These, along with those scattered by the Romans in 70 A.D., were part of the Jewish diaspora.



Now, long before the Israelites were unfaithful and disobedient to God, He knew that they would “blow it.” So He affirmed that for Him to remember His covenant with them, they would be required to confess their sins, humble their hearts, and pay for their sin (Leviticus 26:40-42). As noted before, it was God *alone* who could and would reinstate the covenant with Israel and Judah, and He alone could pay for their sin.

Jesus (*Yeshua* or *Yahshua* in Hebrew), the Son of God, was born to a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-25). He was the descendant, offspring, or “seed” promised to Abraham to come (Genesis 12:7, 13:15; Galatians 3:16). According to God’s law, though, blood is required for atonement to be made and forgiveness to be extended (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). So the shed blood of Jesus on the cross, in the first century A.D., was the means by which God’s atonement and forgiveness came to Israel.

Just as the blood of Pesach or Passover lambs brought about the release of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12:3-6,11-13), Jesus was the ultimate Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7) whose shed blood provided Israel’s freedom from their bondage to disobedience and sin. Jesus was led like a silent lamb to slaughter (Isaiah 53:7), and He willingly gave up His life to pay the necessary price to compensate for Israel’s broken covenant with God—if they only would believe. By and large, though, they did not.

Although the State of Israel was established in 1948, and many Israelites and Jews have returned to their homeland, there still remain multitudes of Jacob’s descendants located in nations around the globe today. A great many have lost their identities and do not know their true roots as members of the tribes of Israel—but God does, and He has *not* abandoned them.

The days are coming when God will bring His people, Israel and Judah, back from the nations into which they have been dispersed; and He will restore to them the land that He originally promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Jeremiah 30:3,10, 31:7-10). God will join together Israel (Ephraim) and Judah as *one* people, *one* nation, to live in their homeland forever, never to be divided again (Ezekiel 37:16-25). At that time, Israel and Judah, as a unified nation, will choose to enter into a new covenant with God, having broken the first covenant with Him long ago, soon after they came out of Egypt (Jeremiah 31:31,32).

God will put His eternal law into their minds and hearts; once and for all, He will be their God, they will be His people, and their sins will be forgiven (Jeremiah 31:33,34). As long as the sun, moon, and stars continue to shine, Israel will be God’s chosen nation; and He never again will reject them (31:35-37).

The Israelites broke the ancient covenant that God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel. Then Jesus/God came along after a couple of millennia and, by the shedding of His own blood, made a *new* or *renewed covenant* at Passover (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25) with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Hebrews 8:6-8). As a whole, though, Israel and Judah have failed to enter into that new or renewed covenant with God.

However, that does *not* mean that they never will. A time is coming when the new/renewed covenant will be restored with Israel and Judah. When God incorporates His laws into the Israelites’ minds and hearts, they all will know Him, they again will be His people, and the old, broken covenant will become obsolete and will disappear (Hebrews 8:9-13). And this state of affairs will continue without end.

The apostle Paul, who was from the tribe of Benjamin, spoke with great sorrow about how he wished that he could be cursed and cut off from Christ (the Messiah, Jesus) in place of his (unbelieving) “brothers”—that is, on behalf of the people of Israel (Romans 9:1-3). He added that it was the people of Israel who were to be adopted as sons, through whom the *covenants* of God had come and the *promises* of God had been made, and who were the ancestry of Christ, who is “God over all” (9:4,5). The gospel is first for the Jew, then the Gentile (1:16).

Jesus Himself said that He had been sent *only* to the “lost sheep of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). In fact, Jesus initially told his twelve disciples *not* to go among the Gentiles but, instead, to the “lost sheep of Israel” (10:5,6). Jesus’ original purpose in coming was to redeem all of Israel from their *old* broken covenant and to bring them back into a *new* covenantal relationship with Himself, God in flesh, and with the Father in heaven. Certainly, Gentile believers *would* be included in the covenant at a later time, just not initially.

Furthermore, in speaking to those in Jerusalem, who primarily were Jews as He was, Jesus pointed out that He had “other sheep” not of that fold or sheep pen (John 10:16)—that is, not from the tribe of Judah. These “other sheep” were *not* Gentiles, at least initially; they were the *other tribes* of Israel besides Judah. In that same statement, Jesus added that “there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” He was *not* implying that the two flocks of sheep were Israel and the Church but, rather, that they were *Israel* and *Judah*. Later, the Church of believers would be “grafted into” Israel, and *only* by that means would they become part of the unified flock.

This is exactly what Ezekiel wrote about: how God, ultimately, would join together Israel (figuratively known as Ephraim) and Judah as one people (Ezekiel 37:16-25), under one Shepherd (Jesus), which will take place at the end of this age and continue throughout the Millennium. We know that this is still to happen, since God/YHWH has not yet put His Law/Torah in their minds and written it on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33) so that they obey it naturally and willingly.

Now, how does the Church of Christian believers fit into all of this? Are they part of the new covenant? Yes, believers in Jesus as Lord and Savior *indirectly* are part of the new covenant, but only by the grace of God. It certainly is *not* because they have “superseded” or “replaced” Israel as God’s chosen people.

There are those who believe that *all* of the lost tribes of Israel, dispersed among the nations, have become Christian believers in Yeshua/Jesus. In some Hebraic and Messianic circles, such as the “Two House” movement, this is a foundational belief. Indeed, many genetic Israelites *have* become believers; however, certainly *not all* believers are genetic Israelites. I feel that this notion is a type of “replacement theology.”



Olive Tree: representative of Israel

In Scripture, the splendor of Israel has been likened to an “olive tree” (Hosea 14:5,6). Paul, an apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13), pointed out that some of the “branches” of this “olive tree” had been broken off, but “wild olive shoots” have been grafted into that tree (11:17,18).

In essence, many “branches” within the actual tribes of Israel have not recognized and acknowledged the blood sacrifice of Yeshua/Jesus as the means of restoring their covenant with God. They have not seen His great sacrifice as clemency for their failure to remain in covenant with God. As such, they have been “broken off” of their covenantal “olive tree.”

On the other hand, Gentile believers, like shoots from “wild olive trees” that have no inherent covenantal relationship with God, have recognized and accepted Jesus’ blood on the

cross as atonement for their sins. Thus, they have entered into God’s *new covenant* with *Israel*—which is *not* a covenant that God has made directly with the Gentiles. For *that reason alone*, believers have been grafted into Israel’s covenantal “olive tree.” Believers in Jesus are God’s elect or chosen people, whether Israeli or Gentile.

Basically, many genetic Israelite “branches” have been broken off of their own “olive tree” because of *unbelief*, while many non-genetic Gentile “shoots” have been grafted into the “olive tree” of Israel because of their *faith* (Romans 11:20). This faith imparts the same righteousness that originally was bestowed upon Abraham for his faith (4:13). It is due *only* to the fact that God made an original covenant with Israel, and then God attached Gentile believers to Israel’s “olive tree,” that Gentiles can be saved; otherwise, they all would be lost forever.

There is a precedent for being grafted in to Israel (Numbers 15:14-16). Abraham is the *genetic* father of the Israelites, but he also is the *spiritual* father of Gentile believers, who have the same faith in God that Abraham did (Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:26-29). As such, the promises of God will be bestowed upon them, as well as upon genetic Israelites who come to accept Yeshua’s blood atonement for them. The latter will be re-grafted back into their own covenantal “olive tree” of promise (11:23,24). When Yeshua returns to rule and reign, Israel’s partial blindness and hardness of heart will be purged. He will deliver them from ungodliness, remove their sins, and reinstate Yahweh’s new covenant with them (Ezekiel 16:60,62; Daniel 9:24; Romans 11:25-27).

Obedying the rules of the Book of the Covenant was not inherently difficult or complicated for Israel; but due to their rebellious hearts, they simply chose not to do it. Later, God even pointed out to the people that fearing and loving God, walking in His ways, and observing His commands and decrees (that is, following His Torah laws) was *good for them* (Deuteronomy 10:12,13).

Jesus asserted that He had not come to abolish or do away with the Law (Torah) or the Prophets but to fulfill them and, furthermore, that even the least bit of the Law would remain intact until heaven and earth disappear (Matthew 5:17,18). He was, in fact, the living, breathing Torah. The idea put forth by many Christians that the ancient Law of Moses was “nailed to the cross,” and should not be obeyed, is erroneous.

The books of the Torah/Prophets are *not* mutually exclusive with the books of the Gospel. In fact, the Torah/Prophets and the Gospel complement each other and, together, give the *complete* Word of God. The Holy Spirit of God will show each earnest believer the fullness of this.

God does not change (James 1:17), nor does the Word of the Law, Yeshua/Jesus, change; He was with God in the beginning (John 1:1,2). Christians should emulate and imitate Jesus, who never broke even the tiniest strand of the law and instruction of Torah; in fact, He lived it out to the fullest. The only “law” that Jesus and the apostles spoke against was that of the Pharisees and Sadducees, which was the distorted, slanted law of their *oral* traditions. But God’s original *written* Law remains intact, and it will remain unchanged forever.

As such, Christian believers—who have been grafted into the “olive tree” of Israel—should consider observing God’s Hebraic feasts, festivals, and holy days, in the Spring and in the Fall. They also should consider observing a seventh-day *Shabbat* or Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11; Leviticus 23:3; Deuteronomy 5:12-15), from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday.

It is fine to worship God or to have “church” on the first day of the week, Sunday, or on any other day of the week. However, eliminating the seventh-day Sabbath is breaking the Fourth Commandment. On the Sabbath, no regular work should be done, and one should assemble with others, of like mind and spirit, who also observe the proper Sabbath (Leviticus 23:3).

The Hebraic feasts, festivals, holy days, and Sabbath are part of God’s Torah and commandments to Israel. They will be observed and celebrated throughout the earth during the Millennium, when Jesus is sitting on His Throne in Jerusalem, so why not now? The book at the right, *The Feasts of Adonai*, is very descriptive in explaining how to have these observances and celebrations.

### The Feasts of Adonai

Why Christians should look at the Biblical Feasts



Valerie Moody

Observing the Hebraic feasts, festivals, and holy days is *not* for the purpose of receiving forgiveness for sins, since *only* the blood of Yeshua/Jesus shed on the cross has done that. *Nor* are these observances to be performed to gain eternal salvation, since *only* His resurrection from the dead has provided for that (Romans 10:9,10)—although Jesus *did* tell the Samaritan woman that “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22), as He Himself, the Savior of the world, was Jewish. Moreover, these observances do *not* make Christians “become Jewish” nor cause them to “convert to Judaism”; that is not the objective.

Rather, the purpose of these observances is to demonstrate an understanding and appreciation, to God, that by His grace He has allowed Gentile believers to be a part of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel, and to partake in His eternal promises with Israel. Israel, including the Jews, are and always will be God’s chosen and covenant people. Let those who have been grafted into the covenantal “olive tree” of Israel consider it a privilege that God has welcomed them as members of His elect people of promise, forevermore.

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<http://www.tedmontgomery.com/bblovrw/Endtimes/EphraimJudah.html>

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