



What We Believe

Article 11 of 13: God's New People

11. **God's New People:** We believe that God's New Covenant people have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem; they are already seated with Christ in the heavenlies. This Universal Church is manifest in local Churches of which Christ is the only Head; thus each local Church is, in fact, the Church, the household of God, the assembly of the living God, and the pillar and foundation of the truth. The Church is the body of Christ, the apple of His eye, graven on His hands, and He has pledged Himself to her forever. The Church is distinguished by her Gospel message, her sacred ordinances, her discipline, her great mission, and, above all, by her love for God, and by her member's love for one another and for the world. Crucially, this Gospel we cherish has both personal and corporate dimensions, neither of which may properly be overlooked. Christ Jesus is our peace: He has not only brought about peace with God, but also peace between alienated peoples. His purpose was to create in Himself one new humanity, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both Jew and Gentile to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility. The Church serves as a sign of God's future new world when its members live for the service of one another and their neighbors, rather than for self-focus. The Church is the corporate dwelling place of God's Spirit, and the continuing witness to God in the world.

Continuing on with our articles and following along the lines of the Biblical motif of Creation, Fall, Redemption, we now come to the doctrine of God's new people, specifically, the nature and unity of the Church, the Body of Christ.

Our Statement of Faith begins by saying:

"We believe that God's new covenant people have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem; they are already seated with Christ in the heavenlies."

The New Covenant

We have mentioned the New Covenant in a few of the previous articles. The primary passage in which this glorious covenant is revealed in the Old Testament is Jeremiah 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, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For 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. And 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 31:31-34

In Ezekiel 36, it reads:

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."

Ezekiel 36:25-27

Here we have the wonderful promises of having God's law written on our hearts, of knowing God, of having our sins forgiven and remembered no more, sanctification, a new heart and a renewed spirit within. Other O.T. passages, such as Ezekiel 11:17-20, Jeremiah 32:38-44 highlight additional important aspects of the New Covenant, like regeneration, God's blessings and restraining power. The New Covenant is also called the "Eternal Covenant" in Hebrews 13:20. It is the last and greatest of God's covenants, and is the covenant of redemptive fulfillment in Christ's precious blood. The New Testament, especially Hebrews chapters 8-10, teaches us that what was promised to Israel and Judah in the New Covenant, has come to apply to God's new people, the Church, the Body of Christ, His "New Covenant" people, made up of both Jew and gentile. More on this later.



The New Covenant People of God Have Come to the Heavenly Jerusalem and are Seated with Christ in Heavenly Places.

In Hebrews 12, the writer is contrasting the New Covenant/Mt. Zion/heavenly Jerusalem with the Old Covenant/ Mt. Sinai:

"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." Hebrews 12:22-24

John MacArthur has written:

"The mountain of the New Covenant is Mount Zion, representing the heavenly Jerusalem. The opposite of Sinai, it is not touchable, but it is approachable. Sinai symbolizes law and Zion symbolizes grace. No man can be saved by the law, but any man can be saved by grace. The law confronts us with commandments, judgment, and condemnation. Grace presents us with forgiveness, atonement, and salvation."

John MacArthur, Commentary on Hebrews, p. 413

He continued,

"The city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, is heaven itself. Coming to Christ is coming to heaven, the only way to come to heaven. When we come to Mount Zion, we come by grace to the city Abraham looked for, "the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God", Heb. 11:10. From the moment of salvation, heaven is our spiritual home where our heavenly Father and our Savior are, and where the rest of our spiritual family is. That is where our treasure is, our inheritance, our hope is. Everything we have of any value is there and all that we should want is there. Until the Lord takes us there to be with Himself, however, we cannot enjoy its full citizenship. For now we are ambassadors on earth. As ambassadors we have full citizenship in our home country, but we are away from it for a while and cannot enjoy its full blessings." John MacArthur, Commentary on Hebrews, p. 414

Ephesians 1:3 says that the Father "has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."

As the New Covenant people of God, we are the assembly of Christ who is the "first-born" from the dead and we are enrolled in heaven. Hebrews 12:23

The Apostle Paul wrote,

"our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" Philippians 3:20

The Nature of the Church, the New People of God

The New Testament word for "Church" is *ekklesia*. This word can mean an assembly, or an assembly of people convened at the public place of a council for the purpose of deliberating, or the assembly of the Israelites. In a Christian sense, it is an assembly of Christians gathered for worship in a religious meeting in a local city, or village, or the whole body of Christians scattered throughout the earth, or the assembly of faithful Christians already received into heaven.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus only used the word *ekklesia* twice, once in Matt. 16:18 and in Matt. 18:17. *Ekklesia* is used consistently in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to translate the Hebrew word *qahal*, which denoted the gathering of God's people.

J. G. Millar wrote,

"It is the word that was chosen by Jesus and the apostles to capture the nature of the new covenant community. The *ekklesia* of God was about to become the *ekklesia* of Jesus Christ.

New Dictionary of Biblical Theology, p. 687

That the word *ekklesia* was used to translate the Hebrew for an assembly of Israelites in the O.T. does not mean that it carries the exact connotation in the N.T. regarding the new people of God as the New Covenant Church. Just as we have seen, significant changes occurred with the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, so also noteworthy distinctions prevail between national Israel and the New Covenant Church. More on this later.

Wayne Grudem defines the Church as, "the community of all true believers for all time."

He goes on to comment,

"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, Ephesians 5:25. Here the term the Church is used to apply to all those for whom Christ died to redeem, all those who are saved by the death of Christ. But that must include all true believers for all time, both believers in the NT age and believers in the OT age as well "

Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, p. 853

Visible and Invisible

The Church, in a real sense, is both invisible and visible. Grudem, commented:

"In its true spiritual reality as the fellowship of all genuine believers, the Church is invisible. This is because we cannot see the spiritual condition of people's hearts. . . The invisible Church is the Church as God sees it . . . On the other hand; the true Church of Christ certainly has a visible aspect as well. . . The visible Church is the Church as Christians on earth see it. . . The visible Church throughout the world will always include some unbelievers . . because we cannot see hearts as God sees them."

Grudem p 855, 856

Names and Metaphors for the People of God the Church

God's New Covenant people are called by various names. Church, Bride of Christ, Body of Christ, etc.

Abraham's Offspring/Seed	Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:29
Body of Christ	Romans 12:4; 1 Cor. 6:15; 10:16; 11:29; 12:12-27; Eph. 1:22; 4:12; Col. 1:24
Bride of Christ	Rev. 19:7, 8; 21:2,9; 22:17
Building of God	1 Corinthians 3:9
Children of God	1 John 3:1,2,9, 10
Chosen Ones/ Chosen People	Luke 18:7; Col. 3:12; 1 Pet. 2:9
City of the Living God	1 Timothy 3:15
Congregations of the Saints	1 Corinthians 14:33
Dwelling of God	Ephesians 2:22
Elect	Mark 13:20-22, 27; Romans 11:7; Titus 1:1
Family	Ephesians 3:14; Galatians 6:10; 1 Peter 4:17
Fellow Citizens	Ephesians 2:19
Flock of God	John 10:16; 1 Pet. 5:2
Pillar & Foundation of the Truth	1 Timothy 3:15
God's Field	1 Corinthians 3:9
God's Household	Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 3:6; 10:21
Heavenly Jerusalem/New Jerusalem	Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22; Rev 3:12; 21:2, 10
Holy City	Revelation 21:2, 10; 22:19
Holy Nation	1 Peter 2:9
Holy Ones	1 Thessalonians 3:13
Holy People	Ephesians 5:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:10
Holy Priesthood	1 Peter 2:5
Holy Temple/ Temple of God	Ephesians 2:21; 1 Cor. 3:16 17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Rev. 3:12
Israel of God	Galatians 6:16
Letter of Christ	2 Corinthians 3:2
Living Stones	1 Peter 2:5
Mount Zion	Hebrews 12:22
People of God	Acts 15:14; Rom. 9:25; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 3:8; Heb. 4:9; 1 Pet 2:10
Royal Priesthood	1 Peter 2:9
Sons of God	Romans 8:14; 9:26; Gal. 3:26-29; 4:1-7
Spiritual House	1 Peter 2:5
Wife of the Lamb	Revelation 21:9

Scripture references are from the Topical Analysis of the Bible, Elwell

Universal Church - Local Church - Christ the Only Head

Concerning the relationship between universal and local Church, our statement says,

"This universal Church is manifest in local Churches of which Christ is the only Head; thus each local Church is, in fact, the Church, the household of God, the assembly of the living God."

With the New Covenant era, a new reality came about. The kingdom of God transitioned from God's dealings with one nation, Israel, to God's plan for a new "nation" made up of Jew and Gentile. With this change came an international aspect to the Church. The Church has a universal aspect and a local aspect.

The universal Church is made up of all true believers in Christ whether those departed and with Him or those still living on earth under His headship. This distinction has been referred to at times as the "Church victorious" (in heaven) and the "Church vigilant" (on earth). Christ is the Head of His Church, He is the Great Shepherd. The local Church, on the other hand, is made up of believers gathered visibly and related to a particular geographical location under the oversight of Christ's delegated under-shepherds, pastors/elders, as a visible extension of the universal Church of Christ. The universal and the local Church are both the household and the assembly of God. True believers in Christ have membership in the universal Church and should have recognized membership in a Bible believing local Church as well.

Personal and Corporate Aspects of the Church

Not only does the Church now have a universal aspect and a local aspect, but it also has a "personal" aspect and a "corporate" aspect. As God's new people, His New Covenant people, we each have membership personally. One of the great promises of the New Covenant is that each believer, whether the greatest or the least will personally know the Lord. But just as we all know the Lord and are personally united with Christ, we are also baptized into His body, the corporate Church, 1 Corinthians 12:13. We are united to Him and to each other, Romans 6:5.

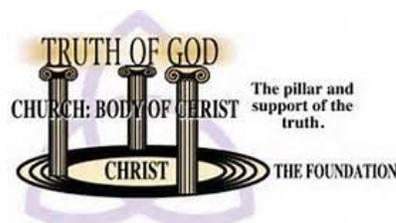
The Church is the Pillar and Foundation of the Truth

The Apostle Paul wrote that the new people of God is the Church of the living God, and is the pillar and foundation or buttress of the truth, 1 Timothy 3:15. What a high calling this is! The pillar and foundation of the truth. John Piper said:

"In 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul calls the Church of the living God "the pillar and bulwark of the truth." This is one of those truths that the Church must hold up like a pillar holds up a building. There are constant pressures throughout history on persons and institutions and cultures to build life around wrong ideas. God has appointed the Church of his Son Jesus to be a mighty advocate for truth in the world."

John Piper, Sermon, [All Jews and Gentiles are under sin](#)

If we were to picture in our minds, one of those pillars from the ancient civilizations, strong, sturdy, enduring, supporting those massive stone structures. In a similar way, the truth of God is being supported and held up metaphorically by the foundation of a pillar, the Church. As God's new people, we must be faithful guardians and proclaimers of the truths passed on to us from Jesus and the Apostles. This would include all Scripture, 2 Tim 3:16, the Gospel, Romans 1:16, and the doctrines taught therein such as the existence and attributes of God, the Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration, etc. Our Tri-une God, is the God of truth. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the truth incarnate, and we His people as the Church of the living God are the pillar and foundation of the truth. God help us to live up to this important role.



A few more words about the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles. The teachings Jesus and the Apostles as contained in the New Testament are the authoritative doctrines and practice for God's people under the New Covenant. In these teachings, they have "contextualized" the Scriptures for us.

Our statement continues:

"The Church is the Body of Christ and Bride of Christ, the apple of His eye, graven on His hands, and He has pledged Himself to her forever."

The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 12:5 that we, "although many, are one body in Christ." And again in 1 Cor. 12:27 he wrote, "you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." The Body of Christ is an interesting metaphor for describing the Church. He is our Head and we are members of His spiritual body. We are His bride and He has given Himself for us.

"(Christ) gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." Titus 2:14

"Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Eph. 5:2

"Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the Church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." Eph. 5:25-27

The Distinctive Treasures of the Church

Our statement goes on to consider the distinctive treasures of the Church:

"The Church is distinguished by her gospel message, her sacred ordinances, her discipline, her great mission, and, above all, by her love for God, and by her members' love for one another and for the world."

God has chosen the Church to bestow upon her some very special and distinctive treasures. We covered the Gospel in article #6, we refer you to it for a more lengthy exposition. The Gospel is our prized message. It is as the Apostle wrote, the Gospel is, "The power of God unto salvation for all who believe", Romans 1:16. We must cherish it, declare it truthfully, faithfully and boldly and live in light of it ourselves every single day of our lives. The Gospel is life to the lost and life and encouragement to believers. The ordinances of the Church are two, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. We will cover these in detail in our next article. Baptism is the initiation ceremony or ordinance of the New Covenant Church. It is the command of Jesus and all Christians need to be baptized as soon as possible after they come to faith in Him. The Lord's Supper, also known as the Lord's Table or Communion is the memorial remembrance of Christ's death for His people to be regularly observed until His return. The bread represents His body given for us and the cup represents His shed blood, the cup of the New Covenant in His blood. Both are precious and meaningful means of edification for the New Covenant people of God.

Our great mission is the Great Commission given to the Apostles by the Lord and passed on to us.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
Matthew 28:19, 20.

The discipline of the New Covenant Church is the commandments of Jesus our Messiah King. In the Great Commission, Jesus said, teach them all I have commanded you. The Lord has called His people to be the salt of the earth and the light on a hill. We are called to be separate and holy unto the Lord, loving the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and strength and our neighbor and one another as ourselves. This is part of the Law written upon our hearts promised in the New Covenant.

Whoever abides in love abides in God!

1 John 4:16

The Church Reflecting God's Love

As God's new people, the Church, we are the beneficiaries of His wondrous redeeming love. This love is His special redemptive love in Christ and is in distinction from His general love for all humanity and the creation. As we are a light on a hill, among other things, we reflect the redemptive love of God in this world. There are various ways in which this is true. Primarily, we display and reflect His love by loving one another.

The night before Jesus was crucified, He told the Apostles:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."
John 13:34-36

This is our high calling among one another, to love each other as Christ has loved us. By this outsiders will know that we are God's new people and disciples of Christ. John 13:35

The Apostle John wrote:

"God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." 1 John 4:16

Listen to what Timothy Savage wrote in his booklet, *The Church: God's New People*:

"For this reason, the exhortation of the apostle Paul to local Churches never varies: 'Put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony' (Col. 3:14); 'Owe nothing to one another except to love each other, for the one who loves has fulfilled the law' (Rom. 13:8); 'So now faith, hope and love remain, these three, but the greatest of these is love' (1 Cor. 13:13); 'Through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' (Gal. 5:13-14); 'May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another' (1 Thess. 3:12). A similar call is issued by the apostle John: 'This is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another' (1 John 3:11); 'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God' (1 John 4:7). So also the apostle Peter: 'Above all, keep on loving one another' (1 Pet. 4:8). These exhortations doubtless find a source in the words of Jesus himself: 'By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:35). Love is the *sine qua non* of the family of God. Examples of how this love works out in practice are ubiquitous in the apostolic canon: 'Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2); 'Look out for the interests of others, having in you the mind that was in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 2:4-5); 'Always seek to do good to one another' (1 Thess. 5:15); 'Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another' (Eph. 4:32); 'Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, living in harmony with one another' (Rom. 12:15-16). . . . The local Church and its love represent the only sure antidote to a postmodern world mired in sin and despair. . . . It is the body of Christ. To catch a glimpse of the local Church, the local Church in action, whose members interact lovingly with each other, pouring out their God-given gifts into each other's lives, showcasing in their relentless self-sacrifice the cruciform love of Jesus Christ himself, is to witness more light by exponents than secular minds can begin to absorb. It is to see what society lacks, a love without which souls wither and die, a love for which all people (whether they know it or not) passionately crave. It is the love found exclusively in the local Church."

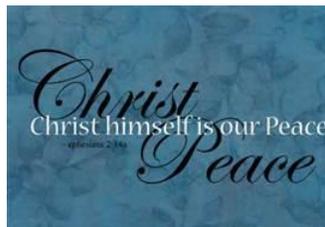
Timothy Savage, *The Church: God's New People* 18, 19

Our statement of faith continues:

"Christ Jesus is our peace: He has not only brought about peace with God, but also peace between alienated peoples."

Peace with God Through Christ

How can sinful humans be right? Only through faith in the precious word, "He Himself is our peace." In Romans 5, He wrote that we are being justified by grace through faith



with God and have peace with Him? through the blood of Jesus. The Apostle Paul wrote, "He Himself is our peace". Ephesians 2:14

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5:1-2

Once, we were by nature children of wrath and at enmity with God. But now by grace through faith alone, we as the new people of God, have right standing and peace with God, through our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Being in Christ is being at peace with God! What a perfect Savior!

Through Him there is Peace Between Formerly Alienated People Groups.

We have just seen how Christ is our peace and through faith in Him we are right with God and have peace with Him. Building on this foundation, God by His reconciling grace, has brought together in Christ people from many different Gentile ethnic groups. The Lord commissioned the Church to make disciples of all nations, Matthew 28:19. In Revelation 5:9 we read that Jesus ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. As we noted above, the new people

of God are an international people. People who once were at enmity with one another or whose ancestors were at war with one another are now united together as one new spiritual nation in Christ. What an awesome blessing!

A New Humanity in Christ - Jew and Gentile Together

Not only have multitudes of people from several different Gentile ethnic groups been united together in the Savior, but the same is true between Jews and Gentiles.

In Ephesians 2, the Apostle Paul revealed that since Christ is our peace, believing Jews and Gentiles are now one in Him and are equally members of the His Church, the new people of God:

"Therefore 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 — remember 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. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."
Ephesians 2:11-22

"This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel." Ephesians 3:6

The Mystery of the Church . . . Jews and Gentiles are fellow heirs and members in the same body and partakers in the promise of Christ Jesus through the Gospel. Ephesians 3:6

John Piper expounded these two Ephesians passages on the relationship of Jew and Gentile as the new people of God:

"Now let's be more precise and notice the actual words that prove this oneness of Jew and Gentile in the new people of God.

Verse 14: "He is our peace, who made both groups [Jews and Gentiles] into one." Christ did not come to open a second alternative way to God. He came to make Jew and Gentile one in his Church.

Verse 15b: ". . . that in himself he might make the two [Jew and Gentile] into one new man, thus establishing peace." Here he pictures the church as a single person. Once there were Jewish persons and Gentile persons. Now Christ comes and unites them to himself so that "in himself" there would be only one new person, namely, Christ: There is neither Jew nor Gentile, but Christ is all and in all (Colossians 3:11). Christ is the one new man. . .

Verse 16: ". . . and [that Christ] might reconcile them both [Jew and Gentile] in one body to God." The reconciling work of Christ brings people to God not in two alien bodies, one rejecting him (Jewish) and one trusting him (Christian). Christ brings Jew and Gentile to God in one body, the Church. And not only in one body, but also in one Spirit. Verse 18: "For through him [Christ] we have access in one Spirit to the Father." So Paul sums up this great unified work of salvation in 4:4-6, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called into the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."

"The same summary statement is given in Ephesians 3:6 where Paul defines the mystery of Christ that he preaches: "to be specific, [the mystery of Christ is] that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs [with the Jews] and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel." What happened? Once we were separated from Christ, now Christ himself has drawn near to us. Once we were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, now we are fellow citizens in Israel. Once we were strangers to the covenants of promise, now we are fellow partakers of the promise. Once we were without hope, now we are fellow heirs of all God has to give. Once we were without God in the world, now we are members of God's household."

John Piper, Sermon, [Israel and Us in One Body](#).

Again Millar writes:

"Jesus' (and the Gospel writers') understanding of his ministry rested firmly on the conclusions drawn from the OT. He worked with a paradigm of fulfillment rather than one of replacement. He came to save the lost sheep of Israel (Matt 10:6; 15:24 . . .) and to realize Israel's true destiny (see e.g. Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30).
New Dictionary of Biblical Theology, p. 686

There is a lot of substance in these passages and quotes and some important things to understand. Remember, the New Covenant Church was completely Jewish on the Day of Pentecost. On that day by God's grace, the Church grew from 120 disciples to over 2,000. Gentiles did not come into the Church until some years later. So for quite some time, the Church was made up of a remnant of Jews, a remnant of Israel. The main population of national Israel remained unbelievers.

The Bible speaks over and over again about remnants. God has always had a remnant people even when Israel was at its lowest state. When Elijah thought he was the only remaining faithful prophet to God, the Lord revealed to him that He had 7,000 individuals who had not bowed the knee to baal, (1 Kings 19; Rom. 11:2-4). Through Israel's generations and through their repetitious failures, God always had a faithful remnant. Fast forward to the night before the crucifixion. There, at the Last Supper with Jesus were His Apostles, a "remnant" as it were, of Israel and Judah. Jesus initiated the New Covenant there and sealed it in His blood the next day. The primitive New Covenant Church was inaugurated at Pentecost and was made up of these "remnant" Jewish believers in Christ. It was not until 6 years later that some Samaritans believed, and it was not until 12 years after Pentecost, that the first Gentiles believed and were added to the membership of the Church. Soon, the Gentiles outnumbered the Jewish believers, but the New Covenant promised to Israel and Judah and implemented by the Lord Jesus Christ, still stands as the functioning covenantal relationship between God and His people, the Church.

So we see by this that the new people of God, the New Covenant Church is a fulfillment in God's redemptive plan to incorporate along with a faithful remnant of the descendants of Abraham, Gentiles from all nations, who were once excluded from the "commonwealth of Israel", but who are now fellow citizens in this "household of God".

Romans chapter 11 is another very important passage for us to understand in relationship to the topic of the new people of God. In this passage we see that believing Gentiles are grafted into a Jewish cultivated "olive tree".

"Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? If the dough offered as lump, and if the root is holy, so branches were broken off, and you, grafted in among the others and of the olive tree, do not be arrogant remember it is not you who support you. Then you will say, 'Branches grafted in.' That is true. They were but you stand fast through faith. So if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree." Romans 11:13-24



What does the olive tree represent? Is it Israel? Is it the kingdom of God? Is it the Church? If we look at the imagery carefully, it would be safest to say that it represents the redeemed family of God. Unbelieving natural/Jewish branches were broken off and believing Gentile, "wild branches" were engrafted into the cultivated olive tree of the family of God and made one with the believing Jewish branches. The Jewish root supports the Gentile believers, not the reverse. So we see a continuity in the olive tree (of the people or family of God) through faith. We could say that this olive tree corresponds to the "commonwealth of Israel" and the "saints" in Ephesians 2.

We find that some N.T. writers apply O.T. names and metaphors to the New Covenant Church. The Apostle Peter wrote saying that the Church is a chosen race, a royal priesthood and a holy nation, 1 Peter 4:10. James wrote a general letter to Christians greeting them as the twelve tribes in the dispersion, James 1:1. We see here some continuity between the O.T. and N.T. people of God.

Continuity and Discontinuity

This brings us to what has become known as the concept “continuity and discontinuity”. By the passages we have seen it is clear that in redemptive history, there has been a basic continuity of the people of God through the ages. The O.T. saints looked forward in faith to Jesus as the coming Redeemer, Messiah King. New Covenant saints look directly to Him as Lord and Savior for salvation and inclusion into the Church. One people redeemed by Christ and united in Him in one overall redemptive plan. It is also clear by the preponderance of Scripture that there has been “discontinuity” or differences in redemptive history when it comes to covenantal administrations. There have been changes in covenant administration, rites of initiation, for example the replacement of circumcision with baptism, and changes with the cessation of certain commandments and requirements from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. One example is that animal sacrifices ceased since Christ’s all-sufficient, once and for all sacrifice was accomplished.

What Has Happened to National Israel?

Jesus told the chief priests and elders of Israel that because of their unfaithfulness, the kingdom would be taken from them and given to another people that produced spiritual fruit:

"Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits". Matthew 21:43

It grieved the Apostle Paul tremendously that His brethren according to the flesh remained lost. In Romans chapter 11 he wrote that a partial spiritual blindness or hardening has come upon them:

"I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." Romans 11:25

Paul wrote about the plight of national Israel and the division that exists between them and believing Jews in Romans:

"No one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. 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 2:28, 29

"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." 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

WHAT ABOUT ISRAEL ?

"What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works." Romans 9:30-32

"But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, 'I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.' Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, 'I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.' But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people." Romans 10:19-21

"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. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew." Romans 11:1, 2

"What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written, 'God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.'" Romans 11:7, 8

"Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." Romans 11:25

What Will Happen to National Israel? Re-grafted by Grace Through Faith

Though the new people of God are a vast majority of Gentiles at this time, when the times of the Gentiles are complete, God will bring salvation to "all Israel" at the right time and re-graft them into the olive tree of people of God:

"And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree. . . . And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob'; 'and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.'" Romans 11:23-27

Piper summarizes the implications of these challenging passages of Ephesians 2 and Romans 11:

"Implications - 1. Being the body of Christ means that we have been brought into a Jewish inheritance. We have our salvation because we are fellow citizens with Israel and have become heirs of the promise of Abraham—that God would be the God of his descendants. The root of God's covenant with Israel supports us the grafted in branches; we do not support the root (Romans 11:18). We are not an independent body over against Israel. We have been grafted in to the true Israel."

John Piper, Sermon, [Israel and Us in One Body](#).

Unity in the Church

As God's new people we are united to God and we are united to one another through Christ, Romans 6:5. We have been baptized into one body, 1 Corinthians 12:13. Since the people of God are spiritually one, the will of God is that we should maintain peace and unity in the Church.

Timothy Savage wrote:

"A striking unity pervades the family of God. Relationships that were once fractured have been supernaturally mended. Even Jews and gentiles, ethnicities renowned for mutual animosity, have come together in one body. How? They 'have been brought near by the blood of Christ' (Eph. 2:13). They have been 'reconciled to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility' (Eph. 2:16). Christ has dealt a mortal blow to the divisiveness of sin, to the social plagues of egotism and pride, and thus broken down walls of separation and brought together in one humanity a new household in which "the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple of the Lord . . . a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Eph. 2:15, 19–22). God, through Christ, is actually making his abode in this freshly minted family. This is a good thing because, with his self-emptying love indwelling the collective hearts of this holy humanity, binding its members more and more firmly together, the newly united family serves as a beacon of hope to the fractured families of the world. Through local Churches, as they multiply and fill the earth, the unifying glory of Christ becomes visible to the ruptured relationships of the planet."

Timothy Savage, *The Church: God's New*, p. 15,16

The Lord calls us to love and serve Him and to love and serve each other. 1 Thess. 1:9; Galatians 5:13. This is how onlookers will know we are His followers, John 13:35. The Apostle Paul exhorted the primitive Church to be of one mind and maintain peace and unity:

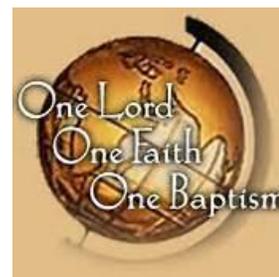
"I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment." 1 Cor. 1:10

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." Ephesians 4:1-6

"If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." Philippians 2:1–5

The Church Exemplifies God's Future New Heavens and New Earth

The Church foreshadows eternity in the new heavens and new earth. Savage wrote:



"A Bit of Heaven on Earth - As we learn from Genesis, the image of God was meant to permeate the earth. As we learn from Christ, it is an image revealed preeminently in the self-giving love of the cross. When that love penetrates the hearts of a body of people—a possibility only for those who have, through the work of the cross, been cleansed of sin and declared in the right—when that love takes up an abode in the family of God, in the church of Jesus Christ, and when expressions of that love mark out the interpersonal relations of local churches in the same manner as they epitomize relations within the triune family of God, the glory of heaven begins to break out on earth. . . The new covenant people of God will, while still walking on earth, obtain a foothold in the heavenly Jerusalem. Their eyes will be alive to the riches of their glorious inheritance (Eph. 1:18). "

Timothy Savage, *The Church: God's New People*, p. 25

The Church is the Corporate Dwelling Place of the Holy Spirit

As we have seen, the Apostle Paul made it clear in Ephesians 2:14-16 that Christ our peace has reconciled and united believing Jews and Gentiles together in one group, one Church, one new people through the cross. He then proceeded to reveal that this very same group, Church, new people of God is the very dwelling place of God by the Holy Spirit a holy temple in the Lord:

"For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

Ephesians 2:18-22

You are God's Temple
1 Corinthians 3:16

The Apostle Peter wrote:

"you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 2:5

This reminds us that under the New Covenant, the emphasis is not on a particular place or physical building like the temple, but on the people. The Church is the people not the building or location. Jesus told the Samaritan woman:

"the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. . . . 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. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:21-24

The Church Witnesses to God in the World.

As God's new people we are witnesses to Him in the world of His Being and of redemption in Christ through the preaching of the Gospel.

Scripture teaches us:

"you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning." John 15:27

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8

"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Acts 2:32

"you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. Acts 3:15

"And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day . . ." Acts 10:39, 40

We also witness to God by honoring His Word and keeping His commandments, living in the world, but not being of the world. Being a set apart people, being the salt of the earth and the light on the hill as we have been called to do. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught:

"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Matthew 5:13-16

Witnessing to God Through the Great Commission

Another very important way we witness to God and the Christ our Savior is through the Great Commission:

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'" Matthew 28:18-20

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8

The Great Commission is our mandate and our message is the saving Gospel. Evangelism is part of this commission and so as God's people proclaim the Gospel to the world with a view to the conversion of the lost, we can also bear testimony of God's transforming grace in our own lives.

And so as we bring this article to a close we want to remember that as the new people of God, people redeemed, Jew and Gentile from every region of the world, that we must be mindful that God has reconciled us to Himself through faith in our perfect Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, that we might enjoy a loving and worshipful relationship with Him, seek to honor Him in everything we do, and faithfully witness to Him and His great salvation in this world by His enabling grace. Amen!

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Free Online Resources:

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