

2 Ways Christians Stop Short of Fully Connecting With Israel

In Part 1 of this series, 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 emnant of believers in Yeshua—Jew and 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 three dimensions of biblical Israel. This is God’s formula for bringing about the “fullness of the Gentiles/nations,” “all Israel being saved,” and the Second 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. 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 in-gathering of the Jewish people and the restoration of our nation. After centuries of mistreatment of the Jews, Christians have accepted the biblical mandate to lovingly “provoke” unbelieving Israel “to jealousy” (Rom 11:11).

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 you’re 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!

2. 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). {eoa}

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