

1. 'For thus says Yahweh Elohim: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. "As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. [Ezekiel 34:11-12 NKJV]

[INTRO ANIMATION]

2. Even casual students of the Bible are readily familiar with the number of parables and prophecies speaking of the Good Shepherd and His dedicated attention to every one of the sheep in His flock. Most of us easily identify with that lost sheep who mindlessly wandered off and needed saving. We understand the peace and comfort that only comes from having been found by our shepherd and reunited with the flock. And therein lies a critically important point that I had somehow overlooked for nearly a decade. Who is the flock? And who am I amongst them?
3. Because we all so easily relate with the lost sheep in this parable, it becomes critically important to also recognize the identity of the flock which the Good Shepherd is leading. And that's because once we **are** found, we are **added to this flock**, we are joined with them. Despite our own personal histories that led to this moment, we are now members of a new distinct group who has a common identity under the authority of our Messiah. However, it was a great shock to me when I eventually realized that although Yeshua is indeed my savior, He did not primarily come to save gentiles like myself. And surprisingly enough, He actually admits to this fact himself.
4. In Matthew 15 we read of an encounter Yeshua has with a Canaanite woman wherein he reveals to his disciples the purpose for which He was sent. Matthew 15:22-24 And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

5. In much the same way, when Yeshua sent out his disciples in Matthew 10 to preach that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, he “commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
6. We can glean some very important context for these statements with a brief overview of some key Biblical history. After the reign of Solomon, the nation of Israel was divided into two separate kingdoms. The ten northern tribes formed their own distinct nation and continued to be called Israel with their capital becoming the city of Samaria. The two southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin, remained loyal to the House of David centered in Jerusalem. They became known as the kingdom of Judea, from which the word “Jew” originates.
7. These two distinct kingdoms each began to stray from keeping the commandments of God and were both eventually punished for their disobedience by being conquered and taken into exile. The kingdom of Judah was sent into captivity in Babylon for 70 years as prophesied by Jeremiah 29. After their time in exile, they did return to rebuild the wall and the temple from which a faithful and obedient remnant remains today. The nation of Israel, however, was given a certificate of divorce by the Most High God, and was sent into captivity in Assyria and never returned to land.
8. Despite this fact, the scriptures have a great many beautiful prophecies that foretell of the eventual return of the House of Israel into the land. [List other scripture passages on screen] One of the more powerful and poetic of these prophecies is found in Jeremiah 23, verses 3 through 8
9. "But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. "I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking," says Yahweh. "Behold, the days are coming," says Yahweh, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. "Therefore, behold, the days are coming," says

Yahweh, "that they shall no longer say, 'As Yahweh lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' "but, as Yahweh lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel from the north country and from all the countries where I had driven them.' And they shall dwell in their own land."

10. So the House of Israel was scattered due to their adultery and disobedience. Yet the prophets repeatedly foretold that Yahweh himself would regather these scattered sheep. And again, we read the words of Yeshua in Matthew 15:24 claiming, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Thus, if I am to take advantage of the Messiah's free gift of salvation being offered by grace through faith, I must understand the context in which that offer is being made. That context is Israel. He ONLY came for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And if I want to be a part of the covenant relationship He's offering, I must be a part of Israel. I must become Israel.

11. This is no different from what we read about in the Exodus from Egypt. Yahweh sent the Christ like figure of Moses into Egypt specifically to rescue His chosen people Israel. However, what marched out of Egypt was a mixed multitude. And when they arrived at Mt. Sinai, they received one law for the native born and the sojourner. (see Exodus 12:49) Even though Moses only came for Israel, people of other nations were allowed to come along and become a member of God's chosen people, provided they were willing to abide by the terms of the covenant. In other words, they had to become Israel.

12. As someone who believes that he has been saved by the substitutionary death of the lamb of God, I now recognize that my spiritual identity is a member of the commonwealth of Israel. Again, this follows the pattern of the Exodus in which ANYONE who applied the blood of the lamb to their doorpost was saved, but that provision was provided specifically for the children of Israel.

13. Thus, as a member of Israel, it is my great honor and privilege to demonstrate my love and gratitude to my Savior by following His example to be as obedient as I can to all that He commanded His people at Mount Sinai. I do this because I was once lost, but now I'm found. I do this because I've come to realize that I am part of Israel.

14. And since I have now been found, I must rejoin the flock that has always remained with the Father and obedient to His instructions. That flock is Judah. Genesis 49:10 even makes mention that, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people." One day the fractured kingdoms of Israel and Judah will be reunited as one harmonious nation under the direction and guidance of our shepherd, the Messiah. This fact is detailed in the prophecy of the two sticks found in Ezekiel chapter 37 wherein the prophet is instructed to label one stick for Judah and one stick for Joseph and he is instructed to symbolically join these sticks together in his hand. What is particularly fascinating about this prophecy is that it clearly occurs near the end times as it specifically makes mention of the new covenant, of the Messiah being a ruler forever, and of the people being in the presence of the tabernacle of God forevermore. Moreover, it also mentions doing away with idolatrous practices in favor of obedience to the law of God.

15. Ezekiel 37:19-28 NKJV - "say to them, 'Thus says Yahweh Adonai: "Surely I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will join them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand. And the sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes. "Then say to them, 'Thus says Yahweh Adonai: "Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; "and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again. "They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be My people, and I will be their God. "David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. "Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever. "Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will

set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. "The nations also will know that I, Yahweh, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore."

16. This prophesied rejoining of the two houses is also addressed in the New Testament as well. Ephesians 2:11-16 outlines how gentiles are brought into the Commonwealth of Israel by the blood of Christ and that under the authority of Messiah we will all become one. "Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh--who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands-- that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity."
17. There are many that suggest that verse 15 in this passage is evidence that Christ abolished the law of God. However, with a little historical context, it quickly becomes clear that "the law of commandments contained in ordinances" is a reference to the Pharisees manmade traditions that had been elevated as more important than the law of God. For a clear and concise explanation of this fact, please consider watching Greg Widener's excellent twelve minute video, "Another look at Ephesians 2:15" You can find a link to this video in the description below.
18. Ephesians 2:11-16 is an important passage because it perfectly echoes what we read earlier in Ezekiel 37. It speaks of reunification and peace between people that were once divided. It foretells of one nation being formed from populations that for millennia were plagued by separation and enmity. It underscores the fact that gentiles who were once strangers to the commonwealth of Israel are now brought near and made partakers of the covenants of promise. In fact, this is specifically addressed a few verses later in Ephesians 2:19, Now, therefore, you are

no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”

19. All of this unification is only accomplished by the prophesied work of our good shepherd, our savior, the Messiah. He is gathering and reuniting the divided kingdoms of his chosen people, while simultaneously allowing gentile believers to join His family, provided they are willing to agree to the terms of the covenant which was originally established at Mount Sinai. That covenant is summed up in the conditional statement Yahweh himself declared to Moses in Exodus 19:5-6 'Now therefore, if you will indeed **obey** My voice and **keep My covenant, then** you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth [is] Mine. 'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These [are] the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

20. Paul also teaches about gentiles being joined into the family of God in Romans 11:16-25 when he compares a wild olive tree and a cultivated olive tree to explain the process of believers being grafted in to the commonwealth of Israel. When we are saved by grace through faith we are adopted into the family of God and become siblings with the children of Israel. As such, we are fellow heirs to both the blessings and the curses connected to the covenant the Most High made with his people. This is an issue of fundamental importance for all believers to understand. Romans 11 is a key passage in explaining the significance of the role gentiles play in our Heavenly Father's plan, as well as our place in his family. For more on this, please consider my video, Are you Grafted In?

21. But perhaps the most conclusive evidence for gentile believers to consider regarding our true Biblical identity, is John's description of the Gates of the New Jerusalem found in Revelation 21:10-12 “And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

22. During the exodus and their subsequent time wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, the Children of Israel were always instructed to camp, walk and otherwise be arranged according to the tribes to which they were born. Thus it is safe to assume that the gates to the New Jerusalem being labeled with the names of the twelve tribes is so that everyone can enter into the city through the gates according to their tribe. There is not a 13th gate labeled separately for gentiles. If we do not recognize ourselves as being part of Israel, how and where do we enter into the city?

23. (Isaiah 53:6) All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; The Good Shepherd has only ever had one flock, His chosen people, Israel. And every lost sheep that cries out to Him, He rescues and brings them into His flock where He can lovingly tend to them, provide for them, and keep them safe. With His rod and His staff, He guides and directs His flock and they learn to recognize His voice and to obey His commands. Every sheep in that flock, regardless of where they were found, now belongs to Him. Every sheep in that flock shares a common identity of being unified under Him according to everything that He has done for them. Every sheep in that flock, whether they realize it yet or not, is now a member of His chosen people. That flock is Israel.