

Modern Israel and Israel in the Bible: Clarifying the Relationship

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The relationship between Israel of the Bible and the modern State of Israel is one of the most debated issues in contemporary Christian theology. Many Christians are trying to determine how present-day Israel relates to the Israel we read about in the pages of Scripture.

This paper examines the relationship between Israel in the Bible and Israel today, with implications for how Christians should view Israel in the present era. I argue that Israel, as a people and nation, always remains significant in God's purposes and that today's Jewish state, though currently in unbelief, remains closely connected to the Israel described in Scripture.

A word should be said about how this issue is approached. Discussions about Israel and contemporary Israel often begin with passages that do not directly address Israel's identity or role in God's plan. This paper instead emphasizes texts that explicitly define who Israel is and what role the nation plays in the unfolding story of Scripture. By starting with these foundational passages, we can better evaluate how Israel today relates to the Israel described in the Bible.

Israel in the Bible

A proper discussion of the relationship between Israel in the Bible and the modern State of Israel should begin by clarifying what the Bible means by "Israel." In Scripture, Israel is an ethnic, national, and territorial people. God described Israel as the "great nation" He promised Abraham (Gen. 12:2).

The Ethnic Dimension of Israel

First, Israel has an ethnic dimension. The nation descends from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes of Israel formed a people connected by identifiable lineage. In Genesis 32, Jacob's name was changed to *Israel* after his wrestling encounter with God. The name "Israel" likely means "he struggles with God." From then onward, Jacob's descendants were known as the *sons of Israel*, and the nation took its identity from this patriarch. Thus, Israelites were the physical descendants of Jacob, the man whom God renamed Israel. The promises to Abraham and his descendants therefore assume the existence of a real people tied together by ancestry.

Yet Israel was never completely closed to outsiders. Non-Israelites could attach themselves to Israel and to the Lord. The "mixed multitude" that left Egypt included people who aligned themselves with Israel (Exod. 12:38). Rahab and Ruth later became part of Israel and even appear in the genealogy of Jesus. Israel therefore possessed a core lineage while remaining open to those who embraced the God of Israel.

Israel as a Nation

Second, Israel is a national entity. At Sinai, Israel became a nation with law, leadership, and corporate responsibility before God (Exod. 19:5–6; Deut. 4:5–8). Israel was not merely a collection of individuals who shared religious beliefs but a people with shared history, language, worship, and patterns of life. The nation possessed its own laws, festivals, institutions, and collective memory that distinguished it from surrounding peoples.

Israel and the Promised Land

Third, Israel is linked with territory. The biblical covenants repeatedly connect Israel with a specific land. God told Abraham, “To your descendants I have given this land” (Gen. 15:18). He later declared, “I will give to you and to your descendants after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession” (Gen. 17:8). The promise was reaffirmed to Isaac (Gen. 26:3) and Jacob (Gen. 28:13).

The Purpose of Israel’s Election

What was the purpose of Israel’s election? Israel was chosen to bless the nations. God told Abraham, “And I will make you a great nation... and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12:2–3). God intended to work through this people so that His blessings would reach the wider world. Psalm 67:1–2 asks, “God be gracious to us and bless us... that Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations.” The nation was chosen so that God’s truth, salvation, and kingdom purposes would extend to the peoples of the earth.

God’s choice of Israel was corporate in purpose and did not depend on the personal salvation or faithfulness of every Israelite or every generation in its history. Rather, Israel was chosen to serve specific historical and international purposes in God’s plan. These worldwide blessings come through several key roles assigned to Israel. Through Israel God gave the Scriptures to the world (Rom. 3:2). Through Israel came the Messiah, the Savior of the world (Rom. 9:5). Israel is also destined to serve as the geographical center of the Messiah’s future earthly kingdom over the nations (Isa. 2:2–4; Zech. 14:16–21).

These purposes did not require that every Israelite be spiritually faithful. Throughout Israel’s history many lived in unbelief, yet God continued to carry forward His purposes through the people as a whole. Israel’s election therefore concerns the role of the nation in God’s historical plan and transcends the failures of particular generations, including periods of discipline, exile, and dispersion. At the same time, the salvation of individuals has always depended on personal faith in the Lord, as exemplified by Abraham in Genesis 15:6.

Israel as a Transgenerational People

Another important feature of Israel in the Bible is that the nation is transgenerational. Israel is not limited to one generation living at a particular moment in history. Rather, it possesses a continuing national identity that spans generations. Scripture regularly speaks of Israel as a people whose identity extends across time.

In Deuteronomy 29 Moses declares that his instruction was made not only with those standing before him that day but also “with those who are not with us here today.” Deuteronomy 30 likewise addresses Israel collectively with language that spans generations. The passage uses the pronoun “you” to speak both to the Israelites of Moses’ day and to future generations who would experience dispersion among the nations and later restoration to the land (Deut. 30:1–5). The same covenant people are addressed across time even though different generations experience different historical circumstances.

In Matthew 23:37–39 Jesus laments over Jerusalem and declares, “you will not see Me again until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.’” His words address the generation before Him while also pointing to a future generation of Israel that will welcome Him. The statement assumes that the nation continues across time.

Israel’s Enduring Existence as a Nation

The Abrahamic Covenant itself establishes the enduring existence of Israel as a people. God promised Abraham, “I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant” (Gen. 17:7). Earlier the Lord had declared, “I will make you a great nation” (Gen. 12:2). Because these promises were given to Abraham’s physical descendants as an everlasting covenant, the continued existence of Israel as a people is guaranteed.

The prophets affirm the enduring national existence of Israel. Jeremiah 31:35–36, a New Covenant text, declares that Israel will remain a nation before the Lord as long as the fixed order of the sun, moon, and stars continues:

Thus says the Lord,
Who gives the sun for light by day
And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night,
Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar;
The Lord of hosts is His name:
“If this fixed order departs
From before Me,” declares the Lord,
“Then the offspring of Israel also will cease
From being a nation before Me forever.”

As long as the created order remains, Israel remains a nation before God. The continued existence of Israel is anchored to the enduring order of creation itself. Jeremiah reinforces this point again 33:25–26:

Thus says the Lord, “If My covenant for day and night stand not, and the fixed patterns of heaven and earth I have not established, then I would reject the descendants of Jacob and David My servant... But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.”

Just as the regular cycle of day and night continues by God’s decree, so the descendants of Jacob will not be rejected as a people.

Israel transcends any particular generation. The nation may experience exile or dispersion across the world. It may even become “few in number among the nations” (Deut. 4:27), yet it remains the same covenant people in God’s purposes. Because of God’s covenant with Abraham, Israel is a people whose national existence continues throughout history.

Even when Israel is removed from its land, the nation is still treated as having an ongoing relationship to it. The prophets frequently addressed exiled Israelites as a people who would one day return to the land promised to their fathers. Jeremiah 16:15 promises that the Lord will bring Israel back “to their own land which I gave to their fathers.” The wording assumes that the land remains theirs even while they are scattered among the nations. Jesus also indicated that Gentile domination of Jerusalem would have a limit, declaring that the city would be “trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). The word “until” indicates that this trampling has a boundary in God’s plan and will one day give way to a different and better situation for Jerusalem.

The Remnant Within Israel

While Scripture affirms Israel’s identity as a nation, it also recognizes a distinction within the nation itself—a faithful remnant that truly trusts the Lord. Paul explains that not all who belong to Israel ethnically are spiritually faithful. In Romans 2:28–29 he teaches that the true Jew is one whose heart is transformed by God. In Romans 11:1–10 he speaks of a believing remnant within the nation during times of widespread unbelief. In Galatians 6:16 he refers to faithful Israelites as the “Israel of God.”

These passages highlight the spiritual dimension of belonging to God’s people while preserving the larger national identity of Israel in Scripture.

Israel in the New Testament

The New Testament continues to treat Israel as a recognizable national entity within God’s unfolding plan. Gabriel announced that Jesus would receive “the throne of His father David” and “reign over the house of Jacob forever” (Luke 1:32–33), language that naturally evokes Israel’s national hopes rooted in the Davidic covenant. Jesus later promised that His apostles would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30). At His ascension, the apostles still expected the kingdom to be restored to Israel (Acts 1:6), showing that the concept of Israel’s kingdom hope remained intact after the resurrection. Peter then spoke of a future restoration connected to Israel’s repentance and the fulfillment of the covenant promises (Acts 3:19–25). Paul likewise said he stood trial for the hope of the twelve tribes (Acts 26:6–7) and anticipated the future salvation of “all Israel” (Rom. 11:26–27).

At the same time, Scripture foretold that the nations would be blessed through Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 17:4–8; 22:17–18). Galatians 3 explains that this promise is fulfilled in Jesus, as Gentile believers are now counted among Abraham’s offspring and share in the blessing promised to him. Yet the inclusion of Gentiles as Abraham’s spiritual descendants does not cancel God’s purposes for the nation of Israel. Rather, it reflects the wider scope of the Abrahamic promise, which always anticipated that blessing would extend beyond Israel to the nations.

The Covenant Pattern for Israel's History

Certain passages are foundational for understanding Israel because they explicitly outline God's big-picture plans and purposes for the nation. Texts such as Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28–30, Deuteronomy 32, Ezekiel 20, and Romans 11 function as interpretive anchors for understanding Israel's role in the unfolding storyline of Scripture. These passages address Israel's identity, covenant relationship with God, historical discipline, and future restoration in a direct and comprehensive way.

Responsible interpretation should give careful attention to these structural passages. Sometimes, in the debate over Israel, interpreters appeal to isolated verses they believe support their position while giving little attention to passages that explicitly establish the framework for Israel's role in God's purposes. When these covenant passages are neglected, conclusions about Israel can become disconnected from the storyline Scripture itself presents.

When we examine these foundational texts, an important observation emerges. Although they clearly predict Israel's rebellion, discipline, and scattering among the nations, none suggest that exile results in the dissolution of Israel as a people or the permanent loss of their national identity and role in God's purposes. Nor do they indicate that Israel will transition into a purely spiritual community disconnected from the nation itself. Instead, the same passages that warn of judgment consistently promise repentance, regathering, and restoration. The covenant pattern assumes Israel's continued existence as a people whom God will ultimately restore.

To understand Israel's role in the biblical storyline, including for today, we must recognize the pattern of Israel's history that God revealed in advance. Two passages are especially important for understanding this pattern: Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28–30. These texts function as prophetic overviews of Israel's national experience, outlining the major stages through which Israel's history would progress.

First, obedience would bring blessing in the land (Lev. 26:3–13; Deut. 28:1–14). If Israel walked in faithfulness to the Lord, the nation would experience prosperity, security, agricultural abundance, and the Lord's presence dwelling among them.

Second, persistent disobedience would bring discipline and eventually exile. Both passages warn that rebellion would lead to escalating judgments culminating in Israel's scattering among the nations (Lev. 26:14–39; Deut. 28:15–68). The covenant blessings of the land would be reversed as judgment fell upon the nation.

Third, dispersion among the nations would not be the final chapter. These covenant texts anticipate a future moment when Israel will recognize its sin and return to the Lord (Lev. 26:40–41; Deut. 30:1–2). Even after judgment and exile, the possibility of repentance remains.

Fourth, God promises restoration. When Israel turns to the Lord, He will remember His covenant and gather His people from the nations, restoring them to the land promised to their fathers (Lev. 26:42–45; Deut. 30:3–5). This restoration involves more than a physical return to the land. Deuteronomy 30 also promises inner transformation: God will “circumcise your heart and the heart

of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut. 30:6). Israel’s future restoration therefore includes both regathering to the land and spiritual renewal among the people.

The Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 also anticipates Israel’s future history. The song predicts Israel’s corruption, God’s discipline through the nations, and His eventual vindication of His people. Moses warned that after entering the land Israel would “act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you” (Deut. 31:29). Yet the song also points forward to God’s compassion and restoration: “The Lord will vindicate His people and will have compassion on His servants” (Deut. 32:36). In poetic form the song reinforces the covenant pattern outlined more formally in Deuteronomy 28–30.

Later prophets reaffirmed this same covenant structure. In Ezekiel 20 the Lord recounts Israel’s long history of rebellion from Egypt onward and announces both judgment and future restoration. The chapter culminates with God gathering Israel from the nations and restoring them to faithful worship in the land (Ezek. 20:34–44). This prophetic review confirms the covenant pattern already outlined in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28–30.

Taken together, these passages reveal the covenant pattern governing Israel’s history: blessing in the land, discipline and exile, dispersion among the nations, and future restoration involving both regathering and spiritual transformation. Israel’s national story unfolds according to this structure, a pattern the New Testament also affirms in passages such as Romans 11.

Any discussion of Israel’s role in the biblical storyline must account for this covenant framework. The texts themselves anticipate these stages, and the biblical narrative repeatedly reflects them. Just as important, the pattern shows that exile and dispersion cannot be the final chapter of Israel’s story. The same passages that warn of national judgment also promise national repentance, regathering, and renewal. Israel’s history therefore moves toward restoration, since the God who announced these stages in advance has committed Himself to bring them to completion.

These biblical foundations are essential for evaluating the modern question. If Scripture presents Israel as an enduring ethnic, national, and territorial people whose history unfolds according to this covenant pattern culminating in restoration, then discussions about the modern State of Israel—or Israel at any point in history—cannot ignore this framework.

The Modern State of Israel

If the Bible portrays Israel as a continuing nation with enduring covenant promises and a lasting connection to the land, an important question arises: how should Christians understand the existence of the Jewish people today and the modern State of Israel?

Before addressing that question, an important clarification must be made. Israel’s ongoing significance does not depend on the establishment of the modern state in 1948. Because of the enduring promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, Israel remains relevant in God’s purposes regardless of political circumstances. Even if a Jewish state had never been reestablished in the land, the people of Israel would still occupy an important place in God’s unfolding plan.

The existence of the modern state, therefore, should not be misunderstood. The establishment of Israel in 1948 does not itself fulfill the prophetic promises of Israel's future restoration. Yet it does demonstrate that the Jewish people continue to exist as a nation in history. And it is likely the stage for events leading to the fulfillment of God's plans for the nation.

The establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948 did not recreate the nation of Israel. Even during long centuries of dispersion, the Jewish people continued to exist as Israel. Though scattered among the nations and often without political sovereignty in their historic land, the Jewish people retained their identity as the descendants of the people of Israel. In this sense, Israel continued to exist as a people even when it did not exist as a political state. Even today the modern State of Israel does not encompass the entire people of Israel. Jewish communities exist throughout the world, including both believing and unbelieving Israelites.

The Jewish people still exist today as a recognizable ethnic and national community. Since 1948 they have once again possessed political sovereignty in the historic land of Israel. These realities raise the question of whether and how modern Israel relates to the Israel described in Scripture.

The modern State of Israel was established in May 1948. After nearly two thousand years of dispersion, a Jewish nation again possessed political sovereignty in that region. The creation of the state followed the United Nations General Assembly's 1947 partition plan recommending the establishment of Jewish and Arab states in the land.

Several features of the modern state are noteworthy.

First, it is a secular political state rather than a nation governed directly by the Mosaic covenant. Modern Israel operates as a democratic state with civil institutions and modern legal systems.

Second, the population largely consists of Jews who returned from many parts of the world. Over the last century Jewish immigrants arrived from Europe, Russia, North Africa, the Middle East, Ethiopia, and the former Soviet Union.

Third, the nation contains a wide range of religious and secular perspectives. Many Israelis identify culturally as Jewish but are not religious, while others are observant. The population also includes Arab citizens and other minority groups.

These historical realities provide important background for the theological discussion that follows. The question remains how the modern State of Israel should be understood in relation to the Israel described in Scripture.

Is Modern Israel Connected to Biblical Israel?

Once Israel emerged as a people through the patriarchs and the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, Scripture consistently portrays the nation as enduring in history rather than disappearing from it. Because God promised that Israel would endure as a nation before Him, the Jewish people have continued to exist across the centuries, even during long periods of exile, dispersion, and loss of political sovereignty.

The Abrahamic Covenant presupposes the continuing identity of Abraham’s physical descendants through whom God’s promises unfold (Gen. 12:1–3; 17:7–8). The prophets likewise affirm Israel’s ongoing national identity. As mentioned earlier, Jeremiah declared that Israel will remain before the Lord as long as the fixed order of creation continues—the sun by day and the moon and stars by night (Jer. 31:35–37). Israel’s national existence will not disappear from history, even when the nation experiences discipline, exile, and dispersion.

History reflects this continuity. After the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, the Jewish people were scattered among the nations. Yet they did not disappear. Jewish communities remained identifiable across the centuries in many parts of the world. At the same time, small Jewish populations continued to live in the land itself, particularly in cities such as Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias, and Hebron.

Across the centuries the Jewish people consistently understood themselves to be the descendants of the ancient people of Israel. Their religious life remained centered on the Hebrew Scriptures, the Sabbath, and the biblical festivals. Even in exile they prayed toward Jerusalem and preserved the memory of the land promised to their fathers.

Several historical developments further reinforce this continuity. Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament, was revived as a spoken language in Jewish society during the modern return to the land. Archaeological discoveries throughout the region confirm the presence of ancient Israelite civilization in the same geographical area described in the Bible. In addition, genetic studies of Jewish populations across the world indicate significant shared ancestry rooted in the ancient Near East.

These realities point to an important conclusion: the Jewish people of today are historically connected to the people of ancient Israel, and the modern state occupies the same land where the biblical story unfolded. Because the Jewish population of the modern state maintains clear ethnic, cultural, and historical continuity with the ancient people of Israel, a meaningful connection exists between the Israel described in Scripture and the Jewish people of today.

Although Israel’s existence does not depend on the approval of international bodies, it is noteworthy that the United Nations acknowledged the historical connection between the Jewish people and the land when it recommended the establishment of a Jewish state in 1947.

This historical continuity also aligns with biblical expectations. Moses warned that Israel would be scattered among the nations because of disobedience and would become “few in number” among the peoples where the Lord would drive them (Deut. 28:62). Yet he also promised that God would gather them again from the nations and bring them back to the land (Deut. 30:1–5).

Modern Israel does not look identical to the Israel of the Old Testament. Ancient Israel functioned as a nation under the Mosaic Covenant, whereas the modern state is a contemporary political nation with a diverse and largely secular population. Yet differences in political structure do not erase the ethnic and historical continuity of the Jewish people or their connection to the land.

For these reasons, the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948 did not create a new people group. Rather, it marked the political reconstitution of a people whose identity had endured across centuries of dispersion.

The modern State of Israel should not be dismissed as irrelevant to the biblical storyline. The existence of the modern state does not itself fulfill the prophetic hopes of Israel's future restoration, yet it demonstrates that the Jewish people continue to exist as a nation in history.

The prophetic hope described by the Old Testament includes spiritual renewal, national repentance, and the reign of the Messiah—realities that have not yet occurred. Yet the continued existence of the Jewish people and their presence again in the land show that the people to whom the biblical promises were given still exist in history. The survival and reestablishment of a Jewish national presence in the land demonstrate that the stage of history still contains the very people and place connected to God's promises in Scripture. In this sense, modern Israel serves as a reminder that the biblical storyline has not been erased from history and that the future restoration described by the prophets remains within the unfolding course of God's historical purposes.

What Israel's Presence in the Land Does—and Does Not—Mean

The continued existence of the Jewish people in the land raises an important question: What does Israel's presence in the land today mean in relation to biblical prophecy? If modern Israel does not yet represent the full restoration promised by the prophets, how should its existence be understood within God's unfolding plan?

First, it is necessary to clarify what it does not mean.

Israel's presence in the land does not mean the nation has already experienced the salvation and spiritual renewal promised by the prophets. Those prophecies include repentance, forgiveness of sins, inner transformation, and the reign of the Messiah from David's throne—conditions that have not yet occurred. Scripture also makes clear that neither the nation nor individual Israelites will inherit the ultimate blessings of the land while remaining in unbelief. The prophets consistently connect Israel's future restoration with repentance and renewed faithfulness to the Lord.

Likewise, Israel's presence in the land does not place the nation beyond moral or political evaluation. Like every nation, Israel's actions should be evaluated by what is right and by standards all countries should abide by. Supporting Israel's right to exist and her continuing role in God's purposes does not require Christians to approve every political or military decision made by the modern Israeli government.

At the same time, the biblical significance of Israel should never lead Christians to disregard the dignity and well-being of other peoples who live in the region. All people are created in God's image and are objects of His concern. Christians should therefore desire justice, peace, and the spread of the gospel among both Jews and Gentiles. Recognizing Israel's role in God's purposes does not diminish the value or importance of other people groups.

Nor should the modern state be used as a basis for speculative date-setting concerning the end times.

At the same time, Israel's presence in the land is more than a historical anomaly. It may have significance within God's providential unfolding of history. Scripture indicates that Israel will exist again in the land as a recognizable people during the period leading up to Israel's future salvation and renewal. Daniel 9:27 portrays Israel as a nation present in the land yet still in unbelief, able to enter into a political covenant with a powerful world ruler.

Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones also sheds light on this issue (Ezek. 37:1–14). The vision explicitly identifies the bones as "the whole house of Israel" (37:11), a people pictured as cut off and without hope because of exile and dispersion. As the prophecy unfolds, the bones come together and form bodies before the breath of life enters them (37:7–8). The imagery suggests a distinction between the national reconstitution of Israel and the later spiritual renewal brought about by God's Spirit. The vision therefore portrays Israel being reconstituted as a people before experiencing the transforming work of the Spirit. This suggests that a national regathering and a later spiritual renewal need not occur simultaneously but may unfold in sequence within God's redemptive plan.

Thus, the idea of Israel existing again in the land prior to her spiritual renewal is consistent with the biblical pattern. This does not require a direct one-to-one identification between modern political events and specific prophecies. Instead, it envisions a stage in which Israel exists again as a nation before the spiritual transformation promised by the prophets takes place.

In light of this pattern, the modern reestablishment of Israel as a nation in the land may reasonably be understood as consistent with the early stage of the restoration process described in Scripture. The nation today does not yet display the widespread spiritual renewal promised in passages such as Ezekiel 36:26–27. Yet the existence of Israel as a people once again gathered in their historic land fits the prophetic expectation that national restoration will precede spiritual transformation.

The modern State of Israel should not be viewed as the fulfillment of restoration prophecies. At the same time, it may represent part of the historical setting through which God will ultimately bring about the future salvation and renewal of the nation.

Israel and Unbelief

One of the most common objections to connecting modern Israel with the Israel of Scripture concerns the nation's current unbelief. Many observe that large portions of the Jewish population do not believe in Jesus as Messiah and that the policies of the modern State of Israel do not always reflect biblical ethics. For this reason, some conclude that modern Israel cannot have any meaningful connection to the Israel described in the Bible.

Yet Israel's present unbelief does not sever the nation's historical or biblical identity. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel frequently acted wickedly while still remaining the nation through which God carried forward His covenant purposes. The prophets repeatedly rebuked Israel for corruption,

idolatry, and injustice. Yet even during periods of national rebellion, God did not cancel His covenant commitments to the people descended from Abraham.

Israel itself acknowledged this pattern in prayers of repentance. In Solomon's dedication prayer for the temple the nation confessed, "We have sinned and have committed iniquity, we have acted wickedly" (1 Kings 8:47; cf. 2 Chron. 6:37). Many of Israel's kings led the nation into serious corruption. Omri "did evil in the sight of the LORD, and acted more wickedly than all who were before him" (1 Kings 16:25). Manasseh "did wickedly more than all the Amorites" and led Judah into widespread idolatry (2 Kings 21:11). Israel's moral failures were a recurring feature of her history, yet those failures never erased her covenant identity. God disciplined His people, but He did not abandon the promises made to the fathers.

The New Testament reflects the same pattern. Peter addressed the unbelieving Jewish people in Jerusalem as participants in the covenant promises while calling them to repentance:

"It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" (Acts 3:25)

Likewise, in Romans 9:3–5 Paul acknowledged Israel's widespread unbelief while affirming that the nation still possessed a unique relationship to the covenants and promises. Speaking of his fellow Israelites, Paul declared that to them "belong the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:4–5).

Israel's current unbelief is therefore a serious spiritual condition that Scripture itself recognizes. Yet Israel often existed in a similar condition during the Old Testament era. If periods of national disobedience did not remove Israel from God's covenant purposes in the past, the same reality should not lead us to deny Israel's continuing identity today.

The Romans 11 Perspective

Romans 11 contains the New Testament's most direct and sustained discussion of Israel in God's purposes. Paul writes in the context of Israel's rejection of Jesus and the growing number of Gentile believers entering the people of God. For this reason, the chapter deserves careful attention in any Christian reflection on Israel's place in God's plan. In it, Paul explains how Israel's present unbelief relates to God's larger purposes and how Christians should view the nation.

Paul's discussion also reflects a pattern already revealed earlier in Scripture. The covenant warnings and promises of Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28–30, the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32, and later prophetic passages such as Ezekiel 20 describe a recurring pattern in Israel's history: disobedience, discipline among the nations, and eventual restoration. Romans 11 fits within this same framework. Paul even draws on Deuteronomy 32 when he explains that God is presently using the salvation of the Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy (Rom. 10:19; 11:11).

Beginning in Romans 9, Paul addresses the theological issue raised by Israel's widespread unbelief: how can God remain faithful to His promises when the nation has not embraced its Messiah? The rise of the church and the growing number of Gentiles coming to faith made this question even more pressing. Some were beginning to wonder whether God had rejected Israel altogether.

"I ask then: Did God reject his people?" (11:1a) Paul responds with a foundational declaration:

By no means . . . God did not reject His people, whom He foreknew (Rom. 11:1–2).

This statement sets the tone for the rest of the chapter. Despite Israel's widespread rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, God's relationship with the nation has not been terminated. Even in their present state of unbelief, Israel is still described as "His people." Paul grounds this claim in God's foreknowledge of them. This language points to God's prior choice and covenantal commitment to Israel. In Paul's writings the term is closely associated with election and God's saving purposes. For example, believers are described as those "whom He foreknew" in Romans 8:29. The word highlights God's sovereign decision to set His saving purposes upon this people, Israel.

Paul's point is clear and should settle the issue of whether Israel in unbelief can still be considered God's people: Israel's present unbelief does not cancel God's prior choice of the nation. The God who foreknew His people, Israel, has not rejected them. His purposes for them remain in place.

Paul then explains how the present situation fits within God's larger plan. In Romans 11:1–10 he first emphasizes that God has not rejected His people, pointing to the existence of a believing remnant within Israel as evidence that His covenant relationship with the nation remains intact. Paul himself is part of this remnant, chosen by grace. Israel's current unbelief, therefore, is neither total nor final. Through Israel's stumbling, salvation has come to the Gentiles, which in turn provokes Israel to jealousy (Rom. 11:11). This development does not mean that Israel's role in God's purposes has ended. Rather, it represents one stage within the larger pattern described in Scripture.

Using the imagery of an olive tree (11:17–24), Paul explains that Gentile believers have been grafted into blessings connected to the patriarchs. At the same time, he warns Gentile believers not to become arrogant toward Israel, the natural branches:

do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you (Rom. 11:18).

Paul also speaks of a future reversal of corporate Israel's unbelief. He points to a coming day when "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26). This salvation is connected with Israel's coming "fullness," which Paul says will bring "riches for the world" and even greater blessing to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:12). Later he adds that if Israel's present rejection has meant the "reconciliation of the world," their future acceptance will be "life from the dead" (Rom. 11:15). These expressions show that Israel is not only significant in God's present purposes but will play an even greater role in the worldwide blessings that accompany her future restoration.

Also crucial to Paul's argument is the recognition that Israel presently occupies a unique dual status. Two realities exist at the same time. The nation is largely in unbelief toward the gospel, yet it remains connected to God's covenant purposes. Paul expresses this tension clearly:

From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers (Rom. 11:28).

From the perspective of the gospel, Israel's rejection of Christ places the nation in opposition to the message of salvation. Yet from the standpoint of God's sovereign choice, Israel remains beloved because of God's covenant commitments to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Paul reinforces this truth with a sweeping statement about God's faithfulness:

for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29).

The "gifts" refer to the blessings Paul listed earlier in Romans 9:4–5, including the promises and the covenants God gave to Israel. Israel's "calling" refers to the nation's enduring historical role in God's purposes to bring blessing to the nations.

What was true in Paul's day remains true today. Israel's unbelief is real and must not be minimized. Yet it does not mean that God has rejected the nation. Israel remains beloved because of the patriarchal promises. And God's calling of the nation cannot be revoked.

For this reason, Gentile believers must reject any posture of superiority toward Israel. Christians should instead view Israel through the lens Paul provides—recognizing both the tragedy of Israel's present unbelief and the certainty of God's future faithfulness to His covenant people.

Summary

Is there a connection between the Israel of the Bible and the Jewish people today, including the modern State of Israel? The answer is yes.

Scripture indicates that Israel would continue as a distinct people and nation within God's purposes. From the time of Israel's founding in Genesis, the biblical storyline never anticipates a period in which the nation permanently disappears or fades from God's plans. Even after dispersion, the Jewish people have continued to exist as an identifiable ethnic community with historical and cultural ties to the people of Israel described in Scripture.

When large numbers of ethnic Israelites again live in the historic land of Israel and consciously identify with that biblical heritage, it is difficult to deny that a meaningful connection exists between the Israel of the Bible and modern Israel. The fact that the modern state is largely secular or at times makes questionable political and military decisions does not erase this historical and biblical continuity. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel often existed as God's covenant people while many within the nation lived in unbelief and disobedience. Those failures did not erase Israel's identity or cancel God's covenant purposes for the nation. For this reason, Israel's present

unbelief should not be seen as severing the historical and biblical connection between modern Israel and the Israel described in Scripture.

The modern nation of Israel should not be viewed as the complete fulfillment of biblical prophecy, nor does its present condition reflect the spiritual renewal promised in the prophets. Yet its very existence stands as a reminder that the people whom God called through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have not vanished from history. The same nation that once received God's covenants and promises still exists in recognizable form today.

For Christians, this continuity invites both humility and expectation. The God who preserved Israel through exile and centuries of dispersion is the same God who declared that His purposes for this people—and for the world through them—are not yet finished.

Learn More

For a fuller treatment of Israel's role from Genesis to Revelation, see my book *Israel in the Bible's Storyline*. In that study I trace Israel's identity, mission, failure, preservation, and future restoration across the entire biblical narrative, showing why Israel remains essential for understanding God's purposes for the world. For a broader explanation of the Bible's grand narrative and Israel's place within it, see *The Bible Storyline* by Michael J. Vlach.

Michael J. Vlach is a Bible teacher and author specializing in biblical theology, the covenants, the kingdom of God, and Israel's role in Scripture. He has written several books on theology and the Bible's grand narrative. More articles and resources are available at **MichaelJVlach.com**.