

Research Article

Israel and the Church in the Perspective of Church History in Indonesia: Between Continuity and Contextualisation of God's People

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Abstract: This article aims to explain the theological relationship between Israel and the Church as God's people, as discussed in biblical studies, and to relate it to the history and development of the Church in Indonesia. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach, this paper explores key theological concepts regarding Israel and the Church, examining how these understandings shape the Church's mission, identity, and role. The study spans from the colonial era to the digital age, highlighting how historical and cultural contexts influence ecclesial expressions. The article argues that while the Church does not replace Israel as God's covenant people, it participates in God's redemptive plan through Christ. In the Indonesian context, the Church manifests its identity as God's chosen people by embracing local wisdom, cultural diversity, and a contextual mission. This dynamic relationship reflects the Church's calling to live out its faith in Christ within a pluralistic society, contributing to nation-building and bearing witness to the Gospel in relevant and transformative ways.

Keywords: Church, Contextualisation, History of the Church in Indonesia, Israel, People of God.

1. Introduction

Questions regarding the relationship between Israel and the church as God's people have been an important theme in Christian theology. Some theologians understand that the church replaces Israel, a view called supersessionism (Ryrie, 2007). However, this understanding is contested by many biblical scholars who emphasise that both Israel and the church have their own roles in God's plan (Hoekema, 1987).

In this context, the church is not seen as a replacement for Israel, but rather as an extension of God's people that now includes other nations who believe in Jesus Christ (Ridderbos, 2008). This understanding is important because it determines how the church views itself in the history of salvation and in its relationship with Israel.

Theologians such as George Eldon Ladd (1999) state that not all people who come from Israel are true Israelites, so God's election is spiritual, not merely ethnic. This emphasises the importance of faith as a condition of belonging. This understanding has implications for how the Indonesian church lives out its identity as God's people in a pluralistic society.

In the diverse context of Indonesia, the church faces challenges in communicating the gospel and forming an identity that is not only liturgical but also contextual. This includes how the church understands itself as part of God's plan for the nations, including Indonesia.

The Indonesian church is growing in a unique context, different from that of the Western church and the church in Israel. Therefore, a deep understanding of the role of the church as God's people in context is necessary, not merely as a conduit of Western theological doctrine.

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A proper understanding of Israel and the church provides a strong foundation for the Indonesian church to remain faithful to God's Word, relevant in the local context, and open to the work of the Holy Spirit among all nations.

2. Proposed Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method. Data was obtained from relevant theological and historical literature, as well as academic journals and church documents that describe the dynamics of church development in Indonesia.

The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the author to conduct an in-depth exploration of theological concepts and their implications in Indonesian history and context. This is relevant to the reflective and interpretative nature of the study.

Library research is the primary technique used to collect and analyse data. The main literature reviewed includes works by theologians such as Ridderbos (2008), Hoekema (1987), Karman (2005), and Ladd (1999), as well as local writings discussing the history of the Indonesian church.

The author also examined various scientific journals from within and outside the country, including articles in *Jurnal Silih Asuh* (2025), which specifically discusses the relationship between Israel and the church as God's people.

In a descriptive analytical approach, the author attempts to systematically describe how the concept of God's people is understood in a biblical context and translated into church practice in Indonesia.

The purpose of this method is to present a systematic, literature-based, and theologically reflective discussion that is relevant to academic readers and church practitioners.

3. Results and Discussion

The Theological Relationship between Israel and the Church: The Chosen and Called People

Theologically, Israel in the Old Testament is understood as God's chosen people, called through a covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). This election is exclusive but universal in purpose, namely to be a blessing to other nations (Hadiwijono, 2007).

The Church in the New Testament is referred to as 'ekklesia,' referring to a community called out of the world to belong to God (Boyce, 2011). This word is derived from the verb 'kaleo,' meaning to call, and 'ek,' meaning out of.

The main difference between Israel and the church lies in the basis of their election. Israel was chosen biologically as the descendants of Abraham, while the church was chosen spiritually through faith in Christ (Ridderbos, 2008).

However, Paul in Romans 11 states that God's election of Israel has not been cancelled. He mentions the existence of a 'remnant of Israel' that remains faithful, and ultimately Israel will be saved (Karman, 2005).

The unity of Israel and the church lies in their shared mission: to be a light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6; Matthew 5:14). Although their forms and essences are different, both are called to reflect God's glory in the world.

Thus, the understanding that the church replaces Israel is incomplete. It is more accurate to say that the church continues and expands God's work of salvation for the whole world, as originally designed.

History of the Church in Indonesia: Mission, Planting, and Contextualisation

The history of the church in Indonesia began with the arrival of Westerners who brought the Christian mission in the 16th century, particularly the Portuguese and Dutch. These missions were initially heavily influenced by colonialism and Western cultural domination (Sumartana, 1993).

Churches such as GPI, GPIB, GMIM, and HKBP were established as a result of church planting by European missionary organisations. In the early days, these churches were highly dependent on theological, financial, and administrative support from abroad (Sihombing, 2002).

However, in the 20th century, there was a revival of ecclesiastical nationalism. Indonesian churches began to assert their identity as churches living in their own homeland, not as extensions of foreign missions. National church conferences became an important turning point in this process (Widyapranawa, 1987).

In the process of contextualisation, churches in Indonesia began to formulate a theology more suited to the cultural and social context of Indonesia. These efforts included the use of local languages in liturgy, the inculturation of music, and ministry that was relevant to local communities.

Churches that were initially denominational now sought to form more inclusive and mission-oriented ecumenical networks without losing their true Christian identity. This demonstrated a dynamic community that was in line with the biblical concept of the people of God.

This history shows that although the Church in Indonesia does not have ethnic roots like Israel, it shares a similar divine calling: to be light and salt in its own society (Matthew 5:13-14).

The Transformation of the Indonesian Church: Faith, Identity, and Contemporary Challenges

The Indonesian Church has undergone significant transformation entering the modern and post-colonial era. The Church is no longer seen as a representation of European Christianity, but rather as a community of faith living within Indonesian culture. This transformation encompasses aspects of identity, ministry, and evangelism that are more contextual (Adiatma, 2021).

The identity of the Indonesian church is increasingly affirmed through an inclusive missiological approach. The church sees itself not only as a spiritual servant but also as a social servant present in the dynamics of a pluralistic society. This context encourages the church to understand faith not only as doctrine but as a way of life that brings change (Sirait et al., 2023).

The challenges of the digital age also require the church to innovate. The presence of social media, online platforms, and digital-native generations (Gen Z and Alpha) has had a major impact on how the church conducts worship, pastoral care, and faith education. A static church will be left behind, while an adaptive church will become relevant and impactful.

However, this development also presents risks, particularly in terms of blurring biblical values and the introduction of popular teachings not grounded in God's Word. Therefore, church transformation must always be guided by fidelity to God's Word and sound doctrine (Erickson, 2004).

Amidst these challenges, the Indonesian church remains called as God's people to be light and salt. Its presence in the midst of a pluralistic nation is not to dominate, but to serve and be a humble and loving witness of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Thus, the transformation of the Indonesian church is not merely about renewal of form, but a reaffirmation of the essence of faith and the identity of God's people in an ever-changing age. Living faith, clear identity, and a strong vision will be the strength of the church of the future.

Eschatological Implications and Unity of Mission: Israel and the Church in the Future

From an eschatological perspective, the future of Israel and the church are not permanently separated. Romans 11:25–27 shows that Israel as a nation will experience restoration in God's time. This unity does not mean assimilation, but the fulfilment of God's promise on a universal scale (Karman, 2000).

The church and Israel are together heading toward one final goal, namely, to become God's perfect people in His kingdom. Paul uses the metaphor of an olive tree, in which other nations are grafted into the root of God's original promise to Israel (Romans 11:17–24; Hoekema, 1979).

This understanding affirms that the unity of God's people is not limited by bloodline, but by faith in Christ. Therefore, the church in Indonesia must see itself as part of the global body of Christ, walking together in hope of the Lord's second coming.

The unity of mission between the church and Israel must be understood as cooperation in fulfilling the Great Commission. The church is called not to replace, but to perfect the plan of salvation that God began in the time of Israel's ancestors (Manuain, 2024).

In practice, the Indonesian church can take an active part in its prophetic and missionary role: proclaiming the truth, fighting injustice, and preaching the gospel to all nations. The church must be aware that its role in the last days is as God's instrument to hasten the coming of the day of the Lord (2 Peter 3:12).

Thus, the eschatological implications for the Indonesian church are to live in readiness, faithfulness, and tireless service. Just as Israel was called to be God's people in history, the Indonesian church is now called to be part of the people who will welcome the coming of the Messiah in glory.

4. Conclusions

The Church and Israel are two communities called by God's grace and have a relationship that is interdependent, not mutually exclusive. In the Indonesian context, this understanding strengthens the identity of the Church as God's people, called not because of ethnicity, but because of faith in Jesus Christ. The Indonesian Church has evolved from a colonial mission history into an independent and contextual church. In the era of globalisation and digitalisation, the Church in Indonesia has the opportunity to fulfil its role as the light of the world, just as Israel was once called for the same purpose. Therefore, the unity of the Church's mission and calling in Indonesia should be based on the truth of the Word, the love of Christ, and social responsibility in a pluralistic society.

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