
THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Origins, Separation, and Identity



A SYSTEMATIC STUDY THROUGH THE WHOLE BIBLE

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Introduction

This study traces the question "who are God's people?" in chronological order from Genesis to Revelation, checking the ESV against the Hebrew and Greek text, the Septuagint, and the Dead Sea Scrolls where relevant, in order to test a working hypothesis against the whole canon rather than a handful of proof texts. It asks three questions throughout: what distinguished God's people from the rest of the world, how God separated them and called them to a unique way of life, and what that looks like today.

Part One: Starting Point

A. Original Hypothesis

Before the study began, the working hypothesis was this: lineage in Scripture is the vehicle for a relationship God re-establishes generation after generation, not the substance of it. God calls people into relationship starting with Adam and commissions them to "be fruitful and multiply," physically and, more fundamentally, spiritually. Every generation includes some who stay faithful and many who do not, so God repeatedly re-anchors the relationship through a covenant with a particular line, showing what family membership looks like, but that membership was never automatic by birth. The true lineage is the relationship itself; physical descent is the picture, not the substance. This was a hypothesis to test against the text, not a conclusion to defend.

B. Common Doctrinal and Denominational Views Today

Survey against the study's findings, not a ranking of traditions.

The central fault line: Israel and the church - one people or two

Dispensationalism (Darby, Scofield; classic form: Chafer) holds Israel and the church as two distinct peoples with two distinct plans - the church as a "parenthesis" while God's national program for Israel is paused, to be resumed at a future, more literal fulfillment. Progressive dispensationalism softens this to one people with two distinct identities and roles, still affirming a future national restoration. [Overview](#); [Christ Over All on progressive vs. classic](#).

Covenant theology holds one unified people of God across both testaments; the church is the flowering/rightful recipient of Israel's promises, not a separate entity. [Comparison chart discussion](#); [Ligonier](#).

Progressive covenantalism / New Covenant theology (Gentry, Wellum) mediates: one new covenant community, more discontinuity with Israel's national structures than covenant theology allows, without dispensationalism's two-peoples framework.

Bearing on this study: all three read Rom 11's olive tree as central, and all affirm salvation is by faith in Christ alone for Jew and Gentile alike (the point of full agreement, per the dispensationalism summary). What they dispute is exactly our Section 13 open question - whether ethnic Israel retains a distinct future corporate role. This study's evidence (Rom 11's three live readings, Heb 8's unresolved addressee question, the Eph 2/Rom 11 metaphor tension) does not resolve this dispute; it explains why the dispute exists in the text itself.

Catholic doctrine

Since Vatican II (*Nostra Aetate*, 1965; *Lumen Gentium* §16), reaffirmed by John Paul II ("never revoked," Mainz 1980) and the 2015 document "The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable": the covenant with the Jewish people is affirmed as valid and irrevocable (citing Rom 11:29), while the Church is called "the new People of God" - explicitly **not** meaning Israel has ceased to exist. [Vatican document Q&A](#); [survey of the teaching's development](#). Scholars note real tension Catholic doctrine itself must hold: the Church's mission is stated as universal (all people, by faith and baptism) while Israel's covenant is affirmed as ongoing and not contingent on that same faith and baptism - a tension acknowledged, not resolved, in the sources themselves ([Marshall, review essay](#)). This is the *ecclesial* register of the same live question dispensationalism and covenant theology dispute doctrinally.

Mainline Protestant (PCUSA, ELCA, Anglican Communion)

PCUSA formally rejected supersessionism in 1987, affirming both church and Jewish people as elected for witness to the world and the land promise's continuity. [PCUSA statement](#). The 1988 Lambeth Conference (Anglican Communion) made a similar affirmation of God's irrevocable call. [Overview](#). Note: application to modern Israel/Zionism specifically remains internally contested within these same bodies (e.g., PCUSA's own later disputes over BDS), a political question distinct from the covenant-theology question this study addresses.

Southern Baptist / Baptist and non-denominational evangelical practice

Less focused on the Israel question institutionally; centers instead on **regenerate church membership** - membership defined by a credible profession of faith plus believer's baptism by immersion, not birth or family status. [Baptist Faith and Message summary](#); ["an irreducible minimum of Baptist identity"](#). This is the closest living institutional echo of this study's own core finding: membership demonstrated over time, marked by a sign (baptism) that follows rather than produces the reality. Live internal debate exists over how strictly to enforce this ("closed" vs. more open membership, per Bobby Jamieson vs. John Piper) - [Baptist News](#) - itself a real-world instance of the sign/substance tension tracked since Jer 9:25-26.

Net assessment for the study

Every tradition surveyed affirms, in its own vocabulary, this study's core finding: membership is not secured by ethnic descent alone (universal across all four). Where they genuinely and substantively differ is the one question this study has also left open every time it surfaced - whether ethnic Israel retains a distinct corporate future (Rom 11:26; Heb 8's addressees). This is not a case of "the world's categories" corrupting the text; the traditions are arguing about a real, textually-grounded ambiguity this study has independently rediscovered at every point it appeared (Section 13, Section 15, Section 20).

A Note on Distinction Within Unity

Core claim: Scripture's picture is unified worship across preserved distinction ("all nations, all tribes and tongues"), not one new ethnicity, culture, or language. The right question is not "which race or nation is God's people" but what Scripture's own categories are (spiritual birth, faith, covenant relationship) - asking in racial or national terms is a category error, not merely a wrong answer. Directly supported by: Rev 21:3's *laoi* variant (peoples, plural, preserved) and Rev 21:24 and 22:2 (nations still named in the new creation) - Section 20; Eph 2:15's "two into one new man" as union without erasure of origin - Section 14; Rev 7:9 and 5:9-10, distinction ("every tribe... tongue") kept visible inside the unified worship scene - Section 20; 1 John 5:1, true birth redefined spiritually - Section 19.

"Unity without erasure of nations" (Rev 5:9, 7:9, 21:3, 21:24, 22:2) is one question. "Does ethnic Israel retain a distinct future corporate role" (Rom 11:26, Heb 8, the Eph 2 versus Rom 11 metaphor tension) is a separate one. The first is settled and convergent in this study: nations persist as distinct peoples, not dissolved into sameness, and no serious

dispute was found anywhere in the study or the doctrinal survey above. The second is the actually unresolved question, and it is narrower: Eph 2:14-16's "the two" and Rom 11's olive tree both concern specifically Jew and Gentile covenant status, not ethnic or national diversity in general. Both texts answer that narrow question two different ways, fusion into a third thing versus grafting into an existing root, and that tension belongs to the second question alone. The first question is treated as settled in this study; the second remains open, tied to Rom 11:26's three views and Hebrews 8's addressees.

Part Two: The Study

Section 1 - Primeval History (Genesis 1-11)

Before Abraham, distinction among humanity is moral and religious, never ethnic - there is no "people" yet to be ethnically bounded. This section supports the universal-scope half of the hypothesis cleanly; the bloodline-purity question hasn't become live yet (that is Section 8, Ezra).

Key terms

Hebrew term	Reference	LXX / textual note	What it marks
<i>tselem elohim</i> (image of God)	Gen 1:26-27	LXX: <i>eikona theou</i>	Given to all humanity at creation - the baseline is universal, not a subset
<i>zera</i> (seed/offspring)	Gen 3:15	LXX: <i>sperma</i>	First division of humanity: two competing lines (woman's seed vs. serpent's seed) - a moral-spiritual split, not a racial one
"call upon the name of the LORD"	Gen 4:26	LXX renders it as Enosh hoping to call on the Lord's name, a notably different nuance from the MT's flat "began to call"	The first marker that distinguishes worshippers of YHWH from the rest of Adam's line - behavioral, not genealogical

Hebrew term	Reference	LXX / textual note	What it marks
<i>bene elohim</i> ("sons of God")	Gen 6:1-4	MT: <i>bene ha'elohim</i> . Textually contested: most LXX witnesses read <i>huiou tou theou</i> ("sons of God"), but Codex Alexandrinus reads <i>angeloi theou</i> ("angels of God")	Interpretation splits three ways: angelic beings, Sethite line intermarrying with Cain's line, or human rulers
<i>berit</i> (covenant)	Gen 9:9-17	LXX: <i>diatheke</i>	God's first covenant is with Noah, "every living creature," and "all flesh" - explicitly universal, not with one family line
<i>goyim</i> (nations)	Genesis 10	LXX: <i>ethne</i>	The Table of Nations traces every nation back to one common ancestor - genealogy organizes the whole world, not yet a boundary marker

The Genesis 6 crisis and why it matters for this study

Whoever the "sons of God" are, the text presents their union with "the daughters of man" as a transgression of a boundary God set, immediately followed by judgment. If the Sethite reading is correct, held historically by Augustine, Jerome, and Calvin, then the very first boundary violation in Scripture is the godly line intermarrying with the line that does not call on the LORD, collapsing a religious distinction, not an ethnic one. If the angelic reading is correct, the majority view among the earliest Jewish interpreters (Enochic literature, the Dead Sea Scrolls' Genesis Apocryphon, Jubilees, Josephus, and arguably Jude 6), the transgression is a category boundary between heavenly and earthly beings, which says nothing about human ethnicity either way. Either reading undercuts a racial reading of separateness this early in the text.

Later NT reception (2 Pet 2:4-5; Jude 6-7, drawing on 1 Enoch) leans angelic, placing the angels' sin immediately before Noah's flood. If that reading holds, Genesis 6 is not, after all, a data point about human ethnic mixing.

The pivot: universal covenant, then universal scattering

The first covenant (Gen 9) is universal. Before there is an Israel, a Levite, or a law code, God's covenant partner is "all flesh that is on the earth" (9:17). Election of a particular family does not appear until Genesis 12, three chapters later. The narrative order argues that particularity is introduced in service of a prior universal commitment, not as a replacement for it.

National plurality itself originates in judgment, not design. Babel scatters a unified humanity into many nations and tongues as a response to rebellion. Genesis 10 and 11 sit right before Genesis 12:3, where God tells Abram that "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed," the same phrase family used for the nations just scattered. Abraham's call is aimed at reversing Babel's fragmentation, not creating one more fragment.

Where this leaves the hypothesis after Section 1

Supports: the pre-Abrahamic material gives no basis for racial election. The only distinctions drawn are moral and devotional, and the first covenant is deliberately universal.

Complicates: genealogy itself is already doing heavy narrative work (Genesis 5, 10, and 11 are literally genealogies). Descent is not treated as unimportant in this material, just not yet used as an exclusionary boundary. That distinction, lineage as structure versus lineage as gatekeeping, is worth watching closely once we reach Abraham, and especially Ezra.

Motif to track: "be fruitful and multiply"

The creation mandate (Gen 1:28) recurs almost verbatim at every covenant renewal: Noah (9:1, 7), Abraham (17:2, 6, 20), Jacob (28:3; 35:11), suggesting each covenant reissues the same original commission rather than replacing it. Worth testing against the Great Commission ("make disciples of all nations," Matt 28:19) as a possible spiritual counterpart to the same formula.

Data point: Cain (Gen 4)

The biological son of two people in direct relationship with God, personally addressed by God, still turns away by choice. Relationship does not transmit by birth even one generation in, an early, concrete case for lineage as vehicle rather than substance.

Section 2 - Patriarchal Narratives (Genesis 12-50)

The call's stated aim (Gen 12:1-3)

Abram's election is explicitly for the nations, not in place of them: "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed," the same "families of the earth" language from the Table of Nations and Babel. Election is framed as instrumental to a universal end from its very first sentence.

Righteousness precedes the sign (Gen 15:6 vs. Gen 17)

"He believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness" (15:6) happens over a decade before circumcision is instituted (17:1, 24). The reality, credited righteousness by faith, precedes its physical sign by years, not the reverse. The sequence itself is the basis of Paul's argument in Romans 4:9-12 that Abraham is father of uncircumcised and circumcised believers alike.

Narrowing on non-meritocratic grounds, then broadening again

Ishmael is blessed and becomes "a great nation" (17:20), but the covenant line runs specifically through Isaac (17:19-21; 21:12, quoted in Rom 9:7). Jacob is chosen over Esau before either is born or has done anything (25:19-34; cf. Mal 1:2-3; Rom 9:10-13), the sharper case, since both are equally Isaac's sons by the same mother. The narrowing then stops: all twelve sons of Jacob, by four different mothers, with sharply different records, become the twelve tribes without further exclusion, exactly at the point Jacob is renamed Israel. Election narrows to a point, then expands into a nation.

The bloodline is already mixed inside the chosen line itself

Ishmael's mother Hagar is Egyptian; even the non-covenant branch is already half-Egyptian. Judah's wife Bathshua is explicitly Canaanite; Tamar's own ethnicity is not stated in the text, though the "plain implication" is Canaanite (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks), and later rabbinic tradition claims she descended from Shem specifically to keep a Canaanite out of the messianic line, itself evidence later interpreters felt this needed explaining away. Either way, Perez, ancestor of Boaz, David, and Jesus, is born from this union, and Matthew's genealogy keeps Tamar's name. Joseph marries Asenath, an Egyptian; their sons Ephraim and Manasseh become two full tribes of Israel. This is stated plainly in the text, not inferred, the single most concrete data point for a mixed bloodline at Israel's own origin.

Where this leaves the hypothesis after Section 2

Supports: explicit textual cases of non-Hebrew mothers producing recognized tribal lines, centuries before any law existed to regulate intermarriage.

Complicates, more precisely than before: the text keeps narrowing one specific physical line generation after generation even while doing so on non-meritocratic grounds.

Election operates through physical descent as its medium, even where ethnic purity is clearly not its basis.

Running Trackers (used throughout Sections 2-20)

Tracking: sequence of faith and inclusion for outsiders grafted into the line

For every outsider brought into the covenant line, this study logged whether professed faith preceded inclusion, followed it, or the text was simply silent.

Person/Group	Reference	Entry point	Faith stated before entry?	Sequence
Hagar	Gen 16	Servant/concubine to Abram	No, but has a personal encounter with God afterward	Inclusion, then some faith
Asenath	Gen 41:45	Given in marriage by Pharaoh	Not stated either way	Silent
Tamar	Gen 38	Already family by marriage	Not stated	Silent
Mixed multitude	Ex 12:38	Joined the Exodus	No stated confession; later blamed for complaints	Inclusion, faith absent or unclear
Rahab	Josh 2, 6	Spared, incorporated into Israel	Yes, explicit confession before rescue	Faith, then inclusion
Ruth	Ruth 1-4	Marriage to Boaz	Yes, explicit declaration before marriage	Faith, then inclusion

Person/Group	Reference	Entry point	Faith stated before entry?	Sequence
Ittai the Gittite	2 Sam 15:19-22	Joins David in exile	Yes, explicit loyalty oath	Loyalty, then inclusion
Uriah the Hittite	2 Sam 11, 23:39	Already among David's mighty men	Not narrated; demonstrated by conduct	Conduct-demonstrated

The Gibeonites (Josh 9; 2 Sam 21) were excluded from this tracker: 2 Sam 21:2 states directly that "the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel." They remained a permanent, subordinate service class, never absorbed into a tribe, unlike Ruth and Rahab. What that case shows instead is that God held Israel to its oath even toward people who never became his covenant people, a finding about divine justice, not a mechanism for inclusion.

Refinement: confession-first entry correlates strongly with a positive outcome (Rahab, Ruth, Ittai), but the absence of confession does not reliably predict harm (Tamar and Asenath are neutral-to-positive; the Gibeonites never corrupt Israel at all). The variable that actually discriminates negative outcomes (Baal of Peor, Solomon's foreign wives) from neutral or positive silent cases is direction of allegiance, toward idolatry or not, rather than the presence or absence of a confession at entry.

Tracked theme: circumcision of flesh and heart

Significance of the sign's placement: on the organ of procreation, the exact medium of covenant transmission, dedicating the mechanism itself rather than just marking a person. Called an *ot* ("sign"), the same term used for the rainbow and the Sabbath: the Old Testament's own category is a reminder of a reality, not a substitute for it. Normally concealed, unlike Leviticus 19:27-28's regulated public identity markers, it is a private seal disclosed precisely at marital union and birth, where lineage is made.

The metaphorical extension begins almost immediately, not only in Deuteronomy: Moses calls himself a man of "uncircumcised lips" (Exod 6:12, 30); Leviticus 26:41 speaks of Israel's "uncircumcised heart" being humbled as the path back from exile.

The sharpest Old Testament statement that the sign is void without the reality is Jeremiah 9:25-26, where physically circumcised Israel is placed in the same category as the uncircumcised nations, "for all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart." Ezekiel

44:7 and 9 require both heart and flesh for sanctuary access, a contrast worth holding alongside Jeremiah's heart-priority emphasis.

The New Testament draws this existing trajectory to its conclusion, and one text does so explicitly, satisfying this study's own guardrail against imposed typology: Colossians 2:11-13 states directly that baptism is circumcision's successor sign. Romans 2:28-29 calls circumcision "a matter of the heart, by the Spirit"; Philippians 3:3 applies the title "the circumcision" to Spirit-worshipping believers. This resolves institutionally at the Jerusalem council in Acts 15.

Working principle for what this looks like today: the failure mode runs in both directions, ritual without reality on one side, and a claimed inward reality with no embodied practice at all on the other, which Scripture never actually endorses. Baptism and the Lord's Table remain as the sign's continuing category.

Section 3 - Exodus, Sinai, and the Wilderness (Exodus-Deuteronomy)

The founding title text (Exod 19:4-6)

"You shall be my treasured possession (*segullah*) among all peoples, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." *Segullah* is documented ancient Near Eastern vassal-treaty vocabulary, a king's personal property held apart from his general holdings. "Kingdom of priests" is mediatorial by definition; priests represent people to God and God to people, pointing outward rather than sealing Israel off. "Holy nation" (*goy qadosh*) is not the odd phrase it might seem: Israel is already called a *goy gadol*, a "great nation," in Genesis 12:2. The word *goy* meaning specifically "non-Jew" is a post-biblical, Hellenistic-era development.

The whole title package is explicitly conditional: "if you obey, then you shall be." It is not an unconditional birthright. 1 Peter 2:9 later applies this exact vocabulary, chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, God's own possession, to the mixed Jew-and-Gentile church: the New Testament's own explicit claim that the title transfers.

The ger (sojourner) laws

Legislated, not sentimental: "you shall not wrong a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt" (Exod 22:21; 23:9); "the stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself" (Lev 19:33-34, deliberately parallel to Lev 19:18); "one law and one rule shall be for you and for the stranger" (Num 15:15-16). This "remember what you once were, therefore extend mercy" logic is a stable

Old Testament pattern, not a New Testament import: Deuteronomy 15:15 uses the identical structure for freeing slaves. The New Testament echoes and intensifies rather than introduces it: Ephesians 2:12, 19 reuses the actual stranger and alien vocabulary for Gentile inclusion, and Titus 3:3-5 and 1 John 4:19 repeat the same shape. This is classified as a recurring ethical pattern the New Testament reapplies, not formal typology, since the text itself does not signal a forward-pointing spiritual meaning the way Deuteronomy 30:6 does for circumcision.

Election explicitly not merit-based (Deut 7:6-8)

"It was not because you were more in number than any other people, but it is because the LORD loves you," unearned initiative stated outright.

A real, unresolved tension (Deut 10:17-19)

God "shows no partiality" sits in the same breath as Israel's unique election and the command to love the sojourner. The text holds both claims without smoothing the friction between them.

What Deuteronomy 23:3-6 actually cites as its reason

Not ethnicity, not their gods: the text gives two specific historical hostile acts, refusing bread and water in the wilderness, and hiring Balaam to curse Israel. This is corporate-national punishment for wilderness-era hostility, not a stated purity or theology clause. The Baal of Peor apostasy (Num 25) is connected but distinct; Numbers 31:16 reveals it was Balaam's advice, part of the same hostile campaign rather than the stated rationale in Deuteronomy 23 itself.

The sharpest complication: Numbers 25 versus Deuteronomy 23 versus Ruth

At Baal of Peor, Moabite and Midianite women lead Israel into idolatry, and a plague kills 24,000. Deuteronomy 23:3 then bars Moabites from the assembly "to the tenth generation." Yet Ruth, a Moabite, becomes David's great-grandmother and is named in Matthew 1. The operative variable across all three texts is covenant loyalty versus idolatry, not ethnicity as such: Peor's women represent active seduction into apostasy, while Ruth explicitly renounces her gods for Israel's God before anything else happens to her.

Section 4 - Conquest and Judges (Joshua, Judges, Ruth)

Rahab (Josh 2, 6) - faith before inclusion

Confession precedes rescue: "the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath" (2:11), stated before any deliverance is arranged. "She has lived in Israel to this day" (6:25). Heb 11:31 and Jas 2:25 both cite her because the sequence, faith, then works, then inclusion, is the point.

The Gibeonites (Josh 9; 2 Sam 21): not an inclusion case

2 Sam 21:2 states directly: "the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel." Josh 9:27 makes them a permanent, subordinate service class, still identified by their own ethnic name generations later, with no land inheritance, no tribal absorption, no genealogy entry, unlike Ruth and Rahab, who are absorbed into Judah by marriage and treated as insiders. What the case actually shows: God holds Israel to its oath even toward people who remain permanently outside the covenant community (the famine in 2 Sam 21 falls on Israel for Saul's violation), a finding about God's character on oath-keeping and justice, not a mechanism for becoming one of God's people.

Section 5 - The United Monarchy (1-2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1-11)

1 Samuel 8: Israel asks to become less distinct

"They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (8:7), the separation theme running in reverse. Deuteronomy's king-law had already capped horses, wives, and wealth, and required daily reading of the law "that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers," a pre-emptive rejection of ancient Near Eastern god-king ideology.

Loyal foreigners in David's inner circle

Ittai the Gittite, a Philistine from Gath, pledges total loyalty fleeing Absalom: "wherever my lord the king shall be, there also will your servant be" (2 Sam 15:21), a real-time, Ruth-style confession. Uriah the Hittite, one of David's mighty men, refuses home comfort out of loyalty to the army in the field (2 Sam 11:11); the outsider outperforms David's own covenant faithfulness in the same chapter.

Bathsheba and Matthew's four flagged women

Uriah's widow becomes Solomon's mother; Matthew 1:6 keeps "the wife of Uriah" rather than naming her, tying the scandal to the genealogy deliberately, a fourth flagged woman alongside Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth. Named pattern in scholarship: John Nolland, "The Four (Five) Women and Other Annotations in Matthew's Genealogy," NTS 43 (1997).

A note on the Rahab-Boaz chronology

Identifying Matthew 1:5's Rahab with Joshua's Rahab is chronologically tight: only four named generations span a conventional 300 to 400 year gap. This is a long-noted issue in scholarship. Biblical genealogies routinely telescope; Matthew's own later list demonstrably skips three kings between Joram and Uzziah compared with 1 Chronicles 3, so the count should not be read as a complete generation-by-generation chain.

1 Kings 8:41-43: universal purpose built into the temple itself

Solomon's dedication prayer petitions for "the foreigner, who is not of your people Israel," that God would hear him too, "that all the peoples of the earth may know your name." Israel's most central sacred space is dedicated with foreign worshippers explicitly in its purpose.

1 Kings 11: confirms the variable is allegiance-direction, not foreign presence

Solomon's foreign wives "turn away his heart after other gods" (11:4); the text explicitly cites Deuteronomy 7's reasoning as fulfilled (11:2). The same category of person that produced Ruth's blessing produces judgment here; the pull runs the other direction.

Refinement: confession-at-entry versus the real discriminator

The tested generalization was: confession-first entry leads to a righteous outcome, silent or no-confession entry leads others astray. The first half holds (Rahab, Ruth, Ittai). The second half fails against Tamar (a righteousness verdict, with no stated confession), Asenath (silent, with no negative outcome, and sons who become major tribes), and the Gibeonites (entered by deception, the opposite of confession, yet never corrupt Israel; Israel is the one punished for breaking faith with them). The variable that actually discriminates negative outcomes from neutral or positive silent cases is direction of allegiance, pulled toward idolatry or not, rather than the presence or absence of a

confession at entry. The entry mechanism itself also is not consistent across cases: an oath for Rahab and Ittai, marriage for Ruth, and legislated circumcision only for a sojourner wanting to eat Passover; there is no single uniform rite.

Section 6 - The Divided Kingdom and the Prophets

Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5)

An enemy army commander, healed by Elisha, confesses "there is no God in all the earth but in Israel" (5:15), then asks to take Israelite soil home to worship on, and asks pardon in advance for still bowing in Rimmon's temple when duty requires it. Elisha simply says "go in peace," with no correction and no conditions, a real, unresolved case of someone confessing exclusive faith in YHWH while still practically entangled in his home religion, left uncondemned. Jesus cites this exact episode (Luke 4:27) as the reason his ministry extends past Israel; the Nazareth synagogue tries to kill him for saying it.

In the same episode, after Naaman's healing, Elisha's own servant Gehazi lies to extract payment from him and is struck with the very leprosy Naaman was just cleansed of, the outsider cleansed and the insider struck, in one story, a direct narrative echo of Judges 2:10's warning that birth guarantees nothing.

Jewish legal tradition classifies Naaman as a *ger toshav*, a resident alien acknowledging God without full conversion, distinct from a *ger tzedek*, a full proselyte, the category Ruth generally occupies. Rabbinic sources and Josephus separately identify Naaman as the unnamed archer who killed King Ahab (1 Kings 22:34), though a modern translation commentary flags this as speculation, since the archer is never named in the text.

Amos 9:7: God's sovereignty over other nations' formative history

"Are you not like the Cushites to me, O people of Israel? Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?" God claims to have orchestrated the Philistines' and Syrians' own migrations the same way as Israel's exodus, undercutting any notion that the exodus made Israel uniquely his concern.

Isaiah 19:24-25: the most extreme universalist text so far

"Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance." Egypt, Israel's historic oppressor, and Assyria, the empire actively threatening Israel as Isaiah writes, both get called "my people," language used nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible for anyone but Israel.

Isaiah 56:3-8: real expansion, calibrated carefully

The popular reading treats this as a direct reversal of Deuteronomy 23:1's eunuch exclusion. A more careful academic treatment complicates this: the specific term for eunuch in Deuteronomy 23:1 does not appear in Isaiah 56, and the promise is a temple memorial rather than assembly entry, a related but distinct concern. The foreigners addressed here also do not map precisely onto Deuteronomy 23's specific list of excluded nations, reading more as a protest against a narrowing, exclusionary spirit among post-exilic leadership generally than a citation of one specific statute. Still, a real and deliberate expansion of who belongs.

Hosea's Lo-Ammi reversal

Hosea names his children "Lo-Ammi," not my people, as judgment on Israel, then reverses it: "you are my people" (Hos 1:10; 2:23). Paul later quotes this exact reversal in Romans 9:24-26 and applies it to Gentiles being brought in, though Hosea's original referent is disobedient, exiled Israel being restored, not Gentiles, an interpretive move worth examining carefully rather than assuming as a straightforward proof text.

Section 7 - Exile (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel)

Jeremiah 29:4-7: a new mode of distinctiveness, embedded rather than separated

"Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." Faithfulness now explicitly requires investment in a pagan society's flourishing, not withdrawal. This connects forward to 1 Peter 2:11's "sojourners and exiles" language for the church, the same historical posture, not a random metaphor.

Jeremiah 31:31-34: the explicit New Covenant prophecy

"I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest." This is directly continuous with Deuteronomy 30:6. Worth flagging without resolving: the stated addressees are still "the house of Israel and the house of Judah," an ethnic designation, not explicitly all humanity. Hebrews 8:8-12 quotes this at length and applies it to the church, an interpretive move examined carefully in Section 15.

Ezekiel 36:24-27: a parallel new-heart prophecy, the same complication

"I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you." This is also explicitly framed as national restoration: "I will take you from the nations and gather you."

Ezekiel 44:6-9 against Isaiah 56: a head-on collision in the same era

Ezekiel's restored-temple vision bars any foreigner "uncircumcised in heart and flesh" from the sanctuary, even foreigners already living among the sons of Israel. The standard is both and: heart circumcision alone would not qualify without physical circumcision too. Academic treatment names this as inner-biblical exegesis, Ezekiel reworking Leviticus 22's blemished-offering language into new legislation excluding foreigners from priestly sanctuary service, running opposite to Isaiah 56's expansion in roughly the same historical window. This is specifically about sanctuary and priestly service, narrower than the assembly broadly, the same category precision required for Deuteronomy 23.

Daniel: a working model of faithful distinctiveness inside empire

Full participation in Babylonian education and government alongside specific, non-negotiable lines: refusing the king's food, refusing to worship the image or stop praying, willing to die rather than cross them. A useful pattern for the question of what this looks like today: full cultural engagement with named, specific lines, not blanket separation.

Section 8 - Return (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Malachi)

Ezra 9-10: the crisis, precisely

"The holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands" (9:2), Leviticus 19:19's seed-mixing language, not Deuteronomy 7:4's stated reasoning. Ezra 10 requires separation from foreign wives, and in some cases their children. The scale involved is around one hundred named individuals, real and harsh, but not depicted as universal.

A genuine conceptual shift, not just stricter enforcement

Christine Hayes, in *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities* (Oxford, 2002), argues Ezra introduces a genealogical impurity distinct from Torah's existing ritual and moral impurity, because it is treated as intrinsic and unremovable by conversion, characterized directly as a racial ideology in one scholarly review.

But Ezra's own book does not speak with one voice

Ezra 6:21, in the same book: "the people of Israel who had returned from exile ate the Passover, and also everyone who had joined them and separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to worship the LORD," an explicit provision for outsiders by religious commitment, the same logic as Rahab, Ruth, and Naaman, three chapters before the holy seed crisis. Peter Lau's study of Ezra-Nehemiah argues this internal tension is real, not to be harmonized away.

Nehemiah 13:23-27: the most sympathetic version, citing Solomon directly

Children "could not speak the language of Judah" (13:24), a practical transmission failure echoing Judges 2:10 almost exactly. Nehemiah explicitly invokes Solomon's foreign wives as precedent, the biblical author himself drawing the Section 5 connection.

Weighing three explanations that do not resolve into one

A legal or registration concern (Ezra 2:59-63) is narrowly about priestly eligibility and does not explain the lay expulsions in Ezra 10. A linguistic or transmission concern (Nehemiah 13:24) is genuine and sympathetic, a small community watching covenant knowledge fail to transmit. The holy seed framing itself (Ezra 9:2) goes further than either, closer to a genealogical or racial framing than a transmission or legal concern, and it is the piece Ruth's own community appears to contest.

Two smaller notes on record

Esther never mentions God, temple, prayer, or law, unique in the canon; identity there is preserved through peoplehood, loyalty, and courage, and Haman's plot targets Jews as an ethnic category regardless of individual piety, a different mode of God's people worth not smoothing into the covenant-faith framing used elsewhere. Malachi 2:11 closes the Old Testament prophetic corpus still on this issue: "Judah has profaned the sanctuary by marrying the daughter of a foreign god," a live concern through the last prophetic voice before the New Testament.

Section 9 - The Gospels

Insiders vs. outsiders inverted from the start

Matt 2: Magi, pagan astrologers, travel to worship the infant Jesus; Herod and the chief priests correctly cite Micah 5:2 but never go themselves. Informed insiders against responsive outsiders, at the New Testament's opening.

Luke 4:16-30: Jesus cites two earlier cases directly, and provokes an attempt on his life

"There were many widows in Israel, but Elijah was sent to none of them except a woman in Sidon," the widow of Zarephath, and "many lepers in Israel, but none was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." The crowd responds by trying to throw him off a cliff, genuinely inflammatory in context, not a later bland gloss.

Matt 8:5-13: the centurion, and birthright status explicitly at risk

"Many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness." Jesus himself makes the not-by-blood argument, as directly as anywhere in Scripture.

The Syrophoenician woman (Matt 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30): the hardest text in this set

Jesus initially refuses her: "it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." A popular reading softens this via the Greek diminutive for "dog" (a household pet, not an insult), but N. Clayton Croy's 2024 Cambridge University Press article directly challenges the softening, arguing real diminutive force remains. [Croy, "Puppies and Pejoratives," Cambridge Core](#). Her persistence and Jesus' commendation land as inclusion, but the road there is rougher than the other cases tracked so far.

She never disputes the dog category; she reasons inside it, confident enough in the abundance on offer to call the overflow sufficient. There is a real textual variant worth knowing: Mark has the dogs eating "the children's crumbs," while Matthew shifts to "their masters' table." Matthew specifically calls her "a Canaanite," an archaic term by this era, where Mark uses the plain ethnic label "Syrophoenician," very likely deliberate: the same Gospel writer kept Tamar's and Rahab's names in Jesus' genealogy and is the one author with a demonstrated pattern of pulling "Canaanite" into faith and inclusion stories. Unlike Ruth and Rahab, she is not narrated as formally incorporated into Israel; blessed and

commended, the story simply ends there. If the harsher reading of the term holds, her non-defensive persistence is more remarkable, not less. A parallel case: in Luke 17:11-19, the one leper who returns to give thanks is "a Samaritan," the same outsider-faith-exceeds-insider-response pattern.

The Samaritan woman (John 4) and the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

Both engage the mixed-descent population created by the Assyrian resettlement in 2 Kings 17. Jesus deliberately routes through Samaria and states his messianic identity to her outright; many Samaritans believe. The parable makes the same population's member the moral hero of a story told to a covenant insider.

John 10:16 and the relocation of Israel's own imagery onto Jesus

"Other sheep I have that are not of this fold, I must bring them also, so there will be one flock, one shepherd." More structurally, Jesus takes Old Testament images that belonged to Israel corporately, vine, shepherd, temple, and applies them to himself. Covenant identity's locus shifts from nation to person, which is why "in Christ" becomes Paul's operative category rather than "in Israel."

A capstone worth sitting with: Jesus' own Davidic claim is adoptive, not biological

His legal claim to the throne runs through Joseph by adoption. The Messiah himself does not have ordinary biological descent in his own qualifying line, either an extraordinary irony or the entire point of everything tracked so far.

A method flag: the Great Commission and the "fruitful and multiply" motif

"Make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19) strongly echoes the Section 1 motif, but this connection is this study's own pattern recognition, not textually signaled the way Colossians 2:11-13 explicitly signals baptism as circumcision's successor. That distinction is kept honest rather than blurred.

Section 10 - Acts

Cornelius (Acts 10): the same category as Naaman

"A devout man who feared God with all his household, and prayed continually to God" (10:2), a God-fearer, the Gentile-world equivalent of the *ger toshav* category used for Naaman.

Peter's vision states its own referent

The vision is about food, "what God has made clean, do not call common" (10:15), and Peter himself supplies the referent: "God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean" (10:28). This is the text's own move, not an inference imposed on it.

The Spirit falls before any rite (10:44-48)

Unmediated by baptism or circumcision. Peter's justification to the Jerusalem church is empirical, not theoretical: "if then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us, who was I to withstand God?" (11:17).

A grammatical detail in Peter's speech at the council (Acts 15)

Facing the circumcision party's demand, Peter concludes: "we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" (15:11), not "they are saved just as we are." Gentile grace-salvation becomes the reference point; Jewish salvation is described as happening in the same way, not the reverse.

James's ruling, and a live scholarly debate over its background

The four requirements (idol-polluted things, sexual immorality, what is strangled, and blood) may map onto Leviticus 17-18's laws for the resident alien living among Israel, per Richard Bauckham. Markus Bockmuehl argues instead for a background in the Noahide commandments, obligations understood to bind all humanity since Noah. Joan Taylor argues both images were in play as two distinct positions in the early community. This is not settled; the live question is which prior category James is drawing on, not whether he improvises from nothing.

Section 11 - Galatians

Dating relative to Acts 15 is genuinely unsettled

The majority view holds that Galatians 2:1-10 describes the same events as Acts 15, meaning the letter was written after the council, addressing continued pressure despite its ruling. A minority view holds that this passage describes an earlier, informal meeting, making Galatians Paul's earliest letter, written before the council, with his theological case possibly informing rather than following it.

Galatians 2:11-14: the Antioch incident, genuinely uncomfortable

Peter, who had the Cornelius vision and argued the council's case, withdraws from eating with Gentiles under pressure from the circumcision party. Paul opposes him to his face. Institutional resolution did not instantly settle practice.

Galatians 3:6-9, 17: Paul makes this study's own Section 2 sequence-argument independently

"It is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham" (3:7), and "the law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God" (3:17), the same chronological logic drawn from Genesis 15 versus Genesis 17 several sections back, now named precisely by Paul himself.

Galatians 3:16: flagged honestly, not accepted uncritically

A singular "offspring," not "offsprings," is identified as Christ. Hebrew and Greek collective nouns for "seed" naturally function as singular in form while referring to a group, so a strict grammatical-historical reading finds this strained. Most critical scholarship reads it as Paul using a contemporary Jewish exegetical technique, drawing theological weight from grammatical number, rather than a modern grammatical argument.

Galatians 3:26-29: the clearest single New Testament statement of this study's whole thread

"Neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus, and if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." Precisely, covenant and inheritance status are undivided by these categories; this is not a claim that the social categories themselves vanished.

Galatians 4:21-31: closes the loop to Section 2, a genuine reversal

Hagar is allegorized as "the present Jerusalem," law-bound Israel, and Sarah as "the Jerusalem above," the promise, now including believing Gentiles, inverting the original story's terms, where Hagar's son was not the heir. Paul's boldest spiritual-not-blood argument, built directly on Genesis material already covered.

Galatians 5:6 and 6:15 close the circumcision tracker

"Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love," and "but a new creation." The stated endpoint of the trajectory tracked since Genesis 17.

Section 12 - 1 Thessalonians and 1-2 Corinthians

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10: the direction-of-allegiance variable in the mission field

"You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God," the same variable tracked since Numbers 25 and 1 Kings 11, now explicit conversion language.

1 Thessalonians 2:14-16: a real, unsettled scholarly debate

The passage blames "the Jews" collectively for Jesus' death, saying "wrath has come upon them at last." Birger Pearson's 1971 article in the Harvard Theological Review argues this is a non-Pauline interpolation, since Paul elsewhere always centers the cross itself, never simply naming "the Jews" as agent, and nowhere else holds up the Judean churches as a model. Markus Bockmuehl defends authenticity, citing overlooked historical evidence of real persecution around AD 48 to 49. There is real tension either way with Romans 11:1-2 and 26, where Paul insists God has not rejected his people. Whichever reading is right, Peter's own speeches in Acts follow a consistent pattern: they charge specific, present audiences, always immediately paired with an offer of repentance to that same audience, echoing Jesus' own "forgive them, for they know not what they do." The purpose is evangelistic invitation to named, present people, not a permanent verdict on an ethnic category, and that distinction constrains how 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 should be read if authentic. This study retains the passage as supporting evidence on that basis, treating the authorship debate as immaterial to its content.

A precision on "two into one," against reading it as simply "corrected Israel"

Ephesians 2:15's "in place of the two" only makes sense if Israel and the nations were genuinely two distinct things fused into a third, not one, Israel, restored to a latent true self while the other joins it. It is also stronger than "corrupted man-made tradition": Paul says Christ made peace "by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in

ordinances," the law's own regulatory function set aside, not merely later accretions to it. This sits in real tension with Romans 3:31, "we uphold the law," the long-running "Paul and the law" problem in scholarship, not to be decided from Ephesians alone.

A working synthesis to test in Romans

"Two into one" frees both groups; "not abolishing the law" means moving from enslavement to it, to Spirit-enabled fulfillment, with grace covering failure. This is strongly supported by Romans 8:3-4, "the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk according to the Spirit," and by Ezekiel 36:27's New Covenant promise, apparently fulfilled. One needed refinement: the picture of Gentiles as sin and Jews as self-righteousness is too tidy; Romans 3:9 puts all under sin, and Romans 2:23 charges Jews with actual transgression. "Self-righteousness" itself is contested in scholarship: E.P. Sanders described first-century Judaism as "covenantal nomism," entered by grace and maintained by obedience, and James Dunn's "New Perspective on Paul" reads Paul's target as "works of the law" functioning as ethnic boundary markers, while critics such as Francis Watson and C.E.B. Cranfield maintain that Paul means the whole law, with real reliance on works. Both readings likely operate at once. A second refinement concerns which law is fulfilled: Paul's own language is love-centered, and Gentiles are never asked to keep the ceremonial ordinances. A candidate reconciliation, to be tested rather than assumed: the ordinances are set aside while the law's righteous requirement is fulfilled by the Spirit. Whether Jewish believers today should keep the ordinances is treated as a separate question, addressed in the conclusion.

Section 13 - Romans

Romans 2:28-29 closes the circumcision tracker

Paul contrasts the Jew "in the visible" with the Jew "in the hidden," the same concealed-sign logic traced from Genesis 17. "His praise is not from man but from God" is commonly read as a wordplay on Judah, whose name means praise.

Romans 3:1-2 and 3:29-30: Israel's advantage is kept, and the boundary question is stated plainly

The Jew has "much in every way," entrusted with the oracles of God; Paul does not erase the medium this study has traced since Genesis. "Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also?" is the boundary-marker question in Paul's own words.

Romans 4: a third independent appearance of the sequence argument

After finding it in Genesis 15 versus 17, and again in Galatians 3, Paul applies it here to both groups. Abraham is father of the uncircumcised who believe and of the circumcised who also walk in the footsteps of that same faith; the circumcised need faith too.

Romans 5:12-21: Adam bookends the whole study

Paul's deepest universal frame is Adam, not Abraham: all humanity in Adam, all who receive grace in the second Adam. This returns to the study's Section 1 baseline, universal and pre-ethnic.

Romans 8:14-17: the title of "sons" is extended, not invented

Believers receive "the Spirit of adoption" and are called heirs, yet Romans 9:4 lists "the adoption" among Israel's own existing privileges, and Exodus 4:22 had already called Israel God's firstborn son. This is an extension of a title Israel already held.

Romans 9-11

A note on a correction made along the way: N.T. Wright is properly associated with the view that "all Israel" in Romans 11:26 means all spiritual Israel, Jew and Gentile together, which he calls a "polemical redefinition" of the term, not with the view that expects a future mass ethnic-Jewish turning.

Hosea's reversal, reapplied (Rom 9:24-26). Hosea's original "Not My People" were northern Israelites exiled and scattered among the nations; in status, they stood where Gentiles stood. The restoration language plausibly covers both groups on that basis, and 1 Peter 2:10 applies the same text again.

The olive tree and "one new man" are two metaphors aimed at different errors, not one settled picture. Romans 11:18 warns Gentiles not to boast over the branches, "it is not you who support the root"; Ephesians 2 addresses Gentile alienation and Jew-Gentile hostility. Paul calls the graft itself "contrary to nature," so the image is not meant to be pressed as horticulture. Romans 11:23 matters here too: natural branches are re-graftable "if they do not continue in their unbelief," so Israel's own standing runs through faith as well.

"Irrevocable" (11:28-29) resolves cleanly once the medium and basis are kept distinct. God's calling and promise are irrevocable, which is the medium; individual participation remains by faith, which is the basis. Romans 11:32, "consigned all to disobedience, that he

may have mercy on all," has the same shape as Genesis 12:3: particular election serving universal mercy.

Three live readings of Romans 11:26 remain, and none of them change this study's core thesis. All Israel may mean all spiritual Israel, Jew and Gentile together; all elect Jews across history; or a future large-scale Jewish turning. The working thesis, that relationship rather than blood defines membership, and that election is the medium for universal mercy, holds under any of the three. What stays genuinely open is only whether ethnic Israel retains a distinct future role, addressed directly in the conclusion.

Section 14 - The Prison Letters (Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians)

Authorship of Ephesians and Colossians is disputed in critical scholarship; this study relies on their content rather than resolving that debate. A textual note on Ephesians 1:1: "in Ephesus" is absent from the early papyrus P46 and the original hands of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, though present in the great majority of manuscripts and all ancient versions; either way the letter addresses Gentile believers.

Ephesians 3:4-6: the "mystery," and a real stress test of the core hypothesis

Paul says Gentile co-heirship "was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed," which sits in tension with Romans 16:26's claim that it was made known "through the prophetic writings," and with the many Old Testament texts already surveyed. The resolution that best fits the whole picture: the Greek word rendered "as" in "as it has now been revealed" is comparative, commonly read as "not in the way or degree now revealed" rather than "not at all." The prophets did not fully grasp their own message either; 1 Peter 1:10-12 says they searched intently for what the Spirit was indicating and learned they were serving others, and Luke records Jesus opening the Scriptures to his disciples after the resurrection. What the prophets left unclear was the manner, not the substance: their picture of Gentile inclusion was largely centripetal, nations streaming to Zion, while Paul's mystery is equal co-heirship in one body through Christ, without that older route. The plan was always for all nations; it was attested but not understood until Christ.

Colossians 2:16-17: explicit shadow-and-substance language, satisfying this study's own guardrail

Food, drink, festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths are called "a shadow of the things to come," while "the substance belongs to Christ." The text itself names the boundary markers as shadow; this is not an imposed typology.

Colossians 3:11-12: the categories widen further, and Israel's titles transfer

"Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all," followed immediately by "God's chosen ones, holy and beloved," Israel's own title from Deuteronomy 7:6, applied to the whole body.

Philippians 3:2-9: a reversal, and pedigree counted as loss

Paul turns the very epithet used for Gentiles, "dogs," back on those demanding circumcision, and declares "we are the circumcision." He then lists his own maximal pedigree, circumcised the eighth day, of the people of Israel, a Hebrew of Hebrews, and counts it all loss for the sake of Christ. "Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law" supports the traditional reading in the ongoing scholarly debate over Paul and the law; the pedigree list itself supports the boundary-marker reading. Both appear in the same passage, from the same author.

Section 15 - Hebrews

The Jeremiah 31 question, addressed only partly

Hebrews quotes "the house of Israel and the house of Judah" and applies the New Covenant to its readers, but never argues for Gentile participation directly; the traditional title "to the Hebrews" is a later addition, and the audience is commonly, though not certainly, taken to be Jewish-Christian. The bridge to Gentile participation comes from elsewhere in the New Testament: Gentile believers at Corinth keep the Lord's Supper as the new covenant, Paul calls himself a minister of the new covenant, and Ephesians 2 describes Gentiles once "strangers to the covenants of promise" now brought near by Christ's blood. Two positions remain live in the wider church: that the covenant is fulfilled in the church as renewed Israel, or that the church shares in its blessings while national Israel remains the covenant's own party, with fulfillment still ahead. This study does not resolve that question; it is the same fork as Romans 11:26.

Hebrews and the audience question, more carefully

The letter never names its author or its readers, and the traditional Jewish-Christian audience is a reasonable but not certain inference. Even on that reading, the letter's own argument undercuts descent as a basis for standing: the wilderness generation had the good news and did not enter; Esau lost his birthright; a stern warning in chapter ten addresses the possibility of profaning "the blood of the covenant." Universal-scope language runs throughout as well: Christ tastes death "for everyone," is the source of salvation to "all who obey him," and "whoever would draw near to God must believe."

Melchizedek, a structural implication worth naming

Christ's priesthood is patterned on Melchizedek, a non-Israelite priest of God Most High who blesses Abraham and receives tithes from Levi while Levi was still, in a sense, "in the loins" of Abraham. The argument requires a priesthood older than, and outside, Israel's own ethnic structure, an outsider recognized as knowing God before any covenant line yet existed.

Membership demonstrated over time, in the new covenant too

"A Sabbath rest for the people of God" (4:9) uses *laos*, the Greek word the Old Testament uses for Israel; the wilderness generation heard the same good news but "were not united by faith with those who listened." "We are his house, if indeed we hold fast" (3:6) is conditional, echoing Exodus 19:5. The faith chapter, Hebrews 11, begins with Abel, Enoch, and Noah, before Abraham and before Israel exist, matching this study's own starting point at Adam; Rahab is the only foreign-born person named in the whole list.

Section 16 - James

Addressed to "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion," James never mentions Gentiles directly, and its date is debated; if early, it may predate Galatians. Believers are called a kind of "firstfruits" of God's creatures (1:18), the same title once held by Israel, and firstfruits imply a further harvest still to come.

James 2:14-26: Abraham and Rahab, read alongside Paul

James cites the same verse Paul does, Genesis 15:6, and adds Genesis 22, arguing Abraham's faith was "completed" by the later act of offering Isaac, decades after the faith first credited to him. Rahab appears here as well, the only foreign-born woman held up for faith in three separate New Testament books. James's argument and Paul's are best read

as answering different errors with different senses of the same words, not as a genuine contradiction: Paul corrects reliance on perfect law-keeping for justification, and James corrects treating faith as license for inaction, since his own illustration concerns a professed believer doing nothing for a brother or sister who lacks food and clothing. Paul raises and rejects the identical concern in his own letters, "are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!" James 2:19, "even the demons believe, and shudder," shows his real target is counterfeit, workless assent, not the kind of faith Paul describes. Faith is the root; works are the fruit; a fruitless tree, in Jesus' own image of the fig tree, is cursed and withers.

Section 17 - 1 Peter

The audience is debated: some read it as addressed to Jewish believers, others as the church described in Israel's own inherited language. Several details lean toward a largely Gentile audience, including references to "futile ways inherited from your forefathers" and time spent formerly "doing what the Gentiles want."

1 Peter 2:9-10: the titles, drawn from the Greek Old Testament

Chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, a people for God's own possession, this is the vocabulary of Exodus 19 and Isaiah 43, applied directly to Peter's readers. "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people" (2:10) is Hosea again, the second independent New Testament use of that reversal. Whichever audience is in view, membership in the titled people runs through relationship to "the living stone," not through descent (2:4-8).

The ger vocabulary is remapped onto the church's situation in the world

Believers are called "sojourners and exiles," the same pairing used of Abraham himself in Genesis. The posture that follows is not withdrawal but embedded, honorable conduct among outsiders, so that they may see the good deeds and glorify God, and a readiness to give a reasoned defense of the hope within, with gentleness and respect.

1 Peter 3:20-21: an explicitly typological connection

The eight persons brought safely through the flood correspond, Peter says directly, to baptism, which now saves. This ties the earliest remnant in Genesis to baptism as the successor sign identified in Colossians 2.

Section 18 - 2 Peter and Jude

2 Peter calls Lot "righteous" three times, a more generous reading than the moral failure that immediately follows his rescue in Genesis 19. Both 2 Peter and Jude place the sin of fallen angels immediately before Noah's flood and draw on the Enoch literature, supporting the angelic reading of Genesis 6 over the Sethite one. Jude 5 has a real textual variant worth knowing: the earliest and best manuscripts may read "Jesus" rather than "the Lord" as the one "who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroying those who did not believe," which, if original, would parallel Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians that "the Rock was Christ." Either reading repeats the same warning found in Hebrews and 1 Corinthians: the exodus generation was a people saved out of Egypt, and unbelief among them still brought destruction.

Section 19 - 1-3 John

1 John 3:9-10 divides humanity into "children of God" and "children of the devil," the same moral-spiritual line first drawn in Genesis 3:15, now named directly. 1 John 5:1 supplies the sharpest single line in the New Testament for this study's whole question: "everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God." Not only relationship but birth itself is now defined spiritually.

Section 20 - Revelation

Revelation 1:6 and 5:9-10: the Exodus 19 title realized at full scale

"Made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father," and, more fully, "you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests." The title first met at Sinai reaches its fullest stated realization here, achieved by the Lamb's blood, at maximal cross-ethnic scale.

Revelation 2:9 and 3:9: "those who say they are Jews and are not"

This continues Romans 2's argument about the true meaning of the name "Jew," but the same caution applies here as with 1 Thessalonians 2: this addresses two specific, named local churches in conflict with two specific local communities, not a sweeping claim about Jewish identity in general.

Revelation 7:9: a numberless multitude, the Abrahamic promise at full scale

"A great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" echoes the promise of offspring too numerous to count made to Abraham in Genesis, now fulfilled trans-ethnically.

Revelation 21:3: a genuine textual variant worth flagging, and left open

Greek manuscripts split between "his people," singular, and "his peoples," plural. Textual scholars lean slightly toward the plural on manuscript weight, though it is the less expected form for this kind of promise. If the plural is original, it may preserve something worth noting: distinct peoples united to God, rather than one undifferentiated mass, which would sit well beside the fact that "the nations" are still named twice more in the same closing chapters.

Revelation 21:24-26 and 22:2: the canon closes by answering its own opening tension

"The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it," a direct answer to Isaiah's vision of the nations streaming to Zion. "The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" closes the whole canon on the same universal note struck all the way back in Isaiah 19's "Egypt my people."

Part Three: Conclusion

The Thesis

The question "who are God's people?" cannot be answered with a genealogical or national category, because Scripture resists that reduction at every point this study tested it. Physical descent, ritual practice, and national identity function as the vehicle through which God's promise travels, never as its basis. Seven movements carry this argument across the whole canon.

I. The plan was universal before it was particular. The image of God is given to all humanity at creation, and the first divine covenant, with Noah, is made explicitly with "all flesh," before Israel exists. National plurality itself originates in judgment at Babel, not in design. Abraham's call is then framed as reversing that very fracture: "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

II. Election operates through descent, but never because of it. Isaac is chosen over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, before birth and before any works. Abraham is credited righteous by faith over a decade before circumcision exists. The bloodline is porous from the very start, Hagar, Tamar, Asenath, with two full tribes descending from an Egyptian mother. Outsiders enter by faith and covenant loyalty, not blood: Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, the centurion, Cornelius. The variable distinguishing blessing from judgment throughout is direction of allegiance, never ethnicity itself.

III. The titles were always mediatorial. "A kingdom of priests and a holy nation" is conditional, and priesthood exists for others by definition. The sojourner laws legislate equal treatment, grounded explicitly in Israel's own experience as outsiders. The prophets widen this further and further, culminating in Egypt itself being called "my people."

IV. Physical signs point to spiritual realities and are void without them. Circumcision is instituted as a sign, and its metaphorical extension into an "uncircumcised heart" begins almost immediately. Jeremiah classes physically circumcised Israel with the uncircumcised nations for lacking the reality it signified. The prophets promise a New Covenant marked by an internalized law, fulfilled explicitly in the New Testament, where baptism is named as circumcision's successor sign.

V. Membership is demonstrated over time, not secured at a single point. Cain, the wilderness generation, the forgetting generation in Judges, Solomon's own late failure, birth inside the covenant repeatedly proves insufficient on its own. Faith apart from works is dead; faith works through love. The book of Hebrews builds an entire argument on this pattern, and 1 John finally redefines true birth itself as being "born of God" through belief.

VI. In Christ, the two become one new people, without erasing either's origin. Jesus relocates Israel's own corporate images onto himself. The Spirit falls on Gentiles before any rite is performed. "One new man in place of the two" is genuine union, not the absorption of one side into the other. And ethnic Israel retains a real, honored destination, without elevated rank over other redeemed peoples.

VII. The end vision confirms the whole arc. A multitude from every tribe and language and people and nation gathers around the throne, distinct and countable. The eternal city itself names both Israel's twelve tribes and the twelve apostles on its gates and foundations, nothing erased, everything gathered.

A Definition

The people of God are those united to him through a persevering, Spirit-given faith in Jesus Christ, grafted into his promise not by birth but by belief, marked outwardly by signs that must reflect that inward reality, gathered from every nation and tribe without those origins being erased, and bound together as one new people under Christ, sent into the world to represent his character to it.

Where the Original Hypothesis Was Refined

The original hypothesis held up well on its central claim, that physical descent is the vehicle for the promise, never its basis. Several places required real correction rather than simple confirmation.

"Relationship, not blood" needed a precise distinction rather than a slogan. Blood is the medium the promise travels through; it is never the basis for who within that line the promise lands on. The original phrasing risked implying blood does not matter at all, when the more precise finding is that it remains the necessary vehicle even though it is never the criterion.

The hypothesis initially treated confession before inclusion as the single mechanism by which outsiders entered God's people. The evidence did not support one mechanism. Rahab and Ruth show faith preceding inclusion; Hagar, Tamar, and Asenath show inclusion with no stated confession at all, and no negative outcome; the Gibeonites were never inclusion in the first place, only a binding oath toward people who remained outside Israel. The refined finding is that the operative variable distinguishing blessing from judgment is the direction of a relationship's pull, toward God or toward other gods, not whether a confession occurred at the moment of entry.

"Israel was never meant to be racially distinct" was too strong as originally framed, and Ezra 9's holy seed language was at first read as if it settled the question toward pure ethnic exclusivism. Tested against the whole canon, that language does not hold up as a standalone doctrine; it is contradicted by Ezekiel's own vision of land inheritance for naturalized foreigners, by Ezra's own sixth chapter, and by the whole of Ruth. But the corrective risked going too far the other way at first, treating Israel's future as reducible only to something spiritual with no remaining distinctness. Romans 11 and the New Jerusalem's own gates required walking that back to a real, honored, but not elevated, destination for ethnic Israel specifically.

The "two into one new man" and "grafted into one olive tree" images in Ephesians and Romans were initially treated as a single, settled picture. They needed to be recognized as two different, only partly reconciled metaphors for the same relationship, addressed to different errors; Paul does not fully harmonize them himself.

The connection drawn between the Great Commission and the "be fruitful and multiply" creation mandate remains this study's own pattern recognition rather than something the text explicitly signals, unlike the baptism-succeeds-circumcision connection in Colossians, which the text states outright. That distinction was maintained throughout rather than blurred.

Where Common Doctrine Diverges from the Text

Measured against this study's yardstick: God's people are defined by sustained, faith-based relationship, not birth; descent is medium, not basis; the purpose has been universal since Genesis 9; membership is demonstrated over time; nations persist as distinct peoples rather than dissolving into sameness; and Israel has a real, honored future destination, but not elevated rank.

Classical dispensationalism matches the real destination given to Israel, but typically grants Israel an elevated or distinct rank above the church, which goes past what the text supports; its two-track structure for Israel and the church also sits uneasily against the genuine fusion pictured in Ephesians 2.

Progressive dispensationalism moves closer, treating Israel and the church as one people with two roles rather than two peoples with two plans, though it can still carry more distinct future national function than the texts require.

Covenant theology aligns well on the medium-not-basis finding and on rejecting elevated status, though its classical form can understate the "irrevocable" language of Romans 11 and the permanent, named place given to the twelve tribes in the New Jerusalem, tending toward functional absorption of Israel into the church.

Progressive covenantalism, or New Covenant theology, is probably the closest overall doctrinal match: one new covenant community, with real discontinuity from Israel's national structures, avoiding both dispensationalism's hard separation and covenant theology's occasional flattening.

Catholic doctrine may be the closest institutional match of all, holding both a covenant with the Jewish people that is "never revoked" and a universal "new People of God" explicitly, without claiming elevated status for either, though it leaves the tension

between the two claims more openly unresolved than this study did.

Mainline Protestant statements, including the Presbyterian Church's 1987 declaration and the 1988 Lambeth Conference, align strongly here as well: an explicit rejection of the idea that the church replaces Israel, without claiming either group ranks above the other.

Baptist and non-denominational evangelical practice barely engages the Israel question institutionally, but it is the strongest match on a different axis: regenerate church membership, a credible profession of faith joined to believer's baptism, is the closest living echo of "born of God" and of membership demonstrated over time rather than assumed at birth.

No single tradition matches the full position this study arrived at. It borrows the destination-affirmation most associated with Catholic and mainline statements, the anti-hierarchy conviction most associated with covenant and progressive-covenantal theology, and the faith-not-birth membership standard most associated with Baptist practice.

Key Tensions Resolved

Several questions surfaced repeatedly through the study and were tested against the whole canon rather than left as impressions.

Israel's destination is real and honored, but does not carry elevated rank. For: Romans 11:28-29 calls Israel "beloved for the sake of their forefathers," with an "irrevocable" calling; Romans 11:26 treats a future for "all Israel" as a genuine mystery; Revelation 21:12-14 names Israel's twelve tribes permanently on the New Jerusalem's gates. Against any elevated status: "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, the same Lord is Lord of all" (Rom 10:12), and 1 Corinthians 12:24-25's explicit rejection of hierarchy within the one body. The gates name Israel's tribes but grant no stated authority over the apostles' foundations or any other people.

Perseverance: those who do not persevere were never truly God's; those who are his own persevere by the help of the Spirit. Support: John 10:28-29, Romans 8:29-39, Philippians 1:6, Ephesians 1:13-14, 1 Peter 1:5, Jude 24. The severe warnings in Hebrews function as the means God uses to keep his people persevering, not evidence that true grace can be lost.

James and Paul on justification are not in real contradiction. Both cite Genesis 15:6; James adds Genesis 22 as completing, decades later, the faith already credited there, the same faith-then-fruit sequence traced since the patriarchs. Paul states James's own point

independently in Ephesians 2:8-10: not saved by works, but created for them. Genuine faith inevitably produces works; works are faith's fruit and proof, never its ground.

Ezra 9's "holy seed" language does not hold up as a standalone doctrine of bloodline purity. A narrow, legitimate legal or registration concern explains the priestly cases in Ezra 2 but not the lay expulsions in Ezra 10. A linguistic and covenant-fidelity concern, children failing to learn the language and the faith, is confirmed everywhere else this issue appears in Scripture, from Numbers 25 through Malachi. The holy seed framing itself is directly contradicted by Ezekiel's vision of land inheritance for naturalized foreigners, by Ezra's own sixth chapter, and by the whole of Ruth. The most faithful reading is real, urgent pastoral rhetoric for a genuine, canon-confirmed concern, not revealed doctrine establishing bloodline purity.

Jewish believers today are free to continue the Mosaic ordinances as heritage and conscience, not required to, and must never present that practice as necessary for right standing before God. Gentile believers are not required to take up those ordinances and must not be pressured to. What binds both is the moral substance Paul calls the law's righteous requirement, fulfilled by the Spirit.

Two textual questions remain genuinely open and are treated as such. 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 has a real, unsettled authorship debate, though this study retains its content on the grounds that it coheres with the whole canon regardless of who wrote it, following the same precedent by which Hebrews was received into the canon despite centuries of uncertain authorship. Revelation 21:3's choice between "people" and "peoples" remains an open textual footnote, not load-bearing for the thesis either way.

Living It Out

The practical shape of this identity, drawn directly from what the study found, rather than added to it.

Engaged, not withdrawn, with specific named lines. Daniel's model: full participation in a surrounding culture, with a small number of non-negotiable convictions rather than blanket separation. 1 Peter gives the aim precisely: honorable conduct among outsiders, so that they themselves see the difference and glorify God, distinctiveness with a missional purpose, not a defensive one.

Actively for the vulnerable and the outsider, as a matter of identity, not charity. "Love the sojourner, for you were sojourners," and James's "visit orphans and widows in their affliction" are not optional additions. They describe how a people who were themselves

once outside now act, precisely because they remember what that was.

Vigilant against nominal faith in every generation. The sharpest warning this whole study surfaced is Jeremiah's: an outward sign with no inward reality is functionally worthless. That applies as much to church membership, family tradition, or national religious identity today as it did to circumcision then. Jesus' own warning belongs here too: "not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord."

Genuinely multi-ethnic as the expected shape of the church, not a program layered on top of it. Revelation's vision of every tribe and tongue is the actual goal, not an aspiration. That cuts two ways at once: resisting a flattened sameness that erases real cultural distinctiveness, and resisting any claim of ethnic or national superiority inside the body, which 1 Corinthians rules out explicitly.

Fruit-bearing and ongoing, not a single past decision. The "be fruitful and multiply" mandate that recurs at every covenant renewal since Genesis finds its spiritual shape in the Great Commission, disciple-making as a lifelong task, not membership as a finished status.

Carrying his name, and answerable to it. Believers were first called Christians at Antioch, and Paul calls them ambassadors for Christ, a people identified by whose they are, responsible for representing his character to a world that will judge him by what it sees in them.