

WHO IS THE JEW?
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The question of "Who is the Jew?" is one that needs answering today. Many people are mistakenly looking forward to some sort of a rehabilitation of the land of Israel by the present day Jew. Almost every denomination in existence today has some sort of millennial leanings in relation to this matter. Even the church of our Lord has not escaped this doctrine, as there are numerous so-called premillennial "churches of Christ" in existence at this present time. If we can come to grips with this question, then we will be a long ways down the road in better understanding how God views the Jew today, and what they have a right to expect from God.

As Paul wrote the Roman letter, by inspiration, he quickly set forth a good definition of exactly who God considered to be a true Jew. Notice carefully his words in Romans chapter two and verses twenty-eight and twenty-nine, "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." Now that we have considered this, lets notice some important points from the text.

First, God did not consider the Jew, at the time of the writing of the Roman letter, from a nationalistic perspective as being approved or saved. Actually, the New Testament is clear relative to National Israel having had their "house" left "desolate" by Jesus due to their failure to accept him as Messiah (Matthew 23:37,38). Likewise, one must be "blind" to miss the point that Paul makes later in Romans chapter eleven, relative to the "casting away" of National Israel due to their rejection of God through their rejection of Jesus (verses 11-15). It should be understood that these are "Jews", but not approved by God simply based upon their national heritage. Perhaps DeWalt's paraphrase best illustrates what is in mind here, "For he is not a son of Abraham, and an heir of the promises, who is one by national descent only..."¹

Secondly, we see that the circumcision of the flesh no longer stood as the sign of the covenant with God. Historically speaking, God had set aside the covenant He made between Abraham, his descendants, and Himself which had as its sign circumcision (Genesis 17:10-14). Now, though, God sought "the cutting off of the stubbornness and sinful desires of the heart"² as the sign of true religion. The national Jew continued to stress his relationship to God by pointing to his circumcision while Paul seeks to show that circumcision, minus obedience, was worthless (Romans 2:17-29). Lard's comments on this are worth our consideration, "Circumcision it certainly was, but not the circumcision which aids in saving. Circumcision is of service only when the law is kept; but since the law is never kept, circumcision is of no value. It avails nothing with God in saving."³

Thirdly, the circumcision now demanded of God involves the heart, and not just the flesh. Years previous to this God had looked upon the heart of David and chose him to be the next King over Israel (1 Samuel 16:7). Likewise, now, He looks upon one's heart to determine his/her true relationship to Him (Romans 10:9-17). In doing this we see the emphasis being placed upon both the "spirit" and the "letter" instead of the "letter" only, as the Jews attempted to do. Paul clearly explains true New Covenant circumcision in Colossians 2:11, "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ."

So what have we seen then? The true "Jew" is one who sees his relationship with God based upon their having put away sin in his/her life. These are the "children of promise" (Romans 9:8), who have willingly complied with God's Word and therefore having become a "Jew" in the spiritual sense instead of in the physical sense. They would be the true "children of Abraham" through Isaac (Romans 9:7). Thus the answer to our question is best summed up by simply saying that the "Jew" is none other than the faithful Christian today.

ENDNOTES

1. DeWelt, Don, Romans Realized, College Press, 1959, p. 45.
2. Whiteside, R.L., Commentary on Romans, The Manney Company, 1945, p. 65.
3. Lard, Moses E., Commentary on Paul's Letter to Romans, C.B.P., 1914, p. 98