

Israel-Church Differences

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One of the rules of basic Bible interpretation is to recognize that the church and Israel represent separate programs of God. They are two trains running on separate railroad tracks. Theologian and founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, Lewis Sperry Chafer, noted twenty-four differences between Israel and the church.¹ Here are a few.

First, Israel is the wife of Jehovah (Isa 54) while the church is the bride of Christ (Eph 5:22-33). Second, Israel gave birth to Christ (Rev 12:1-5) whereas Christ gave birth to the church (Matt 16:18). Third, Christ will return to rescue Israel upon her national conversion at the end of the Tribulation period (Matt 23:37-39). Conversely, He will return to rescue the church at the rapture (John 14:1-3). Fourth, king-subject imagery is used to depict God's relationship to Israel (Isa 33:22) while head and groom imagery is used to depict Christ's relationship with His church (Eph 5:22-33). Fifth, God's program through Israel began in Genesis 12, and His program through the church began in Acts 2 (Matt 16:18; 1 Cor 12:13; Acts 1:5; 11:15-16).

Sixth, while four-fifths of the Bible pertains to Israel, only one-fifth of it deals with the church. Seventh, although Israel was a direct party to the biblical covenants (Jer 31:31-32), the church was not a party to these covenants since the church was not yet in existence when these covenants were made. The church's relationship to these covenants can best be described as one of a third-party beneficiary rather than a direct party to them. Therefore, the church benefits from the covenants as opposed to being a direct party to them. Eighth, Israel is a nation (Ps 147:20). As such, she is always biblically portrayed as an independent nation with borders and a capital. Even today Israel is among the nations of the earth, just like Japan, Argentina, Canada, or any other country. By contrast, the church is not a nation (Rom 10:19) but rather is comprised of people from all nations (Gal 3:28; Eph 2:11-22; 3:6, 15). Rather than taking her seat among the nations of the earth, the church is a mere pilgrim in the world system (1 Pet 2:11).

Ninth, while Israel fought physical wars with various enemies such as the Philistines, the church is engaged in spiritual warfare with angelic enemies (Eph 6:10-20). Tenth, the Scripture assigns numerous *a quo* and *ad quem* statements to Israel (Gen 15:13-16; Jer 25:11; 29:10; Ezek 4:5-7; Dan 9:24-27). These are timing statements with a specific beginning and ending point for each period. One searches the New Testament in vain to find comparable timing statements for the church. Eleventh, Israel had a priesthood with all her priests coming from the tribe of Levi and the line of Aaron. By contrast, the

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary, 1948; reprint, [8 vols. in 4], Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993), 4:47-53.

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church does not have a priesthood because it is a priesthood (Rev 1:6). The New Testament teaches the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:5, 9). Every Church Age believer is a priest with direct access to God the Father through God the Son.

Twelfth, while Israel will be resurrected at the beginning of the millennial kingdom (Dan 12:2; John 11:23-24; Rev 20:4-5), Church-Age believers receive their resurrected bodies at the point of the rapture (1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:50-58). Thirteenth, Israel's judgment will take place on earth, at the end of the Tribulation period, in the wilderness (Ezek 20:33-44). By contrast, the only judgment the New Testament reveals for the church is the Bema Seat judgment of rewards in heaven following the rapture (Rom 14:10; 1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10). Fourteenth, although the gates of the New Jerusalem are named after the twelve tribes (Rev 21:12), who were the foundations of Israel, the foundations of the eternal city are named after the twelve apostles (Rev 21:14) who are the foundations of the church (Eph 2:20). Fifteenth, people become members of the commonwealth of Israel through physical birth. By contrast, membership in the church is only attained by spiritual birth (John 3:1-9; Titus 3:5).

Sixteenth, Israel was directly governed by the Mosaic Law (Ps 147:19-20). By contrast, the controlling authority for the church is New Testament revelation. While all Scripture is *for* the church (2 Tim 3:16; Rom 15:4), only the New Testament's epistolary literature is directly *about* the church. Seventeenth, the Holy Spirit indwelt and filled Old Testament Jews selectively (Joel 2:28), temporarily (1 Sam 16:14; Ps 51:11), and subsequent to salvation to enable for a special purpose (Exod 31:3). By contrast, the Holy Spirit indwells all Church-Age believers (1 Cor 12:13) permanently (John 14:16) and at the point of salvation (Rom 8:9). Thus, the Spirit's work in and through Israel cannot be used as a pattern to depict the believer's normative experience with the Holy Spirit in the present age (John 7:37-39; 14:16-17; Acts 1:5). Eighteenth, while Christ's farewell address to Israel (Matt 24:15; 20) is recorded in the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24–25), His farewell address to the church (John 16:12-13) is found in the Upper Room Discourse (John 13–17). Nineteenth, although Israel is referred to as God's first-born son (Exod 4:22), the church is never given this same designation or title. Twentieth, while Israel's program is revealed in the Old Testament, the church's program was unknown in Old Testament times. Because the church is a New Testament mystery (Eph 3:3-6), or something previously hidden and now unveiled (Rom 16:25-26), Church Age doctrine comes exclusively from the New Testament (Matt 16:18; John 13–17) rather than the Old Testament. Noting such differences should caution us against taking prophecies and promises that are specifically aimed at Israel and misapplying them to the present dispensation of the Church Age.