

God's Righteousness: Who is "Israel?"

By Barbara L. Klika, MSW

Personal Life Coach

Undershepherd

www.set-apart-ministries.org

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Last time, in this series, I addressed the question of returning to God's righteousness and the holiday calendar He has designed vs the one man has made. It has been believed that His calendar was only for the "Jews" and not for Christians. For long years people have viewed the people who believe in this God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as being in two distinct groups, Jews and Christians. Jews are also called "UN-believers" by Christians. Yet we are also known collectively as "The People of The Book." I finished with the question of whether or not the church has replaced Israel, which many believe to be true. It has surely been a division but I do not believe a replacement.

**I have come to understand
that our Father allowed this
division, NOT replacement,
for a season for His
purposes.**

I believe it has nearly come to the fullness of time in which He will be restoring what was His original intent... to RE-establish His people as One Flock, under One Shepherd and under One Law, His own Righteous Teachings. There are many Scriptural and historical references to support this though I will not be able to cover all in one or even two months!

I believe it has to do with an overarching theme throughout the Scriptures, having to do with the concepts of witness and division, which is metaphorically represented in the number two. It takes two (or more) people to establish a witness, and it only requires two to establish a division. In this case, "Jew" and "Gentile." One of the groups kept a better understanding of His Righteous Teachings in the Written Word but missed the Living Word in Messiah Yeshua/Jesus while the other received Christ Jesus as the Living Word but missed His identity as the Written Word, losing the moorings of our Father's teachings on righteousness. ("Messiah" and "Christ" essentially both mean "anointed one.") Two witnesses, divided for a season, yet coming together in the end, as one stick in His Hand to bring the unity back to the Family of God. (Ezekiel 34-39 among other places)

Beyond that, it is really impossible to divide by genetic heritage because thousands of Jews, and other tribes of Israel as well, including priests, believed in Messiah Yeshua in the first century (Acts 4:4, 6:7, 21:20), to be followed by thousands upon thousands of Gentiles who later received Him. One did not “become Jewish” to receive Yeshua, but did become spiritually grafted in to Israel. Your genetic heritage is your genetic heritage...Spanish, German, Italian...whatever. Only those of the biological line of Judah can ever truthfully be “Jewish.” But spiritually, receiving Yeshua DOES bring one into spiritual identity with Israel, as part of the family.

I well recall singing “Father Abraham had many sons” in Vacation Bible School, do you? It declared that “I am one of them, and so are you, so let’s all praise the LORD.” That song declares the spiritual principle at work here: by faith we have been grafted in to the family of the LORD—which is the way the translators chose to render “YHVH,” the Name of the God of Israel, our God.

This was one of the great issues between the Disciples and other leaders, called Judaizers, because some leaders in the synagogues tried to insist that a religious conversion ritual--the circumcision-- was also necessary. The Disciples insisted that the religious conversion ritual was NOT required, having witnessed, to their amazement, the Spirit coming upon those of Gentile background. (Acts 11:15-18)

Later, division came in between those who received Messiah and adhered to God’s righteous teachings in the Whole Word, those who differed in understanding, and those who became alienated from the Jewish/Hebraic roots of the faith. House churches had been established pretty much all over the known world at that time. They held together through the Presence of the Holy Spirit, visitations of the leaders of the faith, such as Paul, and through written communication. Jerusalem, Antioch and Rome were prominent. It was in Rome that a desire to grasp control of the leadership of all took place. A division occurred between Rome and Antioch, in at least one sense over whether or not Mary could be “the Mother of God” or “the Mother of Jesus...*Theotokus* vs. *Christotokus*. The split between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church came in here, with the Eastern Orthodox Church retaining more of the original Hebraic understanding, standing for Mary as “the Mother of Christ.” Church leaders in Rome opted for “Mary, the Mother of God.” Do you see the heresy in this? Genghis Khan swept through the east and decimated the metropolitans of the Eastern Orthodox assemblies, leaving Rome in supremacy.

Then, in one intense time period, about the 300’s, there was a concerted effort by the leaders of the church in Rome to cut away the “new” faith of those who understood Messiah as the Living Word from what was taught to be the contamination of the Jewish/Hebraic roots. Sheer numbers of Gentiles coming into the faith essentially overwhelmed the original heritage and persecution further separated them. The cry went out that Christians should not be associated with the “Christ killers” and in this process, all those of Jewish heritage were thrown into one basket and announced as anathema, unacceptable. This belief lingers, though often unspoken.

Two relevant points:

- 1) Those who were responsible for Messiah's death were NOT people of Israel as a whole, but rather a corrupt element within the priesthood, holding a kangaroo court. Just as today, we see that all those who claim the name of "Christian" are not the same, neither did all those in Israel respond the same way. Some received and believed Yeshua/Jesus was Messiah and some did not. Paul tells us that the ability to receive Him was directly related to those who received the baptism of John. There are other divisions yet today between sects in Israel.
- 2) No human being on earth could have brought about Messiah's death if that wasn't His plan from the beginning. He came on purpose to die in atonement for all who would believe and receive His work on our behalf, first the Jew and then the Gentile.

Though Paul poignantly cried out in his letter to the Romans that the root is Israel and that we should not boast against the root, that is exactly what has happened. (Romans 11: 16-21) But then, if the root is Israel, who is Israel, really, and who are the branches?

Oh how our God loves a good puzzle...setting up so many mysteries for us to search out to find His understanding! And how He delights in those who earnestly seek Him and His Truth, and rewards those who seriously seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Next Time: There is confusion between the identities of "Israel" and "Judah" as much as there is confusion between identities of "Israel/Jews" and "Christians" not to mention confusion over the identities of "the assemblies," "synagogues" and "the church." Will you be surprised to learn that the names for "congregations of believers" all come from one root word? Contact us at info@set-apart-ministries.org or (920) 634-2760.
