Slide 1

END-TIMES ISSUES

A N D

B E Y O N D !

#7 Church and Israel issues…
Understanding "church."

1

Slide 2

LAST TIME:
WE LOOKED AT SOME BLESSINGS THAT BELONGED TO **ISR*AEL*,**
WHICH *WE* NOW HAVE AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

| THINGS THAT WERE ONCE APPLIED TO ISRAEL … | … HAVE NOW BEEN APPLIED TO THE CHURCH. |

This left us with some *unanswered questions* …
SUCH AS:

✓ Is Israel replaced by the church?

✓ Is there any future for Israel in the plan of God?

✓ What about modern-day Israel?

Our goal is to look at some of these issues.

2

Slide 3

HOW should we look at an issue like this?

1. **We would *like* to find a Scripture passage that gives us the answer… *but there are none*.**
   - <u>All</u> of the passages either focus on "Israel" (and not "church"), or on "church" (and not "Israel").
   - We should consider the possibility that, if the Bible doesn't have an answer to our question, *maybe we're asking the <u>wrong</u> question!*

2. **What normally happens:**
   - People *combine* passages from different contexts, make *assumptions*, or *insert* the one concept into passages that mention the other concept.
   - The end result is people arguing over who's view is "correct" – each claiming that "their" chosen Scripture passage "proves" the other viewpoint is wrong.

3

Slide 4

> YOU SHOULD LOOK AT **CHAPTER 2**. IT *PROVES* THAT <u>MY</u> VIEW IS CORRECT!

> YOU SHOULD LOOK AT **CHAPTER 3**. IT *PROVES* THAT <u>MY</u> VIEW IS CORRECT!

THIS ACTUALLY HAPPENED!! *

What's amazing is that they *agreed* on just about every other teaching in Scripture!
But something happened when they turned their focus to "end times" events.

*** (Both pointed to the *same* book in the Bible, but different chapters. Neither chapter was about BOTH church AND Israel – just *one* of the two!)

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Slide 5

> YOU SHOULD LOOK AT CHAPTER 2...

> ...

> *MY* RESPONSE?

> *WHY* CAN'T THEY SEE THAT <u>BOTH</u> OF THOSE CHAPTERS ARE IN THE BIBLE?

<u>BOTH</u> CHAPTERS ARE TRUE, <u>IF</u> YOU LET THEM SAY WHAT THEY SAY, *WITHOUT ADDING TO THEM!*

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Slide 6

3. **Instead of all this arguing, we should ask: What can we learn, if we let *each* passage speak for itself, <u>without</u> inserting into it things that are not there? ***
   - We would definitely learn something, but it might not be the things we *want* to find.

4. **We need to be willing to let *Scripture* change the way we think on issues, so that our views will begin to match the Bible… and not the other way around. THIS INCLUDES:**
   - Letting Scripture change our foundational perspectives and assumptions.
   - Accepting what Scripture passages teach *without* adding to, or subtracting from them.
   - Defining concepts the way *the Bible* defines them.

*** (There are times when we *need* something outside the immediate context. Example: If the passage refers to a "city," we may need to find out what city is being referred to!)

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Slide 7

A BASIC METHOD FOR UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE.

⇨ **This is a basic and valuable starting point for studying the Bible. Start with the passage itself, before taking into consideration what other passages say.**

We need to pay attention to:
① The words and their meanings.
② How those words connect.
③ The context of the passage.
④ What other passages say.

START AT THE CENTER

1 2 3 4

AND WORK OUT!

7

Slide 8

In the early church...

Their "church-Israel" issue involved the nature of salvation – _not_ the relationship between the two entities.

> Then some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."
>
> And after engaging these men in sharp debate, Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.
>
> Act 15:1-2 (BSB)

• Today, our "church-Israel" issues are different. To complicate matters, we have *changed* the definitions of some of the words; so when we *do* look, we don't recognize what Scripture *actually* says!

• **This is especially true of the word "CHURCH."**

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Slide 9

Today, we normally _don't_ use the word "church" the way it is used in the Bible!

① **The Bible _NEVER_ uses the word "CHURCH" to describe a BUILDING! _NEVER_.**

• God defines the church as "people."

• The building might be described as a house, a meeting place, a synagogue, etc.; but NEVER as a "church"!

• "Going to a church" – if they could even *think* in those terms – would have meant visiting a group of Christians, wherever they might be located... even if in a field, far away from any building.

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Slide 10

② **The word "church" was _NOT_ a special word or a "technical term" that referred specifically to Christians, or in some way defined people as being "Christian."**

Today, the word has meanings that did not exist when the Bible was written. We talk about "the church" as an institution, a denomination, a group of Christians (local or worldwide), the Christians living in a specific time period, etc.

↘ Some of the slides in this presentation illustrate this.

❖ **Is it WRONG to use the word "church" this way?**
  • **Within OUR context of life, it might not be wrong to do so.**
  • *The problem occurs when we superimpose OUR modern concepts into the _Bible_.*

THE KEY ISSUE IS: We need to recognize the _difference_ between the way WE use that word and the way THEY used it!

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Slide 11

③ **The modern concept of "church" has become associated with many customs and practices that have nothing to do with the New Testament concept of "church."**

Though the practices aren't always *wrong,* many of them distract people – keeping them from focusing on what *the Bible* defines as the reason(s) for coming together as a group.

Many modern "church practices" were totally unheard of at the beginning of Christianity.

Some of them can actually be _deceptive_.

I'M ON THE LIST. THAT MEANS I'M A CHRISTIAN!

CHURCH MEMBERS

There is NO SUCH LIST in Scripture! This is a human invention that occurred much later.

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Slide 12

④ **Even people who talk about the New Testament Greek word for "church" often misinterpret it!**

• **Typically, we are told something like this:**

  The Greek word is ἐκκλησία (ekklēsia), and it is a combination of two words: ἐκ (ek), which means "out of," and καλέω (kaleō), which means "called." And so, the church is comprised of people who have been "called out" of the world...

  ↘ It is true that Christians are "called out" of the world. But it is NOT because of the word ἐκκλησία (ekklēsia), or "church"!

• Archaeologists, linguists, historical researchers, etc., can all show that this word was used for centuries *before* the New Testament era, and *there is no record of it ever having such a connotation!*

  ↘ (If it ever did have such a connotation, it was lost in the early development of the Greek language.)

• **Here is what the New Testament word really means:** ➡

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⑤ For the early Christians, a "church" was *any* group of people coming together for a common purpose – an <u>assembly</u> or <u>congregation</u>.

- **It was a common word** – not special, but normal to everyday life. It was used by Christians, Jews, the unsaved – anybody who wanted to use it. It is found in the Old Testament (Greek translation), as well as in the New Testament.

- **<u>HERE IS THE PROBLEM</u>:** Most translators use *different* words, based on *who* is assembling or coming together in a group... BUT IT'S THE SAME GREEK WORD IN EACH CASE!

  - ↘ They use "**ASSEMBLY**" (sometimes "**CONGREGATION**") if it involves unsaved people, Jews, or the Old Testament (Greek translation).

  - ↘ They normally use "**CHURCH**" if it involves Christians.

- **There is no *linguistic* reason to separate things this way.** *The early Christians* didn't! *We* do, simply because we are following customs that were *invented centuries later*.

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Why did they pick the word that we translate as "church"?

- Because: ① It *was* a common term. *Why should they pick something totally different?* ② It *was* often found in the Old Testament (Greek translation, which was the Bible *they* used).

- Most New Testament passages refer to *Christians*. That is because *the New Testament is about Christianity!*

  - ↘ Even so, the reason we *know* when the word "church" refers to Christians is because of the *context* or *qualifying terms*.

CONTEXT
> I have written to the **church** about this, but Diotrephes ... will not accept our instruction.
> 3 John 1:9 (BSB)

QUALIFYING TERM ("GOD'S")
> From Paul... To **God's church** in the city of Corinth and to all God's holy people everywhere in Greece.
> 2 Corinthians 1:1 (GW)

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How the word was used:

1. **Used to describe gatherings of unsaved people.**

> Meanwhile the **assembly** was in turmoil.
> "[The matter] must be settled in a legal **assembly**."
> After he had said this, he dismissed the **assembly**.
> Acts 19:32a, 39b, 41 (BSB)

2. **Used to describe gatherings of Jewish people. (N.T. examples.)**

> [Moses] was in the **assembly** in the wilderness ...
> Acts 7:38a (BSB)

> "I will praise you within the **congregation**."
> Hebrews 2:12b (GW)

(In both of these verses, the KJV translation uses the word "**church**"!)

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3. **Old Testament examples (as found in the Greek translation) – gatherings of Jewish people.**

> I will praise you within the **congregation**.
> Psalm 22:22b (GW)

> ... on the day of the **assembly**.
> Deuteronomy 9:10b (GW)

> The whole **assembly** agreed to this ...
> 1 Chronicles 13:4a (GW)

> ... Ezra the priest brought the Law before the **assembly** ...
> Nehemiah 8:2b (BSB)

> [Solomon] blessed the entire **assembly** of Israel, ...
> 1 Kings 8:55b (GW)

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4. **But when it applies to Christians, translators have chosen to use the word "church," instead!**

> ... Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the **church**.
> Acts 20:17b (BSB)

> All the **churches** of Christ send greetings.
> Romans 16:16b (NIV)

> They have told the **church** about your love.
> 3 John 1:6a (NIV)

> John, To the seven **churches** in the province of Asia:
> Rev 1:4a (BSB)

> ... strive to excel in gifts that build up the **church**.
> 1 Corinthians 14:12b (BSB)

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So what's the significance of all this?

① **If we want to know the relationship between Israel and the "church," *we are probably asking the wrong question*.**

- There <u>are</u> differences between us and the nation Israel... but the word "church" ("assembly") is *not* the reason, since *that word applied to both!*

- (There might be a question to ask... but we would have to *reword* it.)

> **WHEN PEOPLE ASK: "ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE, WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH?"**
>
> - **If we use <u>our</u> definition of "church":** We will end up with the wrong answer (since <u>our</u> definition is foreign to the Bible).
>
> - **If we use <u>the Bible's</u> definition of "church":** Asking the question will make no sense (since the word "church" – or "assembly" – applies *equally* to both Jews and Christians).

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② **There is practical value in knowing how _Scripture_ uses the word "church" (or "assembly").**

- **It helps us to better understand the _Bible_.** In some issues, an incorrect view about "church" might not lead us into serious error. But when dealing with issues such as "church vs. Israel," it shows us that even the _question_ is incorrect or misguided.

- **It shows us _our_ obligations toward other Christians.** It points to our _need_ to _"assemble"_ (or _"come together"_) with other Christians, in order to fully function as a Christian.* There are many commands we _cannot_ fulfill without doing so.

- **It discourages fakeness.** It can't stop it 100%; but knowing that "church" just refers to "coming together as a group" makes it harder to associate it with "being saved."

  * (For people who live in a country where there _aren't_ any nearby Christians, the situation will be different. They are not _trying_ to disobey these commands and avoid other Christians.)

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③ **When we realize that the word "church" (or "assembly") does NOT define us as being "followers of Jesus," _we can look for terms that DO define us_!**

> WE ASSEMBLE TOGETHER EVERY WEEK!
> WE GO TO MEETINGS!
> THAT PROVES WE ARE CHRISTIANS!
> **WRONG!!**

- **Such "defining terms" _DO_ exist.** The same terms also occur in the Old Testament; so they do not necessarily distinguish _us_ (in the New Testament era) from _Israel_ (at least those who were saved).*

  * (It is not our purpose here to deal with the similarities and differences that may exist between the two.)

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Here are two of those "defining" terms used in _Scripture_ to describe saved people:

① **"Holy ones"** (also translated as "holy people" or "God's people).*
  ❖ This focuses on the relationship of God's people to God… _as well as the type of life they want to live._

② **"Brothers"** (modern translations may say "brothers and sisters.")**
  ❖ This focuses on "family" – the relationship that saved people have to each other. This also implies _obligations to each other_.

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* Many translations use the word "saints." This can be quite misleading, since many people associate the word "saint" with concepts that have _no_ basis in Scripture. The emphasis is on _us_ being holy. This attitude will influence all that we do.

** In most languages in the world, the term "brothers" is _generic_ in such a context as this. _It is not a reference to gender_. In societies that have abandoned the nature of language, their own connection to history, and even the reasons Scripture defines concepts in such ways, we may have to use _both_ terms "brother" and "sister." (_This is yet another term that has been corrupted by modern society._)

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Whether or not we go to meetings does _not_ define us… but these types of terms _do_:

① **"Holy ones"**   **②** **"Brothers"** (or "brothers and sisters.")

> I AM PURSUING HOLINESS, BECAUSE THAT IS MY CALLING!
> I TREAT OTHER CHRISTIANS AS FAMILY, BECAUSE THAT IS WHAT THEY ARE!
> **CORRECT!!**

- Fakes may feel threatened by these terms, because the terms imply _obligations_ toward God and toward other people. _BUT THIS IS HOW SCRIPTURE DEFINES US!_

  ✓ Fakes tend to treat such terms as empty symbolism or merely figurative (meaningless) expressions, and just focus on "going to meetings" or "doing church."

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>> Today's MISSION <<
GROW!

⇨ **Learning to understand _Scripture_ the way it presents itself** is a _lifetime_ endeavor. God's grace makes it possible for us to grow in knowledge… _but we must be willing to grow!_

> But **grow** in the **grace and knowledge** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.
> 2 Peter 3:18 (NIV)

⇨ **Learning to understand _who we are_.** Since "church" does not define us, we can focus on the significance of concepts that _do_ define us – like "holy" and "brother/sister."

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Credits

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