



How to Connect with Israel? (Part II)

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In Part I, we learned that according to the Bible, “Israel” can mean: a) the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the Jewish people b) the Jewish nation in its Land, and c) the Remnant of believers in Yeshua—Jew & Gentile together.

The Olive Tree metaphor of Romans 11 demands that Christians see themselves as “grafted in” (covenantally connected) to Israel in a way that reflects the fullness of all 3 dimensions of Biblical Israel. This is God’s formula for bringing about the “fullness of the gentiles/nations,” “all Israel being saved,” and the 2nd Coming of Yeshua. (**Rom 11:25-26**)

Before we study what this full “grafting in” might look like in our day, I want to look at how Christians have been connecting to Israel in ways that are good, but stop short of the fullness that we are seeking.

1) C without A or B: The Church= Spiritual Israel and Replacement Theology

For much of history, and still today, many churches have taught that the full meaning of Biblical Israel is now to be found ONLY in the church—the universal people of God. Accordingly, the church is now seen as *replacing* physical/literal Israel (people & nation) in the plan, covenants, and promises of God. This is basically saying that Israel = C, the spiritual remnant of Jew & Gentile together, no longer with any reference to Israel’s continuing, covenantal identity as the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (A, the Jewish people), or to the nation of Israel in her Land with Jerusalem as its capital (B, the nation of Israel). Rather than “connecting” with Israel, this position is more like “swallowing up” Biblical Israel into the Christian church. Of course, in the New Testament, the great problem with this theology is what the Apostle teaches so directly in Romans 9-11, where he uses the term “Israel” in all 3 ways, lending continuing validity to the place of the Jewish people and nation in God’s plan.

2) A+B, without C – Connecting with Israel or the Jewish people OUTSIDE of Gospel faith

Over the last several generations, many Christians have discerned in Israel the fulfillment of the many Biblical prophecies concerning the ingathering of the Jewish people and the restoration of our nation. After centuries of mis-treatment of the Jews, Christians have accepted the Biblical

mandate to lovingly “provoke” unbelieving Israel “to jealousy” (**Rom 11:12**). Many lead tours to the Land, visit the IDF, meet with politicians, rabbis, etc.; others have donated finances or planted trees to help the nation; and many take a strong pro-Israel political stance. These are all good, but can totally miss “C”—the Israel that is the Israel of faith—the spiritual remnant of Israeli believers in Yeshua.

Romans 9:6 and **11:17-18** tell us that not all of Israel is fully Israel. If one’s primary mode of connecting, of grafting into the Olive Tree, is through the unsaved Jewish majority, then one is essentially grafting to branches which are (at least at this stage) cut off from the tree! That’s not a good formula for “partaking with them of the rich root of the olive tree!!” It’s impossible to take blessing and nourishment from the root if your grafting into branches that aren’t even connected to the tree! This error was quite forgivable a generation ago, when the believing remnant in Israel was so tiny as to be practically invisible, but today the Jewish nation is experiencing a spiritual restoration and a growing, maturing remnant of the faithful in Yeshua. It’s time for the fullness of the Olive Tree grafting relationship!

3) Jewish/Hebrew “roots” Torah teaching

Today, there is much popular teaching about the “Jewish roots” of the faith. Learning about the Hebraic background of the Scriptures, Jewish culture, the Feasts, etc. can be beneficial—as long as it does not come with a promise to find through their observance spiritual benefits that we already have in Messiah. But connecting with the laws and culture of a people is different from actually connecting with them in a relational way. Think of it like this: eating out regularly at a sushi restaurant may help you to appreciate Japanese food, but it may not help you actually connect with the reality that is Japan. Of course, an appreciation of the national cuisine, or studying the language and history of Japan, can help foster deeper relationship with Japanese people—but it shouldn’t be mistaken for the relationship itself!

The Olive Tree of **Romans 11** is a “people tree,” not a “Torah teaching/doctrine” tree. According to Paul, the root of the tree (God’s covenant people) is to be identified more with the Abrahamic covenant of faith and promise, than with the later Torah-based religious practices that came to define the boundaries of Jewish identity (**Gal 4-5; Rom 10:4**). In context, Paul’s whole point is about the right relationship with other peoples in the tree—not with observing Sabbaths or Feasts.

This “tree” of the people of God is also like a rainbow, demonstrating an incredible variety of the unique cultures and identities of the nations, whom John could visibly recognize in his vision. (**Rev 7:9**) This mistaken way of “connecting” or “grafting” with Israel through Jewish roots teaching, can actually be a great deception: one may find himself with a supposedly “Jewish,” or “Biblical” way of living and practicing his faith, but without any of the Biblical connections with Israel—neither A, B nor C! In the end, according to our experience, this can lead to a very unhealthy focus on the details of one’s own religious practice, identity and even the deception of thinking that you have Jewish or Israelite “blood.” (**Rev 3:9**)

