

SEED & BREAD

Otis Q. Sellers, Founder

A common mistake is made by those who go to the Bible seeking the answer to the question, “Is our salvation safe and secure or not?” Knowing no right division other than Old and New Testament, they open their Bibles at Matthew to start. By the time they finish this first gospel, they have made up their minds: there is no eternal security for the believer. One who was once a servant could be cast out. What they fail to see is that they have discovered the truth about the servant in Israel, not the believer in Christ. They have failed to rightly divide.

The picture the Bible presents of the believer in Christ today, the saved sinner in the dispensation of grace, coming from every nation jointly and equally, is very different. In Ephesians 2 (SB059 Ephesians-Chapter 2, *The Resultant Version*), we read of the believer in Christ that **“you, at some time or other walk according to the eon of this world, according to the ruler who is the authority of this atmosphere, the spirit now operating in the sons of disobedience”** (Eph. 2:2). Yet while acknowledging the sad reality that we all are sometimes caught up into the common flow of sin, Paul assures us in verse 4, **“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loves us, we also being dead to the offenses, makes us alive together in Christ Jesus, in grace are you saved.”** In grace, our sins do not cut us off from our Savior. In Him, we are safe and secure. That is because we are not born into relationship with Jesus Christ. No one is “in Christ” because his parents were in Christ. The only way to become one who is “in Christ” is to be believing in Him.

II Timothy, Paul’s last book, declares the same thing of us “in Christ.” It declares in II Timothy 2:11, **“This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him.”** Our identification with Christ cannot be rescinded. Ephesians 5:30 says, **“For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.”** If we have thus been identified with His very substance, then of course we cannot be cut out. There is no outer darkness, no weeping and gnashing of teeth, for the believer in Jesus Christ, no matter how poor his service may be.

Ultimately, we should never confuse the servant in Israel with the believer in Christ. Though both are God followers, one is born into that position, while the other takes that place only by believing. One may be cast out for poor service, whereas the other is as safe and secure as Christ Himself. Matthew is the book of the servant in Israel. Ephesians is the book of the believer in Christ.

The Servant in Israel

By Nathan C. Johnson

The book of Matthew was written to present Jesus Christ to Israel as their King. This becomes plain from the very first verse of the book, which declares it to be **the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.** David was Israel’s great king and Abraham their first patriarch, and the Son of these men was the Messiah, the One sent by God as Ruler of His people.

Since Matthew was written to Israel, the typical, God-fearing individual who was expected to be reading the book would be an Israelite. He need not necessarily have been a believing Israelite, but he was an Israelite, and that made him a part of God’s special nation and people. As Moses said to Israel in Deuteronomy 4:7, **“For what nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?”** (*New King James Version* throughout unless noted). The only possible answer is that there was no other nation so great. Israel was God’s nation and God’s people. They had God’s laws, and were in a special relationship with God that no other nation had.

Since the typical reader of Matthew was expected to be an Israelite, it should not surprise us that the instructions, illustrations, parables, and promises are all tailored to Israelites. To understand how this affects the book, we must understand the difference between your average God-fearer “in Israel” of Christ’s day and your average believer “in Christ” of today.

To be “in Israel,” all one had to do was to be born an Israelite. One had to have Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as one’s ancestors, be a descendant of one of the twelve tribes, and be a part of the covenant people to whom the promises were made. One became these things by birth, and not by any special act afterwards. Faith was completely unnecessary. If one was born an Israelite, then one was born as a servant of God. As Leviticus 25:55 declares, **“For the children of Israel are servants to Me; they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”**

The reality that every Israelite was born a servant of God can be demonstrated by the fact that one could also be born into any number of special positions in Israel. One might be born into the

ISSUE NO. 353, December 2023

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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house of David, the kingly family, as the Lord Jesus Christ was. One might be born into the tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe, as the man Barnabas was, as stated in Acts 4:36. One might be born into the family of Aaron, the priestly family, as were Zacharias and Elizabeth, as Luke 1:5 records. All these positions were granted by means of birth, and they all marked out a special sphere of service. No one could sit on David's throne who was not of the lineage of David. No one could serve at the temple who was not of the tribe of Levi. No one could serve as the high priest who was not of the family of Aaron. All these things depended on birth.

The believer of today is in great contrast to those conditions in Israel. By birth, we inherit neither special position with God nor relationship to God nor privileged place of service. All we can say is in the words of I Timothy 1:15: **"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."** All we can have hope in is the love of God, as Romans 5:8 declares; **But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** Before we believed in Christ, we were not Israelites. We were merely sinners in need of a Savior. When we believed in Jesus Christ, we found the Savior we needed, and we were then identified with Him. All the privileges we have and enjoy as believers were then granted to us. First was the forgiveness of our sins, Ephesians 1:7. **"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."** Then we received a portion and future place with God, Ephesians 1:11. **"In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will."** An inheritance is a portion or allotment that is ours from God. Predestined means that we have not received this yet, but that we are destined to receive it in the resurrection life to come. This all comes to us "in Him," in Christ, and not because we are "in Israel."

Mr. Otis Q. Sellers argued that the book of Ephesians was written to "the saints, the ones being and believing in Christ Jesus," see SB058 Ephesians-Chapter One. The book of Ephesians might be defined as pertaining to those who are "in Christ." Yet if this is the case, then the book of Matthew might be described in very different terms, as being about those who are "in Israel." It is about people who were born into their privileged position and had a relationship with God merely because their parents were Israelites. As such, Matthew is focused on the servant in Israel, not the believer in Christ.

In Matthew, we learn most clearly that Christ's ministry was focused exclusively on Israel. This is seen when He sent out His twelve disciples, commanding them, **"But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,"** Matthew 10:6. It is also clear in His own declaration of His commission, **"I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,"** Matthew 15:24. Christ's ministry was

exclusively to Israelites, so we might expect that His teaching was focused on them as well. Those who turn to Matthew in hopes of finding teaching tailored to today's Gentile believers in Christ will be disappointed.

The fact that the servant in Matthew is different from the believer in Jesus Christ today can be clearly seen in the warnings the servant in Matthew receives; that unless he is careful, he may be cut out. In Matthew 21:33-46, the wicked vinedressers, representing the Israelite leaders, will be destroyed miserably, losing their place as servants in Israel. In Matthew 25:1-13, the foolish virgins who had no oil for their lamps will be refused entry into the wedding feast and told by the bridegroom, **"I do not know you."** In Matthew 25:30, the unprofitable servant will be cast **"into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."** This same language is used in Matthew 8:10-12, which tells us that **"the sons of the kingdom will be cast into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."** In all these passages, those who were one-time Israelites, one-time servants, one-time sons are all cast out and lose their place. Yet it is crucial to understand that they received their place of servanthood and sonship by being Israelites. Yes, even sonship was the position of an Israelite by birth. Jehovah tells Pharaoh in Exodus 4:22, **"Israel is My son, My firstborn."** Yet as Matthew 8:12 tells us, they could be disinherited from the position of sonship into which they were born.

The fact that those born Israelites could lose their place in the promises is borne out by Paul in the book of Romans. He assured his Roman readers, **"They are not all Israel, which are of Israel, neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children,"** Romans 9:6-7. He demonstrated this by the fact that, though Abraham received the promise, not all his children were included in it, but only Isaac. This, he argued, justifies the idea that only certain Israelites chosen by God will receive the promises, not all who are Israelites as **"children of the flesh"** but as **"children of the promise."**

Christ also justified the idea that some could be cut out in John 15:5-6. **"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned."** This is exactly what happened to Judas. He did not abide in the Lord, he withered, and someday his end will be destruction in the lake of fire. He lost his place in Israel, his place as a servant, and his place as a son. As the Lord said of him in Mark 14:21, **"The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born."**