

Statement No. 5
The Remnant of Israel
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Statement: Christianity does not replace Israel in God's plan; it renews and strengthens it.

The major divide among current Adventist interpreters of Daniel 11 has to do with whether the terms in the latter portion of the chapter become spiritualized, or remain literal to the end. To help us with that question, a brief look at the concept of "spiritual Israel" is helpful.

It is often assumed that the Christian Church supersedes and replaces the Jewish nation as the new covenant people of God. But biblically, there is a better explanation. Instead of drawing the line of distinction between *national Israel* (the Jewish nation) and *spiritual Israel* (Christians), I find a more significant contrast between *true Israel* and *nominal Israel* within the Jewish nation even before the cross. Jesus referred to Nathanael as "an Israelite *indeed*" (John 1:47). This supports Paul's statement that "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Romans 9:6). To be an Israelite *indeed* required the possession of certain attributes not naturally possessed by all Jews. Jacob was given the name Israel, meaning "a prince of God," when he had "power with God and with men" and "prevailed" (Genesis 32:28). This quality is what Paul recognized when he said, "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly, . . . but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly" (Romans 2:28, 29). This distinction did not originate at the cross, but always existed, separating the true Israel of God from nominal Israel throughout their history.

Christianity does not create a new body of true believers that replaces the old; but instead, under a charter provision in Israel for incorporating Gentiles, the gospel revitalizes authentic Israel and carries it forward to realize its original aims.

Paul declared "that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of *the same body*, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Ephesians 3:6). This incorporating of Gentiles into the body of Israel is emphasized in Isaiah 56:

"Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying, The Lord hath utterly separated me from his people." Verse 3.

"Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings

and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people." Verses 6, 7.

Israel was "a green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit: with the noise of a great tumult he hath kindled fire upon it, and the branches of it are broken." (Jeremiah 11:16). Paul explained the significance of this to the Gentile Christians:

"And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?" Romans 11:17-24.

When Gentiles come to Christ, their stock does not thereafter replace the Jewish tree. No, they, as branches, are taken from their native tree and grafted into the Jewish tree. They are thus identified with Israel, not by replacing Israel, but by joining it. We have an example of this in the story of Ruth. When Naomi urged her to return to her own Moabite people, Ruth replied,

"Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: *thy people shall be my people*, and thy God my God." Ruth 1:16.

Ruth did not found a new religion. She became a part of Israel. In her words to her Jewish mother-in-law, she identified herself with "thy people." In that very same way, we Gentiles may be included among—in the words of the angel to the captive Jewish prophet—"thy people" (Daniel 12:1). The Gentile church does not replace the Jewish nation, for "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22).

This explains why, when Christ's kingdom is made up and His servants are sealed in their foreheads, the subjects of His kingdom are identified as the twelve tribes of Israel (Revelation 7:4-8). The point in time in Revelation 7:4 is the same as in Daniel 12:1—the close of human probation. At that time Jesus receives the throne of David and the kingship of the house of Judah. Since that is the kingdom He plans to rule, His subjects will all belong to Israel. For "if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29). If "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Luke 3:8), then certainly the followers of Jesus "are no more strangers and

foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19).

“Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.”
Ephesians 2:11-14.

In his 1875 “Sermon on the Two Covenants,” J. N. Andrews selected as his text Hebrews 8:10, “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts.” He then develops this thought:

“The language of inspiration is very explicit in stating that the new covenant is made with the same people that were the subjects of the old covenant. Thus Jeremiah, speaking in the name of the Lord, says: ‘I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah’ [Jeremiah 31:31]. And he further alludes to the fact that the new covenant is made with the Hebrew people when he adds: ‘Not according to the covenant that I made with *their fathers* in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt’ [verse 32]. And yet again he identifies the Hebrew people when he says: ‘This shall be the covenant that I will make with *the house of Israel*’ [verse 33]. And Paul quotes at length, in Hebrews 8, this entire statement of Jeremiah respecting the old and new covenants’ being severally made with the Hebrew people. And, as if this were not enough, he makes a statement in Romans 9:4, 5, that exactly meets the case. Thus he says of the Hebrews: ‘Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever.’ Thus it appears that everything valuable God has given to the world through the instrumentality, or by the means, of the Hebrew people. Those who choose to do so can venture to despise the law of God because given to the Jews, and to reject Christ because he came of the Jews; but one thing they cannot do. They cannot say, ‘We accept the new covenant because it pertains to the Gentiles, whereas the first covenant, and the law, etc., pertained to the Jews.’ No such distinction can be drawn. Both the covenants pertain to the Hebrew people, according to the explicit statement of Paul; and both are said by Jeremiah and Paul, or rather by the Spirit of inspiration speaking through them, to be made with Judah and Israel.” SOTC 4.1.

Developing this further, Andrews says,

“The Gentiles were made partakers of the spiritual things which God had wisely and justly placed in the hands of Israel. Romans 15:27. But being thus brought nigh by the blood of Christ, Paul says of those who were Gentiles ‘*in time past*’ (but not now) that they were ‘no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God.’ They were no longer Gentiles, but Israelites. They became sharers in the name and in the riches of Israel. And it is by this adoption into the commonwealth of Israel that they became sharers in the blessings of the new covenant.” SOTC 11.2.

“And their debtors they are.” Romans 15:27.

Noting the Messiah’s Davidic roots, Isaiah wrote,

“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.” Isaiah 11:1. “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.” Verse 10.

So the Gentiles’ hope rests in seeking the root of Jesse. Receiving Christ, we unite with His people.

“And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people.” Verse 11.

“The remnant of his people” are ultimately described in Revelation 12:17. They are the remnant of the woman introduced in the first verse of that chapter. That woman is the nation of Israel. Her crown of twelve stars identifies her with the sons of Jacob (Genesis 37:9, 10) and therefore with the twelve tribes of Israel. This cannot be the Christian church, for the church wasn’t there before Jesus was born (Revelation 12:2-4). It is the daughter of *Zion* that is likened to a comely and delicate woman (Jeremiah 6:2). The “remnant of her seed” (Revelation 12:17) are precisely the remnant of *her* seed. The remnant church is the remnant of *Israel*. The end-time restoration of the Sabbath is accomplished by “they that shall be of *thee*” (Isaiah 58:12, 13), namely, of “the house of Jacob” (Isaiah 58:1), to whom is promised “the heritage of Jacob thy father” (verse 14).

With this understanding, all the Old Testament promises for Israel “are yea, and in him Amen” (2 Corinthians 1:20). They are neither canceled nor reassigned.

“And the Redeemer shall come *to Zion*, and unto them that turn from transgression *in Jacob*, saith the Lord. As for me, this is my covenant *with them*, saith the Lord.” Isaiah 59:20, 21.

Specifically addressing the family of Israel, a most glorious prediction follows:

“Arise, shine; for *thy* light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon *thee*. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the

Lord shall arise upon *thee*, and his glory shall be seen upon *thee*. And *the Gentiles shall come to thy light*, and kings to the brightness of *thy* rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to *thee*: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto *thee*, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto *thee*." Isaiah 60:1-5.

"And the sons of the strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto *thee*: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto *thee* the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought." Verses 10, 11.

Verbally and thematically complementing Daniel 12:1, Isaiah's prophecy climaxes,

"*Thy people* also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified." Verse 21.

"Thus God's purpose for Israel will meet with *literal* fulfillment. That which God purposes, man is powerless to disannul. Even amid the working of evil, God's purposes have been moving steadily forward to their accomplishment. . . . The seer of Patmos, looking down through the ages to the time of *this restoration of Israel* in the earth made new, testified: 'I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.'" *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 720, 721.