



Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: John 15:1-8

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“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.”
(John 15:1-8 CSB)

SUMMARY: Does the Bible address the Israel/Gaza conflict? Most US Evangelicals support Israel, citing Abrahamic promises and unfulfilled prophecies. However, John & Paul’s New Testament writings challenge this stance. In John 15, Jesus declares, “I am the true vine,” signaling a paradigm shift. The vine & vineyard represented OT Israel in the Promised Land, linked with just adherence to Moses’ Law. The Prophets condemned Israel’s fruitlessness. In the New Testament, Jesus redefines Israel; he, with his followers, constitute a new Israel. Rejecting Jesus excludes one from true Israel which fulfills OT Israel’s role. Do New Testament teachings support Standing with Israel today? According to John, the promised blessing to Abraham extends not to national Israel but to the ‘true Israel,’ Jesus and his followers. Thus, US Evangelicals’ staunch support for the State of Israel seems misguided, as the blessing is directed to Jesus and his believers, not to ethnic Israel.

Background:

?In the US white evangelicals are the strongest supporters of Israel. A whopping 86% of white evangelicals said they felt warmly toward Israelis—more than any other Christian group. By comparison, only 58% of US Black Protestants felt warmly toward Israelis. The 2022 survey of U.S. adults found that two-thirds of Americans express at least a somewhat favorable view of the Israeli people. Conversely US evangelicals scored lowest in their estimation of Palestinians (37%).

?70% of US white evangelicals believe God gave the land of Israel to the Jewish people. By comparison, only 32% of US. Jews felt God gave Israel to the Jewish people in a 2020 PEW survey.

?“For America to be on the right side of Israel is the same as being on the right side of history and the right side of God”—Robert Jeffress (First Baptist Church of Dallas TX., US) Nov. 12, 2018

?“Israel has a Bible mandate to own & possess the land of Israel forever. That mandate cannot be amended by the UN. It cannot be revoked by Hamas or Hezbollah...It cannot be amended by the President of the US... It belongs to the Jewish people now & forever.”—John Hagee (founder & Senior Pastor of Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, TX., US)

?Evangelicals justify their support for Israel based on 1.) the Abrahamic Blessing (God blesses those who bless/support Abraham & his putative descendants, Israel; 2.) ‘Unfulfilled prophecies’ linked to Israel and Christ’s Second Coming.

I. Jesus’ True Vine Metaphor

- “Many of us Gentile readers of John’s Gospel fail to understand the force of Jesus’ breathtaking imaginative portrayal of himself as the true vine.”—Richard Hays

A. The Center of Jesus’ Farewell Discourse

- John’s ‘Farewell Discourse’ “resembles a series of concentric rings, a structure that’s...a ‘bullseye.’...The foot washing narrative (13:1-38) and the High Priestly Prayer (17:1-26) bookend the discourse, representing an outer circle. Inside this circle is another, marked out by loneliness & anxiety (14:1-14&16:16-33). Inside that, is the circle on the Paraclete(14:25-31 & 15:26-16:15). It follows, then, that *dead center of the[farewell]discourse is our passage, ‘the true vine’ homily.*” [Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*, p. 71]
- “The Farewell Discourse...Jn. 13-17 demonstrate a typical Chiastic structure ABXB’A’...*The key discourse (the Vine parable) ...is located in the center of the Whole Farewell Discourse. Centering on that vine speech(15:1-17), 15:18-16:33 complements as well as duplicates the ideas of 14:1-13 for dual (or twofold) emphatic effect. The prayer of Jesus in Jn. 17 closes the Farewell Discourse by reorganizing the ideas ...initiated in Jn. 13 & repeatedly explicated in Jn. 14-16.*” [S-H.Kim, *Source book of...Structures & Styles in John*, pp. 28, 35]
- “Jesus’ entire Farewell Discourse (Jn. 14-16) seems...to be chiastic-ally arranged. [ABCDXX’D’C’B’A’] ...If something like this outline is at all on target ...*the most important point appears in the central material of Jn. 15:1-17, which certainly proves crucial theologically.*” [Craig L. Blomberg, *Making Sense of the NT*, p. 123]

B. Deeper than Devotional or Discipleship

- “John 15 can...[provide] a challenging *devotional message about ‘abiding in Christ.’ But it has deeper levels of meaning & application than this!*”—Colin Chapman
- “Before *the vine imagery* can teach [us] about discipleship, its *primary revelation is that Jesus is the true Israel*... Only after perceiving the... significance of Jesus’ *‘I am [the true vine]’*

statement in the light of the OT... can its application to Christian discipleship be properly understood. [Karen Jobes, *John Through OT Eyes*, p. 241]

C. Jesus' Polemic: 'I am the *True Vine*' vs. False Vine(s)

- 'The use of the term 'true' in the emphatic position ('I am the vine the *true*' [Greek word order]) suggests a comparison be made between Jesus, the 'true' vine, & a vine that is 'not true'. – Mary Coloe
- "The choice of words in 15:1 — 'the *true* vine' — *hints at a polemic* ... The most important background for understanding the metaphor in Jn. 15 is the OT & its frequently-used metaphor of Israel as a vineyard and God as the owner. In the 4th Gospel this OT use of the metaphor has been transformed. *A people (Israel) has been replaced by a person* [singular] (*Jesus*).” [Johannes Nissen, *Gospel of John*, p. 152]
- "The description of Jesus as 'the *true* vine'... contains a polemical undertone, '*in contrast to Israel*'." [Stephen Motyer, "Bridging the Gap," in R. Bauckham (ed.) *John & Christian Theology*, p. 156]
- Jesus is 'the true vine' (15:1), where the description 'true' could not fail to be heard as a *polemical counterpart to Israel's self-conception as the 'vine of the Lord'*." [Stephen Motyer, "4th Gospel & Salvation of Israel," in R. Bieringer (ed.) *Anti-Judaism & the 4th Gospel*, p. 102]
- "Although Jn. 15:1-11 focuses upon Jesus' words to his disciples, an atmosphere of *polemical contrast between Jesus' exclusive claim to be the true vine & Israel's claim to be a vine* is present in 15:1." [Francis Moloney, *John*, p. 269]
- "For Jesus to tell his disciples 'I AM the true (*alethenos*) vine ,,,' is... *to place himself in the position of Israel*... The adjective 'true' recalls in particular the Jer. 2:21 passage ['I planted you as a fruitful vine from the *truest* (*alithene*) seed. How could you turn into a degenerate...vine?'] & turns the statement into a *polemic against what was supposed to be the true vine* [Israel]." [Wes Howard-Brook, *Becoming Children of God*, p. 331]

D. The issue: Who is the True Vine? Who is the Genuine Israel?

- The "'Vine' is a traditional picture for Israel ... The point... John[s] Jesus makes is that he is the true vine, Therefore, the question that Jn. 15:1 answers seems to be: *Who is the true vine? Who is the genuine Israel? The answer, by implication, is: only Jesus, the Son of Man solely.*" [Eduard Schweizer, *What about the Johannine Parables?*, p. 213]

II. The Vine & the Vineyard—OT Background (Ps. 80:8; Jer. 2:21; Hosea 10:1; Ezek. 15:1-4; Is. 5:1-7)

A. Israel's Story: The Vine (Israel) in the Vineyard (the Good/Promised Land) (Psalm 80:8-14)

Psalm 80:8-14 8 "You dug up a vine from Egypt; you drove out the nations & planted it. 9 You cleared a place for it; it took root & filled the land. 10 The mountains were covered by its shade, & the mighty cedars with its branches. 11 It sent out sprouts toward the [Mediterranean] Sea & shoots toward the River [Euphrates]. 12 Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its fruit? 13 Boars from the forest tear at it & creatures of the field feed on it. 14 Return, God of Armies. Look down from heaven & see; take care of this vine..." [Psalm 80:8-14 CSB]

- "Psalm 80:8-13 describes Israel as a vine transplanted from Egypt to Canaan – Canaan, which is God's vineyard... The primary OT metaphor depicts '*The Land*' as a *vineyard cultivated by Yahweh*. The people of Israel are the vines planted within this vineyard, upon 'The Land.' Taken

together the cultivated *vineyard (filled with vines)* is 'The House of Israel' tended by Yahweh, Israel's vinedresser." [Gary Burge, "Territorial Religion &... Vineyard of Jn. 15," Max Turner (ed.) *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord & Christ*, pp. 392-3]

- "Psalm [80] is clearly recalling Israel's exodus &... establishment... in the Promised land. But the Psalmist pours out a lament, because the vine has been broken down & ravaged by enemies & wild beasts & fire. That lament leads into an urgent prayer to God to... help & deliver ...When Jesus... proclaims that he is the true vine, he is presenting himself as the surprising answer to the Psalmist's prayer. *He is both ...the [One] through whom God restores Israel & the revived vine, the Israel... God is restoring.*" [Richard B. Hays, *Reading with the Grain of Scripture*, p.]
- "Perhaps the most important OT passage for Jn. 15 is Ps. 80... This Psalm is a prayer for the restoration of Israel, a vine that God brought out of Egypt, planted in the land, & blessed (80:8-9). Just as God had delivered & planted his people in the past, so the psalmist is praying for salvation in the future, which presumably means restoration in the land. However, John 15 indicates that a [paradigm] shift has taken place. *The true vine now is not apostate Israel but Jesus himself, & the place of blessing is in him. Now if exiled Israel wants to be restored, they must be rightly related to Jesus & planted in him.*" [GK. Beale, DA. Carson, B. Gladd, et. al., *Dictionary of the NT Use of the OT*, p. 47]

B. 'The Land' denotes the 'Good/Promised Land' of Canaan – God's 'vineyard' (e.g., Jer. 12:10)

- "Many shepherds have destroyed *my vineyard*; they have trampled *my plot of land*. They have turned my desirable plot into a desolate wasteland." (Jer. 12:10)
- "These shepherds...[trample] *the Land & destroy God's vineyard, a metaphor for the promised land* (Is. 5:1-7). The fertile land that God gave Israel will turn unproductive..." [Tremper Longman, *Jeremiah*, p.]

C. OT Repeated references to the Vine (Israel) (Ps. 80:8; Jer. 2:21; Hos. 10:1; Ezek. 15:1-4; Is. 5:1-7)

- "You dug up a vine from Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it." (Ps. 80:8)
- "I planted you, a choice vine from the very best seed. How... could you turn into a degenerate, foreign vine?" (Jer. 2:21)
- "Israel is a lush vine; it yields fruit for itself. The more his fruit increased, the more he increased the [idol] altars. The better his land produced, the better they made the sacred pillars." (Hos. 10:1)
- "The word of the Lord came to me... How does the wood of the vine... compare to any other wood? Can ...it make something useful? ...It is put into the fire as fuel. The fire devours [it]." [Ezek. 15:1-4)
- "I'll sing... a song about [a]... vineyard: The one I love had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He broke up the soil, cleared it of stones, & planted it with the finest vines. He built a tower in the middle of it & even dug out a winepress there. He expected... good grapes, but *it yielded worthless grapes*.... *The vineyard of the Lord... is the house of Israel*...., the plant he delighted in. He *expected justice but saw injustice*; he *expected righteousness but heard cries of despair*." (Is. 5:1-2, 7)

D. Israel's Land possession was *conditional on keeping Moses' Law* (Lev. 18:28; 20:22)

- "*If you defile the Land, it will vomit you out* as it has vomited out the nations... before you.' (Lev. 18:28)
- "You are to keep all my statutes &...ordinances, & do them, so... the land... will not vomit you out." (20:22)

E. God (the Father) is the Gardener/Vine-grower (Jn. 15:1b, Psa. 80:9-10 “You”)

- Jn. 15:1b identifies “my Father is the gardener.” “Ps. 80:9-10 clearly portrays God as the one who plants & cares for the vine... John 15 focuses on God’s role as vine-grower in maintaining the fruitfulness of the branches by... pruning. This focus does not derive from Ps. 80, but is easily attributed to Ezek. 15.” [Andrew Streett, *Vine & the Son of Man*, p. 216]

F. The Vine: Standard Symbol of Israel

- “The vine had long served as an emblem of the chosen people of God in Jewish literature. Scriptures that support the image as Ps. 80:8; Jer. 2:21; Hosea 10:1; Ezek. 15:2-6; 17:1-10; 19:10; & Is. 5:1-7; 27:2-3. Is. 5:7 (*‘The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel’*) & Hosea 10:1 (*‘Israel is a luxuriant vine’*) probably stand closer to the True Vine of Jn 15 than Ezekiel... Closer still would be Jer. 2:21 where God complains that he has planted a choice vine which has turned degenerate. Jesus, by contrast, is the True Vine...” [Fowler & Strickland, *Influence of Ezekiel in the 4th Gospel*, p. 117]

G. Every OT Prophetic reference involves Israel’s Failure & Judgment

- “In the OT the vine is a common symbol for Israel the...people of God (Ps. 80 ...). Most remarkable is the fact that *whenever historic Israel is referred to under this figure it is the vine’s failure to produce good fruit that’s emphasized*, along with the corresponding *threat of God’s judgment on the nation*. Now, in contrast to such failure, Jesus claims, ‘I am the true vine, i.e., the one to whom Israel pointed... Jesus has already... superseded the temple, the Jewish feasts, Moses, various holy sites; here [Jesus] supersedes Israel as the very locus of the people of God.’ [D. A. Carson, *John*, p. 59]
- In the OT Prophets “the vineyard or vine was a symbol for Israel, God’s covenant people, & [what’s] consistently stressed [is] Israel’s *disobedience & failure to bear fruit* no matter how much God tended to & cultivated them. Thus, God would judge Israel ...[using] other nations (Is. 5).” [Oren Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*, p. 129]
- “Most of the... vine passages...present the vine negatively ...Isaiah 5:1-7; Ezek. 15, 17, & 19; & Jer. 2:21 all result in destruction because of the vine’s unfruitfulness ...Jesus’ interpretation... from Isaiah, Ezekiel, & Jeremiah would... [be]: ‘The prophets portray the Israel-vine as under God’s judgment for unfruitfulness, but I am not like... [that]. In contrast, *I am the true & fruitful vine*, which is what Israel should have been’... *Jesus is ...contrasted to the failure of the nation* [Israel].” [Andrew Streett, *Op. cit.*, p. 218]

III. Jesus is the True Vine, the True Israel

A. Christ’s coming changes the Era (dispensation)

1. Distinguishes between True & False

– “For John, *in the new dispensation*, what’s of decisive importance, [for salvation], is not ethnicity, heritage, religious tradition, & culture. Rather, ...one’s response to Jesus ...is determinative – the *distinction is made between true & false Jew* (Jn. 4:20-24), [*true & false*] *Israelites* [Nathaniel ‘is a true Israelite’] (1:47), [*true & false*] *vine* (15:1) ...” [Saeed Hamid-Khani, *Revelation & Concealment of Christ*, p. 105]

2. From Shadow/‘Type’ to Reality/Fulfillment

– “In the extended metaphor of the vine & the branches in Jn. 15, John capitalizes on the OT picture of Israel as the vine (Ps. 80:8 [etc.]) to present Jesus as *the true Israel, the genuine vine & fulfillment* of that of which the *old vine was but a shadow*.” [Saeed Hamid-Khani, *Op. cit.*, p. 105]

B. The OT Types & Shadows are Fulfilled & Replaced by Jesus Christ (Heb. 8:13)

- “By saying a ‘new covenant,’ he [God] has declared that the first [covenant] is *obsolete*. And what is *obsolete & growing old is about to pass away*.” (Heb. 8:13 CSB)
- “The NT repeatedly sees such OT concepts as the temple., high priest & sacrifice as ‘types’ pointing to & fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Christians who advocate the rebuilding of the temple are regressing to a pre-Christian sacrificial system, superseded & annulled by the finished work of Jesus Christ. The NT portrays the temple as a temporary edifice, a shadow & type anticipating the day when God will dwell with people of all nations because of the atoning work of the true temple, Jesus Christ. The purpose of the temple... finds its ultimate significance & fulfillment...in Jesus Christ...” [Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, p. 183]
- “OT Israel with its people, land, & temple worship was a *shadow, a type* of the Israel of God that was to come in Christ. There’s been a *dramatic movement in redemptive history from shadow to substance & from type to reality*... ‘*The Land* that once was a specific locale for God’s redemptive working *served well* under the Old Covenant forms as a *picture*... but under the New Covenant fulfillment this land has been expanded to encompass the cosmos. The exalted Christ rules from the heavenly Jerusalem demonstrating his sovereignty over all the nations’ (Sizer)... Has (*sic*) all the OT prophecies been fulfilled? Yes, for the Apostle Paul emphasizes that all God’s promises have come true in Christ ([‘all the promises of God find their Yes in him’] 2 Cor. 1:20).” [Steven Paas, *Christian Zionism Examined*, p. 46]

C. In John Jesus Fulfills & Displaces the OT Symbols – Temple, Jerusalem, Feasts, Israel, etc.

- “Almost *every major symbol* of belonging as a Jew to the people of God –Torah, temple, festival calendar, Sabbath, ...the Scriptures, and the Patriarchs –*is displaced* in a ...countercultural way *by the Jesus of John*.” – Stephen Barton
- The Gospel of John ...describes how Jesus fulfills & replaces the old covenant persons & institutions of the temple (Jn. 2), sacred places/mountains (Jn. 4), Moses (Jn. 5), & the Jewish feasts (Jn. 6); as the true vine Jesus also supersedes Israel as the center & source of God’s people. The *places* (i.e., *the land*, Jerusalem, temple, altar) & the *people* (Israel, Jewish bloodlines, priestly heritage) have been fulfilled & replaced by *one person*: Jesus Christ... It is the Son who is now...the Vine tended by the Father.” [Edward Klink, *John*, pp. 650-1]
- “John ...transforms the image of the vine into a ...symbol [of Christ]. Just as *Jesus embodies the true meaning of Israel’s temple & its religious festivals, so also he now becomes ‘the true vine’* (15:1) the figural fulfillment of the nation’s identity & its hopes.” [Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, p.]
- “As the paradigmatic vine, Jesus embodies God’s true intentions for Israel: Jesus is the channel through which God’s blessings flow. Just as *Jesus is the new temple & the fulfillment of Jewish festival symbolism, so also he is the new Israel, the true vine*. Hence *Jesus displaces Israel* as the focus of God’s plan of salvation... faith in Jesus becomes the decisive characteristic for membership among God’s people. Whereas OT Israel was ethnically constrained, the new messianic community, made up of believing Jews & Gentiles, is united by faith in Jesus the Messiah. *Jews still have a place in God’s family, but they must come to God on his terms, rather than their own*.” [Andreas Kostenberger, *John*, in GK. Beale & DA. Carson (eds.) *Commentary on the NT use of the OT*, p. 491]

- John “scholars [see] a ‘fulfillment & replacement’ motif in John. Jesus fulfills & replaces the principal festivals. He’s the prophet like Moses... If the Jews believed Moses, they would believe Jesus (5:46). He’s the new Temple (2:21), therefore the hour has come when the true worshippers... worship the Father in Spirit & in truth (4:23) & neither on Mt. Gerizim nor in Jerusalem (4:21). The effect of this *‘fulfillment/replacement motif is that the Gospel declares by means of specific illustrations that Judaism apart from its fulfillment in Jesus has been rendered invalid by his coming.* The Scriptures... the Jews studied testify on Jesus’ behalf (5:39), but the Torah is now ‘your law’ (8:17).” [R. Alan Culpepper, “*Anti-Judaism as a Theological Problem,*” R. Bieringer (ed.) *Anti-Judaism & the 4th Gospel* – (2000) pp. 80-81]

D. Jesus – the True Israel – Displaces/Replaces Ethnic, National Israel

- “In declaring, ‘I am the true vine,’ *Jesus claims to be distinct from Israel (& the branches), but also the embodiment & thus fulfillment of imagery used of the nation of Israel.*” –Joel B. Green, *Connections*, Year B, Vol. 2, pp. 260-1]
- “The striking feature... of the vine in John 15 is that *it ceases to represent Israel* [the nation/people] & takes on a Christological significance. *It represents Jesus himself.* Whereas [previously] one’s salvation had depended on identity with Israel, the people of God, Jesus declares that life depends on abiding in him. He is the source of life. The added emphasis... ‘I am the true vine’ implies a warning not to accept any... substitute.” [R. Alan Culpepper, *John*, pp. 214-5]
- “You want to know what Jesus means by his being the real vine? *He is the actual embodiment of Israel.* So people need to stick with him if they want to be part of Israel. And that will be the key to their being able to produce... the same fruit of which Isaiah spoke, ‘love,’ Or ‘faithfulness in the exercise of authority.’ Otherwise, they will find themselves cut out (cf. Paul’s parable of the olive tree in Rom. 11).” [John Goldingay, *Reading Jesus’ Bible*, p. 129]

E. Invitation: Transfer your Trust/Loyalty from national, ethnic Israel to Jesus

- In the OT, “the individual’s relationship with God had always been mediated through Israel. Individual fate was tied to the collective fate of Israel. Now Jesus calls his followers to *mediate their relationship to God through himself. Their fate would no longer be dependent on Israel’s faithfulness & usefulness...* The individual’s usefulness would now be assured by his dependence on the faithful vine, Jesus. ...John invites individuals to *transfer their loyalty from Israel to Jesus, the true vine.*” [Gary T. Manning Jr., *Echoes of a Prophet*, p. 138]

IV. ‘Israel’ Redefined by Jesus

A. John’s Distinction between ‘the Jews’ & ‘Israel’ (Jn. 1:47)

- Jesus said about Nathaniel, “Here is *a true Israelite*; no deceit is in him.” (Jn. 1:47 HCSB)
- “‘Israel’... is the [God-ruled] people of God, but the term ‘Jew’ refers to the Jewish nation as such. For John, those who believe in Jesus are now the true Israel –the new people of God. As such, Nathaniel, the ‘true Israelite,’ symbolizes those *Jews who, by faith, have now become ‘true Israelites,’ the new people of God.* Therefore ‘*Israel, the people of God, is no longer identical with the Jewish nation as a religious-national community, although it is still formed of Jews...*” [John A Dennis, *Jesus’ Death &... True Israel*, p. 277]
- “Although ‘Jews’ is characteristically, though not always, a term of opprobrium in the 4th Gospel, ‘Israel’ & ‘Israelite’ uniformly appear in a positive sense. Nathaniel, Jesus’ disciple-to-be, is ‘truly an Israelite’ (1:47) ... ‘Israel’ & ‘Israelite’ ...remain entirely positive terms. Perhaps John sees

the church as the true Israel & the replacement of fallen Israel, but... he doesn't express himself in these terms." [D. Moody Smith, *Theology of... John*, pp. 172-3]

B. True Israel is defined by Faith in Jesus

- "If Jesus is the new Israel, then being 'in Jesus' means being part of Israel." –Munther Isaac
- Against the OT background of Ps. 80:8-18, "when Jesus says, 'I am the true vine' he is identifying himself with Israel, as if saying, '*I am Israel; I am the true Israel...and all who believe in me are the branches of the true vine, the true Israel.*' So John 15 [is]... *about 'abiding in Christ.'* But it has deeper levels of meaning & application than this!" [Colin Chapman, "Biblical Perspective on Israel/ Palestine," in S. J. Munayer (ed.) *The Land Cries Out*, p. 295]
- "John portrays Jesus as taking the place of Israel as the true vine. The disciples of Jesus must be 'in him' in order to produce fruit... Any branch that's not 'in him' will be cast out (15:4-6). The equation is simple: *If Jesus is the new Israel, then being 'in Jesus' means being part of Israel.*" [Munther Isaac, *From Land to Lands...*, p. 241]
- In "the parable of the vine... *Jesus transfers authority & privilege from Israel & its rulers to himself.* ... The branches must cling to the true vine instead of the false. John 15 ... *redefines God's people.* ... Before [Christ], that opportunity came through being a faithful part of the vine of Israel. Now, God's tending, & the resulting fruitfulness would *only come through the faithful vine Jesus. God's people are now those who 'abide in' Jesus*, hear his words, obey his commands, & thus produce fruit." [Gary T. Manning Jr., *Op. cit.*, p. 145]

C. Apostle Paul concludes the same based on Christ being Abraham's unique 'seed/offspring' (Gal. 3:16)

- "Galatians 3:16-17 is one of the major passages that is used... to support the idea Jesus has become the 'greater Israel' & all those who follow Jesus as *now the true Israel* (L. Lapedes)' ... 'Paul is saying that God's ultimate meaning in the Abrahamic covenant was that all the promises would be fulfilled in only one' of Abraham's physical seed/progeny... Jesus Christ!' (S. Storms)." [ML Brown, "'Seed' as Christ... Gal. 3:16," in SE. Porter (ed.) *Future Restoration...*, p. 278]
- "Gal. 3:16... appears to indicate that all the promises God made to national Israel find their fulfillment in Jesus the Messiah, which means that outside of him, Israel has neither national promises nor national purpose. Thus, the many promises which God gave Israel in the OT continue only in Jesus, not in the nation of Israel, as a result... the Jewish people can only be included in those promises by being in him." [Michael L. Brown, "'Seed' as..." *Op. cit.*, p. 280]

D. Apostle Paul presents Abraham's 'Promised Land' as universalized to the whole world (Rom. 4:13)

- "*The promise to Abraham* or to his descendants that he would *inherit the world* was not through the Law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith." (Rom. 4:13 CSB)
- "Christ universalized the Promised Land... [Note] in Rom. 4:13 Paul's use of the expression 'inherit the world,' rather than 'inherit the land of Judea' ... [which] indicates that the Land promise has been reconfigured... The formula that linked Abraham to Jewish ethnic lineage and the right to possess the land has now been overturned in Christ (Burge)." [GR. McDermott (ed.) *New Christian Zionism*, p. 171]
- There's a "universalizing thrust [in] Rom. 1-8, Paul uses *kosmos* ['world'] in Rom. 4:13 as a way of *expanding the Abrahamic land promises* where texts in Genesis have the term ['land'] (Gen. 12:7; 15:7, 18). According to Paul, God's promise to Abraham is not restricted to the land of Canaan. The geographically-restricted promise to the physical descendants of Abraham is *broadened to include the world.*" [T. Ryan Jackson, *New Creation in Paul...*, p. 154]

E. Those Rejecting Jesus Exclude themselves; e.g., Jewish leaders & Judas are 'withered branches' (15:6)

- "In Jn. 15:5 'those who abide in me & I in them bear much fruit' is immediately followed by 'because apart from me you can do nothing'– & then the fate of the separated branches is described (15:6). Here the negative is *implied by the metaphor of 'pruning,'* which is *bound tightly into the basic picture of Jesus as the Vine...* The description of Jesus as 'the true vine' (15:1) already contains a polemical undertone, 'in contrast to Israel'." [Motyer, "Bridging," *Op. cit.*, p 156]
- "The true vine can emerge only through the redemptive ministry of [Christ] ... It's the Redeemer with those united with him through faith & love. By definition this excludes from the true vine those in Israel who rejected Jesus and his revelation, represented above all in the leaders who finally brought about his death." [G. Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 289]
- "Judas has gone out into the night in Jn. 13:30, yet his dark presence is still felt as *he represents the dead-branch* of which Jesus illustrates whom God has taken away from the faithful branches. *Judas, like any dead branch*, only appeared to be 'in' the Vine; he, never 'abided' in Him and produced fruit." [Cory M. Marsh, *Jesus the True Vine*, Southern California Seminary (2017) p. 27]

F. The 'True Vine' is the New Israel, not the Church

- "That the Vine is Jesus, not the church is intentional; ... It's not the church but Jesus who is the true Vine. He is the Vine, not the trunk [stem] over against the branches... The emphasis...is on Jesus, the Vine." [Beasley-Murray, p. 272]

E. The 'Jew – Christian Separation/Divorce' Leaves Judaism's 'House' Empty

- "In the 'separation & divorce' between Christianity & Judaism, the 4th Evangelist has gone through their common home & claimed all the valuables for Christianity: the witness of the *Jewish Scriptures*, the significance of the *Temple*, the true meaning of the *Jewish festivals*, the authority of *Moses* ... self-understanding as '*children of God*,' & the promise of *salvation & resurrection to eternal life*. By the end of the Gospel, therefore, the Jews 'have no king but Caesar' (19:14-15) ... Apart from *all that's fulfilled in Jesus very little is left in Judaism*." [R. Alan Culpepper, "Anti- Judaism as a Theological Problem," in R. Bieringer (ed.) *Anti-Judaism & the 4th Gospel*, (2000) p. 77]

V. God's 3 Covenants with National, Ethnic Israel are Nullified

- "*John nullifies God's covenants with [national] Israel*, because those covenants have been superseded by the new basis for salvation through Jesus. *Those who claim to be children of Abraham are not* because they do not receive God's promised Son. *Those who claim to be disciples of Moses are not* because Moses bore witness to Jesus, & *those who claim the covenant with the house of David ultimately avow 'no king but Caesar.'* ...The Gospel of John does not say that God has abrogated the covenants, but that *the Jews have broken the covenants* & therefore do not recognize Jesus as the Son of God." [R. Alan Culpepper, "Anti- Judaism," *Op. cit.*, p. 116]
- "John... claim[s] ...salvation exclusively through Jesus. ...This...means that apart from confessing Jesus as the Messiah there's no hope for the Jews. *The three principal covenants between God & the Jewish people were the Abrahamic covenant* of sonship, the *Mosaic covenant* of deliverance & fidelity, & the *Davidic covenant* of kingship. Yet, by their actions the

Jews show that they are no longer children of Abraham (8:39-40). John claims that *Jesus fulfilled the role of Moses*, the Jews themselves *do not keep the Law* (7:19), & the Mosaic Scriptures themselves testify to Jesus... & through his death *Jesus himself is exalted as the 'king of the Jews'* (19:19-22). Consequently, *none of the covenantal bases for the Jewish relationship with God survive the coming of Jesus.*" [Culpepper, "Anti-Judaism," *Op. cit.*, p. 81]

- "The Gospel of John vigorously rejects any appeal to Abraham & Moses by those in Jewish Israel who refuse to acknowledge the claims of Jesus. Instead, the Gospel insists that belief in Jesus is the only way to understand Moses & to appropriate the promises made to Abraham & his seed (Jn. 5:46; 8:34-59). Therefore, *the disciples of Jesus* receive the promised blessings & *are viewed as the true or renewed Israel*, even if this is stated only implicitly (Jn. 3:16; 15:1-11)." [David E. Holwerda, *Jesus & Israel: One Covenant Or Two?*, p. 148]

VI. Abraham's Blessing: Does God Bless Those Who Bless the State of Israel? (Gen. 12:3; Num. 24:9)

- The Lord told Abram: "I'll bless those who bless you, I'll curse anyone who treats you with contempt..." (Gen. 12:3) He blessed Israel [via Balaam]: "Those who bless you'll be blessed, & those who curse you'll be cursed." (Num 24:9) "God is going to bless those who bless Abraham [Gen. 12:3], which means He is going to bless those who bless Israel [Num. 24:9b]. And this promise was never withdrawn. It must come to pass, which means it is still in force today. *But does the Israel of God exist today?*
- From a biblical perspective, the Israel of God does still exist. But here is where things get... a little tricky, for in today's world there is a nation-state named Israel that is occupying much of the geography that the OT refers to as the promised land. So, this must mean that if we want God's blessing, we have to do good to the modern nation of Israel by supporting everything that nation does, right? Not exactly. You see, the Bible [in the NT] is also clear *that the Israel of God is not any modern nation-state & that it is not made up of one people group. The Israel of God is Jesus Christ & all those who are united to Him by faith alone.* Referring to the young Jesus' return to the promised land after the death of Herod the Great, Matthew quotes the prophet Hosea, who said "*Out of Egypt I called my son*" (Matt. 2:15). This quote comes from Hosea 11:1, where Hosea is referring to the nation of Israel. Essentially, Matthew is saying that the true son of God named Israel is none other than Jesus the Messiah. Similarly, *in John 15:1, Jesus says, "I am the true vine."* Every Jew who heard Him would have remembered the many places in the OT where Israel is referred to as God's vine or God's vineyard (e.g., Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 6:9; Hos. 10:1). *Jesus' point is clear: because He is the true vine, He is the true Israel of God.* But the Israel of God is not Jesus alone. It's also all those who trust in Him alone for salvation. [In Jn. 15 the 'vine' includes all the branches that 'abide' in Christ (15:6)]... The true Israel of God, then, consists of Christ & all the Jews & gentiles who believe in Him... *There may [or may not] be good political reasons to support many of the modern nation-state [of Israel]'s policies, but Genesis 12:3 does not provide a theological reason to do so.* And of course, Christians are called to do good to all people & to take the gospel to both Jews & gentiles (Rom. 1:16; Gal. 6:10). But *blessing the Israel of God means, in this new covenant era, blessing the church of Christ*—supporting its work, doing good to its people, striving for its peace and purity, & so forth. God will bless those who bless His people, the church." [Robert Rothwell, "Does God Bless Those Who Bless Israel?" Ligonier Ministries.org (2021)]

VII. Israel in the Land – the Vine & Vineyard

- “*John 15* is the 4th Gospel’s *most profound theological relocation of Israel’s ‘Holy Space.’*” – Gary Burge

A. The OT Perspective: National, Ethnic Israel in the Promised Land

- “*John 15:1-6* is the 4th Gospel’s most profound theological relocation of Israel’s ‘Holy Space’ ... The central ...reference point is Israel’s belief that the Land itself is a source of life & hope... A principal metaphor describing this rootedness in the Land is the vineyard. ...Thus Ps. 80:8-13 describes Israel as a vine transplanted from Egypt to Canaan – Canaan, which is God’s vineyard... The primary OT metaphor depicts The Land as a vineyard cultivated by Yahweh. The people of Israel are the vines planted within this vineyard, upon The Land. Taken together the cultivated vineyard (filled with vines) is ‘The House of Israel’ tended by Yahweh, Israel’s vinedresser.” [Gary Burge, “*Territorial, Op. cit.*,” pp. 392-3]

B. Israel’s Land-Possession & Prosperity contingent on Keeping Moses’ Law

- “The task... of Israel [when] they entered the Promised Land was to uphold & observe the Torah [Law]... Their presence in the Land was contingent on their relationship to God & to the Torah. Walter Brueggemann lists three foundational guidelines...: 1.) they were supposed to keep away from images [idols]; 2.) They were to observe the Sabbath; & 3.) They were supposed to care for others ...the poor (Ex. 23:6 [etc.]), the stranger (Ex. 21:21-24 [etc.]), the sojourner (Deut. 14:27), the widow & orphan (Deut. 24:19-22) & those with no standing ...in the community.” [Salim Munayer, “*Theology of the Land*,” in P. Alexander (ed.) *Christ at the Checkpoint*, pp.]

C. Jesus Redefines both the Vine (Israel) & the Vineyard (the Promised Land)

- “The OT image of Israel is...a vineyard filled with vines rooted in the soil of the Holy Land. ...But Jesus upends this. ... There’s one vine—Christ—and the only concern is *not on gaining access to the land* but being attached to him.” –G. Burge “The Vineyard metaphor ...would’ve been explosive in Jesus’ day... [Jesus] was touching one of the most-used images in Judaism to express God’s relationship with his people ...Instead of describing God’s people as planted vines rooted in the soil of Israel, Jesus describes them as branches attached to himself, the one true vine. ...*Something important is happening here.* God’s people are defined not as people now planted in the vineyard of [territorial] Israel, but as people attached to Jesus... Now the vineyard consists of one vine, & *the question for God’s people is no longer, ‘Do I live in the vineyard [the Promised Land]?’ but instead, ‘Am I attached to Jesus, the vine?’*.” [Gary M. Burge, *John*, p.]
- “In... Jn. 15:1-6 Jesus redefines & personalizes what it means to be ‘Israel in the land.’ Jesus claims that he is the ‘*true* vine’ (15:1), indicating indirectly... there’s another ‘false’ vine. Jesus’ use of the vine metaphor is not uncalculated. The vine in the OT is Israel planted in the land. *Jesus claims here that he has replaced Israel: ‘The crux of John 15 is that Jesus is changing the place of rootedness for Israel. The commonplace prophetic metaphor (The Land as vineyard, the people of Israel as vines) now undergoes a dramatic shift. God’s vineyard, the Land of Israel, now has only one vine, Jesus’* (Burge) ... The history of Israel narrows down & focuses on one person: an Israelite and a descendent of Abraham by the name of Jesus. The implication of this *redefinition of Israel* is that *the covenant blessings ...must undergo a similar transformation* ...to accommodate the new reality. The land is...one motif ...we can expect to undergo some redefinition.” [Munther Isaac, *From Land to Lands*, p. 235]
- “John 15 is... *a careful critique of the territorial religion of Judaism* ...Jesus points away from the vineyard as place, as a territory of hills & valleys, cisterns & streams. In a word, *Jesus spiritualizes the land* ...But, what happened to the vineyard? Is Jesus rooted in the vineyard, the

land of Israel? Is Jesus the means of gaining the land? [No!] On the contrary, *Jesus is rooted in the Father*; he is one with the Father (17:11). ...*The land as holy territory ...should now recede from the concerns of God's people.* The vineyard [holy land] is no longer an object of religious desire as it once had been." [Gary Burge, *Jesus & the Land*, p. 56]

- "The crux of John 15 is that Jesus is changing the place of rootedness for Israel. The commonplace prophetic metaphor (The Land as vineyard, the people of Israel as vines) now undergoes a dramatic shift. God's vineyard, the Land of Israel, now has only one vine, Jesus. *The people of Israel cannot claim to be planted as vines in The Land*; they cannot be rooted in the vineyard *unless first they are grafted into Jesus*. Other vines are not true (15:1). Branches that attempt living in The Land, the vineyard, which refuse to be attached to Jesus will be cast out & burned (15:6). *The only means of attachment to the Land is through this one vine, Jesus Christ.*" [Gary Burge, "Territorial," *Op. cit.*, p. 393]
- "Jesus is now the recipient of the promise of the Holy Land held by Jacob [i.e., Israel] ...The NT relocates the properties of the Holy Land [e.g., flourishing] & discovers them in Christ himself." [Gary Burge, *Jesus & the Land*, pp. 49, 129]

D. The NT Churches did not promote residence in the "Holy/Good Land"

- "In the 4th Gospel, *the land* is subsumed within John's theology of Christ[']s ... *replacement/fulfillment*. Christ is the new avenue to God ...What Judaism sought in its festivals & institutions it can now find in Christ. What it sought in its Temple is now fulfilled in Christ. And the energies Judaism directed to the land must now be directed to the One Vine of the vineyard who encompassed ...the very promises life in the [promised] land had to offer... This ... perhaps explains how this [Johannine] community ...was content to remain living in Ephesus – if the later traditions are correct. ...They felt no need to live in the Land." [Gary Burge, *Jesus & the Land*, p. 57]
- "At no point do *the earliest Christians* view the Holy Land as a locus of divine activity to which the people of the Roman empire must be drawn. They *do not promote the Holy Land* either for the Jew or for the Christian as a vital aspect of faith ... The earliest Christians possessed no territorial theology. Early Christian preaching is utterly uninterested in a Jewish eschatology devoted to the restoration of the Land. The kingdom of Christ began in Judea and is historically anchored there but it is not tethered to a political realization of that kingdom in the Holy Land." [Burge, *Op. cit.*, p. 59]

VIII. Various Views on the Modern State of Israel in Biblical Prophecy

- "One of the most popular views among Christians in the US & Canada is that the creation of the modern state of Israel [May 1948] is a literal fulfillment of OT prophecy. In this [literal] view... the OT prophecies of the end-times demands a physical state of Israel in Palestine; thus the creation of [Israel] after hundreds of years is [viewed] as a fulfillment [&] a sign that the end-times are drawing near... Some early writers argued that in 1948... an end-times 'time clock' began (Mk. 13:30)." [J. Daniel Hays (ed.) *Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy & End Times*, pp. 219-20]
- "Another view of modern Israel... & biblical prophecy *urges caution*... Some... note that the present state of Israel *may or may not* play a role in the end-times or be a sign that the end-times are imminent...& note...Israel was disobedient to God in the OT & thus lost the Land. Moreover, Israel rejected Jesus the Messiah in the 1st century, & thus once again the Jews were scattered & exiled, losing the Land. The modern state of Israel ...is one of the *most hostile countries to the gospel message* in the world today. The Jews in Israel today *continue to reject*

God's Messiah. Thus, these Christian writers urge caution regarding... modern Israel in prophetic fulfillment. *Who is to say that God can't remove the Jews from the 'Promised Land' for disobedience in the future just as he did in the past? Who is to say that God won't judge their lack of justice & righteousness just as he did in the time of Jeremiah?*" [JD. Hays, *Op cit.*, pp. 219-20]

QUESTIONS:

1. Evangelical Christians in the US are among the strongest supporters of Israel. A few years ago, surveys reported that "A whopping **86%** of US white evangelicals said they felt warmly toward Israelis — more than any other Christian group. By comparison, only **58%** of US Black Protestants felt warmly toward Israelis (the same as those with 'No religion')."

a. If you are from (or aware of) other countries, how do you think the numbers in those places compare with the US?

b. What do you think are the underlying reasons for US evangelical Christians' strong support for Israel?

2. Consider the quotes from two leaders among US Evangelical Christians concerning Israel:

- "For America to be on the right side of Israel is the same as being on the right side of history and the right side of God" — Robert Jeffress (First Baptist Church of Dallas TX., US)
- "Israel has a Bible mandate to own & possess the land of Israel forever. That mandate cannot be amended by the UN. It cannot be revoked by Hamas or Hezbollah...It cannot be amended by the President of the US... It belongs to the Jewish people now & forever."—John Hagee (Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, TX., US)
- How would you evaluate these claims in the light of the New Testament? Discuss.

3. Jesus' assertion "I AM the true vine" (15:1) read against the OT symbols of Vine & vineyard, raises the questions: "*Who is the true vine? Who is the genuine Israel? The answer, by implication, is: only Jesus.*" In effect, Jesus is claiming "I am the true Israel." What are the implications of this for

a. Jesus' disciples, like Nathaniel, "a true Israelite" (Jn. 1:47)?

b. for Jews considering Jesus' claims, how can they join this new/true Israel?

c. For Jews like Judas Iscariot &/or Caiaphas the High Priest – what's their destiny according to Jesus' metaphor?

4. If Jesus is the "true Vine, the true Israel," what about the Jewish nation/State of Israel? How should we view Israel:

a. Are they the legitimate heirs to all God's promises to Abraham & his descendants? What do John (& Paul) say?

b. Does the State of Israel have a Biblical warrant to possess the “Promised Land”?