



Scriptures and Doctrine :: Identifying with God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - Art Katz

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By Art Katz

Some reflections from Ephesians.

Modern Jewry misconstrues the gospel to be an invitation to forsake their intrinsic identity and culture as a distinct people in order to become "Christianized" into an assimilation in the mainstream culture. For the most part, Jews cherish their traditions, and sense in them, however diminished, a vitality and spirituality often more than that which ironically purports to "save" them.

Tragically, Jews have not historically had placed before them the grandeur of the gospel of the Kingdom (i.e., the actual theocratic rule of God over the nations from Zion, and the consequent redemption of all creation) that alone transcends race, time and culture. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, in its breadth and majesty, describes the supremacy of that which in the divine intent eclipses all—namely, the eternal calling and purpose of Israel's God! As it was for Abraham, so also every subsequent son of Abraham, the greater vision requires the greater sacrifice—the bringing up to the mount our dearest cultural and ethnic "saacs" in exchange for what God in Himself has provided!

As the epistle I believe demonstrates, true Christianity is not the "successor" (let alone replacement) of Israel's faith; it is its continuation and completion (Eph. 2:11-19). We need to remember that the age concludes with Israel's Messiah returning to them! The mourners in Zech. 12:11 are the Jewish inhabitants of the land of Israel at the national conversion prophesied in both Old and New Testaments (Hos. 3:5, Rom. 11:25-27). What a challenge, in the unity of this faith, to bring back the lost sheep of the house of Israel to conclude the age by a demonstration of the reality and glory that flows out of the root from which they have been broken off and to which Gentiles, who were "far off", have been grafted in. Remember that believing Gentiles have been brought into Israel's covenants and promises! Modern-day Jews have been the victim of an inadequate and truncated gospel, promulgated by a church that is itself suffering an impoverished gospel, and which can be remedied, in part, by a critical identification with Israel and its destiny as being to a large degree its own!

We know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father—and one Lord, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 8:4b-6b).

Though it may seem elementary or self-evident to state it, to be a Christian means to be in conscious covenant relationship with Israel's God. An abstract "belief in God" is far removed from faith in the God of the Bible; He is not to be relegated to man's concept of Him. He identifies Himself as the "God of Jacob." It is only in this God-specified concreteness that He can function as God for the Gentiles. To reject that particularity is in fact to reject God as God and forfeit the benefit of that relationship.

How many Gentile believers have in fact made this conscious identification? To what degree does God yet wait for the breaking of stubborn human pride that supposes to have God on its own terms and conditions and will not condescend to recognize or submit to God as God of the Jews? Even condescension "in principle" but not "in heart" may as effectually bar the recalcitrant Gentile believer from the experiential depths and joy in believing!

This is the first hurdle in the scandal of specificity that makes the faith the faith. Have we made it? I am fond of saying that outside the crucifixion of Jesus, there is nothing more that reveals God as God than in His dealings and judgments of Israel. How can we understand or know Jesus as the Christ when the word means Messiah? His whole foreshadowing, definition and function is described in Old Testament prophecy and anticipation as the deliverer of Israel! His exaltation as the King of Israel is upon the throne of David in Jerusalem's holy hill of Zion (Ps.2:6, 68:16, Isa. 2:2-3)!

For "you who formerly were far off" having no hope and without God in the world have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:12-13). As the context clearly shows, hope is rooted in having part in Israel's covenants of promises, indeed into "the commonwealth of Israel" itself. However much one can point to the injustices of men

and of society, to what degree does present hopelessness, despair and dejection have its roots in spiritual rather than earthly conditions? How sustaining can any hope be that is not this hope obtained by the Messiah's blood? Having this hope and the heavenly priorities and reality that has now come, why concern yourself about the earthly conditions you find yourself in? This is salvation in which heavenly blessings have come to earth by the God "who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). (END)

docs: From the article: "Remember that believing Gentiles have been brought into Israel's covenants and promises! Modern-day Jews have been the victim of an inadequate and truncated gospel, promulgated by a church that is itself suffering an impoverished gospel, and which can be remedied, in part, by a critical identification with Israel and its destiny as being to a large degree its own!"

A central question that rose in me from the article and the above mentioned part of the article is - if the Church is suffering from the proclamation of an impoverished gospel while at the same time living under the prayer and hope of a full restoration of its life and message, how far will a return to Brother Katz' perspective regarding Israel go toward that very restoration? How critical is it?