

## Old Ideas Do Not Die Easily

Even with Peter's vision and the obvious outpouring of the Holy Spirit on non-Israelites, there were some who still taught that Gentiles had to first be circumcised in order to be saved:

And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question (Acts 15:1-2)

While the Bible does not declare the end of the circumcision covenant in Acts 17 where Abraham is promised descendants and physical blessing for obedience, the believers at Jerusalem concluded that Circumcision was not necessary for salvation. Nevertheless, many years later, even Peter still struggled with his old ways of life:

<sup>11</sup>Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I [Paul] withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; <sup>12</sup>for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles, but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. <sup>13</sup>And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup>But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?" <sup>15</sup>"We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, <sup>16</sup>knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified (Gal 2:11-16)

Peter was wrong to treat Gentiles as a lower class of believers. There are no lower class believers, now or in the Kingdom to come.

## All Are One in Christ

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Rom 1:16).

where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all (Col 3:11).

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal 3:28-29).

<sup>12</sup>For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. <sup>13</sup>For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." <sup>14</sup>How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup>And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom 10:12-15).

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).

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WHOSAV01

# Who Can Be Saved?

Most of the Bible is about the nation of Israel, a people whom God chose for a special purpose. Jesus was an Israelite of the tribe of Judah (Matt 1:1-14; Heb 7:14) and said of his early ministry:

"I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 15:24).

Indeed, that is where he conducted his ministry. Even in the next to last chapter of the Bible, in the prophecy of the book of Revelation, the nation of Israel is still prominent:

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, ... Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel (Rev 21:10,12).

But the Bible does not teach salvation—the promise of Eternal life—for only one nation. It is about the means whereby God used one nation, Israel, to be a blessing to bring salvation to the entire world. The Apostle Paul explains it this way:

<sup>6</sup>Consider Abraham [the grandfather of Israel]: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." <sup>7</sup>Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. <sup>8</sup>The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles [all nations] by faith, and announced the gospel in ad-

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vance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." <sup>9</sup>So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith... <sup>16</sup>Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ (Gal 3:6-9, 16).

The greatest blessing brought to the world through Israel was Jesus the Christ, the Son of God (Matt 3:17). The second blessing brought through Israel was the written Scriptures:

What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God (Rom 3:1-2).

### Beginnings

One can understand why the Israelites of Jesus' day came to believe that they were the only people who could receive salvation. Many Old Testament verses uphold Israel as a special nation above all other nations (Deut 14:2, etc.). At times they were told to completely destroy unbelieving nations (Deut 20:17, etc.). Salvation being made available to the whole world was a mystery that was not understood until much later:

<sup>5</sup> which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: <sup>6</sup> that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, <sup>7</sup> of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. <sup>8</sup> To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the

heavenly places (Eph 3:5-10).

During Jesus' ministry on earth, His disciples apparently never understood this mystery. They were shocked or annoyed when He healed a Canaanite woman's daughter (Matt 15:21-28), spent two days teaching the Samaritans [who were **not** Israelites] (John 4:7-42), and healing a Roman Centurion's servant (Matt 8:5-13). They apparently did not fully understand some of His teachings such as:

"And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt 8:11-12)

"and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones" (Matt 3:9).

Even after Jesus died and rose again, his disciples still primarily looked for an Israelite kingdom.

Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:6-8).

The disciples may have thought being a witness to "Samaria" and the "ends of the earth" meant going to the scattered Israelites (Jms 1:1) in those areas. Years later, God showed them the meaning of this statement to the apostle Peter in a powerful vision.

### The Big Switch

Acts chapters 10 and 11 document Peter's vision in which he was shown that the message of Salvation should go all nations. The meaning here is **not** "Israelites scattered in other nations"—it would not be unlawful for Peter to keep company with Israel-

ites. But here, Peter is teaching and then seeing the Holy Spirit come upon Cornelius, a man whom he previously would not have gone to visit:

<sup>28</sup> Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

<sup>34</sup> Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. <sup>35</sup> But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. <sup>36</sup> The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—<sup>37</sup> that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. <sup>39</sup> And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. <sup>40</sup> Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

<sup>44</sup> While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. <sup>45</sup> And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. <sup>46</sup> For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, <sup>47</sup> Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" <sup>48</sup> And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days (Acts 10:28, 34-48).