

# Understanding Israel

By Shane Becker

A Christian friend involved in our fellowship group recently emailed me saying he would be interested to know my personal thoughts regarding Israel's future. He rightly felt that "it is an important subject as God's integrity hinges upon Israel, upon His Word being fulfilled. (Isa.45:23)".

My response to the question of Israel follows. I also have links to some great articles at the end of this article. They each go into further details on various aspects relating to Israel.

Most importantly, I desire that this issue not be a deciding factor for anyone considering a church or fellowship group. Additionally, churches and individuals ought to acknowledge that there is a variety of views on this subject among Christ-loving conservative evangelicals. This is not a 'gospel' issue.

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I thought I'd reply by summarising up front my present thinking regarding Israel and then show you where I get my view from Scripture. My view may seem unusual for those only familiar with the prominent modern view. So please have a read, pray and think through all that I've written below.

## SUMMARY

Under God's redemptive program, Old Testament ethnic Israel (under the Old Covenant) has now been re-formed into a new eternal Israel (under the New Covenant) which is now made up of all believers. This occurred at the cross when the veil of separation was rent in two.

There is an organic connection and continuation between Old Covenant ethnic Israel and New Covenant eternal Israel (believers). The connection may be explained by way of illustration. Old Covenant Israel can be likened to a tree made up of believing branches and unbelieving branches (i.e. all ethnic Israelites including believers and unbelievers). Under the New Covenant, God has pruned off the unbelieving branches (unbelieving Jews) and has grafted in new believing branches (believing Gentiles). The result of this transition is a continuation of the one Israel which has been reconstituted into a new people all of whom will be saved.

Owing to this connection, it can be said that God is faithful to all his promises to Israel. And He is, in many instances, faithful in even greater measure than was evident in the original giving of many of the promises in their pictorial/prophetic context.

The New Testament is a swing period where the focus of God's redemptive program is turned from ethnic Israel to the Gentiles (or rather from ethnic Israel to the entire world including ethnic Israel). God has not forgotten ethnic Israel. He is pursuing

their good through the ministry of the gospel, as He is pursuing the good of the entire world.

In practice, we are left to marvel at the wonderful work of Christ in redeeming the eternal Israel of God, fulfilling all the Father's promises, and engrafting in Gentiles like me. As a wild Gentile olive branch I know that "salvation is of the Jews" and I was once excluded from the Commonwealth of Israel. I praise my Lord who has brought me into His eternal covenant and made me part of the true and eternal Israel of God.

The future of the true and eternal Israel of God is eternal salvation. Not one will be lost to the praise and glory of God through Jesus Christ!

### EXPANDED WITH SCRIPTURE

#### ***God's Faithfulness to Ethnic Israel was Always Extended to a Limited Remnant.***

In Joshua's day, the Lord was indeed faithful to Israel even though only a remnant survived to enter the Promised Land.

“. . . not one thing has failed of all the good things the Lord your God spoke concerning you; all came to pass for you, not one thing has failed.”  
Joshua 23:14

“17And with *whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?*” Hebrews 3:17

Jesus said that although “there were many widows in Israel”, Elijah was sent “to none of them but only to Zarephath”. And “there were many lepers in Israel . . . but only Naaman was cleansed”. (Luke 4:22-30).

“27And *Isaiah* cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, *only a remnant of them will be saved,*”  
Romans 9:27

#### ***Under the New Covenant, that Remnant within Ethnic Israel is the Believers. (Unbelieving Israelites Have Been Excluded.)***

The New Testament is a swing period where the focus of God's redemptive program is turned from ethnic Israel to the Gentiles (or rather from ethnic Israel to the entire world including Israel).

Acts 3:25, 26 and other passages speak of the Gospel to Jews first.

The focus is then turned towards the Gentiles – to include Gentile believers and exclude Israelite unbelievers.

30What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; 31but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. 32Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

25And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: 26"Go to this people, and say, You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. 27For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they (NB: ethnic Israel) should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' 28Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen." Acts 28:25-28

Only a remnant is considered eligible to receive the promises to Israel.

"Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? 3"Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." 4But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5 So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace." Romans 9:2-5

In 2 Cor 3:11-14, Paul speaks of the transition from the Old to the New Covenant. The Old Covenant, under which the promises were made to ethnic Israel, has passed away. The veil remains over the minds of many within ethnic Israel still not understanding the coming fulfilment in New Testament times.

***Now the Distinction between Ethnic Israel and Gentiles is forever done away in Christ.***

12For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. Rom 10:12

See also 1 Cor 12:13, Gal 3:28, Col 3:11.

"9 and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith." Acts 15:9

Now, only those that have received 'heart circumcision' are considered "Jews" in the sight of the Lord.

26So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 27Then he who is physically

uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. 28For **no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.** 29 **But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart,** by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. Romans 2: 26-29.

In Romans 9, Paul understands statements, such as those above, raise objections regarding ethnic Israel not being the ones that receive the ultimate fulfilment of the promises. His answer demonstrates that he understands the reality of a new reconstituted Israel made up of believers (Jews and Gentiles) but excluding unbelieving ethnic Jews. Some have objected that if this is the case the change impacts upon God's integrity and the word of God has failed. Paul explains that this is not the case. And his answer has nothing to do with a future for ethnic Israel in Palestine but rather the present reality of God's goodness to true Israel, those circumcised of heart (many of which are believing ethnic Israelites).

6But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For **not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring,** but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." 8 *This means that it is **not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.*** Romans 9:6-8

Paul is clearly teaching that God's Israel is now not based on physical descent which is why "not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring".

Paul now sees no advantage to being part of ethnic Israel.

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5circumcised on the eighth day, **of the people of Israel,** of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law<sup>[c]</sup> blameless. 7But whatever **gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.** Phil 3:4-7

Those that have faith are now sons of Abraham:

"7Know then that **it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.** 8And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." Gal 3:7-8

Paul has stated clearly that it is "not the children of the flesh who are counted as offspring" (Rom 9:8) but rather "it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham" (Gal 3:7).

See also John 8:37-29 where Jesus considers doing the will of God is what qualifies us as Abraham's seed (or descendant) not ethnicity.

***Under the New Covenant, Gentile Believers Have Been incorporated into “The Israel of God”, what we Might Call the True or Eternal Israel of God.***

There is an organic connection and continuation between Old Covenant ethnic Israel and New Covenant eternal Israel (believers). The connection may be explained by way of illustration. Old Covenant Israel can be likened to a tree made up of believing branches and unbelieving branches (i.e. all ethnic Israel - believers and unbelievers).

17But if ***some of the branches were broken off <Unbelieving Ethnic Israelites>, and you <Believing Gentiles>, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in*** among the others ***and now share in*** the nourishing root of the olive tree, 18do not be arrogant toward the branches. Romans 11:17-18

(Refer article below for more on Romans 11.)

Jesus also spoke of Gentiles that join the kingdom while unbelieving Jews are cast out.

11I tell you, ***many will come from east and west*** and recline at table ***with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven***, 12while ***the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness***. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matt 8:11-12

8Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And ***do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.'*** For I tell you, ***God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.*** ***9Even now the axe is laid to the root*** of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." Matt 3:8, 9

28In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God ***but you yourselves cast out.*** 29And ***people will come from east and west***, and from north and south, and recline at table ***in the kingdom of God.***  
Luke 13:28-29

Under the New Covenant God has pruned off the unbelieving branches (unbelieving Jews) and has engrafted in new believing branches (believing Gentiles). The result is a transition of God's Israel from ethnic Israel to eternal Israel (believing Jews and Gentiles).

The result of this transition is a continuation of the one Israel which has been reconstituted into a new people, all of whom will be saved.

"11He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him ***the father of all who believe without being circumcised***, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, 12and to make him the father of the circumcised ***who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham*** had before he

was circumcised. 13For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. 14For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void." Romans 4:11-14

16That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring--not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"--in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. Romans 4:16-17

See also Hebrews 11:39-40 which speaks of the faithful ethnic Jews who bore witness but did not receive what was promised to them. The author of Hebrews says that apart from us (believers) they (ethnic Jews) will not be made perfect. Another way of putting it is to say that believing ethnic Jews will be made perfect together with us. The blessings God has for ethnic Israelites can only be received through the New Covenant community of believers.

39And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Hebrews 11:39-40

### The New Commonwealth of Israel

"11Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands-- 12remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Ephesians 2:11-13.

### Exodus 19 and 1 Peter 2 – Believers Receive the Blessings Promised.

The blessings promised to Israel, which were contingent upon their obedience, have now been received by believers based on Christ's obedience.

The original blessings presented to ethnic Israel to be received based upon obedience:

5Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." Exodus 19:5-6

The final blessing mentioned here to ethnic Israel is received by believers (i.e. Jews inwardly having received heart circumcision – Rom 2:26-29). Notice the contrast

between unbelieving Israelites, who do not receive the blessing, and all believers, who do receive the blessing:

“ 6 "Behold, *I am laying in Zion a stone*, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and *whoever believes in him* will not be put to shame." 7 So *the honor is for you who believe*, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," 8 and "*A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.*" *They stumble* because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. 9 *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession*, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 *Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* ” 2 Pet 9:6-10.

(Note also the reference to Hosea 2:23 in 2 Peter 9:10. The Hosea reference is to ethnic Israel. Peter's application is to believers.)

Understanding this newly formed Spiritual Israel, Paul uses expressions such “Israel after the flesh” (1 Cor 10:18) to contrast with true Israel having received circumcision of the heart.

***The Apostles Readily Apply Old Testament Texts, Which Prophetically Make Promises to Ethnic Israel, as Having Their Fulfilment to New Covenant Believers.***

Amos 9 and Acts 15

In the original context of Amos 9, a prophecy concerning David's fallen tent, is given *only* to ethnic Israel in the context. In Acts 15, James understands salvations to the Gentiles as *the actual rebuilding* of David's fallen tent spoken of in Amos 9.

Amos 9

In the context of a prophecy regarding the restoration of Israel we read:

11 "In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, **12 that they may possess** the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name," declares the LORD who does this. 13 "Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. 14 **I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel**, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. 15 I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them," says the LORD your God. Amos 9:11-15

## Acts 15

15And with this **the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,**  
16**"After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, 17that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things 18known from of old."**

19Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, 20but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.

Gentile salvation in Acts *is the* rebuilding of David's tent *not* a physical restoration of the tent physically located in Jerusalem. James simply equates Amos 9 as speaking of what he was witnessing.

Without understanding the transition from ethnic Israelites to the reconstituted Israel made up of believers, as taught in the New Testament, the fulfilment of Amos 9 in the Gentile salvation of Acts 15 doesn't make sense. The option some take to deal with this dilemma is to speak of multiple fulfilments of Amos 9 – one in believers and one for ethnic Israel. There are a few problems with trying to do this:

- It is forcing the Bible to say what we want it to rather than allowing the progressive revelation of the New Testament reveal the relationship between the original prophecy and the manner in which God is pleased to reveal its fulfilment.
- James doesn't speak of '*a*' fulfilment of Amos 9. James speaks of the Gentile salvation during New Testament times as '*the*' fulfilment of Amos 9. In instances such as this, and others, there is never a hint, in the original context or the fulfilment context of the New Testament, that multiple fulfilments of these prophecies will take place. The New Testament events are always *the* fulfilments of such prophecies without any qualifications **ever** given that another fulfilment is coming.
- Seeing multiple fulfilments creates the problem of having to pick and choose which parts of the original prophecy are fulfilled in the believing community (in New Testament times onward) and which are fulfilled in ethnic Israel (sometime in the future). For example, upon what basis can it be said that Amos 9 verses 9 to 12, regarding David's fallen tent, are fulfilled in Acts 15, yet Amos 9 verses 13 to 15, regarding restoration of Israel to land and buildings, are fulfilled only in ethnic Israel in the future? Amos 9 verses 9 to 20 are all in the written in same context looking forward to the one restorative event. In Acts 15, James sees the prophetic picture of Amos 9 as fulfilled in his day. The fulfilment is the spiritual rebuilding and restoration of God's eternal Israel.
- To speak of separate fulfilments ignores the fact that believers are now considered Jews (Rom 2:26-29), Israelites, and descendants of Abraham (Rom 9:6-8). The reason believers are given these titles is to demonstrate that they are the ones that inherit the promises. It is to establish the connection to God's overall program involving the Israelites.

- The separate fulfilments view ignores the context of Acts 15 which teaches that the Lord, “. . . made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.” Acts 15:9
- It causes the interpreting of simple single event prophecies to be forced to apply to separate fulfilments in separate people groups at separate times where the Scripture is silent.
- To view Amos 9 as having a future fulfilment, in addition to that spoken of in Acts 15, ignores the consistent apostolic pattern of interpreting Old Testament prophecies concerning ethnic Israel being fulfilled in the believing community. Apostles frequently apply these prophecies to the present community of believer *but never* clearly apply *a specific prophecy* to a future restoration of ethnic Israel. And they never imply restoration prophecies have multiple fulfilments.

### Romans 10

In Romans 10:12, Paul states, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.” As proof there is no distinction Paul goes on to quote Joel 2:32

13For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."  
(Rom 10:13)

Yet the context of Joel 2:32 is *a prophecy and promise to ethnic Israel*.

32And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. ***For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem*** there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls. Joel 2:32. (See also Joel 2:23 and 27 for further context).

Having made the assertion that there is no distinction and applying a prophecy concerning ethnic Israel as a proof text, Paul goes further in Romans 10:15. Speaking of the preaching of the gospel throughout the world, he quotes Isaiah 52:7 saying, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news”. Again, the original context of this quote was the pronouncement *to ethnic Israel of the return of their Lord to them*. That was the good news in the Isaiah passage – the restoration of Israel. Paul applies it to the good news of the gospel to all.

In other words, Paul understands the progressive development from ethnic Israel to the reconstituted Israel. Paul has no trouble applying Old Testament verses, apparently to ethnic Israel in their original contexts, to the New Testament call of the Gentiles. Paul assumes his readers adopt his method of understanding and interpretation of Old Testament prophecies as applying to reconstituted Israel (believers).

The Apostles frequently and readily apply Old Covenant Texts to the New Covenant community of believers including promises. Their understanding of this reconstituted Israel results in them naturally seeing the Gentile believers coming to faith as

fulfilment of promises given to Israel in the Old Testament (without seeing a future restorative event physically in earthly Jerusalem).

### Romans 9 & Hosea 1 & 2

In Romans 9:24ff, Paul sees the incoming of the Gentiles as fulfilling Hosea 1 & 2 which he quotes. "I will call them my people, which was not my people". Without reading the context this sounds like Hosea is speaking of Gentiles. However, reading the original context of Hosea we find it is speaking of the restoration of Israel who has abandoned God (and was living as "not my people" in Hosea's day). Those ethnic Israelites will once again be "my people" according to the prophecy. Paul can use the passage about ethnic Israel as applying to the incoming of the Gentiles because of the grid he is reading the Old Testament through. He automatically translates passages, such as Hosea apparently to ethnic Israel, as applying to true Israel made up of believers (believing Jews with believing gentiles engrafted in).

### Original Context

10 Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where **it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."** 11 And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel. Hosea 1:10

21 "And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, 22 and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel, 23 and I will sow her for myself in the land. **And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God.'**" Hosea 2: 21-23

Hosea 2 is speaking of a future restoration of ethnic Israel as is clear from the context of Hosea 1:10; 2:11, 15; 3:1.

### Paul's Application

Paul, in Romans 9, applies these passages to the New Testament bringing in of the Gentiles to Salvation.

24 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only **but also from the Gentiles?** 25 As indeed he says in Hosea, **"Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" 26 "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" Romans 9:24-26**

## Romans 9 & Isaiah 1 & 10

Paul takes a prophecy originally about a remnant of ethnic Israel being saved from future physical destruction and teaches the fulfilment is the present spiritual salvation of a remnant of ethnic Israel.

### Original Context

9 If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah. Isaiah 1:9

20In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. 21A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. 22For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness. 23For the Lord GOD of hosts will make a full end, as decreed, in the midst of all the earth. Isaiah 10:20-23

### Paul's Application

27And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, 28for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." 29And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah." 30What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; 31but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. 32Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." Romans 9:27-33

Paul uses texts referring to the salvation of a remnant of ethnic Israelites from physical destruction and applies it to the salvation of a remnant of ethnic Israelites from spiritual destruction. Although both refer to ethnic Israelites, the point is that the restoration is fulfilled spiritually through them becoming believers in the present. (Paul, in Romans 9, is not speaking of the physical salvation used in the original prophecy).

## Romans 9 24-25 Summary Chart

<b>Scripture Reference</b>	<b>Original Old Testament Context</b>	<b>Paul's Interpretation in Romans 9:24-29</b>
Hosea 1:10, 2:23	God will restore <u>the nation of Israel</u> both spiritually and physically.	God will bring <u>Gentiles</u> to spiritual salvation.
Isaiah 1:9, 10:22-23	God will save a tiny remnant of ethnic Israelites from <u>physical</u> destruction.	God will save a tiny remnant from among the ethnic Israelites from <u>Spiritual</u> destruction.

(Chart adapted from Steve Lehrer's book, "NCT: Questions Answered.")

A close examination of Paul's use of Hosea 1&2 and Isaiah 1&10 reveals that Paul very naturally interprets passages to ethnic Israel as now applying to believers. He also assumes his audience understands and accepts the transition from physical ethnic Israel to believers (spiritual Israel) since he even uses such passages as proof texts regarding believers:— referring to both *believing* ethnic Israelites *in the present* (Isaiah 1&10 quoted in Rom 9) and believing Gentiles (Hos 1 & 2 quoted in Rom 9). Paul's original audience, reading Romans 9, would have understood this transition because of the consistent teaching pattern regarding true Israel by Paul and others (e.g. Romans 2:26-29, 4:11-14, 4:16-17, 9:6-8, 10:12, 11:17-18; Ephesians 2:11-13, Gal 3:7-8; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:1; 1 Pet 2:9-10; Hebrews 11:39-40, Matt 3:8-9, 8:11-12; Luke 13:28-29; John 8:37-39; Acts 15).

### Gal 6:15, 16

In Gal 6:15&16, Paul speaks of those that walk by the rule that salvation is by Christ alone and now circumcision (ethnic Israel) and un-circumcision (being outside ethnic Israel) are nothing but rather a new creation is what matters. He states,

"16Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God". (Gal 6:16).

There are some who say this "Israel of God" is ethnic Israel. This understanding has no contextual basis in the New Testament generally or any of Paul's letters specifically. Claiming the text refers to ethnic Israel, rather than believers, undermines the argument Paul has been making in the context. Against the Judaizer's Paul is proclaiming "the blessing of Abraham" that now belongs exclusively to all those, "who are of faith" (3:9); and they exclusively "belong to Christ" and are now the "heirs according to the promise" (3:29). These are the "Israel of God" being referred to in Gal 6:16. (Refer below for link to an article on this.)

## Hebrews

The promise of the New Covenant to Israel is given in Jeremiah 31:

31"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make **a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah** . . . 33But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' **for they shall all know me**, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. **For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.**" Jeremiah 31:31

In expounding the details of the New Covenant, the author of Hebrews quotes this passage in Hebrews 8. According to Hebrews, who are the recipients of this covenant and its promise of forgiveness and saving knowledge of the Lord? It is present day believers (since New Testament times) as demonstrated in the following passages which are speaking of the New Covenant blessings.

"22This makes Jesus the guarantor of **a better covenant** . . .  
25Consequently, he is **able to save** to the uttermost **those who draw near to God through him**, since he always lives to make intercession **for them**."  
Hebrews 7:22. . . 25

"12 he entered **once for all** into the holy places . . ." Hebrews 9:12

"9 . . . He abolishes the first <covenant> in order to establish the second. 10 And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all**. . . 14For by a single offering he has perfected **for all time those who are being sanctified**. 15And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, 16"**This is the covenant that I will make with them** after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," 17then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." 18 Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. " Hebrews 10:8-18

The New Covenant, promised to ethnic Israel, has now come to all who believe.

***The Bible speaks of the New Testament Times as the Time of Fulfilment of the Promises to Israel (not some future event).***

## Mary

Mary spoke of the present coming of Christ in her day as remembrance of His promises specifically to Israel. "54He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever"  
Luke 1:54

## Zechariah

Zechariah saw Christ and said, “68”Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people 69and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,”

## Simeon

Simeon was waiting for the “consolation of Israel”. When he saw Christ he concluded he could now “depart in peace”. Refer Luke 2:25 to 32. Simeon believed the present appearance of Christ to be the consolation of Israel not another future event.

## Jesus Quoting from Isaiah

In Luke 4:18-21, Jesus quotes the prophecy in Isaiah 61:1-2, and states “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” The context of Isaiah 61 is prophetically speaking of the future glory of Israel. See for example Isaiah 61:3 which completes the quote used by Jesus: “To grant to those who mourn in Zion”. For the context see also Isaiah 59:20, 21; 60: 3, 10, 12, 13, 14; 61:1-3, 6; 62:1.

These sections are all about speaking in prophetic language about Israel’s future restoration spoken of in the Old Testament. Jesus sees this as fulfilled in New Testament times not in another future event for ethnic Israel.

## Moses and All the Prophets

In Luke 24:13-27 it says that Jesus, “beginning with Moses and *all the Prophets*, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself”. The context speaks of Jesus giving them a full understanding of New Testament events leading up to His death and resurrection. This is what ‘*all the Prophets*’ testify to.

## John the Baptists

In John 1:31 John came baptising, “that he might be revealed to Israel”. The revelation to Israel was at the New Testament times.

## The Woman at the Well

Jesus speaks of the progression away from an ethnic people centrally located. Yes, salvation is from the Jews, but the time of the decentralised transition has come where the people of God are not contained to a people or a location.

21Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when *neither on this mountain **nor in Jerusalem*** will you worship the Father. 22You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23*But the hour is coming, **and is now here**, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.* John 4:12-23.

## The Triumphal Entry

In John 12:14-15, John speaks of the triumphal entry as fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9.

“14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, 15 “Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.” John 12:14-15

The context of Zechariah 9:9 is the future restoration of Israel.

9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. 10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. 11 As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. 12 Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double. 13 For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword.” Zech 9:10-13

A little further on in Zechariah the context demonstrates the prophecy is regarding the future restoration of Israel. It says:

6 “I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back because I have compassion on them, and they shall be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the LORD their God and I will answer them. Zech 10: 6.

The restoration Zechariah speaks of occurred in New Testament times according to John 12:14-15.

Like Zechariah 9, the New Testament refers to many prophecies as having fulfillment in New Testament times. For ethnic Israel to have a future according to these prophecies then the single events spoken of in the original Old Testament context need to be split into two separate events involving separate people groups. Neither the original context nor the New Testament gives any indication these prophecies are to have separate fulfillments with separate people groups.

## Acts

The accounts in Acts speak of God's goodness *in the present*.

“31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” Acts 5:31

36 As for *the word that he sent to Israel*, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all),

43To him all *the prophets bear witness* that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." Acts 10:43

## Romans 11

In Romans 11, Paul sees the *present goodness* of God in bringing salvation *to ethnic Israelites*, such as himself, as evidence God has not abandoned ethnic Israelites. In other words, Paul's answer to the question, "has God rejected his people?" lies in the present reality of the salvation of many ethnic Jews rather than in a future restoration of the nation.

"I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! **For I myself am an Israelite**, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

Paul continues the argument, that God has not abandoned ethnic Israelites, *on the basis* of His present goodness in bringing *a remnant to spiritual* salvation (rather than on the basis of a *future physical* restoration).

2God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? 3"Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." 4But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. Romans 11:2-52.

Likewise, in Romans 11:31, Paul *proves* that Israel is now receiving the mercy that many believe is future. Notice the two 'now's.

30Just as you were at one time disobedient to God *but now have received mercy* because of their disobedience, 31so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy.

## My Summary Regarding Romans 11

In Romans 11, Paul continues with the same theme he has been explaining throughout Romans regarding the re-forming of Israel into God's true eternal Israel (believers). He explains that "*some of the branches were broken off . . . because of their unbelief*" and believing Gentiles "*although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root*" (Rom 11:17-23). Up to this point Paul has been teaching that "*no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly*" (Rom 2:28) "*for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek*" (Rom 10:12, Acts 15:9). He has explained that "*not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring*" this is because "*it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring*" (Rom 9:6-8). It is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham (Gal 3:7-8).

God's faithfulness to ethnic Israel is demonstrated by God's present mercy to them for "if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in". God is still demonstrating His mercy to them "by the mercy shown to you <believing Gentiles> *they also may now receive mercy*". This process of engrafting in 'wild olive branches' and 'natural branches' into true Israel will continue "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom 11:25). At this point the process will have been completed and all believers will have been engrafted into the true Israel of God "and in this way all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26).

## Hebrews

The author of Hebrews tells us that *now (from New Testament times) is 'the end of the ages'* and the future coming event we are awaiting is the final redemption to save believers. (Note the context of Hebrews 7 to 10 is all about the New Covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31).

26 . . . he has appeared once for all **at the end of the ages** to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, 28 so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, **will appear a second time**, not to deal with sin but **to save those who are eagerly waiting for him**.

The key difference between the Old and New Covenant is that the people under the New Covenant all know the Lord and have their sins forgiven. God has made this covenant with the reconstituted house of Israel and house of Judah. Israel's Messiah came, the New Covenant was established, the news proclaimed to ethnic Israel first and then the Gentiles. Jews were among the first to receive and embrace Christ and the believing Gentiles were engrafted into the Israel of God.

God has not abandoned Israel in the present day. The gospel is offered to them, many are being saved, and all those that put their trust in Jesus Christ will be saved.

## ***Literal Problem Texts for Those Who See a Millennial Future for Ethnic Israel***

### Jeremiah 33:18

God promises to Israel that a man would always sit on the throne of Israel and that the Levites will offer sacrifices forever.

17"For thus says the LORD: **David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel**, 18 and **the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever**." Jeremiah 33:18

We know, from Hebrews and elsewhere, that the one sufficient sacrifice of Christ ends all others. Therefore, the eternal sacrifices of God's true and eternal Israel can be understood as either consummated in the greater sacrifice of Christ and/or through our sacrifices of service/praise as New Covenant priests.

If the language of the prophetic picture is taken literally we'd conclude there will forever be animal sacrifices performed by ethnic Israelites over in Palestine in the temple. This is clearly unbiblical. The question must then be asked, upon what basis does someone say the blood sacrifices of Jer 33 have ended, as they were just a picture, but the physical restoration of Israel spoken of throughout Jer 33 is a future event, not a picture? In other words, my understanding consistently applies what is spoken of Israel throughout Jeremiah in the same way the Apostles apply similar passages. However, to be consistent with the New Testament, those that say the restoration of Israel in Jeremiah 33 verses 11-17 is a future physical event for ethnic Israel also say that the very next verse (vs 18) is not a future event because we won't have future animal sacrifices. Either the whole passage applies to ethnic Israel in the future or it does not.

To be consistent some say that there will be animal sacrifices in Jerusalem but they will be done only in remembrance of Christ. This view clearly contradicts Heb 9:23-28 and we already practice the Lord's Supper in remembrance.

In short, to say the restoration of Israel spoken in Jeremiah 33 is a future event, we need to arbitrarily exclude verse 18 to keep animal sacrifices out or contradict Hebrews 9 to keep Jeremiah 33 verse 18 in.

As demonstrated, the Apostles readily see prophecy spoken to ethnic Israel as pictures which are fulfilled in believers as the true Israel circumcised of heart

#### The Offering Bowl of Zechariah 14

A similar problem exists in Zechariah 14 which speaks of the restoration of Israel. First, the context:

3Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle . . . 10The whole land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem shall remain aloft on its site from the Gate of Benjamin to the place of the former gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's winepresses. 11And it shall be inhabited, for there shall never again be a decree of utter destruction. Jerusalem shall dwell in security . . . 16Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths. 17And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. Zech 14:3-17

For those that hold to a millennial future for ethnic Israel, passages such as these usually present problems at some point when practices ended by Christ are also included in the prophecies regarding the restoration. In this case, the problem is the animal sacrifices mentioned in the same context:

20And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "Holy to the LORD." And **the pots** in the house of the LORD shall be **as the bowls before the altar**. 21And **every pot** in Jerusalem and Judah **shall be holy** to the LORD of hosts, so **that all who sacrifice** may come and take of them and

**boil the meat of the sacrifice in them.** And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day. Zech 14:20-21

Will we be sacrificing animals and boiling the meat of sacrifice in consecrated bowls in Jerusalem? (Heb 9:23-28)

### Isaiah 65

Another problem occurs in Isaiah where the passage in verse 17 which speaks of the new heavens and the new earth followed by what is meant to be the millennium for ethnic Israel (for those who understand it this way). The problem is that the new heavens and the new earth are not meant to be until *after* the millennium.

17"**For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth,** and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. 18But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, **I create Jerusalem to be a joy,** and her people to be a gladness. 19I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. 20No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. 21**They shall build houses** and **inhabit** them; they shall **plant vineyards** and eat their fruit. 22They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, **and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.** 23They shall not **labor** in vain or **bear children** for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them.

### 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 & Psalm 110:1-2

1 Corinthians 15:24-28 is Paul's application of Psalm 110.

"1The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, **until I make your enemies your footstool.**" 2The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies!" Psalm 110

24**Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.** 25**For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.** 26The **last enemy to be destroyed is death.** 27For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. 28When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. 1 Corinthians 15:24-28.

How long must Jesus sit at the Father's right hand?

"Until I make your enemies your footstool" (Psalm 110:1). In other words, Jesus remains at the Father's right hand until the end of history when all enemies are

subdued and not before then.

How long will Jesus reign at the Father's right hand?

"25For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26The last enemy to be destroyed is death" 1 Cor 15:25

The last enemy is destroyed at the resurrection when Christ returns (1 Cor 15:24-26, 54).

Jesus therefore remains at the Father's right hand until history ends and death is destroyed: just as a *literal* reading of these two texts demands.

(See also Matthew 13:24-30 & 36-43 on the continuity of God's kingdom).

In summary, we need to be consistent with the way we apply Scripture and not adopt a 'literal except whenever inconvenient' approach which I believe is characteristic of those who teach a millennial future for ethnic Israel in Palestine.

### **What Is the Appeal or Advantages of My View?**

**1. *This view (my view) I believe is Scriptural.*** It aligns the reading of the OT with the way the Apostles read and apply the OT texts and promises relating to Israel. My understanding applies the same Apostolic method for interpreting passages regarding "Israel".

**2. *My view is consistent with the reading of much prophecy which uses pictorial language to convey eternal truths.***

Understanding the 'picture to fulfilment' relationship between ethnic Israel and eternal Israel, as taught in the New Testament, enables consistent application and understanding of Old Testament prophecies. The problem of '*literal except when it doesn't work for me*' problem when reading an Old Testament prophecy is resolved.

**3. *It is a truly Christ-centred view that puts the focus of God's entire redemptive program upon Jesus Christ and His finished work on the Cross.***

To speak of future earthy land with a physical people seems to me to be a digression in the overall process from picture to fulfilment. Now, for example,

- The old Temple gives way to Christ, the one in whom we meet with God. (John 2:21)
- The old temporal Sabbath rest gives way to Christ who is our Sabbath rest (Col 2:16).
- The temporal Levitical priesthood gives way the perfect priesthood of Christ on our behalf and the resultant priesthood of all believers.
- The old animal sacrifices give way to the one time offering, eternally effective, sacrifice in Christ (Heb 9). New Covenant Sacrifices = Christian service.

- Physical circumcision under the OC gives way to heart circumcision. Rom 2:26-29.
- The focus on an earthly inheritance gives way to an eternal inheritance (Heb 11:16).

To speak of going back to a physical ethnic people being re-established in Palestine is a digression to the changes brought about under the New Covenant.

At the Cross the veil was torn, the Old Covenant was ended, and my inclusion into Israel was secured. As I teach and preach through those Old Testament texts I am very naturally able to bring their application and focus to the cross, the wonder of Christ, and the greater present and eternal fulfilment to us who believe, His eternal Israel.

My experience with those who preach the Old Testament prophecies, with the understanding that it applies to future ethnic Israel, is that they struggle to bring the focus upon Christ. (I may be wrong on this in many cases but please understand that I am just sharing my experience). Often the sermon covering the prophecies does not glory in Christ but rather becomes; 1. A history lesson focusing on ethnic Israel in the past; and, 2. An eschatology lesson focusing on ethnic Israel in the future. To me this conflicts with the entire flow of redemptive history which brings the focus upon the finished work of Christ on the cross.

With one eye on ethnic Israel's past and one eye on ethnic Israel's future it is understandable that such preaching is often done without glorying in Christ. Yet the author of Hebrews considers the history of the Old Testament ought to leave us "looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith . . ." (Heb 12:2 – see also the context of Heb 10 & 11 and earlier. In particular Heb 10:1, 9, 12, 16-19; Heb 11:8, 10, 13, 16, 32, 39-40.)

Also, Paul determined "to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). And Jesus, "beginning with Moses and *all the Prophets* he interpreted to them in all the Scripture" (Luke 24:13-27) while speaking of the events of his life, death and resurrection (as per the context).

My theology of Israel empowers me to use the whole Bible to bring my listeners to "look unto Jesus", "preach nothing but Christ and Him crucified" and display Christ's work through "Moses and all the Prophets". It is a Christ-treasuring theology! Christ has brought redemption to His people Israel, at the cross, fulfilling all the promises in ways beyond all I could ask or think! All the shadows give way to reality, to Christ Himself (Heb 8:5, 9:23, 24, 10:1, Col 2:16).

#### ***4. It helps to fuel our amazement at the wonder of God's plan, and the work of Jesus Christ, in our personal incorporation into Israel as Gentiles.***

God's plan has always been, and always will be, to save his people Israel. The Old Covenant with physical Israel, the physical seed of Abraham, was unable to save and a New Covenant was needed. But by God's grace, under the new eternal Covenant, believing Gentiles are incorporated into Spiritual Israel, the Spiritual/Eternal seed of

Abraham, and unbelieving Israelites are removed (as all unbelievers have no eternal inheritance). The promises of earthly land for an earthly people are fulfilled in the greater land (New Jerusalem) for all who believe. (Heb 7 to 11).

### **FURTHER REFERENCE**

Others have expanded and explained all this better than I could. So, if you are able to find the time, please read the following articles and have a think and pray about them. If you disagree that's fine but please understand I also hold a high view of God and don't believe my understanding in any way causes reproach upon His integrity. Rather, I believe it causes us to wonder at our Covenant keeping God who keeps his promises in ways that is above and beyond we could ever ask or think.

#### Steve Lehrer Articles

How does NCT View Israel?

[http://liftedveil.org/theology/nct/NCT%20QA/NCTQA\\_06\\_HowDoesNCTViewIsrael.pdf](http://liftedveil.org/theology/nct/NCT%20QA/NCTQA_06_HowDoesNCTViewIsrael.pdf)

How Do You Handle Old Testament Promises About Land, Military Power, And

Priests? [http://liftedveil.org/theology/nct/NCT%20QA/NCTQA\\_07\\_PromisesofLandPowerPriests.pdf](http://liftedveil.org/theology/nct/NCT%20QA/NCTQA_07_PromisesofLandPowerPriests.pdf)

Does Romans 11 Say There Is a Special Future for Israel?

[http://liftedveil.org/theology/nct/NCT%20QA/NCTQA\\_08\\_Romans11andIsrael.pdf](http://liftedveil.org/theology/nct/NCT%20QA/NCTQA_08_Romans11andIsrael.pdf)

Is NCT "Replacement Theology"?

[http://liftedveil.org/theology/nct/NCT%20QA/NCTQA\\_23\\_IsNCTReplacementTheology.pdf](http://liftedveil.org/theology/nct/NCT%20QA/NCTQA_23_IsNCTReplacementTheology.pdf)

What is the Difference between NCT and Progressive Dispensationalism?

[http://liftedveil.org/theology/nct/NCT%20QA/NCTQA\\_26\\_ProgressiveDispensationalismVsNCT.pdf](http://liftedveil.org/theology/nct/NCT%20QA/NCTQA_26_ProgressiveDispensationalismVsNCT.pdf)

Did Paul Misinterpret The Old Testament?

[http://liftedveil.org/theology/nct/NCT%20QA/NCTQA\\_AppA\\_PaulsUseOfTheOT.pdf](http://liftedveil.org/theology/nct/NCT%20QA/NCTQA_AppA_PaulsUseOfTheOT.pdf)

(Note, for all the articles from the book: <http://liftedveil.org/theology/nct/NCT%20QA/>)

#### Gal 6:16 Article

Article regarding the "Israel of God" in Gal 6:16:

<http://www.bible-researcher.com/gal6-16.html>

I hope all that explains my position. It would be nice to win you all over but if not we can disagree as brothers and be sure it will all be sorted out in the future. We can safely leave the details to Him who loves us and sent His Son to die upon the cross. Let us enjoy the present blessings of the New Covenant in sweet fellowship until He returns.

Your brother in Christ-

Shane.