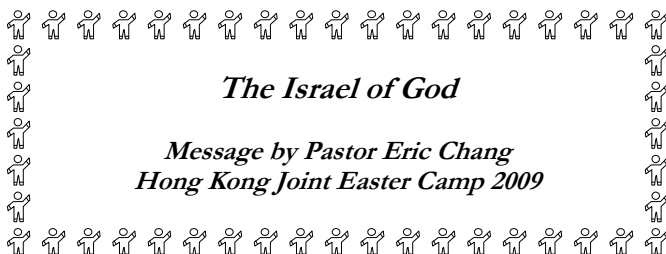




CHRISTIAN GOSPEL DISCIPLES CHURCHES OUTREACH PUBLICATION  
VOL. 36 NO.1 MARCH 2016  
Website – [www.christiandiscipleschurch.org](http://www.christiandiscipleschurch.org)



## *The Israel of God*

*Message by Pastor Eric Chang  
Hong Kong Joint Easter Camp 2009*

### **Paul's Very Unusual Greeting**

I would like to begin with a special greeting to all of you here: Peace and mercy be upon all of you who are the Israel of God. The term that I used—"Israel of God"—may sound unusual and foreign to you, but it actually comes from Paul's greetings to the Galatians: "And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16, ESV).

Do you find my greeting unusual? You may be asking yourself, "Why is he calling us the Israel of God? Is he joking or is he out of his mind? We are Chinese people, so how can we be Israel?" Well, I am not joking and I am not out of my mind. In fact many of you here—maybe most of you here—are the Israel of God! What is the meaning of this remarkable phrase "Israel of God"? This is what I intend to expound to you today. Its extreme importance lies in its in-

separable connection to the New Testament message of salvation, yet it is a vital truth that has been lost from the church today.

When I finished writing the book on Biblical monotheism (The Only True God — A Study of Biblical Monotheism) about ten months ago, I thought my work had finished and now I can retire and happily disappear. So when we came back to Asia a few months ago, I was very eager to hand over all my responsibilities and retire!

We were supposed to leave Hong Kong and return to Canada before the Easter camp. The return date was hard to change because we were using frequent-flyer award tickets. Though we were supposed to return to Canada last month, the regional overseers said to me, “Could you please consider staying in Hong Kong for the Easter camp?” I thought to myself, “I am retired, so you don’t need me anymore. I can go home now.” But as I waited before the Lord, the Lord changed the whole thing, and so here we are at this Easter camp. He showed me that my work isn’t over yet, for there are yet more truths to be expounded.

It was only in the past two or three weeks that the Lord showed me the seriousness of the whole doctrinal matter. And this is what I hope, by the grace of God, to expound to you today.

### **A Recent Experience of the Lord**

But before I get to that, I would like to testify about the living God. I have been serving the Lord all my Christian life. The reason I am in this work is that the living God has revealed Himself to me, otherwise I would not have been in this work.

I usually share only about my recent experiences since I don’t need to go back years and years. I would like to share with you a recent experience.

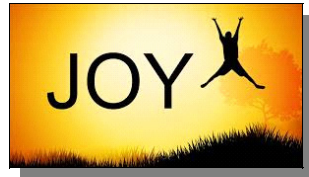
Two months ago, on Valentine’s day, I woke up, and the word of the Lord—in a verse of Scripture—came to me. I hadn’t thought about this verse for a very long time. The last part of the verse stood out, and it referred to Yahweh our Father: “He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.”

Yahweh shouting for joy? When was the last time you shouted for joy? Most people in their lifetimes never shout for joy unless they are watching a football match and somebody scores. When in church do you hear people shout for joy? I mean the church is not the place for loud shouting, right?

But this verse says Yahweh “will rejoice over you—Israel, His chosen people—with shouts of joy.” It comes from a little known book in the Old Testament called Zephaniah. The last part of this verse, Zephaniah 3:17, is rendered differently in various translations. The NASB has, “He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.” What a wonderful verse! God has so much joy over us—His people—that He shouts for joy. This is an amazing picture of God.

Valentine’s day just happens to be my wife Helen’s birthday. That’s a problem because nobody can forget her birthday! Sometimes a husband may forget his wife’s birthday, but it’s very hard for me to forget Helen’s birthday! And it was on Valentine’s day, just a few hours after the Lord had given me this verse, that we received an e-card. Interestingly, some people still send me Valentine cards, I suppose to express their love in the Lord.

Before the e-card came in, I had already said to Helen soon after I got up, “Here is a verse the Lord gave me. I think it’s for you.” Then the e-card arrived a few hours later. And do you know what was on the e-card? You could have guessed it. Yes, Zephaniah 3:17! I received two or three cards that day, but the one that stood out was the one with this verse. I thought to myself, I don’t recall having ever received a card with Zephaniah 3:17 on it. Was it pure coincidence that I got this verse from the Lord in the morning and then from an e-card a few hours later?



A few days after this, I had a meeting with the regional overseers, and I shared this experience with them. We had a long meeting that evening because there are always so many things to discuss about the Lord’s work.

When I got home, I rested in a reclining chair. Then I decided to stand up. But as soon as I got up, I felt something like a knife stabbing right into my lower back. Wow, what horrific pain! It went straight into my spine, and I collapsed back into the chair. A few minutes later, I tried to get up again, but the pain just got worse. After falling back again, I tried to straighten out the chair’s back. I was wondering if I could even move. I tried to turn to the right, but the stabbing pain overwhelmed me. I tried turning to the left but could not. I lay there wondering what was happening.

My wife Helen was watching this whole thing in great distress. I saw her concern and anxiety because this wasn’t the first time that this kind of thing hap-

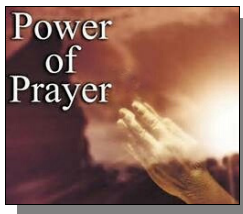
pened. It happened once before during the Fifth Full-Time Training, nineteen years ago. Those from the Fifth Full-Time Training would remember that I could not move about for two or three months, and the training was suspended during that time. So I lay there wondering, “Is this going to be another couple of months?”

It went on for almost an hour, and then I said to Helen, “Why don’t you pray about this and commit the matter to the Lord?” She tried to pray but after a few sentences she broke down completely and could not carry on. As I was lying there, I said, “Lord, look at Helen’s condition. She’s in complete distress.”

Actually I was very peaceful myself. All my life I have always considered myself to be a soldier of Christ. As a soldier, you expect to be injured in battle. We are fighting strong enemies. As the apostle Paul says in Ephesians 6, we are not fighting against flesh and blood but against principalities and spiritual powers in very high places. Our enemies have powerful weapons. It looks like I took a good shot, a real bullet, in my back, but I accept the reality that in battle you either get killed or get seriously wounded, that’s normal in military life.

Helen was in terrible distress and confusion, and she said so in her prayer. But hadn’t the Lord given me Zephaniah 3:17? “He loves you and He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy!” Yet I was lying on my back, unable to move. What’s with this “loving you with shouts of joy”? I was thinking, “If this is love, maybe You can spare me the love. I can manage without it.”

When Helen could not continue any longer, I called on the Lord our God, Yahweh: “Lord, what is this all about?” And the Spirit of Yahweh moved in me with power, and I could feel the power within. In the New Testament, the Spirit of Yahweh is often called the Holy Spirit. There was this powerful movement, and the Lord said to me, “Ask for healing and I will give it to you.” He had to say this for a specific reason because I do not, as a rule, use God’s power for my own benefit. For other people, yes, for myself, no. We don’t want to benefit ourselves by using God’s power entrusted to us. So the Lord had to issue the specific instruction, “Ask for healing and I will give it to you.”



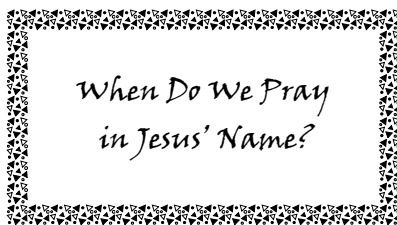
When Helen could not continue any longer, I quietly said, “Lord, Father Yahweh, grant me the healing according to Your good pleasure.” It was just a short prayer. Then I stood up. Helen looked at me in astonishment: “Okay, can you

walk?” Then she watched me walk around the room with no pain at all. The stabbing pain had vanished completely. It was the early morning of February 20th, almost two months ago, and the pain has never come back.

### **When Do We Pray in Jesus’ Name? The Vertical Aspect**

I would like to draw a lesson from this experience for your benefit. First, you would notice that when I talked to Yahweh, I did not pray in Jesus’ name. Why was that? Is it wrong to use “In Jesus’ name”? No, but you must know when to use it and when not to use it, or else you will end up misusing it. So when do you use Jesus’ name? Every Christian in every church prays in Jesus’ name, but usually without knowing what it means. Recently I asked a co-worker what it means, and he couldn’t tell me.

In this particular case, why was I able to talk to Yahweh directly? Because He is my Father! When it comes to my earthly father, I don’t have to say to him, “I am coming in older brother’s name in order to see you”. I mean, is your father your father, or is he not? In my case, it also happens I am an only child, so I can’t even say, “Father I come to you in older brother’s name”. I don’t even have a sister, so neither can I say “in my sister’s name”.



So when is it appropriate to use “In Jesus’ name”? In our vertical relationship with God, there are two situations in which we can use “in the name of Jesus”. The first is when you do not know God yet. Without a relationship with God, you obviously cannot come to God and say “Father”. He is not your Father because you have no relationship with Him. But Yahweh has made it possible for us to come to Him and become His children. The section from 2 Cor 5:19 onwards says that God—Yahweh—was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Yahweh saves you through Christ. His saving process is not just about forgiving you your sins—that is just the first step—but also about making you into His son or daughter.

When you come to God for the first time, what happens is that you repent of your sins and claim the blood of Jesus for forgiveness. And in Jesus’ name, you come to God. Then God forgives you because in Christ He reconciles you to Himself. When you are praying your prayer of repentance and offering yourself to Yahweh, that is when you say to God, “I come to You in Jesus’ name. I have been a sinner all my life, so I have no right to come into Your presence. But

You have provided Your Lamb—the Lamb of God—who is Jesus. He is the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world, and now I come to You in his name.”

I hope you understand this. God accepts you through Jesus’ name. As a result, you are in Christ and become united with Christ. I have expounded all this in my book “Becoming a New Person”. All this teaching is absolutely valid, yet there is something else that is very important, as I will explain in a moment.

There is a second situation in our vertical relationship with God in which we use “in the name of Jesus”. After we become children of God, do we still need Jesus? Of course we do. As believers we often fail, don’t we? 1 Jn 1:8 says, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.” Verse 10 adds, “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us” (NASB).

We sin more often than we care to think about. But when we are convicted of sin, what do we do? Verse 9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Why? Because we have an “Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous”. After you sin, you realize that it is hard to get back into the presence of God, but there is a way—in fact the only way—to get back to the Father. It is through Jesus Christ that you come back to the Father, saying, “I repent of my sins, and come back to you in the name of Jesus.”

You must understand what you mean when you say, “In the name of Jesus.” If you keep on saying, “In the name of Jesus” and “In the name of Jesus”, it becomes meaningless. Recently in Malaysia, I asked someone to pray, and as usual he concluded the prayer in the name of Jesus. I asked the co-worker, “Please tell me, why did you conclude the prayer in Jesus’ name?” And you know what? He couldn’t give me an answer even though he was a church leader. He sat there in total silence. Would that be true of you too? If someone, even an unbeliever, asks you why you pray in Jesus’ name, can you give him an answer? Visit any church in the whole Christian world, and you will see that everyone, no matter if he is good or bad, finishes his prayer in Jesus’ name. It degrades the whole phrase into a meaningless ritual.

In our vertical relationship with Yahweh, I have mentioned two main situations in which you can—and should—use the name of Jesus. But at other times, when you are walking with God, you don’t need to keep saying in Jesus’ name. It is pointless to do that when you are already a beloved child of God, over

whom Yahweh God your Father rejoices. You don't keep on saying, "I am coming to You in somebody else's name." In what is called the Lord's prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray, "Our Father in heaven". Jesus wants you to talk with your Father directly, and he doesn't bother to tell us to close the prayer in Jesus' name.

### **When Do We Pray in Jesus' Name? The Horizontal Aspect**

But on the horizontal level of human relationships—and this may be new to most of you—we always function in Jesus' name. That is because Jesus is the head of the church and the king of Israel. Everyone in the church—the body of Christ—and in the kingdom functions in Jesus' power. That is because all power was given to Jesus by Yahweh God to fulfill the purpose of salvation and of preaching the gospel. Therefore if we are to function in Yahweh's power on the horizontal level, we must always go through Jesus.

This is not a matter of theory but of practice. You may or may not use Jesus' name, depending on who you are. You may use Jesus' name only if your whole life is lived in Jesus' name. "In Jesus' name" is not a phrase that we throw around, but is basically a lifestyle. I live my life in Jesus' name every day; it means that I live under Yahweh, and immediately under Yahweh is Jesus. As Paul says in 1 Cor 11:3, the head of the wife is the husband, the head of the husband is Christ, and the head of Christ is Yahweh God. Here you see the order.

Because the horizontal level governs human relationships and the affairs of the world, Yahweh's power comes to me through Jesus. I need to live my life in Jesus' name, that is, under Yahweh's authority as it is given to me through Christ. It must come to me through Christ, or else I may be under the wrong authority. Because I live in the name of Jesus, I have the right to say "in Jesus' name" whenever the situation calls for it. "In Jesus' name" is a lifestyle that is lived under God's authority. Most people don't even understand that basic definition.

As Acts 19 tells us, the people of Ephesus witnessed great powers of miracle among Paul and the other apostles who were casting out demons left and right in Jesus' name. Some of the people, notably the seven sons of Sceva, tried to duplicate the casting out of demons by invoking the name of Jesus. But one day a demon said to them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" Then the demon jumped on them and gave them a horrific beating. They were not living in Jesus' name, so they had no authority to use that name.

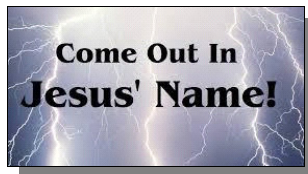
When you pray in Jesus' name, do you have the right to use that name? Are you living in Jesus' name? I hope you are not spending all your life repenting of sin. I assure you that God does not approve of Christians who live in constant defeat. He has already provided a means of living victoriously, so even though we may fail occasionally, we have no excuse for constant failure.

### **Casting out a Demon in Jesus' Name: A Real-life Case**

Let me give you a real-life example of how I used "in Jesus' name" on the horizontal level. Demon possession is not a common state of affairs today, but a few years ago in Canada, I got a phone call from someone from another church: "We have a demon possessed woman, and no one, not even the church staff, can cast out this demon. Can you please help?" I said, "All right, please take her to a certain household and I will meet you there."

I mentioned that household to them because it was closer to the city of Montreal, and they wouldn't have to travel so far. I went there together with Helen, and there I saw this woman inside the house. Her husband was sitting on the sofa beside her, and their teenage daughter was sitting on the other side of her.

The first thing I did was to try to understand what kind of demon was possessing her. Then a long battle ensued. To cut the story short, the battle went on for probably over an hour or something like that. Then I began to realize that the demon who was possessing her was a high ranking demon. Most of you may not be familiar with the spiritual world, but there are many ranks of demons. As I said, we are fighting evil powers in high places (Ephesians 6).



After a fairly long battle, the demon eventually realized that the fight was going to be futile, and that he was going to lose. At that point, the woman stood up, fell at my feet, and tried to embrace my feet as I was sitting there. I said to her, "Please get up and return to your seat."

We battled for a while longer. Then in the name of Jesus I commanded the demon to leave her.

The demon then made a reply that sounded odd to all of us: "I would like to make one request." So I said, "Speak." The demon said, "I request permission to leave through the front door." I stopped for a moment to think about this remarkable request. What does it mean? Then I realized that this was a high rank-

ing demon, and it was requesting a little bit of respect. The demon was probably thinking, “If you are going to throw me out, please don’t throw me out through the window. At least allow me to walk through the front door.” It is almost amusing, isn’t it? In a military defeat, the enemy commander surrenders and hands his sword or pistol over to you, yet he still requests a little bit of respect. He salutes you and you salute him, yet you are mortal enemies fighting to the death. Very interesting.

I said to the owner of the house, “Please open the front door.” When he opened the door, the demon left and suddenly the possessed woman became completely normal. You have to be there to see the wonder of this thing.

I cast out a demon—how?—in Jesus’ name. On this horizontal level—on this battlefield—Jesus is the commander and we function under his authority. This was what the Roman centurion understood (Matthew 8 and Luke 7). He understood the principle in this way: “When I give orders to my men, they obey me. In the spiritual world, when you give a command, it is carried out immediately.” So he asked Jesus to have mercy on his servant. Jesus spoke a word of command, and the servant was healed.

Those of us who follow Jesus function in his name because we live in his name. It does not matter how high a demon’s rank may be, we still cast it out in Jesus’ name. The church workers could not cast out the demon, so they had to send the woman to me. I don’t want to be critical and it’s not up to me to say, but clearly if they could cast out the demon, they wouldn’t have to send her to me. In fact I had never seen this woman or her husband or her daughter before. I didn’t know them at all. And not long afterwards, this woman requested baptism, as did her husband and daughter. The whole family was baptized, and Helen and I were present at the baptism.

### **Paul’s Greetings to the “Israel of God”**

Before we continue, I would like to say this: Don’t accept any teaching that I, Eric Chang, give you just because I have said it is true. When Paul and Silas preached to the Jews in the synagogue of Berea, a city in northeastern Greece, they examined the Scriptures daily, to see if what Paul was teaching was in line with the word of God (Acts 17:10-11). In the New Testament, the term “the Scriptures” refers to the Old Testament as it is called today. And I hope that you will follow the noble example of the Bereans because only if you search the Scriptures will you have the confidence to know that what I am teaching you is the truth. Don’t believe something just because I say so, just as the Jews of Berea didn’t believe something just because the apostle Paul said so. Having

said this, let me come to my main point.

Earlier on, I greeted you with Paul's greeting in Galatians 6.16 to the "Israel of God"—神的以色列民. (The Chinese Union Bible adds the word "people (民)" but it is not in the original text.) The phrase "Israel of God" is unique to this verse because here is the only place in the whole Bible where the phrase occurs.

First we notice that this is a farewell greeting to the Galatians. Paul is saying goodbye as he ends his letter to the Galatians. Even today, Jews greet each other with "shalom" (peace). They do this when they first see each other, and when they say goodbye. They don't say "goodbye" as such, they simply say "shalom" (peace).

Paul does the same. At the start of his letter in Galatians 1:3, he greets them "shalom" in "Grace and peace be to you". At the end of his letter, he says "shalom" when he conveys peace and mercy to the Israel of God.

Do you even know that you are Israel? Probably not. But at least you know this much, that anyone who belongs to Israel is an Israelite. An Israelite is also called a Jew. In modern English, and in fact already in the New Testament, the people of Israel are called Jews. But you may ask, "Are you telling me that I am a Jew? I thought I was Chinese. How did I become a Jew or an Israelite all of a sudden?"

This is an important truth that is practically unknown to the church. There is a lot in this truth, but I cannot cover all the ground today in one message; it will have to be expounded more fully on another occasion.

### **Justification by Faith**

There is something you need to know for the sake of your salvation and for the sake of preaching the gospel to others. When you ask people to believe in Jesus, what do you say to them? Well, exactly that. "Believe in Jesus and you will be saved." For how else do you preach the gospel? But there is a problem here. Do you tell people, "Believe that Jesus died and rose again for you at Easter time"? Do you really think that a person is saved simply by believing the fact that Jesus died and rose again? Even if he believes that Jesus died for him particularly and personally, is that enough to be saved? But that is the standard teaching of the church today, isn't it?

Brothers and sisters, it isn't as simple as that. In the Reformation, Martin Luther brought notice to the words "justification by faith". What does this phrase mean? The problem is that most people don't really know what it means, so in the end, every preacher is preaching his own thing. In fact scholars have been studying the question of justification for a long time.

The fundamental question about justification is its very definition. There are two important possible meanings. One is to make righteous, the other is to declare righteous. There is a world of difference between the two. If you are made righteous, you really become righteous. You have become a changed person and a new person. You were unrighteous, but now you are made righteous because the Spirit of God has come into your life and changed you.

But that is not the standard teaching today, as you can even see from the Chinese translation. Out of the two possible meanings of "justification", the Chinese Bible chose "declared righteous (称义)" rather than "become righteous (成义)". The Chinese Bible has thereby interpreted the word "justification". This is a very serious translation issue. It is interpretation, not translation. I hope that the translator will accept responsibility for what he has done in Chinese. At least the English rendering ("justification") does not make this kind of implication either way.

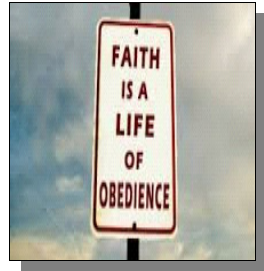
You can be declared righteous when in fact you are not righteous. It is like a murderer who is acquitted in a court of law because not enough evidence was produced to establish his guilt. So he is declared free of guilt even though he had committed the crime. But this kind of thing will not happen before God because He knows all your guilt. To declare a person justified when he is still living in sin, what kind of salvation is this? Did Jesus die so that you are declared not guilty even as you continue to live in sin? But that is the standard teaching today, and that is why the church today is weak, powerless, and unable to cast out demons. Sorry if that sounds as a criticism, but we know that these are the facts. Sometimes we need to speak the truth even if it doesn't sound nice or polite.

In the end, "justification by faith" is not very enlightening, and is in fact confusing, unless you define the terms.

And if justification is a problem, so is faith. What exactly is faith? To some people, faith means, "I believe in my head that there is a God, and that there is a person in history called Jesus Christ. I believe that Jesus died and rose again.

I believe further that he died for the sins of the whole world, which includes me. That is faith! I truly believe! And according to what you just told me, I am now justified and saved.” Well, if you are going to fill a church with people with this kind of faith, the church will go nowhere. It will be a dead church. Is that what you preach to people? That you are saved simply by believing in facts? Do you know that this is not the definition of faith in the Bible?

In the Bible, the essence of faith is obedience. Paul talks about the “obedience of faith” in the opening chapter of Romans and in the closing chapter (Romans 1:5 and 16:26). If you truly believe, you will obey. Obedience comes from the heart and involves action. Faith is not something that you talk out of your head. You can believe something in your head and never do anything about it. But to obey means you stand up and carry out the commands, and live in Jesus’ name. As I said, living in Jesus’ name is living under his authority and obeying him. If you don’t live under his name, you are not obeying him, and you should not use “in Jesus’ name”.



### **Circumcision of the Heart**

What has gone wrong with the teaching of salvation? In this connection, I have to mention something that is unpleasant to talk about, but it is a historical fact that is not open to debate.

Why is the western Christian church unwilling to talk about the believer as an Israelite or as the Israel of God? When I say that you are the “Israel of God”, does it sound strange and foreign to you? Yet in Paul’s teaching, and indeed in the whole New Testament teaching, if you are a true believer, you are a true Israelite. The God of Israel is your God precisely because you are an Israelite. Spiritually you are a Jew. I stress the word “spiritually”. Spiritually, not externally, you and I are Israelites.

Brothers and sisters, this is a teaching of the greatest importance. Because God is the “God of Israel”, He is your God if you are an Israelite. The term “God of Israel” occurs over 200 times in the Bible. The whole Bible talks about Israel. Open your Bible and you will find Israel all over the place. The name “Israel” occurs some 2,500 times in the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible. Do you see how important it is?

What has all this to do with our salvation? This constant talk about being saved

by believing in Jesus and the like, has no foundation in the Bible, my brothers and sisters. Having spent my life studying the Bible and preaching the gospel, it was a shock for me to realize that we have not been expounding the whole teaching of the truth of salvation. For all the entire effort put into the 600 page book “Becoming a New Person”, I missed some important things. Even though the book is thoroughly rooted in Scripture, it lacked the basic foundation. I missed the foundation because in all my Biblical and theological training, I had never been taught that it is essential for us to become spiritually—as opposed to physically—an Israelite.

In his first meeting with Nathanael, Jesus made an interesting comment: “Here is a true Israelite in whom there is no deceit” (John 1:47). That comment was a bit strange coming from Jesus because Nathanael was already an Israelite, a Jew. You see, Jesus was already teaching the important truth that there is a true Israelite as opposed to an Israelite who is not true. That is what Paul expounds in Romans 2:28-29:

No one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. [ESV]

Here is something that if you fail to understand, you may miss salvation all together. If you are not circumcised in heart, you are not saved. A central truth of salvation expounded in many places in the Bible is that you must be circumcised in heart in order to be saved. This is expounded both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, for example, Deuteronomy 30:6, where it says that Yahweh will circumcise your heart and those of your children. For what purpose? “So that you will love the LORD [Yahweh] your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live”—that is, that you may be saved. If you are not circumcised in heart, you cannot possibly love Yahweh your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength.

I hope you see the immense importance of this truth. The prophet Jeremiah proclaimed God’s punishment on “all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh ... for all these nations are uncircumcised, and the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart” (Jer 9:25-26, ESV). Israel, like the rest of the world, was uncircumcised of heart. Paul says in Romans 9.6 that not everyone descended from Israel belongs to Israel, and that it is not the physical children of Israel who are the children of Israel (verse 8). In other words, the physical Jews are

not necessarily the children of Israel. We who by the Spirit have received circumcision of heart, are the true Israel of God. We who are circumcised in heart are the true spiritual descendents of Abraham (Rom 4:11-12).

Paul's statement in Colossians 2:11—"you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands"—is remarkable because he was speaking to the Colossian church which was made up of a few Jews but mostly Gentiles. Yet he said to them, "you were circumcised". The circumcision that they received was not physical circumcision but circumcision of the heart. Paul says to the Philippians, "We are the circumcision" (Phil 3:3). The term "the circumcision" simply means the Jews. Paul is saying that we who have circumcision of heart are the real Jews.

Now do you see why Paul greets the Galatians as the "Israel of God"? When you re-read the Bible and re-read the letter to the Romans, maybe now you will read them with new eyes, because you now realize that you are the real Jews, the true Israel, just like Nathanael who was a true Israelite. Nathanael had received circumcision of the heart and not only of the body, which is why he is a true Israelite.

### **Long History of Anti-Semitism in the Western Church**

I now go into something that is unpleasant to talk about, but which I cannot avoid. Why has the western Christian church suppressed the teaching about Christians being the spiritual Jews? Let me tell you why. It is because the western church—meaning primarily the church in Europe, which has the longest history of Christianity—has a strong anti-Jewish mentality.

We in Asia have not really had anti-Jewish feelings. Maybe it is because there are not many Jews in this part of the world. When the Jews fled persecution in the West hundreds of years ago, many of them came to China. As is well known, many of them settled in the area of Kaifeng (開封) in the province of Henan (河南省). Today you can read books about the Jews of Kaifeng. Over the centuries, they adopted Chinese clothing and spoke Chinese fluently. There is no conflict between the Chinese and the Jews.

But the history of the Jews in the West was very different. I shuddered when I recently read again—this time more thoroughly—the history of the Jews in relation to the church in Europe. They were constantly persecuted.

It is true that most Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah, resulting in the hostility

between the church (the Christians) and the synagogue (the Jews). We know from the book of Acts that Paul was persecuted quite badly by the Jews. It was because he would go to their synagogues and preach the gospel to them. He was rejected and beaten many times, which was the standard punishment in the synagogues for those who were considered heretical. It was a measure taken by the synagogues to protect their own religion. The standard punishment was forty lashes minus one lash for the sake of mercy. Five times Paul received the forty lashes minus one, and three times he was beaten with rods (2 Cor 11:24-25)—these rods (hard sticks) were actually more painful. Paul took a lot of beatings not only from Jews but also from Gentiles. That had left a lot of marks and bruises on his body, as he says, “I bear the marks of Jesus on my body” (Gal 6:17).

But there a vital difference between Paul’s attitude towards the Jews and the attitude of the Gentile church. Paul loved the Jews and would always preach to them first before he preached to others. And why was Paul beaten so many times? Because he kept going back to them, that’s why! If you don’t go back, you won’t get beaten! He so badly wanted to preach the gospel to them that they could beat him for all they liked, and he would still go back. Paul followed the teaching of Jesus: Blessed are you when you are persecuted for the sake of Jesus (Mt 5:10-12).

But the Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians had a very different attitude towards the Jews, and they were extremely hostile to them. This time around, it was not they who were beaten by the Jews, but they who beat the Jews. Actually it was a lot worse than that.

By the fourth century, the lot of the Jews got worse when emperor Constantine made the church the state religion in a certain qualified sense, in giving the Christian religion a greater status than the other religions. He did this for political and not religious reasons. Then the Council of Nicaea of 325 declared Jesus to be God, as you can read in various books. And the consequences of this for the Jews were terrible. Not only were they accused of rejecting and crucifying Christ, they were declared to be God killers. English has even coined a word for that: “deicide”. This word comes from Latin “dei” (God) and “cida” (from “caedere”, to cut down or kill). The act of killing God is called “deicide”, just as murdering a man is called “homicide”.

May God help the Jews, for now they are called the murderers of God. It was bad enough before the fourth century, but after the fourth century, the persecution often went far beyond beatings. Now the Jews were being killed and ac-

cused of everything imaginable. After you have been accused of killing God, what other crimes are you not guilty of ? (To be fair, some church leaders did try to restrain the attacks on the Jews.) If you research the literature, you can read extensively about the long history of the church's oppression of the Jews. Declared righteous? Made righteous? What are we talking about? This is righteousness?

By the time we come to the Crusades in the 11th century, in one place alone, the Christians killed 10,000 Jews. The Crusaders had crosses on their chests, crosses on their shoulders, crosses everywhere. They killed the Jews because these so-called God killers simply had to be killed. So the Crusaders did not just kill Muslims, they also killed Jews. When the Christians



recaptured Jerusalem from the Muslims in the First Crusade, they burned down the synagogues with the Jews inside! We Christians don't want to hear about such things because we refuse to believe that Christians can do this kind of thing. Well, Christians do exactly this very thing. I say this with a heavy heart, with feelings of shame for what we Christians have done.

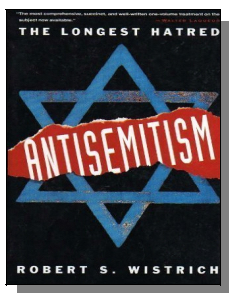
But we in Asia have no quarrel with the Jews. It doesn't mean that I support everything the Jews do in the Middle East today. I don't. I have great sympathy for the Palestinians. The Palestinians are Arabs, and the Arabs are descended from Abraham. The Arabs, like the Jews, are sons of Abraham. They are brothers, yet look at the things they do to each other.

But before we get self-righteous, look at the atrocities committed by Christians. You may think that these were committed by average Christians out of ignorance, but in fact these atrocities were often encouraged by church leaders—yes, even Martin Luther, the one who talked about justification by faith. I was greatly shocked when I read his commentary on Romans. I got a shock just from his introduction to Romans. Luther's anti-Jewish sentiment is all over his introduction to Romans, so much so that by the time I finished reading the introduction, I didn't want to read his commentary anymore.

When we visited Germany about ten years ago, I made a point of visiting the church where Luther nailed his theses to the church door. As I looked around inside the church, I saw an apology that was apparently put up there by the religious council in Germany. It was an apology for Luther's anti-Jewish attitude.

There was a statement saying that the apology is also on display outside the church. I went outside to take a look, and just outside the entrance was a figure of a pig, for Luther had compared the Jew—the filthy God killer—to a pig.

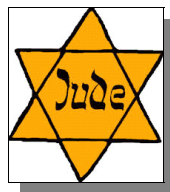
I have a book here called “Anti-Semitism” with the subtitle “The Longest Hatred”—think of that, the longest hatred—written by Robert S. Wistrich. The inside of the front cover says that Wistrich was educated at Cambridge and London, and is now a professor at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. This book was written in conjunction with a series of BBC documentaries on anti-Semitism.



This book has a long quotation of Luther in which he rails against the Jews, but I won't quote it in full because it is too tasteless to quote. It comes from Luther's booklet titled, “Concerning the Jews and Their Lies,” published in 1543. The first paragraph of the quotation begins, “First their synagogues or churches should be set on fire, and whatever does not burn up should be covered or spread all over with dirt, so that no one may ever be able to see a cinder or a stone of it. And this ought to be done for the honor of God and of Christianity, in order that God may see that we are Christians.”

I don't wish to continue reading this. Luther says somewhere else that the homes of Jews should be destroyed, and that the Jews should be driven out of the country.

Earlier on in Germany, in the Middle Ages (Luther belonged to the late Middle Ages), the Christians required Jews to put a yellow badge on their clothes. This was so that Christians could identify the Jews and avoid them—or if necessary beat them or even kill them. This yellow cloth reminds us of something in Nazi Germany, doesn't it? As is well known, the Nazis required all Jews to put on yellow badges with the Star of David on it. You know the rest of the story, and how six million Jews were killed in gas chambers and burned to ashes.



But this was simply the climax of a long history of hatred against the Jews. The Nazis did not do this out of nowhere; it was simply the logical conclusion of a deep hatred of the Jews that went on for nearly two thousand years.

Now you can see why the western Christian church doesn't want to say that we are spiritual Jews or Israelites. They don't want to hear about it, though they may be vaguely aware that the Bible says something to that effect.

Brothers and sisters, it's a sad day. We have already suffered far too much from the errors of the western Christian church. We have already suffered from the longstanding error of Christian polytheism masquerading as monotheism, in which God is declared to be a substance and not a person. In any language, a substance means a thing. In chemistry, a substance is a thing. How then can we apply this word to God? Yet Trinitarian Christians have no reservations about saying that God is three persons sharing the same substance or thing. I wonder if this may amount to blasphemy.

I hope that from this background information you may see why I greeted you as the Israel of God, even though this phrase may sound strange to you. But that is so only because of the other error we have inherited from the western Christian church, namely, the anti-Jewish sentiment that keeps boiling up and up. After the Second World War, this has been suppressed, and now they don't dare express this kind of sentiment openly. Yet it is still there, as this author documents in his scholarly work. In the United States, some white supremacy groups use the Nazi swastika as its own symbol. In Germany there are still attacks on synagogues. All these things come about because the church was unable or unwilling to see the Scriptural teaching about salvation.

### **Citizenship in Israel, Covenant with God**

In closing let us look at Ephesians 2:12: "Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world." (NIV)

The Ephesian church was not primarily a Jewish church, though it had some Jews there. Paul is telling the Ephesians that they were once separated from Christ and excluded from citizenship in Israel, being foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God (Yahweh) in the world. But when you are united with Christ, the situation is reversed, and all these spiritual blessings that you did not have, you now have.

As I said, those of the Israel of God are circumcised in heart. Paul explains what circumcision of the heart means just two verses before his statement about the Israel of God: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal 6:14, NIV). If you have been circumcised in heart, you have also

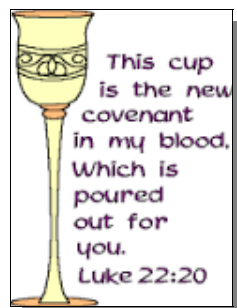
been crucified to the world, and the world to you.

Paul goes on to talk about circumcision in the next verse: “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation” (v.15). In verse 16, he says, “Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.” Paul is not speaking of two separate groups of people—those who abide by the rule versus those who belong to the Israel of God—they are one and the same group. Those who live by this rule are the Israel of God.

In the foregoing are two things which are intimately associated with the Jews: circumcision and covenant. We have already talked about circumcision, so now we say a few things about the important concept of covenant.

As we saw in Eph 2:12, we were foreigners to the covenant of promise, but now we are in the covenant. What is this covenant? The new covenant.

When you partake of the communion, do you understand what Jesus teaches about the covenant? Probably not, because you probably don’t know that you need to be a Jew and be circumcised of heart to be in the covenant. And how many communion services have you attended? You have probably heard Jesus’ words in Luke 22:20 many times: “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (repeated in Matthew and Mark; see also 1 Cor 11:25.) Have you ever established a covenant with Yahweh God? If not, what exactly does the communion mean to you? The blood of Jesus was shed so that you and I can be part of God’s covenant with His people, the Israel of God. If you are not part of the covenant, what are you doing at the communion?



Through most of my Christian life, I understood nothing about covenant. That was because the western Christian church doesn’t want to talk about Jewish things such as covenant. Ironically enough, “Old Testament” and “New Testament” are supposed to mean “Old Covenant” and “New Covenant”. The English word “testament” is a bit vague, but is supposed to mean “covenant”. The concept of “covenant” comes out more clearly in the Chinese.

Brothers and sisters, now you can see how much we have lost. We are talking about matters of salvation. If you are not in the covenant, you are not saved and you have not inherited the promise of life that Paul talks about in 2 Timothy

1:1.

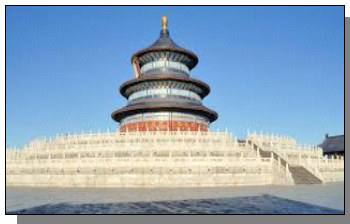
I hope you understand the New Testament teaching about covenant because it is not a matter of opinion or doctrine, but a matter of life and death. This burns in my heart. As you can see, I am already losing my voice. But I am willing to lose my voice completely, or even to lose my life, for the sake of your salvation.

In the New Testament, salvation has to do with our being the true Israel, our being circumcised in heart by the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit), and our inclusion in the new covenant established by the blood of Jesus, Yahweh's Lamb. Brothers and sisters, this was what Jesus died for. This was why he lifted up the cup of the new covenant. You are not in the New Testament if you haven't established a covenant with God. May the Lord have mercy on His people.

### **A Truly Asian Church**

It is important to search the Scriptures, for in it we find the truth. We must break free from the notions that the western Christians have, with their deep-rooted polytheistic background from which they have never completely freed themselves, as well as their anti-Jewish sentiments from which they also have never completely freed themselves.

More and more I see the need to establish a truly Asian church, a church with its roots in Asia. That may be one reason why the Lord enabled me to see these truths. Even though I was educated in the West, I am perhaps Chinese deep down in my consciousness. I recall that in ancient Chinese culture, we talked about God (“上帝” and



“天神” two terms for “God” in Chinese). In Beijing we have the Temple of Heaven (天坛) in which there is no statue or image but only words about God (上帝). In China there is a long tradition of respect for the emperor in heaven and for the emperor on earth who gives offerings to the emperor above. I observed this early on in my Chinese education.

As I said, we in China have no hostility towards the Jews. They have never been a problem to us. I share frankly that this doesn't mean that I particularly like the Jewish people, the physical Jews. That was because in my home town,

Shanghai, I had a couple of unpleasant experiences with the Jews. But I won't allow that to override my thinking.

Right from the start, I was somewhat free from these western concepts. As a church we must preserve our Chinese qualities. China speaks of socialism with Chinese characteristics (中国特色社会主义). Maybe what we need is a church with Chinese characteristics (中国特色). Why should we throw away what is good in our culture? I don't mean to be nationalistic at all, but there are indeed some good things in our culture that we must treasure. I am grateful for my Chinese background and education, for they have finally helped me, after a long struggle, to see the errors in the western church.

I am glad to say that our church, Disciples Church, has never been controlled by a western Christian organization. We have never relied on any western organization for money. Whether in finances or in leadership or in the preaching of the gospel, our church has always been multi-racial, having people from various places such as China, Canada, India, Australia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and so on, and has never been under the control of any western church or organization. We have no hostility towards the western church. There are good people in the western church, and they, like I was, have been led in the wrong direction for who knows how many generations. Many good people have come to China to serve as missionaries, and some have sacrificed their lives. (Unfortunately some of them were not good, as we know.)

We still maintain a friendship with everyone who tries to pursue the truth. But our church here in Hong Kong and in China must remain a truly Chinese church. I hope that every Chinese person, whether in Hong Kong or in China, gives thanks for being Chinese. To a large degree, I think I came to see the error of the western teaching on trinitarianism and salvation because of my Chinese background. I give thanks to God that He was able to make something good out of that.

Let us learn to love China the way Paul loved the Jews, his own nation, and bring people into relationship with the one true God, so that they may have life. I think China will progress wonderfully because of its monotheistic background. I am aware, of course, of the many gods and ghosts and the like in China, but I am talking about the mainline tradition.

I would like to close with one verse in the Bible, the word of God: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God,

that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet 2:9, NIV).

Here Peter says that we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God Yahweh’s own possession. He is quoting from Exodus 19:5-6 which applied to the Jews, but which he now applies specifically to the Gentiles who have been circumcised in heart. And now they too are included in the wonderful new covenant with Yahweh.

I don’t know when I will get a chance to talk with you again. Maybe not too far down the road, or maybe never, we don’t know. Like the apostle Paul, I can only say that I have fought the good fight and finished the race, the end of which is the crown of righteousness. But our future is in the Lord’s hands. Shortly before finishing the book on Biblical monotheism, I stood up one day and discovered that I almost could not stand because my hip had been badly affected by the long hours of sitting at the computer. You can see that I have difficulty walking. But I thank God for the privilege for serving Him in this way. And this may even indicate that my race is over. After all, it is a bit hard to run when you’ve got hip problems! Anyway, I pray God’s blessing on each one of you.



*End of message*

*This is an edited transcription of the message.*

*The editors accept full responsibility for arrangement and addition of Bible references.*

### **EXPLANATION OF COVER**

*“... And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.. ”*

*Galatians 6:16 NASV*

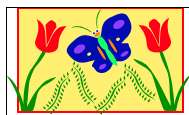
## *From the Editor's Desk*

To our dear readers:

*May you carry the spirit of the Resurrection always in your heart & forever rejoice in God's great love for us in Christ Jesus.*

*Wishing you all the blessings this Easter!*

From the Oasis Team



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