

Rightly dividing Israel and the Christian Church

It was only after I was helped to clear Israel out of the way that I was able to see clearly the distinctive doctrine of Paul's gospel of grace and believe, and be saved. I had remained lost after years of journeying through various denominations that blur the line between Israel and the Christian Church. The power of God unto salvation eluded me until I opened my mind to the then strange idea that Paul was my apostle and the masterbuilder of the Christian Church - separate and distinct from the nation Israel.

Many Christian denominations today see the Christian Church as a continuation of Israel and claim Peter, one of the apostles of the circumcision, as their apostle - as the first pope or what have you. It is quite a conundrum and difficult to see where Israel ends and the Christian Church begins.

After several attempts at this subject I think I have found a model that works as an illustration of the God-directed transition from Israel to the Christian Church. The model has helped me to see the transition more clearly and hopefully more accurately reflects what actually happened.

The ISRAEL Ltd. employee rebellion

In my model Israel is called ISRAEL Ltd. - a strictly national earthly company that the heaven-based Owner chose to temporarily shut down due to a long running and widespread employee rebellion. Throughout the company's history the Owner's earthly representatives had been rarely obeyed and were more often ignored, rejected and/or killed. The rebellion came to a head when the Owner sent his Son from heaven to take hands-on earthly control of the corporation. The employees rejected his authority and had him killed. The Owner then raised his Son from the dead and recalled him to heaven to sit at his right hand.

The Owner made one final bid for control of ISRAEL Ltd. by sending his Holy Spirit as an internal, invisible presence among his loyal employees on earth. The rebellious employees instigated a persecution of the Spirit-filled employees and declared their rejection of the Owner's Holy Spirit by killing one of his brightest lights.

The new recruit - masterbuilder of CHRISTIANS Ltd.

The Owner's glorified Son then manifested from heaven to forcibly recruit the rebellion's point man and give him the role of masterbuilder of a new corporation - CHRISTIANS Ltd. He was to go offshore and hire a foreign workforce. The Owner revealed to this new recruit that through his foreknowledge he had always planned the establishment of the new multinational corporation and that the death, burial and resurrection of his Son was not a setback but was really a great victory - secretly planned from the outset. His Son's work had made it possible for each employee to have a direct link with him and his Son in heaven via the internal presence of his Holy Spirit - the ultimate in a 'flat', non-hierarchical management structure. The Owner also revealed that a small remnant of the staff of ISRAEL Ltd. had been kept on by the new corporation.

ISRAEL Ltd. employees had gone about establishing their own righteousness by obeying an array of laws and ordinances.

"For they being ignorant of *God's* righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of *God*. For *Christ* is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." (Romans 10:3-4 AV)

CHRISTIANS Ltd. employees submit themselves unto the righteousness of God when they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

"But now the righteousness of *God* without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of *God* which is by faith of *Jesus Christ* unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:" (Romans 3:21-22 AV)

Scriptural basis – ISRAEL Ltd. employee rebellion

The scriptures regarding Israel's history of unfaithfulness to God, their poor treatment of most of his prophets and their rejection and murder of God's Son are well known. Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, summed it all up just prior to being stoned to death by his countrymen.

"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers *did*, so *do* ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept *it*. When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with *their* teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of *God*, and *Jesus* standing on the right hand of *God*, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of *God*. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast *him* out of the city, and stoned *him*: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon *God*, and saying, Lord *Jesus*, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." (Acts 7:51-60 AV)

With the stoning of Stephen, the nation Israel's rejection of God's Holy Spirit was communicated to him in no uncertain terms. The battered body of the 'man with the face of an angel' was dumped on God's doorstep. God then withdrew Israel's 'most favoured nation' status – a reality that Israel and most Christians still haven't cottoned onto. This change in status was first revealed to Peter in Acts 10.

"Then Peter opened *his* mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that *God* is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." (Acts 10:34-35 AV)

God currently does not have a 'most favoured nation'. He has only his new creature – the Church, the body of Christ, which in my model is represented by the new multinational corporation under the headship of his Son in heaven with each employee directly joined with him via the indwelling Holy Spirit.

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (1Cor 12:13 AV)

"For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." (Eph 2:18 AV)

God has a long-standing covenant with his beloved ISRAEL and he will honour it after the new corporation has reached its fulness and has departed the earth.

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, **There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.** As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all." (Rom 11:25-32 AV)

Scriptural basis – the new recruit, the wise masterbuilder

Saul (later Paul) was the zealous point man of ISRAEL Ltd.'s rebellion against the Holy Spirit. He was consenting to the death of Stephen and on his way to arrest other Spirit-filled employees at Damascus when the risen and glorified Lord intervened.

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." (Acts 9:1-6 AV)

The Lord gave Ananias at Damascus a glimpse of what was in store for Saul.

"Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." (Acts 9:13-16 AV)

The Church at Syrian Antioch with its large Gentile membership was the first branch of the new multinational and where it got its name - CHRISTIANS Ltd. Saul did not plant this Church but ministered there in partnership with others.

"And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the Church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the Church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." (Acts 11:20-26 AV)

Paul (Saul's Greco-Roman name) got the extremely hazardous task of going further abroad and setting up more branches of the new multinational corporation with a foreign workforce, (we heathen, pagan Gentile dogs 😊) in the face of hordes of hostile employees of the shut down ISRAEL Ltd. who did not believe for a moment that he was acting upon orders from their God. Paul was initially in partnership with Barnabas but later became *the* 'apostle of the Gentiles'.

"Now there were in the Church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus." (Acts 13:1-4 AV)

"And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles." (Acts 22:21 AV)

"For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:" (Rom 11:13 AV)

"For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1Cor 3:9-11 AV)

"But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming." (Acts 13:45 AV)

"And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead." (Acts 14:19 AV)

CHRISTIANS Ltd. was regularly infiltrated by Judaisers (disgruntled employees of the shut down ISRAEL Ltd.) with an agenda to sabotage their freedom under grace and put them back under the law – preferably circumcised as well. They thought the Gentiles were being employed by ISRAEL Ltd. and should act accordingly.

"And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:" (Gal 2:4 AV)

To Paul was given the revelation of ISRAEL Ltd. being temporarily shut down.

"What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day. And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back away. I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" (Rom 11:7-12 AV)

Paul was also given the revelation of the mystery – God's plan of salvation kept secret since the world began. (See the study - 'Progressive Revelation and the Revelation of the Mystery'.)

"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began," (Rom 16:25 AV)

Which employees of ISRAEL Ltd. were absorbed into CHRISTIANS Ltd.?

Most of the employees of ISRAEL Ltd. did not find employment in the new multinational corporation - only a remnant according to the election of grace. Those employees of ISRAEL Ltd. who continued to go about establishing their own righteousness were not eligible for employment in the new multinational corporation.

"But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;" (Rom 9:31-32 AV)

"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." (Rom 10:3-4 AV)

The above scriptures declare that the criteria for ISRAEL Ltd. employees to be kept on in CHRISTIANS Ltd., was not merely whether or not they believed that Jesus Christ was their Messiah. It was whether or not they also ceased from **'going about to establish their own righteousness' by the works of the law.**

James and his 'thousands of Jews' never left Judaism

The above criteria would exclude James' multitude in Jerusalem, encountered by Paul in Acts 21, who were all 'zealous of the law' and keen for Paul to demonstrate that he also 'keepeth the law'.

"And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many **thousands of Jews** there are which believe; and they are all **zealous of the law**: And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the *Gentiles* to forsake *Moses*, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave *their* heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; **but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepeth the law.**" (Acts 21:20-24 AV)

Paul chose not to do battle with James over the issue of his continuing reliance upon the law for righteousness. He perhaps sensed the hopelessness of overcoming such deep-seated and widespread ignorance of the new dispensation. Imagine the uproar if Paul had immediately responded to the above comments by James with what he had already told the Galatian Churches.

"I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." (Gal 2:21 AV)

It is most likely that the James that led the Jerusalem church in Acts 21 is the same James that wrote the epistle of James in our New Testament. All scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit so it is apparent that for a time there was a large body of Jews led by a man who had received the Holy Spirit and yet continued to be "zealous of the law". I have come to see that this is a contradictory conundrum that I must avoid wading into (as I have done previously). That James was beloved of God is not in doubt so who am I to criticise God?

But for the sake of doctrinal clarity I prefer to think of James and his multitude as clinging to the doctrine given by Moses and remaining ignorant of the doctrine revealed to Paul. It was altogether too much for James and his Jerusalem church to accept that their contemporary, this 'Johnny come lately' upstart Paul, had received revelation of new doctrine which fulfilled and superseded that given to Moses.

Peter, John, Barnabas and many others became Christians

As with any major corporate restructuring there was a period of transition and confusion. Although I am swimming against the tide of opinion of many highly esteemed mid-Acts teachers, I believe that a small group of Peter's little flock at Jerusalem, who acknowledged the ongoing revelation given by the Lord to Paul, were the elect remnant of ISRAEL Ltd., absorbed into the new multinational CHRISTIANS Ltd.

It is clear that Peter kept up to date with Paul's epistles and went so far as to class them with 'the other scriptures' in his second epistle, written several years after Paul wrote Romans.

"And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." (2 Pet 3:15-16 AV)

It is also clear by the word of God in the book of Acts that several Jews who had been members of Peter's little flock were present at Antioch in the period reported in Acts 11. Barnabas, who was first mentioned in Acts 4 (5 chapters before Paul got saved), was among them.

"And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus," (Acts 4:36 AV)

Barnabas and several other members of Peter's little flock were among those who were 'first called Christians' at Antioch.

"And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the Church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." (Acts 11:26 AV)

John's gospel, written long after Paul had been martyred, is overwhelming evidence that John had also come to understand that belief or faith in Christ was the 'end of the law for righteousness'.

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12-13 AV)

"For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (John 1:17 AV)

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:14-16 AV)

After Paul was well down the road of establishing the new corporation, he declared in his epistle to the Romans that the employees of the shut down company ISRAEL Ltd., now fell into one of two categories: they were either among the remnant according to the election of grace or they were blinded.

Who would dare include Peter, John and many of the other saints at Jerusalem among the blinded portion of Israel?

"Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work. What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded" (Rom 11:5-7 AV)

Who would dare tell Peter that he was not a Christian?

"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." (1Pet 4:15-16 AV)

Why did Paul rebuke Peter at Antioch?

Paul's action in rebuking Peter for his dissimulation (hiding his true feelings) at Antioch is very clear evidence of his concept of the body of Christ. Peter and Barnabas had been mixing freely with the Gentiles until certain Jews came from James. The arrival of James' people caused them to remove themselves from among the Gentiles and eat in the 'Jews only' section. James' people retained a patronizing attitude toward Gentile believers and this infected Peter and Barnabas. They still had the old "wall of partition" in place in their minds.

"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation." (Galatians 2:11-13 AV)

Paul's rebuking of Peter would not have been necessary if he considered Peter to be in a separate Church, or body, to the Church, the body of Christ. But Paul strongly opposed Peter's actions thereby revealing that he considered Peter to be a member of the same Church as he and the Gentiles - the Church the body of Christ.

Note that Paul did not rebuke the "certain Jews who came from James". Why not? I believe it was for the same reason he did not argue 'law vs grace' with James on the occasion of his direct encounter with James and his multitude of believers in Acts 21. Paul was "walking circumspectly" and choosing his battles. James and his multitude were virtually indistinguishable from unbelieving Israel and were "old wine bottles" of law that would burst with the wine of the new dispensation of grace.

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." (Ephesians 5:15-17 AV)

Is Christ divided?

The Church, the body of Christ, is constituted of all who have received the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, regardless of whether or not they had hands laid on them or were water baptized before or after receiving it. If these Jewish rituals are the determining factors then our apostle Paul does not qualify as a member of the body. Paul received the Holy Spirit through water baptism and the laying on of hands – not on the road to Damascus but three days later. The manner of his receiving of the Holy Spirit was in direct continuance of the spreading of the Holy Spirit among the Jews and Samaritans after the initial outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

"And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized." (Acts 9:17-18 AV)

"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Romans 8:9 AV)

We are right to believe that the grace dispensation did not begin until some time after Israel had rejected the Holy Spirit by killing Stephen in Acts 7. We are wrong to exclude any who have received the Holy Spirit (and continued in faith) from the body of Christ. If once having received the Spirit by the hearing of faith, members (such as James and his people) do not continue by the hearing of faith (but rather by the works of the law), they are excluded – not by a judgment of God as such, but because it is faith (not works) that GETS us into the body of Christ and it is faith (not works) that KEEPS us there.

"But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, *even* in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;" (Romans 10:8 AV)

"Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:" (Romans 11:20 AV)

"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:1-3 AV)

The ministry of the Spirit changed over the time between Acts 2 and Acts 28, as establishment Israel's hardening against the Lord became set in concrete. As the enemy of Christ (the spirit of antichrist) takes on different tactics and guises, so the Spirit of Christ ministers according to the circumstances believers are placed in and the Lord's will for them.

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." (Ephesians 5:15-17 AV)

The supposed division of Peter's Jewish remnant from the Church, as taught by most mid-Acts teachers, would have been in effect at the time Paul first wrote to the Corinthians, some of whom were 'Peter' Christians and some of whom were 'Paul' Christians. I will let the apostle have the final say on this matter. (No doubt most of you are aware that Peter is also referred to as Cephas in the NT.)

"For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them *which are of the house of Chloe*, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor 1:11-13 AV)