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After Jesus had declared that He would build His church on the truth of Peters noble confession, He went on to say, I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:19). Later, addressing all the disciples, our Lord repeated the words, Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Matthew 18:18).Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven, not the keys to heaven.1 A key was a badge of authority (Luke 11:52), and then as now was used to open doors. Peter used the keys Christ gave him to open the door to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), to the Samaritans after the preaching of Philip (Acts 8:14-17), and to the Gentiles after the Lord had sent him a vision and an appeal from Cornelius (Acts 10).The concept of binding and loosing found inMatthew 16:19 andMatthew 18:18 was commonly used among the Jewish people in relation to the authority of the rabbis to forbid and permit certain practices. Jesus gave Peter and the apostles authority over both the doctrine and practices of the first-century church. Through the leading of the Holy Spirit, they would be given wisdom to know what to forbid and what to permit.This authority, not on exactly the same level as during the apostolic era, still resides in the leaders of the local church. They may not receive the same kind of supernatural guidance as the apostles did, but they possess the entire New Testament along with the direction of the Holy Spirit. 2 Therefore, when church leaders discipline a church member who promotes incorrect doctrine or is involved in evil behavior, they act with divine approval. They are carrying out Gods will, and what they do is ratified in heaven. Since their authority is not ultimately derived from their personal qualities or their office but from Scripture and the instruction of the Holy Spirit, they should exercise it humbly and prayerfully. The two expressions kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven actually have the same basic meaning. They should be understood within the context of the passages in which they are found. They can be used in a number of ways. They can refer to the universal sense of the entire creation, which is ultimately under the control of God. They can refer the mediatorial kingdom of Jesus Christ, which will come into being when Jesus returns triumphantly to reign directly over the earth. And, finally, they can refer to the kingdom of God, which is already present in the hearts of believers who have yielded themselves to Jesus Christ as Lord. Hebrews 12:22-24 expresses the reality of Gods present kingdom:You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Back To Article The authority of the apostles and their chosen successors was basic to the survival of the early church. However, after centuries passed and the canon of Scripture along with the doctrinal foundation of the church had become firmly established, it was necessary to return to the Scriptures themselves as the primary source of authority.Back To Article Israel is the name God gave Jacob on the night he wrestled with the angel (Genesis 32:28). As a group, his sons along with the 12 tribes that descended from them inherited the name. Although Israel always accepted proselytes,1 it was at first largely made up of people physically descended from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. Eventually the term Israelites was replaced by the term Jew (Yehudi), derived from the kingdom of Judah (Yehuda), the southern Israelite kingdom that retained its independence for approximately 135 years after Assyria conquered the northern kingdom and took its leading citizens into captivity. After the fall of the kingdom of Judah, Judaism (the Israelite religion) continued to be open to Gentile converts. The book of Esther mentions one such occasion in every province and city, wherever the kings command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them (8:17 nkjv).Soon after the conversions described in Esther, Alexanders conquests established a common Hellenistic culture around the Mediterranean, exposing pagans to Jewish religion and lifestyle. Judaism became a vibrant missionary faith. Many thousands of Gentiles became God-fearers and converts.2During the third and second centuries BC, a group of Greek-speaking Hebrew scholars in Alexandria translated the Bible into Greek (the Septuagint) so that it would be available in the common language of commerce and culture. Philo and other Jewish apologists strove to explain Israels faith to the Gentile world. They wrote intertestamental booksincluding those in the Apocryphat that described the superiority of their God.3 The proselytizing zeal of the Jews was still strong during Jesus ministry.4 Most Gentiles who converted to Judaism did so because Israels God offered both a superior way of life and the hope of resurrection. Some, like the Edomites and Itureans, were forcibly converted by Jewish rulers.5 There were about six million Jews throughout the Roman Empire when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, of whom a large proportion were converts or descendants of converts. Regardless of their pedigree, all Jews identified with the symbols and story of Israel and hoped that Messiah would come to initiate the longed-for days of blessing and restoration. But when He appeared, many didnt accept Him (John 1:11).Two thousand years have brought significant religious and demographic changes to non-Christian people who identify with the Hebrew tradition. A majority of the Jews in the Roman Empire probably converted to Christianity during the first five centuries ad6 following the official Jewish expulsion of Christians from synagogue worship.7 It is a common misunderstanding that following the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in the Jewish-Roman wars of ad 70 and 135, the Jews of Palestine were driven from the land as a people and that modern diaspora Jews are their descendants. Actually, there never was a great dispersion or mass exile of Jews following the Jewish-Roman wars of ad 70 and 135. Most of the Jews were people of the land (Am Haaretz), peasant farmers generally indifferent to politics but devoted to their homeland. Keeping a low profile, they remained in Palestine, many becoming Christians and Muslims under Byzantine and Arab rule. As mentioned earlier, Jews of the Diaspora, including the ancestors of todays northern European, Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazim, continued to be largely the descendants of proselytes. Today, dark-eyed, brown-skinned Palestinians are more likely to be Abrahams physical descendants than the light-skinned northern European Ashkenazim displacing them. This has been acknowledged by Jewish historians, including two of the founders of the modern state of Israel, David Ben-Gurion and Itzhak Ben-Zvi:To argue that after the conquest of Jerusalem by Titus and the failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt Jews altogether ceased to cultivate the land of Eretz Israel is to demonstrate complete ignorance in the history and the contemporary literature of Israel . . . The Jewish farmer, like any other farmer, was not easily torn from his soil, which had been watered with his sweat and the sweat of his forebears . . . Despite the repression and suffering, the rural population remained unchanged (Eretz Israel in the Past and in the Present, Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi, 1979; in Hebrew, translated by Sand, p.198).The fellahin [Arabic-speaking Palestinian peasants] are not descendants of the Arab conquerors, who captured EretzIsrael and Syria in the seventh century CE. The Arab victors did not destroy the agricultural population they found in the country. They expelled only the alien Byzantine rulers, and did not touch the local population. Nor did the Arabs go in for settlement. Even in their former habitations, the Arabians did not engage in farming . . . They did not seek new lands on which to settle their peasantry, which hardly existed. Their whole interest in the new countries was political, religious and material: to rule, to propagate Islam and to collect taxes (Ibid., p.196). If Jewishness were determined by the preponderance of patriarchal genes alone, the people we know today as Jews would be a significantly different group. The myth that the dominant group of modern Jews,the Ashkenazimare uniquely the descendants of Abraham creates a tribal idolatry. Even among Christians, it encourages new manifestations of the Judatizing spirit that the apostles battled in the first century. Although todays Jews still identify with the Israel of the Old Testament, they are not uniquely the descendants of the patriarchs, and their rejection of Jesus has locked their focus on the tribal aspects of the Old Testament tradition while distancing them from the universal message of the Old Testament prophets. Jesus said, The last will be first, and the first will be last (Matthew 20:16). Israel was formally the primary witness for God in the world, but the members of this judicially blinded group remain the most opposed to His universal plan. When Israel repents its corporate rebellion, it will be life from the dead. The elect Jews will be freed from their judicial blindness, and their desperate faith in a tribal God will be transformed into passion for the salvation of the entire human race.Even though they are not unique people in a genetic sense, and have no rights they can demand from the Lord (including the right to return the ancient Hebrew homeland, displace or drive out its current inhabitants, and establish a Jewish state), both the Old and New Testament testify of Gods love for the Jews and His desire to restore them when they humbly submit to Him and the Messiah He has sent. Some examples: Joseph married Asenath, an Egyptian priests daughter (Genesis 41:45,50; 46:20). She bore him sons Manasseh and Ephraim. Moses married Zipporah, the daughter of a Midianite (Exodus 2:21). She may have been partially of African descent (Numbers 12:1). She bore Moses two sons: Gershon and Eliezer (Exodus 18:3-4). During the period of the judges, the Israelites intermarried extensively with the surrounding nations (Judges 3:5). Jesses wife, the mother of Israels great King David, was probably a Moabite. King David himself took the daughter of the king of Geshur as one of his wives. King Solomon was notorious for the number and variety of his wives: Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites (1 Kings 11:1-3). Other kings and commoners married foreigners, including the notorious daughter of a Phoenician king, Jezebel, wife of Ahab. Back To ArticleIt would not be an exaggeration to say that but for the symbiosis between Judaism and Hellenism, which, more than anything, turned the former into a dynamic, propagative religion for more than 300 years, the number of Jews in todays world would be roughly the same as the number of Samaritans. Hellenism altered and invigorated the high culture of the kingdom of Judea. This historical development enabled the Jewish religion to mount the Greek eagle and traverse the Mediterranean world. The conversions carried out by the Hasmonean kingdom were only a small part of a far more significant phenomenon that began in the early second century BCE. The pagan world was already beginning to rethink its beliefs and values when Judaism launched its campaign of proselytization and became one of the factors that prepared the ground for the great Christian revolution. Judaism did not yet produce professional missionaries, as its younger sibling would do before long, but its encounter with the philosophies of the Stoic and Epicurean schools gave birth to a new literature that demonstrated a strong desire to win souls (Shlomo Sand, The Invention of the Jewish People, p.161). Back To Article See Ibid., pp.162-164. Back To ArticleWoe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves (Matthew 23:15 nkjv, see also Acts 2:10). Back To Article In 125 BCE Yohanan Hyrcanus conquered Edom, the country that spread south of Beth-zur and Ein Gedi as far a Beersheba, and Judaized its inhabitants by force. Josephus described it in Antiquities of the Jews:Hyrcanus took also Dora and Marissa, cities of Idumea, and subdued all the Idumeans; and permitted them to stay in that country, if they would circumcise their genitals, and make use of the laws of the Jews; and they were so desirous of living in the country of their forefathers, that they submitted to the use of circumcision, and of the rest of the Jewish ways of living, at which time therefore this befell them, that they were hereafter no other than Jews.Thus did the ruling Hasmonean high priest annex an entire people not only to his kingdom but also to his Jewish religion. Henceforth, the Edomite people would be seen as an integral part of the Jewish people (Sand, TIOTJP, pp.157-158).In 104-103 BCE Judas Aristobolus (son of Yohanan Hyrcanus) annexed the Galilee to Judeaand forced its Iturean inhabitants, who populated the northern region, to convert to Judaism. According to Josephus, He was called a lover of the Grecians; and had conferred many benefits on his own country, and made war against Itrurea, and added a great part of it to Judea, and compelled the inhabitants, if they would continue in that country, to be circumcised, and to live according to the Jewish laws (TIOTJP, Sand, 159). Back To ArticleThe systematic expulsion of Christian Jews from Judaism occurred prior to the Bar Kokhba revolt. See below.In the oldest Palestinian version of the 12thbenediction of the Prayer of Eighteen Benedictions, now known to us through the findings in the CairoGeniza, Nazarenes and minim are mentioned together: May the Nazarenes (Christians) and heretics perish in a moment, be blotted out of the book of life, and not be written with the just. The introduction of this benediction into theShemone Esreand therewith into the liturgy by R. Gamaliel II c. ad 90 carried with it a definitive breach between the Chr. Church and Judaism. From then on cursing the Nazarenes became an integral part of synagogue worship and the daily prayer of every Jew. Precisely in this benediction very great care was taken to see that the cursing of the minim was done correctly and without abbreviation. Attending the synagogue and taking part in its worship thus became impossible for Christians. Complete separation resulted. In future confession of Jesus Christ meant excommunication and expulsion from Judaism. The Johannine statements belong to this period (Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. 7, p. 850). Back To Article Scholars generally agree that in the first century there were approximately six million Jews in the Roman Empire. That was about one tenth of the entire population. About one million were in Palestine, including todays State of Israel, while those in the Diaspora were very much part of the establishment in cities such as Alexandria and Constantinople. At one point Klinghoffer acknowledges that, during the life of Jesus, only a minuscule minority of Jews either accepted or rejected Jesus, for the simple reason that most Jews had not heard of him. Some scholars have noted that, by the fourth or fifth century, there were only a few hundred thousand, at most a million, people who identified themselves as Jews. What happened to the millions of others? The most likely answer, it is suggested, is that they became Christians. What if the great majority of Jews did not reject Jesus? That throws into question both the title of the book and Klinghoffers central thesis. The question can be avoided only by the definitional legerdemain of counting as Jews only those who rejected Jesus and continued to ally themselves with rabbinical Judaisms account of the history of Israel (Richard John Neuhaus, Why the Jews Did or Did Not Reject Jesus, First Things).To begin with, a few definitions: Who is a Jew? A Jew is anyone who has a Jewish mother or who converted to Judaism in conformity with Halacha, Jewish religious law. This definition alone excludes racism. Judaism does not seek converts, but those who do convert are accepted on a basis of equality. Let us see how far this goes. Some of the most eminent and respected rabbis were converts to Judaism. Jewish parents throughout the world bless their children every Sabbath and holiday eve, and they have done it in the same way for millennia. If the children are girls, the blessing is, May G-d let you be like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. Not one of these matriarchs was born a Jewess; they were all converts to Judaism. If the children are boys, the blessing is, May G-d let you be like Ephraim and Menashe. The mother of these two was an Egyptian woman who became Jewish and had married Joseph. Moses himself, the greatest Jew who ever lived, married a Midianite woman who became Jewish.Finally, the Tenach, the holy writings of the Jew, contains the book of Ruth. This woman was not only not Jewish by birth, but she came from the Moabites, traditional enemies of the Jewish people. This book describes Ruths conversion to Judaism and is read annually on the holiday commemorating the giving of the Torah, the Law, i.e., the Pentateuch. At its very end, the book of Ruth traces the ancestry of King David, the greatest king the Jews ever had, to Ruth, his great-grandmother. Apart from the Zionists, the only ones who consistently considered the Jews a race were the Nazis. And they only served to prove the stupidity and irrationality of racism. There was no way to prove racially whether a Mrs. Muller or a Mr. Meyer were Jews or Aryans (the Nazi term for non-Jewish Germans). The only way to decide whether a person was Jewish was to trace the religious affiliation of the parents or grandparents. So much for this racial nonsense. Racial pride has been the downfall of those Jews in the past who were blinded by their own narrow-minded chauvinism.This brings us to a second definition. Is there a Jewish people? If so, what is its mission? Let us make this completely clear: The Jewish nation was not born or reconstituted a generation ago by some Zionist politicians. The Jewish nation was born on Mount Sinai when the Jews by their response, let us do and let us hear, adopted the Torah given to them by G-d for all future generations. This day you become a people, though valid still today, was spoken thousands of years ago. (Quotation from Neturei Karta, The Difference Between Judaism and Zionism). Back To Article

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