

Is There a Jewish 'Race' Today?

by [Todd D. Dennis](#)

A Closer Look at the Generation of the Olivet Discourse. What difference does it make whether a Jewish person is a blood descendent of Abraham? There seems to be little doubt that the proper identification of Israel is the cornerstone of correct theology.

Modern Israel is considered, by some, to be the blood inheritors of the promises given to Abraham. Politicians speak of a Jewish race in Biblical references to garner support for the 'nation of Israel.' Religious folk make the claim of an Jewish race to promote the idea of futurity for the nation in the prophetic scheme of things.

Numerous verses identify Israel, in New Testament prophecy, in terms of their tribal associations; however, these associations do not (and cannot, as will be seen) extend beyond the first century. One example of this is Matthew 24:30, where Christ declares that "the tribes of the (land) shall mourn." Knowing that no New Testament prophecy extends beyond the first century, we recognize the fulfillment of this verse in that Israel, prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, was reckoned in tribal relations. Paul, for instance, refers to his being of the stock of Benjamin in Romans 11:1. Another example of tribal reference in NT prophecy is the counting of the **first century first-fruits** to the Lord (notice that they are not **last-fruits**) in Revelation chapter 7, verse 4.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, however, the nation of Israel after the flesh was scattered throughout the earth, and lost all tribal relations. This scattering was made immutable due to the fact that all tribal genealogical records were destroyed with the Second Temple in A.D. 70. The simple fact is that there is no existing Jewish race.

Consider the following quotations:

The Encyclopedia Britannica (1973)

'The Jews As A Race: The findings of physical anthropology show that, contrary to the popular view, there is no Jewish race. Anthropometric measurements of Jewish groups in many parts of the world indicate that they differ greatly from one another with respect to all the important physical characteristics.' (vol. 12, page 1054)

Encyclopedia Judaica Jerusalem (1971)

"It is a common assumption, and one that sometimes seems ineradicable even in the face of evidence to the contrary, that the Jews of today constitute a race, a homogeneous entity easily recognizable. From the preceding discussion of the origin and early history of the Jews, it should be clear that in the course of their formation as a people and a nation they had already assimilated a variety of racial strains from people moving into the general area they occupied. This had taken place by interbreeding and then by conversion to Judaism of a considerable number of communities. . . .

"Thus, the diversity of the racial and genetic attributes of various Jewish colonies of today renders any unified racial classification of them a contradiction in terms. Despite this, many people readily accept the notion that they are a distinct race. This is probably reinforced by the fact that some Jews are recognizably different in appearance from the surrounding population. That many cannot be easily identified is overlooked and the stereotype for some is extended to all - a not uncommon phenomenon" (Encyclopedia Judaica Jerusalem, 1971, vol. 3, p. 50).

Encyclopedia Americana (1986)

"Racial and Ethnic Considerations. Some theorists have considered the Jews a distinct race, although this has no factual basis. In every country in which the Jews lived for a considerable time, their physical traits came to approximate those of the indigenous people. Hence the Jews belong to several distinct racial types, ranging, for example, from fair to dark. Among the reasons for this phenomenon are voluntary or involuntary miscegenation and the conversion of Gentiles to Judaism" (**Encyclopedia Americana**, 1986, vol. 16, p. 71).

Collier's Encyclopedia (1977)

"A common error and persistent modern myth is the designation of the Jews as a 'race! This is scientifically fallacious, from the standpoint of both physical and historical tradition. Investigations by anthropologists have shown that Jews are by no means uniform in physical character and that they nearly always reflect the physical and mental characteristics of the people among whom they live" (Collier's Encyclopedia, 1977, vol. 13, p. 573).

Today, being a Jew simply means that one is of the Judaistic religion or a convert to it, or else in a "brotherhood" of those who are. Therefore, being a Jew has nothing to do with race. We are familiar with a number of notable figures, such as Sammy Davis, Jr., Elizabeth Taylor, and Tom Arnold, in fact, who became Jews by conversion to the religion of Judaism. In fact, one is defined a Jew by legal dispensation or coercion, with race playing no part at all:

Funk and Wagnall's New Encyclopedia (1970)

"In 1970 the Israeli Knesset adopted legislation defining a Jew as one born of a Jewish mother or a convert." (vol. 14, p. 214)

H.G. Wells

"There can be little doubt that the scattered Phoenicians in Spain and Africa and throughout the Mediterranean, speaking as they did a language closely akin to Hebrew and being deprived of their authentic political rights, became proselytes to Judaism. For phases of vigorous proselytism alternated with phases of exclusive jealousy in Jewish history. On one occasion the Idumeans, being conquered, were all forcibly made Jews. There were Arab tribes who were Jews in the time of Muhammad, and a Thrkish people who were mainly Jews in South Russia in the ninth century. Judaism is indeed the reconstructed political ideal of many shattered peoples - mainly Semitic.... The main part of Jewry never was in Judea and had never come out of Judea" (The Outline of History, p. 505).

Therefore, we can clearly and confidently assert that there is no such thing as a Jewish race, nor ever can there be.

Scriptural Consequences

The fact that there is no Jewish race stirs up many relative issues. Of all the ramifications, which includes political right to the land of Palestine, the Scriptural implications are the most significant. It has been declared that the entire framework of the Dispensational model is the

existence of a temporal nation of Israel, throughout eternity. Obviously, if the nation that they call the heir of Israel is shown to have no relationship to the pre-desolation nation, there is no credibility to that system.

As inviting as this topic is, the only consequent issue that will be brought up is the impact this fact has upon the pivotal passage of the Olivet Discourse, as presented by Luke - "Verily I say unto you, this **generation** shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled" (21:32).

In an attempt to elude the prophetic significance of placing the fulfillment of the Olivet discourse within the time-frame of that half-century, many claim that the word used here for generation is in reference to the entire Jewish race - that the Jewish race would not pass away, until all those things were brought upon the Jewish race (never mind the redundancy, they say). To support this assertion, passages such as I Peter 2:9 ("But ye are a chosen *generation*") are used to support the idea of this word referring to the entire race. What is not told, however, is that these passages use an **entirely different Greek word**, *genos*. The word in the Olivet Discourse is *genea*, from which we get genealogy - the generations of a family. This word is never used in terms of the entire Jewish race.

The belief in a **race-related identification of generation** is, by no means, the position represented in a study of the doctrinal positions throughout the centuries. This writer has, in fact, not found **one writer** to propose such a notion prior to the Reformation period. Instead, we find comments such as the following, from St. Chrysostom:

"For I will ask them, Did He send the prophets and wise men? Did they slay them in their synagogue? Was their house left desolate? Did all the vengeance come upon that generation? It is quite plain that it was so, and **no man gainsays it.**" (Homily LXXIV on MATT. XXIII. 29, 30.)

For him to have the confidence to claim that not one person questions the identity of the generation in question should carry a great deal of weight; in fact, the greatest scholars of all Christian ages seem to agree unanimously on this point. Though off our initial point, some examples from the earliest days of Christianity, are as follows:

Chrysostom (375)

"He speaks of the Jewish wars coming upon them at no great distance, for henceforth the Roman arms were a matter of anxiety. Since then these things also were sufficient to confound them, He foretells them all. Therefore He saith, they shall come not by themselves or at once, but with signs. For that the Jews may not say, that they who then believed were the authors of these evils, therefore hath He told them also of the cause of their coming upon them. "For verily I say unto you," He said before, "all these things shall come upon this generation," having made mention of the stain of blood on them. " (*Homilies*)

Clement of Alexandria (A.D.150-215)

"Accordingly, therefore, prophesying concerning the temple, He said: "See ye these buildings? Verily I say to you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another which shall not be taken away [Matt. 24:3]; and this generation shall not pass until the destruction begin [Matt. 24:34]. . . ." And in like manner He spoke in plain words the things that were straightway to happen, which we can now see with our eyes, in order that the accomplishment might be among those to whom the word was spoken.⁶³ (*Clementine Homilia*, 3:15. See Roberts and Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Fathers, 8:241.)

Eusebius (325)

"And when those that believed in Christ had come thither from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgment of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed **that generation** of impious men." (*Ecclesiastical History*, [Book III, Ch. 5](#))

And we have, even in the late nineteenth century, the following declaration:

Ezra Gould (1896)

"there is general consent now that the prophecy is restricted in time to that generation, (Mark 13) v. 30. In general, the historical interpretation of this prophecy is fairly settled." (*Commentary on Mark*, p.249)

The belief in a race-related identification of the *generation* that would see the fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse is negated by the very simple fact that there is no possibility of any race being identified with that passage, aside from a Jewish race. We know that there is no possibility that this passage of the Olivet Discourse has any relation to a Jewish race, as there is no such thing. Since the fall of Jerusalem, and the scattering of the nation of Israel in the first century, the nation calling itself Israel has consisted of a collection of people from nearly every nation in the world, with no relation to the twelve tribes of the historical nation known as Israel. Any attempts to state that there is, or will ever again be, a race of Israelites are proven to be futile and of no force. ***There is no Jewish race.***

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