COGMA

Church of God Mission Academy

STUDY GUIDE 75

Ordinances Fulfilled in Jesus Christ

STUDY GUIDE 8 OF 12:

The Israel of God

An overview of God's one people in Christ.



Equipping and empowering for effective service

2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

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- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

COGMA therefore strongly advises that you prayerfully study the content of each Study Guide with the heart of a Berean (**Acts 17:10–12**).

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PREFACE

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The previous Study Guide established that Jesus Christ made Jew and Gentile one in Himself. The former covenant separation had been removed, both were reconciled unto God in one body, both were brought into that body by one Spirit, and the Spirit of Christ was shown to be the identifying reality of belonging. This raises the next important question: How are God's people identified in the New Covenant?

Under the former covenant, natural descent, circumcision and outward covenant identity had real significance. Natural Israel occupied a God-appointed covenant position.

But the New Covenant brings us to something deeper. Paul speaks of:

- "A Jew, which is one inwardly";
- "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel";
- "The children of the promise";
- "The Israel of God";
- "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed."

These expressions reveal one consistent movement: From natural covenant identity to spiritual identity in Jesus Christ. The central question of this Study Guide is therefore: Who are God's covenant people in the Gospel Day, and what identifies them? The answer will take us from the outward to the inward, from natural birth to new birth, and from natural descent to belonging to Jesus Christ. The determining reality is not who a person is naturally, but whether that person belongs to Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must New Covenant identity be understood through belonging to Christ rather than natural descent?

Personal Reflection

How does the movement from outward identity to inward spiritual life challenge your own understanding of God's people?

Action Step

What do you want to understand more clearly about the inward work that identifies a person as belonging to Christ? Identify one conviction or attitude that this teaching challenges. What specific response will you make?

INTRODUCTION

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The previous Study Guide established that Jesus Christ made Jew and Gentile one in Himself. The middle wall of partition was broken down, both were reconciled unto God in one body, and both were brought into that body by one Spirit. This means that covenant identity can no longer be determined by natural ancestry or outward covenant signs alone.

Under the former covenant, natural descent, circumcision and the Law had genuine covenant significance. But Jesus Christ has come, and Paul now moves the question from the outward to the inward.

Paul wrote in **Romans 2:28-29**:

> *"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."*

Paul deliberately contrasts:

- Outward with inward;
- Flesh with heart;
- Letter with Spirit;
- Physical circumcision with circumcision of the heart.

The direction is clear. Spiritual covenant identity is determined by the inward work of God.

This does not deny the natural existence of Jewish people or the real covenant position natural Israel once held. Natural identity and spiritual covenant identity are not the same thing.

A person may be naturally Jewish and still need to be born again. A person may be naturally Gentile and also need to be born again. Both must come to Jesus Christ. The central question of this Study Guide is therefore: Who are God's people in the Gospel Day, and what identifies them?

Paul's answer will take us:

- From the outward Jew to the inward Jew;
- From natural birth to new birth;
- From natural Israel to the Israel of God;
- From children of the flesh to children of promise;
- From natural ancestry to belonging to Jesus Christ.

The determining relationship is not simply natural descent. It is *"If ye be Christ's."* That brings us to the first major section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Paul's contrasts between outward and inward identity explain circumcision of the heart?

Personal Reflection

What does the distinction between natural ancestry and spiritual identity mean to your understanding of belonging? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

How would you consider your own relationship with Christ without relying on ancestry or outward religious signs? Name one inherited expectation you will reconsider and explain how Christ's fulfilment changes your response.

WHO IS A JEW IN THE GOSPEL DAY?

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The Introduction established that the New Covenant changes the question of covenant identity. Under the former covenant, natural ancestry and outward covenant signs had genuine meaning. But Jesus Christ has come, the former wall of separation has been broken down, and Jew and Gentile are brought into one spiritual body. This raises the question: Who is a Jew in the Gospel Day?

Paul wrote in **Romans 2:28-29**:

> *"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."*

These verses mark a clear movement from outward covenant identity to inward spiritual reality. Paul begins with the words *"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly."* He is not denying natural Jewish ancestry. Natural identity remains a fact of birth and history.

But Paul is speaking about something deeper: spiritual covenant standing before God. A person may be Jewish according to the flesh and still need the inward work of God.

Paul continues with the words *"Neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh."* Under the former covenant, physical circumcision was a God-given sign of covenant identity.

But Paul now shows that the outward mark by itself cannot define the true spiritual relationship with God. The physical sign may be present while the inward reality is absent. An outward covenant sign can exist without the spiritual reality it represents.

"He Is a Jew, Which Is One Inwardly"

Paul then gives the contrast: *"But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly."* The word *"inwardly"* is decisive.

Spiritual covenant identity is not located in ancestry, flesh or an outward mark. The true work of God reaches the heart.

Paul continues with the words *"Circumcision is that of the heart."* The former sign had been physical, but the New Covenant reality is inward.

Paul adds *"In the spirit, and not in the letter."* The contrast is deliberate:

- Outward to inward;
- Flesh to heart;
- Letter to Spirit;
- Physical circumcision to circumcision of the heart.

Natural Israel Still Exists Naturally

Spiritual covenant identity is determined by the inward work of God. We must keep an important distinction clear. Natural Israel continues to exist naturally, and Jewish ancestry remains a fact of natural descent.

The New Covenant does not erase natural identity. But natural identity and spiritual covenant identity are not the same thing.

A person may be naturally Jewish and still need to be born again. A person may be naturally Gentile and also need to be born again.

Neither enters God's spiritual people through natural birth. Both must come to Jesus Christ.

The true covenant question is therefore deeper than:

- Who are your natural ancestors;
- Were you circumcised in the flesh;
- Were you born into natural Israel.

The deeper questions are:

- Have you been born again;
- Has God changed the heart;
- Does the Spirit of Christ dwell within;
- Do you belong to Jesus Christ;
- Have you been brought into His one body?

These are spiritual questions because God's New Covenant people are a spiritual people. Natural birth can establish ancestry and nationality, but it cannot create spiritual life.

A person can descend naturally from Abraham and still need the new birth. Natural identity cannot produce spiritual identity. This principle will be developed more fully in the next section.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does being a Jew inwardly concern spiritual standing without denying natural Jewish ancestry?

Personal Reflection

How could an outward sign give you confidence while leaving the question of inward life unanswered? What difference should this make to your own response?

Action Step

What do you want to consider about your own understanding of the inward work of God rather than outward identity? Consider someone whose background differs from yours. What change in your thinking or treatment of that person is needed?

The Spirit of Christ Is the Identifying Reality

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"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."*

Paul does not make an exception for natural Israel. He says *"If any man."* Then he gives the identifying reality: *"The Spirit of Christ."*

If the Spirit of Christ dwells within, the person belongs to Christ. If the Spirit of Christ does not dwell within, Paul says *"He is none of his."*

This has direct importance for our study of the ordinances. If the identifying reality is the indwelling Spirit of Christ, an outward act must never be allowed to replace that spiritual identity.

Water baptism cannot place Jesus Christ within a person. Bread and a cup cannot place Jesus Christ within a person. Feet washing cannot place Jesus Christ within a person.

The outward act may be visible. The spiritual reality is inward.

Circumcision gives us an important warning. It had genuinely been commanded by God and had genuinely marked covenant identity under the former order.

Yet Paul still says *"Neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh."* The outward sign could not create the inward relationship.

Therefore, we must be careful before assigning the same spiritual authority to another outward ceremony. We cannot simply reason: The Old Covenant had an outward covenant mark, therefore the New Covenant must also have another outward membership mark.

That conclusion must be established from Scripture. Paul's direction moves the other way: from outward in the flesh to inwardly, and from physical circumcision to circumcision of the heart.

In the Gospel Day, spiritual covenant identity is inward. Paul distinguishes the outward Jew from the inward Jew and physical circumcision from circumcision of the heart. Natural ancestry remains real, but it does not produce spiritual covenant standing. The defining work is the inward work of God.

This raises the next question: If natural ancestry cannot produce spiritual identity, what can natural birth actually accomplish? Jesus gives the answer plainly. That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does **Romans 8:9** *identify belonging to Christ beyond ancestry or an outward mark?*

Personal Reflection

What warning does circumcision give you about assuming a visible ceremony proves an inward relationship? Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

How would you assess your own reliance on religious ceremonies in the light of the Spirit of Christ as the identifying reality? What will you change in your understanding or practice so that the saving work belongs to Jesus Christ alone?

NATURAL BIRTH CANNOT PRODUCE SPIRITUAL BIRTH

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The previous section established that spiritual covenant identity is inward. A person may be naturally Jewish and still need the inward work of God, while a person may be naturally Gentile and also need that same work. This brings us to a foundational New Covenant truth: Natural birth cannot produce spiritual birth. Natural descent can establish ancestry, family and nationality, but it cannot create the life of God within.

Nicodemus Was Naturally Jewish

Jesus made this distinction very clear when He spoke to Nicodemus. John wrote in **John 3:1-3**:

> *"There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

Nicodemus was not a Gentile. He was *"a ruler of the Jews."* He belonged naturally to Israel, possessed covenant ancestry and knew the Law.

Yet Jesus told him *"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* Natural Jewish identity did not remove Nicodemus' need for the new birth.

Jesus continued in **John 3:5-7**:

> *"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."*

The distinction is plain. *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh,"* and *"that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."*

Natural birth produces natural life. Spiritual birth produces spiritual life. The one cannot substitute for the other.

Natural descent from Abraham can produce a natural descendant of Abraham. Natural descent from Israel can produce a natural Israelite.

But flesh cannot produce Spirit. Natural ancestry cannot create spiritual life.

Therefore, no person can enter God's spiritual people through natural birth alone. This applies equally to Jew and Gentile.

Jesus said *"That which is born of the Spirit is spirit."* Spiritual life must come from God.

It cannot be inherited naturally, passed through ancestry, created by a physical mark or produced by a ceremony. A person must be born of the Spirit.

Every Person Needs the Same Spiritual Birth

This agrees perfectly with the truth of the one new man. The Jewish believer does not enter God's spiritual people one way while the Gentile enters another way.

Both need:

- Jesus Christ;
- The new birth;
- Spiritual life;
- The Spirit of Christ;
- Entrance into the one body by one Spirit.

Therefore, the true identifying reality must be something both Jew and Gentile can receive equally. Natural ancestry cannot provide that. The new birth can. John also describes the believer's spiritual birth.

John wrote in **John 1:12-13**:

> *"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."*

Notice the contrast. They were born *"not of blood,"* not *"of the will of the flesh,"* but *"of God."*

Natural bloodline cannot create the new birth. The believer's spiritual life comes from God.

The Spirit of Christ Identifies the Born-Again Believer

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"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."*

Paul does not say that only Gentiles need the Spirit of Christ while natural Israel is exempt. He says *"If any man."* The standard is universal.

The identifying reality is *"the Spirit of Christ."* Natural descent does not replace this inward reality.

This principle reaches directly into our study of the ordinances. Water baptism, bread and a cup, and feet washing are outward. All can be physically performed.

But none can produce the new birth, create spiritual life or place the Spirit of Christ within. Only God can do that.

A person may undergo a ceremony and still remain spiritually unchanged. The body may be touched by water while the heart remains unchanged. Bread and a cup may be received while Christ is absent within. Feet may be washed while pride remains in the heart.

Therefore, outward action cannot be equated with inward life. The movement is now clear:

- Natural birth to new birth;
- Flesh to Spirit;
- Natural ancestry to spiritual life;
- Outward covenant identity to inward identity in Christ;
- Birth according to the flesh to birth of God.

This is a decisive New Covenant movement. Natural birth can produce natural identity, but it cannot produce spiritual life. Every person, Jew or Gentile, must be born again. New Covenant identity therefore comes through the inward work of God, not through natural ancestry or outward ceremony.

This now brings us to Paul's next important statement. If natural descent cannot produce spiritual sonship, then natural Israel and spiritual Israel cannot simply be treated as identical.

Paul says *"They are not all Israel, which are of Israel."* That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did Nicodemus still need the new birth despite his natural Jewish identity and religious knowledge?

Personal Reflection

What does the difference between natural birth and birth of God lead you to consider about your own spiritual life?

Action Step

What personal response do you want to make to Jesus' words about the need to be born again? Explain honestly. Identify any trust you have placed in outward water or a later experience. What will you rely on instead?

NOT ALL ISRAEL IS ISRAEL

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The previous section established that natural birth cannot produce spiritual birth. A person may belong naturally to Israel and still need to be born again because natural descent from Abraham cannot, by itself, create the life of God within. Paul now applies this principle directly to Israel.

Paul wrote in **Romans 9:6-8**:

> *"Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed."*

Paul makes a distinction that is essential to New Covenant identity: *"They are not all Israel, which are of Israel."* Natural Israel and spiritual Israel cannot simply be treated as identical.

Paul is not denying the existence of natural Israel. He speaks plainly of those who are *"of Israel."*

Natural ancestry remains real. Jewish descent remains real. The history of Israel remains real.

But Paul also says *"They are not all Israel."* Natural identity and spiritual covenant identity are therefore not the same thing.

Natural Descent Does Not Equal Spiritual Sonship

Paul continues with the words *"Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children."* Physical descent from Abraham does not automatically create spiritual sonship. Paul then states the principle plainly: *"They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God."* Natural descent alone cannot make anyone spiritually a child of God.

Paul's teaching agrees perfectly with what Jesus told Nicodemus. Jesus said *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."*

A person may be born naturally into Israel and still need to be born of God. There is no contradiction between Jesus and Paul. Both make the same distinction: Natural birth cannot produce spiritual life. Natural Israel had received great covenant privilege.

Paul wrote in **Romans 9:4-5**:

> *"Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."*

These privileges were genuine, but they did not remove the need for Jesus Christ. The Law could not replace Him. Natural ancestry could not replace Him. Circumcision could not replace Him.

The Word of God Had Not Failed

The promises themselves were moving towards Him. Paul begins **Romans 9:6** with an important safeguard: *"Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect."* The distinction between natural Israel and spiritual Israel does not mean that God's promise failed. Paul is explaining how God's purpose must be understood correctly.

The promise was never meant to end in natural descent. It was moving towards Jesus Christ. Natural Israel had an important place in God's unfolding purpose, but the ultimate spiritual

identity of God's people could not be limited to natural descent. Paul therefore distinguishes between *"the children of the flesh"* and *"the children of the promise."*

Natural birth produces natural descendants. It does not produce the inward life of God. The children of promise must therefore be identified through something greater than flesh.

"The Children of the Promise"

Paul says *"The children of the promise are counted for the seed."* This raises the next important question: Who are the children of promise, and where is the promise ultimately centred?

Paul answers that question in Galatians. The promise leads directly to Jesus Christ.

The direction of Scripture is now becoming clear. The inward Jew points us towards the inward work of God. The new birth points us towards spiritual life from God.

Romans 9 distinguishes natural Israel from spiritual Israel. The children of promise now direct us towards Jesus Christ. Spiritual covenant identity must therefore be centred in Christ.

Natural Israel remains a real natural people, but natural descent alone does not establish spiritual identity before God. Paul says, *"they are not all Israel, which are of Israel,"* and distinguishes the children of the flesh from the children of promise. Spiritual sonship therefore depends upon the inward work of God and the fulfilment of His promise in Jesus Christ. This brings us directly to Paul's next distinction: *"the children of the flesh"* and *"the children of the promise."*

That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

How can Paul say not all Israel is Israel without saying God's Word has failed?

Personal Reflection

How does distinguishing natural descent from spiritual sonship challenge your own understanding of privilege before God?

Action Step

What would help you consider your own need for Christ without treating a religious heritage as spiritual sonship? Name one choice in your own life that should change because of this truth, and explain why.

CHILDREN OF THE FLESH AND CHILDREN OF PROMISE

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Paul's statement in Romans 9 introduces another important distinction. Paul wrote in **Romans 9:8**:

> *"That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed."*

This verse makes clear that natural descent and spiritual sonship are not the same thing. A person may be connected naturally with Abraham and may belong naturally to Israel, yet spiritual identity before God requires more than physical ancestry. Paul distinguishes between *"the children of the flesh"* and *"the children of the promise."*

Paul uses the expression *"children of the flesh."* Natural birth produces natural descendants.

Natural family relationships are real, and natural Jewish ancestry is real. But natural birth cannot produce the life of God within a person. Therefore, natural descent cannot by itself make someone a child of God spiritually.

This agrees with what Jesus told Nicodemus. A person must be *"born again."*

Spiritual Sonship Comes Through the Promise

Paul then contrasts the children of the flesh with *"the children of the promise."* The children of promise are connected with what God promised and then fulfilled.

That promise does not end in natural ancestry. It moves towards Jesus Christ.

Paul had already explained the promised Seed. Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:16**:

> *"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."*

Paul identifies the promised Seed plainly: *"Christ."* Therefore, the promise ultimately leads us to Jesus Christ.

The promise to Abraham cannot be correctly understood if Jesus Christ is removed from the centre. Natural Israel had an important role in preserving covenant history and bringing forth Christ according to the flesh.

But the promise itself was moving towards the Person. Paul says *"Thy seed, which is Christ."* Therefore, those who participate spiritually in the promise must be identified through their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Paul began Romans 9 by saying *"Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect."* The movement from natural covenant identity to spiritual identity in Christ does not mean that God's promise failed.

The opposite is true. The promise reached its fulfilment.

God did not promise one thing and later abandon it. The promise arrived at the Person to whom it had always been pointing.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 1:20**:

> *"For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us."*

Notice the words *"All the promises of God in him."* The promises find their certainty and fulfilment in Jesus Christ. Therefore, when we ask who inherits the spiritual promise, we must look to Christ.

If the children of promise were defined only by natural ancestry, Paul's distinction between children of the flesh and children of promise would lose its force. But Paul deliberately separates the two.

Natural birth produces the child of the flesh. Spiritual relationship with God's promise is found in Christ. Therefore, the children of promise are a spiritual people.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the promise fulfilled in Christ distinguish children of promise from children of the flesh?

Personal Reflection

What does the promise reaching its fulfilment rather than failing mean to your confidence in God's Word? What difference should this make to your own response?

Action Step

How could you consider your own relationship with God's promise by looking to Christ rather than natural background? What assumption will you examine, and how will your response change if it does not agree with the Bible?

Faith Becomes Central

Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:7**:

> *"Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham."*

Paul does not say that natural descent from Abraham automatically creates spiritual sonship. He says *"They which are of faith."* Faith connects the believer with the promise fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Paul also wrote in **Romans 4:16**:

> *"Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,"*

Notice that Paul declares the promise is *"of faith, that it might be by grace."* He then explains that the promise extends beyond those who possessed the Law to those who share the faith of Abraham. Therefore, natural Jewish ancestry does not give one person a separate spiritual inheritance, and Gentile ancestry does not exclude another from the promise. Both receive the same spiritual inheritance through faith in Jesus Christ.

Jew and Gentile Come on the Same Basis

This principle applies equally to Jew and Gentile. The Gentile does not need to become naturally Jewish in order to become spiritually connected with the promise. The Gentile comes to Jesus Christ by faith.

The same principle applies to the natural Jew. Natural descent cannot replace faith. The Jew must also believe, be born again and receive Jesus Christ. Both come to the promise through the same Person.

The pattern is clear. For the Jew, natural ancestry cannot replace Christ. For the Gentile, lack of Jewish ancestry cannot exclude someone from Christ. For both, faith in Jesus Christ is the determining spiritual relationship.

This agrees perfectly with the one new man. The promise does not produce one spiritual inheritance for Jewish believers and another for Gentile believers. Paul's direction is

consistently towards one spiritual people in Jesus Christ. The children of promise must therefore be understood spiritually rather than naturally.

Circumcision could not produce the spiritual promise. Temple worship could not produce the spiritual promise. Outward ordinances could not produce the spiritual promise. These things could point, teach and prepare, but the promise finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, no outward act can take His place. Natural descent produces children of the flesh, but spiritual sonship belongs to the children of promise. The promise reaches its fulfilment in Jesus Christ, and those who come to Him by faith participate in that spiritual inheritance.

This brings us directly to the next major question. If the children of promise are identified spiritually through Jesus Christ, then where was the promise itself always moving? Paul has already told us: *"Thy seed, which is Christ."*

That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why do Jew and Gentile participate in the same promise through faith rather than separate inheritances?

Personal Reflection

What does Abraham being father of those of faith mean for the way you view people of another ancestry? Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

How could this shared spiritual inheritance guide your own attitude towards someone from another background? Explain one boundary you will stop using to judge spiritual belonging, and what you will do differently.

THE PROMISE WAS MOVING TOWARDS JESUS CHRIST

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The previous section established that Paul distinguishes between the children of the flesh and the children of the promise. Natural descent alone cannot produce spiritual sonship.

The children of promise must therefore be understood through the promise itself. Paul tells us where that promise was always moving.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:16**:

> *"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."*

The promised Seed is identified plainly: *"Christ."* The promise to Abraham cannot be understood correctly with Jesus Christ removed from the centre.

Natural Israel had an important historical role. Through natural Israel came:

- The Law;
- The prophets;
- The covenants;
- The promises;

- Jesus Christ according to the flesh.

But that history was moving towards the Person. Paul says *"Thy seed, which is Christ."*

Therefore, the final spiritual inheritance cannot be centred only in natural bloodline. It must be centred in Jesus Christ.

Paul had already said *"Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect."* Someone might hear Paul say *"They are not all Israel, which are of Israel"* and conclude that God's promise had somehow failed.

Paul rejects that conclusion. The Word of God had not failed. When the promise reaches Jesus Christ, it has not been abandoned. It has reached its fulfilment.

This is the same principle we have followed throughout this module. When a shadow reaches its reality in Christ, it has not failed. It has fulfilled its purpose.

All the Promises Are "In Him"

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 1:20**:

> *"For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us."*

Notice the expression *"All the promises of God in him."* The promises find their certainty and fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, when we ask who participates spiritually in the promise, we must look to Christ. The promise does not lead us away from Him. It leads us directly to Him.

This does not diminish the historical role of natural Israel. God used natural Israel in His unfolding purpose.

The Law was given there. The prophets spoke there. The promises were preserved there. Jesus Christ came according to the flesh through that history.

But preparation must not be mistaken for the final spiritual reality. Natural Israel carried the promise forward. Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the promise. If the promise ended simply in natural ancestry, Paul's words in **Galatians 3:16** would have little force.

But Paul deliberately says *"Not... seeds, as of many; but as of one."* Then he identifies the one: *"Which is Christ."* Natural ancestry had an important historical place, but spiritual inheritance is centred in the Person.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does Paul identify Christ as the promised Seed when explaining the promise to Abraham?

Personal Reflection

How does the promise reaching a Person clarify your understanding of natural Israel's historical role? What does this reveal about an assumption you have held?

Action Step

What would help you keep Christ at the centre of your own understanding of God's promises? Identify one conviction or attitude that this teaching challenges. What specific response will you make?

Every Natural Jew Still Needs Jesus Christ

This explains why natural Jewish ancestry cannot itself produce salvation. If natural descent automatically made every Israelite spiritually a child of God, there would be no need for a Jewish person to be born again.

Yet Jesus told Nicodemus *"Ye must be born again."* Natural covenant history did not remove the need for Jesus Christ. Natural privilege cannot replace the new birth.

The other side is equally important. If natural ancestry does not create spiritual sonship, then lack of Jewish ancestry does not prevent spiritual sonship.

The Gentile does not need to become naturally Jewish. The Gentile must come to Jesus Christ.

The same new birth is available. The same Spirit is given. The same one body receives both.

The promise does not rebuild the former wall between Jew and Gentile. It brings both to Christ.

Faith Connects the Believer With the Promise

Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:7**:

> *"Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham."*

Paul says *"They which are of faith."* The determining relationship is no longer natural ancestry alone.

Faith connects the believer with the promise fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This applies to both Jew and Gentile.

The Jew cannot rely upon natural descent instead of faith. The Gentile is not excluded because of lack of natural descent. Both come to the same Person.

The pattern is clear. For the Jew, natural ancestry cannot replace Christ. For the Gentile, lack of Jewish ancestry cannot exclude someone from Christ. For both, faith in Jesus Christ is the determining spiritual relationship.

This agrees perfectly with the one new man. We must make an important safeguard here. The movement from natural covenant identity to spiritual identity in Christ does not mean that one natural nation has simply replaced another. God has not taken covenant identity from the Jewish race and handed it to another race.

The movement is not:

- Natural Israel → another natural nation

The movement is:

- Natural covenant identity → spiritual identity in Jesus Christ

The one new man contains people from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. It is a spiritual people. If the promise produced one spiritual inheritance for Jewish believers and another for Gentile believers, Paul could not say *"Ye are all one in Christ Jesus."* The Scriptural direction is consistently towards one spiritual people in Jesus Christ.

The promise to Abraham was always moving towards Jesus Christ. Natural Israel carried that promise forward historically, but the promised Seed is Christ Himself. Therefore, spiritual participation in the promise is determined by relationship with Jesus Christ, not by natural ancestry alone.

This prepares us for another important expression Paul uses. If circumcision no longer determines spiritual standing, and if the promise is fulfilled in Christ, how does Paul describe God's spiritual people? He writes *"The Israel of God."*

That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can natural ancestry neither replace Christ for a Jew nor exclude a Gentile from Him?

Personal Reflection

What does faith being the shared relationship mean to your own sense of access to God's promise?

Action Step

How could you respond to the promise in Christ without treating any natural group as spiritually superior? Name one choice in your own life that should change because of this truth, and explain why.

THE ISRAEL OF GOD

BACK TO CONTENTS

We have now seen that Paul distinguishes between natural descent and spiritual covenant identity. He says *"He is a Jew, which is one inwardly."* He also says *"They are not all Israel, which are of Israel."*

He distinguishes *"the children of the flesh"* from *"the children of the promise."* These statements prepare us for another important expression Paul uses concerning God's people in the Gospel Day: *"the Israel of God."*

Paul wrote in **Galatians 6:15-16**:

> *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."*

These verses bring several important truths together:

- Jesus Christ;
- Circumcision;
- Uncircumcision;
- New creation;
- The Israel of God.

The order is important. Before Paul speaks of *"the Israel of God,"* he tells us what now determines spiritual standing: *"a new creature."*

Paul begins with the words *"For in Christ Jesus."* Once again, Jesus Christ is the centre.

The Gentiles who were once far off were made nigh *"in Christ Jesus."* Jew and Gentile were made one *"in himself."* Abraham's promised Seed is *"Christ."*

Now Paul places the Israel of God within the same Christ-centred setting. Spiritual covenant identity cannot be understood apart from Jesus Christ.

Paul continues with the words *"Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision."* Circumcision had once been a God-given covenant sign.

But Paul now says that in Jesus Christ neither possessing that mark nor lacking it determines spiritual standing. The former outward sign no longer defines God's spiritual people.

The Determining Reality Is "A New Creature"

Paul then gives the contrast: *"But a new creature."* The New Covenant does not replace one physical covenant sign with another physical sign. It brings *"a new creature."*

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:17**:

> *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*

Again, notice the location *"in Christ"* and the result *"a new creature."* This is spiritual transformation. It is the work of God within.

Paul places *"the Israel of God"* immediately after the statement *"Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."* Those ideas must be read together.

The former outward mark no longer determines spiritual identity. New creation does. Therefore, God's New Covenant Israel must be understood in the setting of new creation in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the setting of new creation explain Paul's expression the Israel of God?

Personal Reflection

What does new creation rather than circumcision help you recognise about inward spiritual identity? What difference should this make to your own response?

Action Step

What do you want to consider about your own relationship to Christ rather than using an outward sign as proof of belonging? State one specific conclusion you need to correct or confirm in the Bible, and how it will affect your conduct.

"As Many as Walk According to This Rule"

Paul continues, *"And as many as walk according to this rule."* The rule immediately before these words is that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision determines spiritual standing, *"but a new creature."*

This places *"the Israel of God"* directly within the setting of new creation in Jesus Christ. The emphasis is not upon the former physical covenant sign, but upon the spiritual work God has performed within.

Romans 2 says *"He is a Jew, which is one inwardly."* Galatians 6 says *"Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."*

These teachings move in the same direction:

- Outward to inward;
- Flesh to Spirit;
- Physical mark to spiritual reality;
- Natural covenant identity to new creation in Christ.

Romans 9 says *"They are not all Israel, which are of Israel."* Galatians 6 now speaks of *"the Israel of God"* in the setting of new creation.

Paul's teaching is consistent. Natural Israel exists naturally, but spiritual Israel must be identified according to the New Covenant reality found in Jesus Christ.

The previous Study Guide established that Jew and Gentile are made *"one new man."* That one new man is not defined by natural ancestry or circumcision. It is defined by Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the Israel of God cannot be understood as a separate spiritual people existing beside the one new man. God's New Covenant people are one spiritual people in Christ.

The Israel of God cannot be limited geographically to one natural nation. The Gospel went to all nations.

People from every natural background can:

- Be born again;
- Receive the Spirit of Christ;
- Become new creatures;
- Be brought into one body;
- Belong to Jesus Christ.

Their unity is not geographical. Their unity is spiritual.

Natural nations continue naturally, but natural identity does not create separate covenant standings before God. All must come to Jesus Christ. Neither is spiritual Israel centred upon an earthly Temple.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:20-22**:

> *"And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."*

Notice the expressions *"in the Lord"* and *"through the Spirit."* God's people themselves are His habitation. The spiritual Temple is centred in Jesus Christ and formed through His Spirit.

The Israel of God Must Be Understood Through Christ

We must therefore understand the expression *"the Israel of God"* in harmony with everything Paul has already taught. He has said:

- "He is a Jew, which is one inwardly";

- "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel";
- "Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision";
- "Ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

Therefore, when Paul speaks of *"the Israel of God,"* we must not return to an outward natural definition that the surrounding teaching has already moved beyond. The Israel of God is identified in the setting of new creation in Jesus Christ. Physical circumcision no longer determines spiritual standing, and neither natural ancestry nor outward covenant signs can define God's New Covenant people. The determining reality is what God has made the believer in Christ.

This now raises another important question. If natural ancestry and circumcision do not determine spiritual identity, what happens to the promise given to Abraham? Who is counted as Abraham's seed in the Gospel Day? Paul answers directly: *"If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed."*

That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the inward Jew, new creation and the Israel of God point towards one spiritual people?

Personal Reflection

How does God's habitation through the Spirit challenge a view of spiritual identity centred on one nation or Temple? Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

What would help you reconsider a geographical or national boundary in your own understanding of God's people? Explain one boundary you will stop using to judge spiritual belonging, and what you will do differently.

IF YE BE CHRIST'S, THEN ARE YE ABRAHAM'S SEED

BACK TO CONTENTS

We have now seen that Paul identifies God's New Covenant people spiritually. He speaks of:

- The inward Jew;
- The children of promise;
- The Israel of God;
- The new creature.

This raises another important question: What happens to the promise given to Abraham, and who is counted as Abraham's seed in the Gospel Day? Paul gives a direct answer.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:26-29**:

> *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."*

The final statement is especially important: *"And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* The determining relationship is *"If ye be Christ's."*

The Children of God Are "By Faith in Christ Jesus"

Paul begins with the words *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."* He does not place natural ancestry at the centre. He places Jesus Christ at the centre.

Spiritual sonship is *"by faith in Christ Jesus."* This agrees with everything we have already established.

Natural descent cannot produce spiritual sonship. The new birth is required. The promise reaches its fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

Paul continues with the words *"For ye are all one in Christ Jesus."* Natural distinctions continue as ordinary facts of human life.

A Jewish believer remains naturally Jewish. A Gentile believer remains naturally Gentile. Male and female remain real natural distinctions.

But those distinctions do not create separate spiritual covenant standings before God. In Christ Jesus, the people of God are one. This is the same truth established in the previous Study Guide: *"Of twain one new man."*

"If Ye Be Christ's"

Paul then gives the determining relationship: *"And if ye be Christ's."* Notice what he does not say:

- If ye be naturally descended from Abraham;
- If ye be circumcised;
- If ye belong to an earthly nation;
- If ye possess an outward covenant mark.

He says *"If ye be Christ's."* This is the controlling New Covenant relationship.

Paul continues with the words *"Then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* The order is important.

First, *"If ye be Christ's."* Then, *"Are ye Abraham's seed."* Then, *"Heirs according to the promise."* Participation in the spiritual promise is therefore connected directly with belonging to Jesus Christ.

This is especially important for Gentile believers. The Gentile does not need to change natural ancestry or become naturally Jewish in order to receive the spiritual inheritance.

The believer comes to Jesus Christ. If the believer belongs to Christ, Paul says *"Then are ye Abraham's seed."* The relationship is spiritual and centred in Christ.

The same principle applies to the natural Jew. Natural ancestry does not make Jesus Christ unnecessary. Natural descent cannot replace faith. Natural covenant history cannot replace the new birth.

The natural Jew must also belong to Christ. Therefore, both Jew and Gentile face the same determining question: Do you belong to Jesus Christ?

Abraham's Seed Is Identified Through Christ

Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:16**:

> *"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."*

The promised Seed is *"Christ."* Therefore, it is entirely consistent that those who belong to Christ should be described as *"Abraham's seed."*

The promise is centred in the Person. Those who belong to the Person participate spiritually in the promise.

Paul does not stop with *"Abraham's seed."* He adds *"And heirs according to the promise."*

The spiritual inheritance is not created by natural ancestry, physical circumcision or an outward ceremony. It is found in Jesus Christ. Paul's teaching does not create one spiritual inheritance for Jewish believers and another for Gentile believers.

He says *"Ye are all one in Christ Jesus."* Then he says *"If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed."*

There is:

- One promised Seed;
- One Christ;
- One spiritual inheritance;
- One spiritual people in Him.

Again, we must keep natural and spiritual identity distinct. Paul is not saying that natural Jewish ancestry ceases to exist or that natural Israel disappears from history.

He is teaching that natural identity does not determine New Covenant spiritual standing. The determining spiritual relationship is *"If ye be Christ's."*

Those who belong to Jesus Christ are Abraham's seed in the spiritual sense Paul describes and are heirs according to the promise. Natural ancestry does not replace Christ, and lack of Jewish ancestry does not exclude the believer. The determining reality is belonging to Jesus Christ.

We have now brought together several expressions:

- The inward Jew;
- The children of promise;
- The Israel of God;
- Abraham's seed;
- The one new man;
- The one body.

These are not disconnected teachings. Together they reveal one consistent New Covenant truth.

Before bringing them all together, however, we must guard against an important misunderstanding. The movement from natural Israel to spiritual identity in Christ does not mean that God simply replaced one natural nation with another.

That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does belonging to Christ make someone Abraham's seed and an heir according to the promise?

Personal Reflection

What does that relationship mean to you when natural ancestry cannot provide or prevent spiritual inheritance? What does this reveal about an assumption you have held?

Action Step

What honest personal response do you want to make to the determining question of whether you belong to Christ? Identify one conviction or attitude that this teaching challenges. What specific response will you make?

THIS IS NOT THE REPLACEMENT OF ONE NATURAL NATION WITH ANOTHER

BACK TO CONTENTS

We must guard against an important misunderstanding. When Scripture moves from natural covenant identity to spiritual identity in Jesus Christ, it is not teaching that God simply replaced the Jewish nation with another earthly nation.

The movement is not:

- Natural Israel → another natural nation

The movement is:

- Natural covenant identity → spiritual identity in Jesus Christ

Natural Israel Still Exists Naturally

Natural Israel continues to exist as a natural people. Jewish ancestry remains real, and the history of natural Israel remains important.

Paul wrote in **Romans 9:4-5**:

> *"Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."*

These privileges were real and formed part of God's unfolding purpose. But Paul also makes clear that natural ancestry does not automatically create spiritual sonship. Natural Israel and spiritual Israel are not identical categories.

The Israel of God is not another ethnic nation that has replaced the Jewish people. God has not moved covenant identity from one race to another.

The one new man contains people from many natural backgrounds. Therefore, spiritual Israel must be understood spiritually, not racially.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:28-29**:

> *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."*

Paul does not say that Gentiles replace Jews. He says *"Ye are all one in Christ Jesus."*

The Jew who belongs to Christ is in Him. The Gentile who belongs to Christ is in Him. Neither possesses a separate spiritual standing based upon natural ancestry.

The One New Man Contains Both

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:15-16**:

> *"Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:"*

Notice the words *"Of twain one new man"* and *"Reconcile both unto God in one body."* God did not remove the former separation so that one natural group could take the spiritual place of another. He removed the separation so that both could be made one.

If spiritual Israel were simply another natural nation replacing natural Israel, the basic principle would remain unchanged. Spiritual standing would still be centred in ethnicity and natural descent. But Paul moves in the opposite direction.

Circumcision had genuinely been commanded by God and had genuinely served as an outward covenant sign. Paul wrote in **Galatians 6:15**:

> *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."*

The determining reality is not another race. It is *"a new creature."*

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:17**:

> *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*

Notice the words *"If any man."* New creation is not restricted to one natural people.

Jew and Gentile may both be *"in Christ."* Jew and Gentile may both become *"a new creature."* Therefore, spiritual identity is received through the inward work of God, not inherited racially. The Gospel does not require a Gentile believer to become naturally Jewish before belonging to God's spiritual people.

The Gentile does not need:

- Jewish ancestry;
- Circumcision in the flesh;
- Membership in natural Israel;

- Adoption of the former covenant order.

The Gentile must come to Jesus Christ. If the Gentile belongs to Christ, Paul says *"Then are ye Abraham's seed."*

The same principle applies to the natural Jew. Natural ancestry does not automatically place a person into the one spiritual body. Natural privilege cannot replace the new birth.

The Jew also must believe, be born again and possess the Spirit of Christ. Therefore, Jew and Gentile come to God through the same Person.

We cannot have:

- One spiritual Israel made up only of natural Jews;
- Another spiritual body called the Church made up of Gentiles.

That would recreate the separation Jesus Christ removed. Paul has already said *"Ye are all one in Christ Jesus."* He has said Christ made *"of twain one new man."* He has said both were reconciled *"unto God in one body."*

The One Body Confirms This

Therefore, God's spiritual people are one. Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"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."*

Again, notice *"Whether we be Jews or Gentiles"* and *"one body."* The Spirit does not create one Jewish spiritual body and one Gentile spiritual body. He brings both into one body.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:18**:

> *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."*

The one body is *"the church."* Therefore, the Israel of God cannot be understood as a separate spiritual people standing alongside the Church.

The Scriptural pictures belong together:

- One new man;
- One body;
- One Church;
- The Israel of God.

The New Covenant is not the replacement of one natural nation with another natural nation. It is the movement from natural covenant identity to spiritual identity in Jesus Christ. The one new man contains both Jew and Gentile, and both are brought by one Spirit into one body. God's New Covenant people are therefore a spiritual people, not a new ethnic nation.

We can now bring together Paul's descriptions of God's one spiritual people in Jesus Christ:

- The inward Jew;
- The children of promise;
- The Israel of God;

- Abraham's seed;
- The one new man;
- The one body.

These are not separate spiritual peoples. They are different Scriptural descriptions of God's one people in Jesus Christ.

That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is spiritual Israel neither another natural nation replacing the Jews nor a separate saving people beside the Church?

Personal Reflection

How does one body containing Jew and Gentile challenge the way you think about spiritual standing and ethnicity? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

How could you speak about God's spiritual people while respecting natural Jewish identity and rejecting racial superiority? Name a real relationship in which this truth should change your attitude or conduct. What response will you make?

THE TRUE ISRAEL IS ONE SPIRITUAL BODY

BACK TO CONTENTS

We have now examined several Scriptures that describe God's people in the Gospel Day. Paul has spoken of:

- The Jew who is one inwardly;
- Circumcision of the heart;
- The children of promise;
- The Israel of God;
- Those who belong to Christ as Abraham's seed;
- Jew and Gentile becoming one new man;
- Both being brought by one Spirit into one body.

These teachings are not disconnected. Together they reveal one consistent New Covenant truth: God's spiritual people are one people in Jesus Christ.

Natural ancestry, physical circumcision, membership in an earthly nation and an outward ordinance do not create this spiritual people. God's people in the Gospel Day are those who have been born again, belong to Jesus Christ, possess His Spirit and have been brought into His one body.

The True Jew Is Inward

Paul wrote in **Romans 2:28-29**:

> *"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."*

Paul moves spiritual covenant identity from the outward to the inward. The true covenant work is within.

Paul wrote in **Romans 9:6-8**:

> *"Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed."*

Paul says *"They are not all Israel, which are of Israel."* Natural Israel exists according to natural descent, but natural descent alone does not establish spiritual sonship.

A person may belong naturally to Israel and still need to be born again. Therefore, natural Israel and God's spiritual people cannot be treated as identical.

The Israel of God Is Connected With New Creation

Paul wrote in **Galatians 6:15-16**:

> *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."*

The former outward mark no longer determines spiritual standing. Paul says *"But a new creature."* The Israel of God is therefore identified in the setting of new creation in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:28-29**:

> *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."*

The governing words are *"If ye be Christ's."* Belonging to Christ determines participation in the promise.

Jew and Gentile do not inherit two different spiritual promises. Those who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.

Romans 2 says *"He is a Jew, which is one inwardly."* Romans 9 says *"They are not all Israel, which are of Israel."*

Galatians 6 says *"Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."* Galatians 3 says *"Ye are all one in Christ Jesus"* and *"If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed."*

These statements all point in the same direction. God's spiritual people are identified through Jesus Christ and the inward work of God, not through the flesh.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"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."*

Notice the words *"Whether we be Jews or Gentiles"* and *"one body."* The Spirit does not bring Jewish believers into one spiritual body and Gentile believers into another. Both are brought by one Spirit into one body.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Paul's descriptions of the inward Jew, children of promise and new creation agree about God's people?

Personal Reflection

Which connection between these truths has clarified your understanding of spiritual identity? Explain. What difference should this make to your own response?

Action Step

What do you want to reconsider in your own beliefs about ancestry, faith and belonging to the one body? Consider someone whose background differs from yours. What change in your thinking or treatment of that person is needed?

The One Body Is the Church

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:18**:

> *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."*

The body is *"the church."* Therefore, God's spiritual people are not one body called the Church and another spiritual Israel existing beside it.

The Scriptural pictures belong together:

- One new man;
- One body;
- One Church;
- The Israel of God.

They describe God's one spiritual people in Jesus Christ. Spiritual Israel cannot be limited geographically to one natural nation. The Gospel went to all nations.

People from every natural background can be:

- Born again;
- Made new creatures;
- Indwelt by the Spirit of Christ;
- Brought into the one body;

- Made heirs according to the promise.

Natural nations continue naturally, but natural identity does not create different spiritual covenant standings before God. Both Jew and Gentile must come to Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"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."*

The decisive words are *"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."* The identifying reality is not natural descent, circumcision, nationality or an outward ceremony. It is the Spirit of Christ within.

The true Israel of God is one spiritual body in Jesus Christ. It is made up of those who have been born again, belong to Christ, possess His Spirit and have been brought by one Spirit into His one body, the Church. Natural ancestry, physical circumcision, earthly nationality and outward ordinances do not create this spiritual identity.

This now brings us to a practical question. If God's people are identified spiritually, what is the true mark by which we know whether a person belongs to Jesus Christ?

That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does identifying the one body as the Church connect it with the Israel of God?

Personal Reflection

What does the same Spirit bringing people from all nations into one body mean to your view of fellowship? Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

How could you receive another believer in recognition of belonging to the same spiritual body rather than the same nation? Explain one boundary you will stop using to judge spiritual belonging, and what you will do differently.

THE TRUE MARK OF BELONGING

BACK TO CONTENTS

The previous sections have established that God's New Covenant people are identified spiritually. Paul has spoken of:

- The Jew who is one inwardly;
- Circumcision of the heart;
- The children of promise;
- The Israel of God;
- Abraham's seed in Christ;
- One new man;
- One body;
- One Spirit.

These truths bring us to a practical question: What is the true mark that a person belongs to Jesus Christ and to His Church? The answer is not found in an outward ceremony. It is found in the indwelling Spirit of Christ.

The Spirit of Christ Identifies Those Who Belong

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"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."*

The decisive words are *"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."* Paul does not make water baptism, bread and a cup, feet washing or another outward ceremony the identifying test.

He identifies the Spirit of Christ. If the Spirit of Christ dwells within, the person belongs to Him. If the Spirit of Christ is absent, an outward act cannot create that belonging.

This agrees with everything Paul has already taught. The true Jew is inward. Circumcision is of the heart. The Israel of God is connected with new creation. Believers are brought by one Spirit into one body.

Therefore, the true mark of belonging must also be inward. The person belongs because Jesus Christ dwells within.

Notice Paul's language carefully. He first says *"The Spirit of God."* Then, in the same verse, *"The Spirit of Christ."*

Paul is not describing two different Spirits. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 3:17**:

> *"Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."*

The statement is direct: *"The Lord is that Spirit."* Therefore, when the Spirit of Christ dwells within the born-again believer, the believer possesses the Person.

Jesus said in **John 3:3**:

> *"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

The new birth comes from God. No outward ordinance can produce that birth.

Water can touch the body. Bread and a cup can be received physically. Feet can be washed. But none of those actions can cause a person to be born again.

Spiritual life must come first. Paul says believers are brought by one Spirit into one body, and the body is the Church. Therefore, the Church is not created by people performing the same outward ceremonies.

It is composed of those who possess the life of Christ. The spiritual life must be present.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is the Spirit of Christ the true identifying reality of belonging?

Personal Reflection

How does possessing the Person differ from performing a ceremony in your own understanding of spiritual life?

Action Step

What do you want to consider about your own relationship with Christ in the light of His words about the new birth? Identify any trust you have placed in outward water or a later experience. What will you rely on instead?

The Spirit Is God's Seal

Paul also speaks of the Spirit as God's seal upon the believer. Paul wrote in **Ephesians 1:13**:

> *"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,"*

The believer is *"sealed with that holy Spirit of promise."* The seal is spiritual.

God places His own Spirit within the believer. This is greater than an outward mark placed upon the body.

Under the former covenant, circumcision served as a visible covenant sign. But Paul has already said *"Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."*

The New Covenant therefore does not centre spiritual identity in another outward mark. Its identifying reality is inward. Its seal is spiritual.

Human beings can perform ceremonies. Only God can:

- Give spiritual life;
- Purify the heart;
- Give the Holy Ghost;
- Make a new creature;
- Place the Spirit of Christ within;
- Bring a believer into the one body.

Therefore, the true mark of belonging must be God's work, not human performance. A person may be water baptised, receive bread and a cup, participate in feet washing and remain active in a congregation, yet still not be born again.

The outward act can be present while the inward reality is absent. This was already true of circumcision. The outward sign may be present while the heart remains unchanged.

The Inward Reality Can Exist Before an Outward Act

The opposite is also true. A person can receive Jesus Christ, be born again and possess the Spirit of Christ before an outward ordinance is performed.

At that moment:

- The person belongs to Christ;
- The person possesses spiritual life;
- The person belongs to the one body.

Therefore, an outward act performed later cannot be credited with creating that belonging. If the Spirit of Christ dwells within the believer, that person is not partly Christ's. The believer is not almost in the Church and is not waiting for a ceremony to complete spiritual membership. The believer belongs to Christ.

The identifying reality is already present. We can therefore state the defining question plainly: Does the person belong to Jesus Christ? Scripture tells us how that belonging is identified: Does the Spirit of Christ dwell within? That is deeper than outward religious performance.

The true mark that a person belongs to Jesus Christ and His Church is the indwelling Spirit of Christ. The New Covenant identifies God's people inwardly through the new birth, new creation and the Spirit, not through outward ceremonies. Therefore, an outward ordinance must never become the test of salvation, Church membership or spiritual fellowship.

This brings us directly to the next major section. If the Spirit of Christ is the true identifying reality, then outward ordinances must never be permitted to become alternative New Covenant identity marks.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does God's seal through His Spirit differ from an outward mark performed by people?

Personal Reflection

What does belonging already being present before a later ceremony mean to your understanding of acceptance by God? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

How would you reconsider a belief that an outward act must make your relationship with Christ more complete? Name one inherited expectation you will reconsider and explain how Christ's fulfilment changes your response.

OUTWARD ORDINANCES CANNOT BECOME NEW COVENANT IDENTITY MARKS

BACK TO CONTENTS

We have now established that God's New Covenant people are identified spiritually. The true Jew is one inwardly. Circumcision is of the heart. The children of promise are distinguished from the children of the flesh.

The Israel of God is connected with new creation. Those who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed, and Jew and Gentile are brought by one Spirit into one body. Therefore, outward ordinances cannot be permitted to become the new defining marks of God's people. God did not fulfil the former covenant order and then replace it with another system in which outward ceremonies once again become the principal marks of belonging.

The New Covenant is greater. Its defining realities are:

- New birth;
- New creation;
- Circumcision of the heart;
- The Spirit of Christ;
- Belonging to Jesus Christ;
- Membership in His one body.

These realities are inward and spiritual. Therefore, we must not give an outward ordinance the place Scripture gives to the inward work of God.

Circumcision Gives Us an Important Warning

Paul wrote in **Galatians 6:15**:

> *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."*

Paul does not replace circumcision with another outward mark. He gives something greater: *"A new creature."*

The movement is not from one outward mark to another. It is from outward identity to spiritual transformation.

Water Baptism Cannot Simply Replace Circumcision

This principle is especially important with water baptism. If water baptism is treated as though it automatically became the new outward mark of covenant membership after circumcision ceased to determine spiritual standing, that claim must be proved from Scripture.

It cannot simply be assumed. Paul does not say that circumcision no longer identifies God's people and therefore water baptism now performs that function.

He says *"Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."* The New Covenant emphasis is upon new creation.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"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."*

The decisive words are *"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."* Therefore, if the Spirit of Christ dwells within a believer, the identifying reality of belonging is already present. Physical water cannot make that person more fully Christ's.

If a person has been born again, possesses the Spirit of Christ and has been brought into the one body by one Spirit, an outward ordinance cannot later be credited with creating that spiritual membership. The inward work has already been performed by God.

The same principle applies to communion and feet washing. Bread and a cup cannot create spiritual fellowship where Christ is absent. Feet washing cannot create humility, spiritual life or membership in the one body. The inward life must come first.

A person may:

- Be water baptised;
- Receive bread and a cup;
- Participate in feet washing;
- Attend religious meetings;
- Be recognised by a congregation;

and still not possess the Spirit of Christ. The outward action can be present while the inward reality is absent. This was already true of circumcision.

Paul distinguished between circumcision *"outward in the flesh"* and circumcision *"of the heart."* The same principle must govern our understanding of outward Christian ceremonies.

The opposite is also true. A person may be born again and possess the Spirit of Christ before a particular outward ceremony is performed.

At that moment the person already:

- Belongs to Jesus Christ;
- Possesses spiritual life;
- Is part of the one body.

Therefore, an outward act performed later cannot be credited with creating what already existed through the inward work of God. If Scripture identifies a person as belonging to Christ because the Spirit of Christ dwells within, we should not declare that person spiritually outside the Church because an outward ordinance has not been performed.

If God has accepted the believer, we must not create an additional human barrier. The Church must be defined by Christ.

If a person has not been made new in Christ, an outward ceremony cannot compensate for that absence. A person may be water baptised and remain spiritually unchanged. A person may receive communion and still not possess Christ. A person may wash feet and still lack the Spirit of Christ.

The outward act cannot produce *"a new creature."* Only God can do that.

The opposite is equally important. If a person has already been made a new creature in Christ, an outward ceremony cannot make that person more new.

It cannot improve the new birth, increase spiritual sonship or add another level of covenant identity. The believer is already complete in Jesus Christ.

The Person Is Greater Than the Sign

An outward act may point to something, represent something or belong to a particular historical setting. But the sign is not greater than the Person.

The born-again believer possesses more than an outward representation of Jesus Christ. The believer possesses Christ within.

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ, and the Lord is that Spirit. Therefore, New Covenant identity must remain centred in the Person.

Outward ordinances cannot become the defining marks of New Covenant identity. Water baptism cannot simply replace circumcision as the new boundary of covenant membership, communion cannot create spiritual fellowship, and feet washing cannot identify the true Church. God's people are identified by new birth, new creation, the indwelling Spirit of Christ and membership in the one spiritual body.

This brings us to the final major application of this Study Guide. If God's people are identified inwardly rather than ceremonially, what does that mean when we come to examine water baptism, communion and feet washing in detail?

That brings us to the next section:

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why cannot water baptism simply be assumed to replace circumcision as a New Covenant identity mark?

Personal Reflection

How does the difference between a sign and the Person help you assess religious boundaries? What difference should this make to your own response?

Action Step

Is there a ceremonial requirement you want to examine in relation to your own judgement of who belongs to Christ? Explain. What assumption will you examine, and how will your response change if it does not agree with the Bible?

WHY THIS MATTERS TO THE ORDINANCES

BACK TO CONTENTS

We have now established how Scripture identifies God's people in the Gospel Day. The true Jew is one inwardly. Circumcision is of the heart. Not all who are naturally of Israel are spiritual Israel. The children of promise are distinguished from the children of the flesh.

The Israel of God is identified in the setting of new creation. Those who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed, and Jew and Gentile are brought by one Spirit into one body. These truths bring us directly back to the subject of this module: water baptism, communion and feet washing. If God's New Covenant people are identified spiritually, then outward ordinances cannot become the defining marks of salvation, Church membership or spiritual fellowship.

The New Covenant Identity Is Inward

The direction of Scripture has been consistent:

- Outward to inward;
- Flesh to Spirit;
- Natural birth to new birth;
- Physical circumcision to circumcision of the heart;
- Natural ancestry to belonging to Christ;
- Outward covenant sign to new creation.

The New Covenant identifying reality is therefore spiritual. An outward ceremony must never be given a place greater than the inward work of God.

A person may ask whether someone has been water baptised. Another may ask whether that person receives communion. Another may ask whether a congregation practises feet washing. Those questions may tell us something about religious practice, but they do not answer the deeper New Covenant question: Does this person belong to Jesus Christ?

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"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."*

The decisive question is: Does the Spirit of Christ dwell within? Water baptism cannot create the new birth. Communion cannot create the new birth. Feet washing cannot create the new birth.

None of these outward actions can produce:

- The Spirit of Christ;
- Circumcision of the heart;
- New creation;
- Spiritual sonship;
- Membership in the one body.

Water Baptism Cannot Make Someone Belong to Christ

Those things are the work of God. If water baptism is made the determining mark of who belongs to Jesus Christ, that claim must be compared with Scripture. Paul does not say *"If any man have not water baptism, he is none of his."* He says *"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

That distinction is fundamental. If the Spirit of Christ dwells within the believer, that person belongs to Christ. Physical water cannot make that belonging more real.

Jesus said in **John 3:3**:

> *"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

The new birth comes from God. Water may touch the body, but physical water cannot produce spiritual birth. Therefore, water baptism cannot replace the inward work that makes a person spiritually alive. Under the former covenant, circumcision was an outward sign associated with covenant identity.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 6:15**:

> *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."*

Paul does not say that one outward membership mark has simply been replaced with another. He points instead to *"a new creature."*

Therefore, if water baptism is said to replace circumcision as the new identifying mark of covenant membership, that claim must be established clearly from Scripture. It cannot simply be assumed.

The same principle applies to communion. A person may receive bread and a cup without possessing Jesus Christ. Therefore, the outward act cannot prove spiritual fellowship.

True fellowship depends upon spiritual life. If Christ dwells within His people, fellowship already exists in Him. The ceremony cannot create the Person, and it cannot create the relationship.

Feet washing must also be tested by the same principle. The act may express humility or service, but it cannot produce humility in the heart.

It cannot create the servant life of Jesus Christ within a person. The inward life must come first.

A person may:

- Be water baptised;
- Receive bread and a cup;
- Wash another person's feet;
- Participate faithfully in religious meetings;

and still not possess the Spirit of Christ. Outward religious performance is not proof of inward spiritual life. The outward sign may be present while the inward reality is absent.

The opposite must also be recognised. A person may be born again, possess the Spirit of Christ and belong to the one body before an outward ceremony is performed.

At that moment, the person already belongs to Jesus Christ and already possesses spiritual life. Therefore, the later outward act cannot be credited with creating a relationship that already existed through the work of God. If a person possesses the Spirit of Christ, we must not declare that person spiritually incomplete because an outward ordinance has not been performed. If God has accepted the believer, we must not create an additional human barrier.

Paul says believers are brought by one Spirit into one body. Therefore, outward ordinances must not become walls within that body. If two people are born again, possess the same Spirit of Christ and belong to the same body, an outward ceremony must not be used to treat one as spiritually complete and the other as spiritually incomplete. That would divide what Jesus Christ has made one.

Complete in Christ Means Nothing Spiritual Is Missing

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:9-10**:

> *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"*

The believer is *"complete in him."* Therefore, if an ordinance is said to supply a missing spiritual element after the believer has already received Christ, we must ask: What spiritual deficiency remains in someone whom Scripture says is complete in Him? If nothing is missing, the outward act cannot be made necessary to complete salvation. We have deliberately

established this foundation before examining water baptism, communion and feet washing separately.

When we examine each ordinance, we must ask:

- Does this outward act create new birth;
- Does it give the Spirit of Christ;
- Does it make the believer a new creature;
- Does it place the believer into the one body;
- Does it make the person belong to Christ;
- Does it complete salvation;
- Or are these realities already accomplished by God before the outward act?

These questions keep Jesus Christ at the centre. God's New Covenant people are identified by the inward work of Jesus Christ, the new birth, new creation, the indwelling Spirit and membership in the one body. Therefore, water baptism, communion and feet washing cannot become the defining marks of salvation, Church membership or spiritual fellowship, nor can they complete what God has already completed in Christ. The question that has governed this Study Guide can now be answered simply: Who belongs to God's people in the Gospel Day?

Paul gives the answer in words that bring the whole Study Guide together: *"If ye be Christ's."* That brings us to the foundations that govern ordinances.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do new birth, new creation and completeness in Christ govern the meaning assigned to ordinances?

Personal Reflection

What difference does an inward reality already present make when you consider water baptism, communion or feet washing? Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

Which claim about an ordinance do you want to reconsider in relation to your own understanding of Christ's completed work? Examine where you have placed your confidence. What will you change to keep that confidence in Jesus Christ?

THE FOUNDATIONS THAT MUST GOVERN THE ORDINANCE STUDIES

BACK TO CONTENTS

Before we begin examining water baptism, communion and feet washing individually, it is important to bring together the principal truths that have been established throughout these Study Guides. These truths are not separate from the ordinance question. They are the foundation upon which every ordinance must be examined. If an interpretation of an outward ordinance contradicts one of these established Scriptural and New Covenant realities, then that interpretation must be reconsidered.

We Are Living in the Seventh Period of the Gospel Day

The first foundation concerns the period of the Gospel Day in which we understand ourselves to be living. Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 30:26**:

> *"Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound."*

As established in the module The Gospel Day, we understand the seventh period of the Gospel Day as a time when the light becomes *"sevenfold, as the light of seven days."* This does not mean that God gives another Gospel or another revelation outside His Word. It means that truths already contained in Scripture are brought together and understood more clearly in the light of Jesus Christ. The message of the seventh period is all Jesus.

Therefore:

- Every shadow must be understood through Him;
- Every type must find its fulfilment in Him;
- Every doctrine must preserve His sufficiency;
- Every ordinance must be examined according to what has already been accomplished in Him.

Greater light must never move us away from Jesus Christ. Greater light must reveal more clearly that Jesus Christ is the centre, fulfilment and reality of God's purpose. This is why the question of ordinances must be examined again in the full light of Scripture rather than simply accepted because previous generations practised them.

Jesus Christ Is the Fulness of God, and We Are Complete in Him

The second foundation concerns the Person of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:9-10**:

> *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"*

These two statements belong together. First, *"In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."* Then, *"Ye are complete in him."*

Nothing is lacking in Jesus Christ. Therefore, nothing spiritual needs to be added to Him in order to make Him sufficient. Because the born-again believer is in Christ, Scripture says that the believer is complete in Him. Jesus Christ is complete, and our completeness is found entirely in Him.

This also means that we do not believe in partial salvation. The born-again believer does not receive one portion of salvation from Jesus Christ and then wait for another necessary portion to be supplied through a later spiritual experience, an outward ordinance, another work of grace or a future physical coming of Jesus Christ.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 9:12**:

> *"Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."*

Notice the words *"having obtained eternal redemption for us."* Redemption has been obtained. It is not partly obtained.

It is not waiting for water baptism to finish it. It is not waiting for communion to complete fellowship with Christ. It is not waiting for feet washing to supply another spiritual reality. Neither is the born-again believer waiting for a future physical return of Jesus Christ before salvation can finally become complete.

Salvation in Jesus Christ is complete. An outward ordinance therefore cannot supply a missing portion of salvation, righteousness, spiritual life, fellowship or completeness because nothing necessary is missing from the Person in whom the believer is already complete. Complete means complete.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must greater light in the Bible preserve Christ's sufficiency rather than introduce another Gospel?

Personal Reflection

What does complete redemption in Christ mean to your understanding of a later experience or ceremony being needed to finish salvation? What does this reveal about an assumption you have held?

Action Step

What do you want to understand or respond to more clearly about Christ's sufficiency for your own life? Choose one present decision and explain how you will respond from Christ's life within, not independent effort.

Jesus Christ Came Again at Pentecost as Spirit

Jesus promised His disciples that He would not leave them comfortless. Jesus said in **John 14:16-18**:

> *"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."*

Jesus said that the Spirit of truth was *"with you"* but would be *"in you."* Then He declared *"I will come to you."* The Study Guides have established from **John 14:16-20, 2** Corinthians 3:17, **Romans 8:9**, **Hebrews 9:28** and **Acts 2:1-4** that this promised coming was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus Christ came again as Spirit to dwell within His people.

The Church is therefore not waiting for a future physical Second Coming before the New Covenant reality can finally arrive. The Person has come, and the reality has arrived.

This is essential to the ordinance question because a shadow points forward while the reality is still future. Once the reality has come, the shadow has reached the purpose for which it was given.

The Old Covenant Was Fulfilled and the New Covenant Established in Jesus Christ

The New Covenant did not wait until A.D. 70 to become effective. Jesus Christ fulfilled the former covenant and established the New Covenant before the Temple disappeared from sight.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 10:9**:

> *"Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."*

The first was taken away so that the second could be established. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70 did not establish the New Covenant. It brought the visible former system to its historical end after its covenant purpose had already been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the ordinances must be examined from the standpoint of a New Covenant already established in Jesus Christ.

The Former Outward Ordinances Were Shadows With an Appointed Purpose

The former covenant contained sacrifices, washings, holy days, priesthood, an earthly sanctuary and outward ordinances. These things were not wrong. They had genuinely been given by God.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:16-17**:

> *"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."*

Scripture describes these former outward things as shadows pointing towards something greater. Hebrews also describes the former order as containing *"carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation."* Therefore, outward forms could have a genuine God-given purpose without being intended to continue forever. A shadow is not the final reality.

Its purpose is fulfilled when the reality to which it points arrives. Therefore, the question concerning every outward ordinance must be: What did it represent, and has that spiritual reality now come in Jesus Christ?

Salvation Is Complete at the New Birth

The Christian life begins with the inward work of God. Jesus said in **John 3:3**:

> *"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

At the new birth, the believer receives spiritual life in Jesus Christ. The believer is not partly saved and then progressively completed through outward religious ceremonies. We do not believe in partial salvation.

Jesus Christ has obtained eternal redemption, and the born-again believer is complete in Him. Therefore:

- Water baptism cannot become a missing portion of salvation;
- Communion cannot become a missing portion of salvation;
- Feet washing cannot become a missing portion of salvation.

An outward ordinance cannot finish something Jesus Christ left incomplete because Jesus Christ did not leave salvation incomplete. Salvation is complete in Him.

The Holy Ghost Is Received at the New Birth

The born-again believer does not receive Christ first and then wait for another spiritual experience before receiving the Holy Ghost. Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"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."*

Anyone who does not possess the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. Therefore, the person who belongs to Jesus Christ possesses His Spirit. The Holy Ghost is received at the new birth.

There is no later necessary reception of another Spirit to complete salvation. This is especially important when considering baptism because the baptism that brings a believer into the body of Christ is the work of the Spirit.

Jesus Christ Personally Dwells Within the Born-Again Believer

The New Covenant gives the believer more than a symbol of Jesus Christ. It gives the believer the Person.

Jesus promised "I will come to you." Paul wrote in **Galatians 2:20**:

> *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*

Paul says *"Christ liveth in me."* The Lord is that Spirit, and the Spirit who dwells within is described as both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. Therefore, Jesus Christ Himself dwells within the born-again believer as Spirit.

This is one of the greatest distinctions between the shadow and the reality. The former order could represent Christ. The New Covenant gives us Christ within.

One Spirit Brings Every Believer Into One Body

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"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."*

Jew and Gentile are brought by one Spirit into one body. Paul identifies that body in **Colossians 1:18**:

> *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."*

The body is the Church. Therefore, entrance into the Church is fundamentally spiritual. It is not accomplished by natural birth, circumcision, Temple participation or an outward ceremony. The Spirit brings the born-again believer into the one body of Jesus Christ.

New Covenant Identity Is Inward Rather Than Outward

An outward ordinance cannot provide a second entrance into a body the Spirit has already brought the believer into. Paul wrote in **Romans 2:28-29**:

> *"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."*

The direction of New Covenant revelation is consistently:

- From outward to inward;
- From flesh to Spirit;
- From natural birth to new birth;
- From physical circumcision to circumcision of the heart;
- From natural ancestry to belonging to Christ;
- From outward covenant marks to new creation.

The New Covenant does not fulfil the former outward system in order to establish another outward system as the principal means of identifying God's people. New Covenant identity is spiritual. Therefore, an outward ordinance must not become a new circumcision by which we determine who belongs to God.

The Spirit of Christ Is the True Mark of Belonging

Paul gives a direct test in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"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."*

Belonging to Christ is determined by whether the Spirit of Christ dwells within. Scripture does not identify water baptism, communion or feet washing as the determining mark of whether a person belongs to Jesus Christ. The identifying reality is the Spirit of Christ.

Paul also wrote in **Ephesians 1:13**:

> *"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,"*

The believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. If the Spirit of Christ dwells within, the person belongs to Him. Therefore, an outward ordinance cannot make that person more fully Christ's.

The Spiritual Reality Is Greater Than the Outward Representation

An outward act may represent something spiritual. Water may represent cleansing; bread and a cup may represent fellowship and spiritual nourishment; feet washing may represent humility and service. But representation is not production.

The outward act cannot produce the inward spiritual reality. Water cannot create the new birth. Bread and a cup cannot place Christ within. Feet washing cannot create the servant life of Jesus Christ in the heart.

The Person is greater than the sign. If the believer already possesses Jesus Christ, the outward representation cannot supply something spiritually absent from Him.

Acts Records a Period of Transition

The book of Acts must be read within its historical and covenant setting. The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 8:13**:

> *"In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away."*

The first covenant had already been made old, while the outward system was still historically visible and ready to vanish away. Jewish believers were therefore living through a period in which they were moving from an Old Covenant world of Temple worship, circumcision, ceremonial distinctions and outward forms into the completed New Covenant reality found in Jesus Christ.

Their understanding did not change immediately. Therefore, Acts records genuine believers who were still learning, being corrected and bringing their conduct into agreement with what Jesus Christ had already fulfilled. The fact that an apostle or believer performed an outward action during the transition does not, by itself, establish that action as permanent New Covenant practice.

Christ's completed work must interpret transitional conduct. Transitional conduct must never redefine Christ's completed work.

God Has One New Covenant People: The Israel of God

The New Covenant does not preserve natural Israel and the Church as two separate covenant peoples with two different saving programmes. Natural Jewish people can and must come to Jesus Christ in exactly the same way as everyone else.

They must be born again. They must possess the Spirit of Christ. They must be brought by one Spirit into the one body.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 6:15-16**:

> *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."*

Paul connects “the Israel of God” with “a new creature.” Paul also wrote in **Galatians 3:28-29**:

> *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."*

Those who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. Scripture does not establish a future second covenant opportunity in which natural Israel again becomes God's spiritual people apart from Jesus Christ and His Church. Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:14-16**:

> *"For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:"*

God's purpose is *“of twain one new man.”* Therefore, God's New Covenant people are not another natural nation replacing natural Israel. They are one spiritual people in Jesus Christ.

Jew and Gentile who are born again are brought together into one body, the Church, the spiritual Israel of God. There is not one future way of salvation for natural Israel and another present way for the Church. There is one Saviour, one Gospel, one Spirit, one body and one New Covenant people in Jesus Christ.

THESE FOUNDATIONS MUST GOVERN EVERY ORDINANCE

These fourteen truths now provide the doctrinal framework within which water baptism, communion and feet washing must be examined. They do not stand independently of one another.

They are line upon line and precept upon precept, with each truth strengthening and harmonising with the others. Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 28:10**:

> *"For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:"*

This becomes especially important when we consider the promise of the light being *“sevenfold, as the light of seven days.”* Greater light does not contradict previously established Scriptural truth. Greater light brings the truths of Scripture together so that we see more clearly how completely they centre in Jesus Christ.

We must therefore not begin with the ceremony and then attempt to determine what spiritual importance should be given to it. We must begin with what God has already accomplished in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as we examine each ordinance individually, we must ask:

- What did the outward action represent?
- What spiritual reality did it point towards?
- Has that reality already come in Jesus Christ?

- Does the born-again believer already possess that reality?
- Does the action create the new birth?
- Does it give the Spirit of Christ?
- Does it bring the believer into the one body?
- Does it establish belonging to Jesus Christ?
- Does it complete salvation?
- Or has God already accomplished these things through Jesus Christ?

These questions must determine how each ordinance is understood. They keep Jesus Christ and the inward work of God as the controlling standard.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Christ's coming as Spirit, the new birth and entrance into one body keep the Person greater than an outward representation?

Personal Reflection

How does bringing these truths together change your understanding of what an ordinance can spiritually supply? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

As you consider an ordinance for yourself, how will you test its claimed purpose against what God has already accomplished in Christ? Name one inherited expectation you will reconsider and explain how Christ's fulfilment changes your response.

CONCLUSION: IF YE BE CHRIST'S

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We began this Study Guide with an important question: Who are God's people in the Gospel Day, and what identifies them? The answer is now clear. God's New Covenant people are not identified by natural ancestry, physical circumcision, membership in an earthly nation or an outward ordinance. They are identified spiritually through Jesus Christ.

Throughout this Study Guide, Scripture has consistently moved us:

- From outward to inward;
- From flesh to Spirit;
- From natural birth to new birth;
- From physical circumcision to circumcision of the heart;
- From children of the flesh to children of promise;
- From natural ancestry to belonging to Christ;
- From outward covenant signs to new creation.

The defining question is therefore not *"What is your natural ancestry?"* Nor is it *"What outward ceremony have you performed?"* The defining question is: Do you belong to Jesus Christ?

The True Jew Is Inward

Paul wrote in **Romans 2:28-29**:

> *"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."*

The true covenant work is not something visible in the flesh. It is *"of the heart, in the spirit."*

This does not deny natural Jewish identity. It establishes that natural identity alone cannot produce spiritual covenant standing. Every person needs the inward work of God.

Paul wrote in **Romans 9:6-8**:

> *"Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed."*

Natural ancestry and spiritual identity cannot be treated as identical. Natural Israel remains a real natural people.

But Paul says *"They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God."* Natural birth cannot produce spiritual sonship.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:16**:

> *"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."*

The promised Seed is *"Christ."* The promise does not end in natural ancestry. It reaches its fulfilment in the Person. Therefore, spiritual inheritance must be understood through Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 6:15-16**:

> *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."*

The former outward mark no longer determines spiritual standing. What matters is *"a new creature."*

The New Covenant does not replace one physical covenant mark with another. It brings new creation.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the inward Jew, children of promise and new creation explain spiritual identity without erasing natural ancestry?

Personal Reflection

Which part of the movement from outward signs to inward life has most challenged or clarified your understanding? What difference should this make to your own response?

Action Step

What do you want to consider about your own beliefs concerning natural heritage and the inward work of God? Consider someone whose background differs from yours. What change in your thinking or treatment of that person is needed?

"If Ye Be Christ's"

Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:28-29**:

> *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."*

The determining relationship is *"If ye be Christ's."* Not natural ancestry. Not physical circumcision. Not an outward covenant mark. Not ceremonial completion.

Belonging to Jesus Christ is the determining New Covenant relationship. Paul says *"Ye are all one in Christ Jesus."* This agrees with everything established in the previous Study Guide.

Jesus Christ made *"of twain one new man."* He reconciled both Jew and Gentile *"unto God in one body."*

Therefore, God's spiritual people cannot be divided into separate covenant peoples according to natural descent. They are one in Christ.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"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."*

The decisive words are *"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."* The true mark of belonging is not outward. It is the indwelling Spirit of Christ. The believer possesses more than a symbol of Jesus Christ.

The believer possesses the Person. The Scriptures we have examined all return us to the same Person. The inward Jew is identified by the inward work of God. The children of promise are connected with Christ. The Israel of God is identified through new creation in Christ.

Abraham's seed is identified by the words *"If ye be Christ's."* The one body belongs to Christ, and the Spirit who identifies the believer is the Spirit of Christ. Therefore, Jesus Christ must remain the centre of covenant identity.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:9-10**:

> *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"*

All the fulness is in Jesus Christ. The believer is *"complete in him."* There is therefore no missing spiritual portion that an outward ordinance must supply. Complete means complete.

This gives us a simple principle that must govern the ordinance studies that follow: The Person is greater than the sign. The sign may point, the ceremony may represent and the outward action may illustrate. But the born-again believer possesses Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the outward action cannot be given a place greater than the Person it represents. We can now answer the central question of this Study Guide. Who belongs to God's people in the Gospel Day? Paul says *"If ye be Christ's."*

How is that belonging identified? Paul says *"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."* Therefore, the defining question is: Do you belong to Jesus Christ?

If the Spirit of Christ dwells within, the person belongs to Him. If the person belongs to Christ, that person belongs to the one body, the one new man and the spiritual Israel of God.

The Central Truth

God's New Covenant people are not identified by natural ancestry, physical circumcision or outward ordinances. They are identified spiritually through the new birth, new creation, the indwelling Spirit of Christ and belonging to Jesus Christ. The true Israel of God is one spiritual people in Christ, and those who are Christ's are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. This foundation now prepares us to examine water baptism, communion and feet washing with one truth unchanged: *"If ye be Christ's."*

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do belonging to Christ, inheriting the promise and completeness in Him bring together the identity of God's people?

Personal Reflection

What does the Person being greater than the sign mean to you as you consider your own relationship with Christ?

Action Step

What honest response do you want to make to the truth that belonging to Christ identifies His one spiritual people? Identify one personal response you will make, trusting in Jesus Christ rather than your own religious effort.

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

How do the inward Jew in Romans 2 and the new creature in Galatians 6 explain the Israel of God? Use verses to show why spiritual covenant identity cannot be determined by natural ancestry or outward circumcision.

2. Understanding

How do Paul's distinction between children of the flesh and children of promise and his identification of Christ as the promised Seed belong together? Explain why those who are Christ's are Abraham's seed without concluding that God's promise failed.

3. Personal Reflection

Nicodemus had natural Jewish identity and religious knowledge, yet Jesus told him he must be born again. What does his need lead you to consider about your own background and spiritual life? Explain the difference between inherited identity and birth of God.

4. Response to Truth

The Israel of God is one spiritual people containing Jew and Gentile, rather than one natural nation replacing another. What does accepting that truth ask of your own attitudes towards ancestry and spiritual standing? Explain your personal response.

5. Action Step

Consider what you rely on when thinking about your own relationship with God. How does the Spirit of Christ as the true mark of belonging lead you to reconsider trust in ancestry or an outward ceremony? Explain a personal response you want to make or are still considering.

6. Early Response

Have you already considered what you rely on in your own relationship with God, in the light of the Spirit of Christ as the true mark of belonging rather than ancestry or an outward ceremony? If yes, explain what became clearer or how you responded. If not, explain what you are still considering or what has made it difficult to begin.

7. Ongoing Practice

How can the truths of one new man, one spiritual body and one Church guide your continuing understanding of the Israel of God? Explain what will help you avoid returning to separate spiritual standings for Jew and Gentile.

8. Doctrinal Clarity

How does Jesus' promised coming as Spirit at Pentecost relate to receiving His Spirit at the new birth? Use verses to explain why complete salvation in Christ does not await a later necessary spiritual experience, ceremony or future physical coming.

9. Living the Truth

Someone says water baptism has simply replaced circumcision as the outward mark deciding who belongs to God's people. How would you examine that claim alongside new creation and God's seal through His Spirit? Explain how you would respond to someone being excluded on that basis.

10. Final Response

The teaching about the seventh period of the Gospel Day calls for truths already in the Bible to be understood together in Christ. How do the promise, His completed work and inward spiritual identity govern the examination of water baptism, communion and feet washing? Explain what has become clear to you and what you still need to consider.