

**“Replacement Theology:  
Has the Church Superseded  
Israel as the People of God?”**

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# “Replacement Theology: Has the Church Superseded Israel as the People of God?”

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Lecture 1—Introduction to Replacement Theology

Lecture 2—A Critique of the Arguments of Replacement Theology

Lecture 3—The Case for the Restoration of Israel



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Dr. Vlach speaks regularly at churches and conferences and has appeared on several national radio broadcasts. He has also published numerous articles in Christian magazines and scholarly journals. His educational training includes these degrees: B.S., University of Nebraska-Lincoln; M.Div., The Master’s Seminary; and Ph.D., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

In addition to his classroom duties, Dr. Vlach is also a frequent conference speaker and a published author. His written works include the following:

### Books and Monographs

*The Church as a Replacement of Israel: An Analysis of Supersessionism.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009.

*Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths.* Los Angeles: Theological Studies Press, 2008.

*Philosophy 101: The "Big Idea" for the 101 Most Important People and Concepts in Philosophy.* Los Angeles: Theological Studies Press, 2007.

### Journal Articles

"Rejection Then Hope: The Church's Doctrine of Israel in the Patristic Era", TMSJ. 19:1 (2008): 51-70.

"New Covenant Theology and Covenantalism", TMSJ. 18:2 (2007): 201-19.

"Americans and the Bible", (2002).

"Has the Church Replaced Israel in God's Plan?" The Conservative Theological Journal. 4:11 (2002): 6-32.

# Lecture 1: Introduction to Replacement Theology

By Michael J. Vlach

## Defining Replacement Theology

What is the doctrine of replacement theology or supersessionism? Giving a title to the view that the church replaces, supersedes, or fulfills Israel as the people of God has not been without controversy or debate. As Marten Woudstra observes, “The question whether it is more proper to speak of a replacement of the Jews by the Christian church or of an extension (continuation) of the OT people of God into that of the NT church is variously answered.”<sup>1</sup>

A common designation used in scholarly literature to identify this position is “supersessionism.” The term “supersessionism” comes from two Latin words: *super* (on or upon) and *sedere* (to sit). Thus it carries the idea of one person sitting on another’s chair, displacing the latter.<sup>2</sup> The title “replacement theology” is often viewed as a synonym for “supersessionism.”<sup>3</sup> This title appears to be the most common designation in popular literature, at least for now.

The title, “replacement theology,” is not well received by some. Several have noted that they would rather be known as “fulfillment theologians” or some other title that is more positive. Steve Lehrer, for example, shies away from the term “replacement theology” since he does not see the church replacing the nation Israel. He says, “Instead I would rather use the term ‘fulfillment theology.’ Israel was simply a picture of the true people of God, which the church fulfills.”<sup>4</sup> This sentiment has been expressed by others as well.

Unfortunately for those who desire a different label, the titles “replacement theology” and “supersessionism” are more well established and do not appear to be going away any time soon. Plus, many theologians who espouse a supersessionist view have used the terms “replace” and “replacement” in regard to Israel and the church. It is not simply the case that nonsupersessionists have imposed the title “replacement theology” against the will of supersessionists. Those who espouse the supersessionist view are partly to credit (or blame) for this title since they often have used “replacement” or similar terminology themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> Marten H. Woudstra, “Israel and the Church: A Case for Continuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 237. Woudstra believes that the terms, “replacement,” and “continuation” are both acceptable and consistent with biblical teaching. See also G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 55.

<sup>2</sup> Clark M. Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel: Post-Holocaust Church Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 268, n. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Diprose views the titles “replacement theology” and “supersessionism” as being synonymous. He also notes that the title “replacement theology” is a “relatively new term in Christian theology.” Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel in the Development of Christian Thought* (Rome: Istituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, 2000), 31, n. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Steve Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* (n.p.: Steve Lehrer, 2006), 203. Lehrer is a leading representative of New Covenant Theology.

Personally, I have no trouble with the designation “replacement theology” because with this view there is a taking away or transferring of what was promised to national Israel. One can use “fulfillment” terminology as some prefer, but in the end the result is the same—something that was promised to the nation Israel is no longer the possession of national Israel. Israel’s promises and covenants now allegedly belong to another that is not national Israel. This other group may be called the “new” or “true” Israel by some but this does not change the fact that what was promised to one people group—national Israel—is now the possession of another group to the exclusion of national Israel.

Thus, the title “replacement theology” appears appropriate. Those who say, “I’m not a replacement theologian, I’m a fulfillment theologian” are not making the criticisms of replacement theology moot. Nor does it make the whole discussion of replacement theology irrelevant. Those who approach this issue should not be sidetracked by claims that “replacement theology” does not exist, only “fulfillment theology.” In my study I have found that those who teach that the church is the complete replacement or fulfillment of Israel use the same basic arguments. It is not as though replacement theology comes with its own set of arguments while fulfillment theology has a different compilation of arguments. The position is the same while some call it one thing and others call it something else.

Several theologians have offered definitions of “supersessionism” or “replacement theology.” According to Walter C. Kaiser, “Replacement theology . . . declared that the Church, Abraham’s spiritual seed, had replaced national Israel in that it had transcended and fulfilled the terms of the covenant given to Israel, which covenant Israel had lost because of disobedience.”<sup>5</sup> Ronald Diprose defines replacement theology as the view that “the Church completely and permanently replaced ethnic Israel in the working out of God’s plan and as recipient of Old Testament promises to Israel.”<sup>6</sup>

Soulen argues that supersessionism is linked with how some view the coming of Jesus Christ: “According to this teaching [supersessionism], God chose the Jewish people after the fall of Adam in order to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus Christ, the Savior. After Christ came, however, the special role of the Jewish people came to an end and its place was taken by the church, the new Israel.”<sup>7</sup> Herman Ridderbos asserts that there is a positive and negative element to the supersessionist view: “On the one hand, in a positive sense it presupposes that the church springs from, is born out of Israel; on the other hand, the church takes the place of Israel as the historical people of God.”<sup>8</sup>

These definitions from Kaiser, Diprose, Soulen, and Ridderbos appear consistent with statements of those who have explicitly declared that the church is the replacement of Israel. Bruce K. Waltke, for instance, declares that the New Testament teaches the “hard fact that national Israel and its law have been permanently replaced by the church and the New

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<sup>5</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “An Assessment of ‘Replacement Theology’: The Relationship Between the Israel of the Abrahamic–Davidic Covenant and the Christian Church,” *Mishkan* 21 (1994): 9.

<sup>6</sup> Diprose, *Israel in the Development of Christian Thought*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 1–2.

<sup>8</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 333–34.

Covenant.”<sup>9</sup> According to Hans K. LaRondelle, the New Testament affirms that “Israel would no longer be the people of God and would be *replaced* by a people that would accept the Messiah and His message of the kingdom of God.”<sup>10</sup> LaRondelle believes this “people” is the church who replaces “the Christ-rejecting nation.”<sup>11</sup> Loraine Boettner, too, writes, “It may seem harsh to say that ‘God is done with the Jews.’ But the fact of the matter is that He is through with them as a unified national group having anything more to do with the evangelization of the world. That mission has been taken from them and given to the Christian Church (Matt. 21:43).”<sup>12</sup>

When comparing the definitions of Kaiser, Diprose, Soulen, and Ridderbos with the statements of those who openly promote a replacement view, it appears that supersessionism is based on two core beliefs: (1) the nation Israel has somehow completed or forfeited its status as the people of God and will never again possess a unique role or function apart from the church; and (2) the church is now the true Israel that has permanently replaced or superseded national Israel as the people of God.

Supersessionism, then, in the context of Israel and the church, is the view that *the New Testament church is the new and/or true Israel that has forever superseded the nation Israel as the people of God*. The result is that the church has become the sole inheritor of God’s covenant blessings originally promised to national Israel in the Old Testament. This rules out a future restoration of the nation Israel with a unique identity, role and purpose.<sup>13</sup>

### **Variations within Supersessionism**

While all supersessionists affirm that the church has superseded national Israel as the people of God, there are variations within supersessionism. Thus, this is not a one-size-fits-all perspective. Three major forms of supersessionism that have been recognized are punitive supersessionism, economic supersessionism, and structural supersessionism.

#### *Punitive Supersessionism*

“Punitive” or “retributive” supersessionism emphasizes Israel’s *disobedience* and *punishment* by God as the reason for its displacement as the people of God. Or in other words, Israel is replaced by the church because the nation acted wickedly and has forfeited the right to be the people of God.

As Gabriel J. Fackre explains, this form of supersessionism “holds that the rejection of Christ both eliminates Israel from God’s covenant love and provokes divine retribution.”<sup>14</sup> With punitive supersessionism, according to Soulen, “God abrogates God’s covenant with Israel . . . on account of Israel’s rejection of Christ and the gospel.”<sup>15</sup> Because the Jews reject Christ, “God

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<sup>9</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, “Kingdom Promises as Spiritual,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 274.

<sup>10</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 101. Emphasis in original.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1957), 89–90.

<sup>13</sup> We use this term “restoration” strategically and by it we mean more than just a salvation of Israel. By “restoration” we mean a return of Israel to her land and a role to the nations in an earthly millennium.

<sup>14</sup> Gabriel J. Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 148.

<sup>15</sup> Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 30.

in turn angrily rejects and punishes the Jews.”<sup>16</sup> In sum, with punitive supersessionism, God has rejected the Jews because of their disobedience and their rejection of Christ.

Belief in punitive supersessionism was common in the Patristic Era. Hippolytus (c. 205), for example, promoted punitive supersessionism when he declared: And surely you [the Jews] have been darkened in the eyes of your soul with a darkness utter and everlasting. . . . Furthermore, hear this yet more serious word: “And their back do you bend always.” This means, in order that they may be slaves to the nations, not four hundred and thirty years as in Egypt, nor seventy as in Babylon, but bend them to servitude, he says, “always.”<sup>17</sup>

Origen (c. 185–254), too, espoused a form of punitive supersessionism: “And we say with confidence that they [the Jews] will never be restored to their former condition. For they committed a crime of the most unhallowed kind. . . .”<sup>18</sup> Lactantius (c. 304–313) also asserted that the Jews were abandoned by God because of their disobedience:

For unless they [the Jews] did this [repent], and laying aside their vanities, return to their God, it would come to pass that He would change His covenant, that is, bestow the inheritance of eternal life upon foreign nations, and collect to Himself a more faithful people out of those who were aliens by birth. . . . On account of these impieties of theirs He cast them off forever.<sup>19</sup>

Punitive supersessionism was also held by Martin Luther. For him, the destruction of Jerusalem was proof of God’s permanent rejection of Israel:

“Listen, Jew, are you aware that Jerusalem and your sovereignty, together with your temple and priesthood, have been destroyed for over 1,460 years?” . . . For such ruthless wrath of God is sufficient evidence that they assuredly have erred and gone astray. . . . Therefore this work of wrath is proof that the Jews, surely rejected by God, are no longer his people, and neither is he any longer their God.<sup>20</sup>

### *Economic Supersessionism*

A second form of supersessionism is “economic” supersessionism. This view is not as harsh as punitive supersessionism since it does not emphasize Israel’s disobedience and punishment as the primary reason for its permanent displacement as the people of God. Instead, it focuses on God’s plan in history for the people of God to transfer from an ethnic group (Israel) to a universal group not based on ethnicity (church). In other words, economic supersessionism asserts that it was God’s plan from the beginning that Israel’s role as the people of God would expire with the coming of Christ and the establishment of the church.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Hippolytus, *Treatise Against the Jews* 6, ANF 5.220.

<sup>18</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.22, ANF 4.506.

<sup>19</sup> Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 4.11, ANF 7.109.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther, “On the Jews and Their Lies,” in *LW* 47:138–39. See also *WA* 53:418.

According to Soulen, economic supersessionism is the view that “carnal Israel’s history is providentially ordered from the outset to be taken up into the spiritual church.”<sup>21</sup> With this form of supersessionism, national Israel corresponds to Christ’s church in a merely prefigurative and carnal way. Thus, Christ, with His advent, “brings about the obsolescence of carnal Israel and inaugurates the age of the spiritual church.”<sup>22</sup>

With economic supersessionism, Israel is not replaced primarily because of its disobedience but rather because its role in the history of redemption expired with the coming of Jesus. It is now superseded by the arrival of a new spiritual Israel—the Christian church.

For those who adopt an economic supersessionist view, the key figure in bringing about this expiration of national Israel’s role in redemptive history is Jesus Christ. According to Rudolf Bultmann, “The new *aeon* has dawned in the Christ-event.”<sup>23</sup> As a result, “The people of God, the true Israel, is present in the Christian community.”<sup>24</sup> Because of this “Christ-event,” the people of God is no longer an “empirical historical entity.”<sup>25</sup>

Economic supersessionism, according to Soulen, “logically entails the ontological, historical, and moral obsolescence of Israel’s existence after Christ.”<sup>26</sup> With his coming, Jesus, the ultimate Israelite, fulfills all God’s plans and promises regarding Israel. All those who are in Jesus, then, are the true Israel. This appears to be the approach of Vern S. Poythress:

Because Christ is an Israelite and Christians are in union with Christ, Christians partake of the benefits promised to Israel and Judah in Jeremiah. With whom is the new covenant made? It is made with Israel and Judah. Hence it is made with Christians by virtue of Christ the Israelite. Thus one might say that Israel and Judah themselves undergo a transformation at the first coming of Christ, because Christ is the final, supremely faithful Israelite. Around him all true Israel gathers.<sup>27</sup>

While punitive supersessionism was popular in the early church, several early church fathers also espoused economic supersessionism. Melito of Sardis, for example, declared:

The people [Israel] was precious before the church arose, and the law was marvelous before the gospel was elucidated. But when the church arose and the gospel took precedence the model was made void, conceding its power to the reality . . . . The people was made void when the church arose.<sup>28</sup>

A more recent advocate of economic supersessionism is Karl Barth. He stated:

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<sup>21</sup> Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 181, n. 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, “Prophecy and Fulfillment,” in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. Claus Westermann, trans. James C. G. Greig (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1969), 71.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 30.

<sup>27</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 2d. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1994), 106.

<sup>28</sup> Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha*, trans. S. G. Hall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 21.

The first Israel, constituted on the basis of physical descent from Abraham, has fulfilled its mission now that the Saviour of the world has sprung from it and its Messiah has appeared. Its members can only accept this fact with gratitude, and in confirmation of their own deepest election and calling attach themselves to the people of this Saviour, their own King, whose members the Gentiles are now called to be as well. Its mission as a natural community has now run its course and cannot be continued or repeated.<sup>29</sup>

In line with an economic supersessionist viewpoint, N. T. Wright asserts that “Israel’s purpose had come to its head in Jesus’ work.”<sup>30</sup> As a result “Those who now belonged to Jesus’ people . . . claimed to be the *continuation of Israel in a new situation*.”<sup>31</sup> Wright also argues that, “Jesus intended those who responded to him to see themselves as the true, restored Israel.”<sup>32</sup>

### *Structural Supersessionism*

According to Soulen there is a third form of supersessionism—*structural supersessionism*. Structural supersessionism is more of a hermeneutic or perspective concerning the Jewish scriptures. Soulen asserts that there has been a deeply engrained bias against the Jewish scriptures of the Old Testament on the part of Christians. He links this form of supersessionism with how Christians have traditionally understood the biblical canon:

The problem of supersessionism in Christian theology goes beyond the explicit teaching that the church has displaced Israel as God’s people in the economy of salvation. At a deeper level, the problem of supersessionism coincides with the way in which Christians have traditionally understood the theological and narrative unity of the Christian canon as a whole.<sup>33</sup>

According to Soulen, whereas punitive and economic supersessionism are “explicit doctrinal perspectives,” structural supersessionism concerns how the standard canonical narrative as a whole has been perceived.<sup>34</sup> Thus, “Structural supersessionism refers to the narrative logic of the standard model whereby it renders the Hebrew Scriptures largely indecisive for shaping Christian convictions about how God’s works as Consummator and as Redeemer engage humankind in universal and enduring ways.”<sup>35</sup>

Soulen argues that the standard canonical narrative model, which the church has accepted since Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, turns on four key episodes: (1) God’s intention to create the first parents; (2) the fall; (3) Christ’s incarnation and the inauguration of the church; and (4) the final consummation.<sup>36</sup> He says two facts stand out from the narrative content of this standard model.

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<sup>29</sup> Karl Barth, *CD III/2*, 584.

<sup>30</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 457.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 316. Emphasis in original.

<sup>33</sup> Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 33.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 181, n. 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

First, the foreground of this standard model emphasizes God's engagement with human creation in "cosmic and universal terms."<sup>37</sup> Second, the foreground of this model "completely neglects the Hebrew Scriptures with the exception of Genesis 1–3!"<sup>38</sup> The standard model tells how God engaged Adam and Eve as Consummator and how God's consummating plan for them was disrupted at the fall. The story, however, then "leaps to the Apostolic Witness" and the "deliverance of humankind from the fall through Jesus Christ."<sup>39</sup>

Thus, according to Soulen, God's purposes as Consummator and Redeemer "engage human creation in a manner that simply outflanks the greater part of the Hebrew Scriptures and, above all, their witness to God's history with the people of Israel."<sup>40</sup> What is the result of this leap over the Hebrew Scriptures? God's identity as the God of Israel and his history with the Jewish people "become largely indecisive for the Christian conception of God."<sup>41</sup>

Putting it together, Soulen is claiming that most supersessionists have adopted a hermeneutical approach that ignores or removes the Hebrew scriptures of the Old Testament from having a voice. Clearly, those who hold a supersessionist view will deny the claim of Soulen or call it something different than "structural supersessionism." But in our view, what Soulen is discussing is accurate and is similar to the supersessionist concept of "New Testament priority" in which the New Testament is viewed as having interpretive priority over the Old Testament. We will have more to say on this later in this book. For now, though, we agree with Soulen's assessment. We also agree with Craig Blaising when he states that the "structural nature of supersessionism" has established "the deep set tradition of excluding ethnic, national Israel from the theological reading of Scripture."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>42</sup> Craig A. Blaising, "The Future of Israel as a Theological Question," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 44:3 (2001): 442.

## **Lecture 2: A Critique of the Arguments of Replacement Theology**

**By Michael J. Vlach**

### **Primary Arguments of Replacement Theology**

1. INTERPRETIVE PRIORITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT -- Supersessionists believe that Old Testament (OT) prophecies regarding Israel should be viewed through the lens of the New Testament (NT). Thus, it is believed that the NT can transcend or redefine OT promises to Israel.  
  
--Acts 15:13-18 transcends the literal meaning of Amos 9:11-15  
--Acts 2 transcends the meaning of Joel 2
2. NATIONAL ISRAEL VIEWED AS A TYPE -- National Israel was a type that has given way in significance to the greater antitype Christ and the church. This is all based on Christ being the true Israel which means there is no future significance for national Israel.  
  
--Matt 2:15 and Hos 11:1—Christ is true Israel
3. ISRAEL HAS BEEN REJECTED -- Matt 21:43 states that the kingdom of God was taken from the nation Israel and given to the New Testament church. This signifies a change in the people of God from national Israel to the church.
4. CHURCH IS THE NEW ISRAEL -- The NT explicitly identifies the church as “Israel” in Gal 6:16. Plus texts such as Rom 2:28–29 and 1 Pet 2:9–10 apply Israelite imagery to the church. This means the church is identified as the new Israel.
5. EQUALITY RULES OUT A RESTORATION OF ISRAEL -- Jews and Gentiles are now united. Thus there can be no special identity or role for national Israel as texts like Eph 2:11–22 and Rom 11:17–24 show.
6. CHURCH INHERITS THE NEW COVENANT -- The New Covenant was made with Israel, but the NT says the church is participating in the New Covenant (Heb 8:8-13). Thus, the church is the new Israel since it is experiencing the fulfillment of the covenant.

### **Responses to Replacement Theology**

1. PROGRESSIVE REVELATION DOES NOT CHANGE THE MEANING OF EARLIER REVELATION—While newer revelation may give information not known before it cannot change earlier revelation.
  - a. The New Testament reaffirms Old Testament eschatology
    - i. Day of the Lord and the temple (2 Thess 2)
    - ii. Israel’s salvation is linked to the new covenant (Rom 11:26-27)

- iii. Restoration of Israel (Acts 1:6-7)
    - b. If God changes the meaning of OT passages in what sense were these passages revelation to the original audiences?
    - c. Passages such as Acts 2 and 15 indicate that certain aspects of OT prophecy are being fulfilled now but they are not claiming that the OT prophecies are being spiritually fulfilled with the church.
2. THE NATION ISRAEL DOES NOT FIT THE CRITERIA OF A TYPE
- a. If God makes eternal unconditional promises and covenants with a specific people group, He must fulfill His promise with that group. The nature of the covenant promises means that Israel cannot be a type.
  - b. Jer 31:35-37 indicates that the nation Israel will have a perpetual existence (see also Isa 66).
  - c. The New Testament itself predicts a future for Israel (Matt 19:28; 23:39; Luke 21:24; Acts 1:6; Rom 9:4; Rom 11:26; Rev 7:4-8). How can Israel be a type when the New Testament gives future significance to the nation?
3. ISRAEL'S REJECTION IS TEMPORARY, NOT PERMANENT—Matt 23:39 predicts a day when Israel will cry out for salvation. See also Luke 21:24.
4. THE NEW TESTAMENT NEVER IDENTIFIES THE CHURCH AS ISRAEL.
- a. The title "Israel" is used seventy-three times and always refers to ethnic Jews: The vast majority refer to national, ethnic Israel. A few refer specifically to Jewish believers who are ethnic Jews.
  - b. The New Testament still consistently refers to national Israel as "Israel" even after the establishment of the church (Acts 3:12; 4:10; 5:21, 31, 35; 21:28).
  - c. The book of Acts maintains a distinction between Israel and the church. In Acts, both Israel and the church exist simultaneously. "Israel" is used twenty times and *ekklesia* (church) nineteen times, yet the two groups are always kept distinct.
  - d. Romans 9:6 – Believing Jews are those who are the true spiritual Israel. As William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam state: "But St. Paul does not mean here to distinguish a spiritual Israel (i.e. the Christian Church) from the fleshly Israel, but to state that the promises made to Israel might be fulfilled even if some of his descendants were shut out from them. What he states is that not all the physical descendants of Jacob are necessarily inheritors of the Divine promises implied in the sacred name Israel."<sup>1</sup>

- e. Galatians 6:16 – Paul is referring to Christian Jews in his reference to the “Israel of God.” Paul scolded the Judaizers who said circumcision was necessary for salvation, but he acknowledges those Jews in Galatia who had not followed the Judaizers in their error. These Christian Jews are the true “Israel of God.” Ronald E. Diprose: “Galatians 6:16 is insufficient grounds on which to base an innovative theological concept such as understanding the Church to be the *new* and/or *true* Israel.”<sup>2</sup>
- f. Romans 11:26 – There is very little chance that “Israel” here refers to the church, something even many supersessionists acknowledge. Like the other ten references to “Israel” in Romans 9–11, Israel in 11:26 refers to ethnic Israel.
- g. 1 Peter 2:9–10 and Romans 9:24–26 – Yes, language used of Israel in the Old Testament is used of believing Gentiles in the New Testament. *But similarity with Israel does not mean identification with Israel.* There are occasions in Scripture when “Israel” imagery is applied to non-Israelites without these non-Israelites becoming Israel. Isa 19:24–25, for instance, predicts that Egypt would someday be called “my people.” Yet, the context makes clear that Egypt is distinct from Israel since Egypt is mentioned alongside “Israel my inheritance.” So, even in the Old Testament it was predicted that non-Israelites would someday carry some of the titles of Israel without becoming identified as Israel.
- h. J. Ramsey Michaels says, “Nowhere in 1 Peter are the readers addressed as a *new* Israel or a *new* people of God, as if to displace the Jewish community.”<sup>3</sup>
- i. Galatians 3:7, 29 The New Testament teaches that believing Gentiles are the seed of Abraham but this does not mean that believing Gentiles are Israel. The concept of “seed of Abraham” is used in several different ways in the New Testament. First, it can refer to those who are biological descendants of Abraham. Second, it can refer to the Messiah, who is the unique individual seed of Abraham. Third, it can refer to the righteous remnant of Israel (cf. Isa 41:8 with Rom 9:6). Fourth, it can be used in a spiritual sense for believing Jews and Gentiles (Gal 3:29). John Feinberg states, “no sense (spiritual especially) is more important than any other, and that no sense cancels out the meaning and implications of the other senses.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, the application of the titles “sons of Abraham” or “seed of Abraham” to believing Gentiles does not mean that believing Gentiles are spiritual Jews or part of Israel.<sup>5</sup>
- j. Galatians 3:7–8 links the Gentiles being “sons of Abraham” with the part of the Abrahamic Covenant that predicted that “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.”

5. SPIRITUAL UNITY AMONG JEWS AND GENTILES EXISTS ALONGSIDE A COMING RESTORATION OF THE NATION ISRAEL.

- a. Ephesians 2:11–22 shows that Gentiles who used to be far from God have now been brought near God because of Christ. Thus, the soteriological status of believing Gentiles has changed. They now share with Israel in Israel’s covenants and promises but they do not become Israel.
- b. Believing Gentiles cannot be incorporated into Israel because Paul says they are now part of a new structure—the new man.
- c. Howard Taylor: “Superficial logic has continued to argue that there is no more uniqueness for the Jew and physical Israel. Since it is said Christ has broken down the barrier between Jew and Gentile [Eph. 2:11–18], Israel’s election is finished. But this is not the logic of the New Testament. Although there is only one way of salvation for both Jew and Gentile, the New Testament teaches that the Jewish people do still have a unique place in the *historical* working out of God’s redemption of the world in Christ.”<sup>6</sup>
- d. Rom 11:17–24 stresses that Gentiles are now related to the promises of God. Thus, there is a soteriological unity between believing Jews and Gentiles. But it does not indicate that the church is now the true Israel. There is a difference between saying that Gentiles participate with Israel in Israel’s covenants and claiming that believing Gentiles become Israel. Gentiles are partakers of the covenants not takerovers. This passage does not rule out a future role for national Israel or indicate that the church is now Israel.

6. THE NEW COVENANT IS FULFILLED WITH BOTH ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH.

- a. Hebrews 8:8-13 and Jeremiah 31
- b. The Old Testament never indicated that the New Covenant would *only* be for the nation Israel. Isaiah uses the New Covenant concept of “sprinkling” in regard to salvation in Isaiah 52:15.
- c. Paul quotes New Covenant passages in Romans 11:27 to show that the nation Israel will be saved (see Rom. 11:26). Thus, even after the church began Paul sees Israel as still related to the New Covenant.
- d. The purpose of Hebrews 8 is not to address the issue of who is and is not the people of God. Hebrews 8 is directly addressing the superiority of the New Covenant over the Mosaic Covenant, not whether the church is now the true Israel.
- e. Only the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant are mentioned in Hebrews 8:8-13. If the New Covenant were being fulfilled in its entirety we should expect the

physical blessings of the New Covenant to be mentioned as being fulfilled with the church. The New Testament never links the church with the physical blessings of the New Covenant.

- f. It is best to conclude that the church is participating in the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant while the full eschatological fulfillment of the New Covenant will take place with Israel in the millennium.

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<sup>1</sup> William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), 240. See also Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 574. About Rom 9:6, Gutbrod writes, "We are not told here that Gentile Christians are the true Israel. The distinction at R. 9:6 does not go beyond what is presupposed at Jn. 1:47. . . ." Walter Gutbrod, "Ἰσραηλ, κ. τ. λ.," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 387.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel in the Development of Christian Thought* (Rome: Istituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, 2000), 47. Emphasis in original. See also Jacob Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ: A Study in the Controversy between Church and Synagogue* (London: SPCK, 1962), 422, n. 316.

<sup>3</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, WBC, vol. 49 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), 107. Emphases in original.

<sup>4</sup> John Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton: Crossway, 1988), 73.

<sup>5</sup> Fruchtenbaum states, "What replacement theologians need to prove their case is a statement in Scripture that all believers are of 'the seed of Jacob.' Such teaching would indicate that the church is spiritual Israel or that Gentile Christians are spiritual Jews." Fruchtenbaum, "Israel and the Church," in *Issues in Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 126–27.

<sup>6</sup> Howard Taylor, "The Continuity of the People of God in Old and New Testaments," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 3 (1985): 14–15. Emphasis in original.

## **Lecture 3: The Case for the Restoration of Israel**

**By Michael J. Vlach**

- 1. There is nothing unspiritual about nations or a nation being used by God.**
  - a. God intended for a nation (Israel) to be a vehicle for bringing blessings to all the families of the earth (see Gen 12:2-3)
  - b. God works with nations after the second coming (see Isa 2 and Zech 14)
  - c. It appears that nations are an important part of the new earth (see Rev 21:24, 26; 22:2).
  
- 2. The Old Testament explicitly teaches the restoration of the nation Israel.**
  - a. Deuteronomy 30:1-6: Israel would experience dispersion because of disobedience but would one day be saved as a nation and experience restoration to its land.
  - b. Jeremiah 30, 31, and 33: This prediction of the New Covenant promises a restoration of Israel that includes spiritual blessings and physical blessings.
  - c. Ezekiel 36–37 This section promises the future salvation and restoration of the nation Israel to its land.
  - d. Isa 49:3-6 The Servant (Jesus Christ) will restore the nation Israel and bring light to the nations.
  - e. Zephaniah 3:14-20
  - f. Zechariah 12–14
  - g. NOTE 1: Even if the NT never discussed the restoration of Israel, the many explicit texts about Israel's restoration in the OT give enough reason to believe in the restoration of Israel.
  - h. NOTE 2: Since the Abrahamic (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:18-21) and New Covenants (Jer. 31) are eternal and unconditional covenants we should expect God to fulfill these covenants with Israel, the people with whom the covenants were made.

**3. The Old Testament explicitly promises the perpetuity of the nation Israel** (see Jer. 31:35-37).

“Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day, And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: "If this fixed order departs From before Me," declares the LORD, "Then the offspring of Israel also shall cease From being a nation before Me forever." Thus says the LORD, "If the heavens above can be measured, And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done," declares the LORD” (Jer. 31:35-37).

Have you seen the sun, moon or stars today? If so, you can know that the nation Israel still has a place in God’s plan.

**4. The New Testament reaffirms the Old Testament expectation of a salvation and restoration of Israel.**

- a. Matthew 19:28 -- Apostles to rule over 12 tribes of Israel. According to E. P. Sanders, Matt 19:28 “confirms the view that Jesus looked for the restoration of Israel.”<sup>1</sup>
- b. Matthew 23:37-39 / Luke 13:34-35-- Israel one day will accept her Messiah. Donald Senior states, “In Matthew’s perspective, the rejection of Jesus by the leaders is indeed a grave sin, one that brings divine judgment. Yet the story of God’s relationship to Israel is not concluded, and the day will come when Jerusalem will again receive its Messiah with shouts of praise.”<sup>2</sup>
- c. Luke 21:24-- Times of the gentiles will come to an end. J. Bradley Chance states, “Close examination of L. 21:24b,c provides a strong hint that Luke did foresee the restoration of Jerusalem.”<sup>3</sup>
- d. Luke 22:30-- Apostles to rule over the 12 tribes of Israel.
- e. Acts 1:3-7-- Apostles believed in a restoration of the nation Israel after 40 days of kingdom instruction from Jesus. Scot McKnight states: “Since Jesus was such a good teacher, we have every right to think that the impulsive hopes of his audience were on target. This is not to say that they, at times, drew incorrect references or came to inaccurate conclusions about time or about content, but it is to admit that Jesus believed in an imminent realization of the kingdom to restore Israel and that he taught this with clarity.”<sup>4</sup>

- f. Acts 3:19-21 -- Restoration is preached to the leaders of Israel.
  - g. Romans 11:26-27-- Salvation of “all Israel” will occur in accordance with the New Covenant promises given to Israel in the Old Testament.
    - i. C.E.B. Cranfield: “It is only where the Church persists in refusing to learn this message, where it secretly-perhaps quite unconsciously-believes that its own existence is based on human achievement, and so fails to understand God's mercy to itself, that it is unable to believe in God's mercy for still unbelieving Israel, and so entertains the ugly and unscriptural notion that God has cast off His people Israel and simply replaced it by the Christian Church. These three chapters [Rom. 9-11] emphatically forbid us to speak of the Church as having once and for all taken the place of the Jewish people.”<sup>5</sup>
    - ii. Jonathan Edwards: “Nothing is more certainly foretold than this national conversion of the Jews in Romans 11.”
    - iii. In his comments on Rom 11:26–27, Ernst Käsemann rightly states that “Christianity is already living in the new covenant” while “Israel will begin to do so only at the parousia.”<sup>6</sup>
- 5. The New Testament explicitly states that the Old Testament promises and covenants to Israel are still the possession of Israel even during this church age and even while the nation is currently in a state of unbelief (see Romans 9:3b-4).**

my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises (Rom. 9:3b-4).

- 6. The New Testament indicates that God is faithful to Israel because of His promises to the patriarchs of Israel. (Romans 11:28)**

From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of *God's* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers (Rom.11:28).

- 7. The New Testament indicates that Israel’s election/calling is irrevocable. (Romans 11:29; see also Deuteronomy 7:6-8).**

- a. “God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew” (Rom. 11:2).
- b. “for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29).

- c. Jürgen Moltmann: “There can be no question of God’s having finally rejected the people of his choice—he would then have to reject his own election (11:29)—and of his then having sought out instead another people, the church. Israel’s promises remain Israel’s promises. They have not been transferred to the church. Nor does the church push Israel out of its place in the divine history. In the perspective of the gospel, Israel has by no means become ‘like all the nations.’”<sup>7</sup>
- d. Wolfhart Pannenberg: “How could Christians be certain of their own comparatively new membership in the circle of God’s elect if God for his part did not remain faithful to his election in spite of Israel’s unbelief? This is the apostle’s point when he advocates the inviolability of the election of the Jewish people (11:29; cf. 9:6). He has in mind also Christian assurance of election.”<sup>8</sup>
- e. The more one believes in the sovereignty of God especially as it relates to election, the more one should be committed to a salvation/restoration of Israel based on God’s election of this people.

**8. New Testament prophecy refers to Israel and events in Israel, thus indicating the importance of Israel in God’s plans.**

- a. Revelation 7:4-8: all the tribes of Israel are mentioned and are distinguished from the nations in 7:9.
- b. Matthew 24:15ff.
  - i. The abomination of desolation is clearly related to the Jewish temple.
  - ii. Jesus tells those in Israel what to do in the Tribulation Period.
- c. Paul refers to a temple in 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

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<sup>1</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 103.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Senior, *Matthew*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 264.

<sup>3</sup> J. Bradley Chance, *Jerusalem, the Temple, and the New Age in Luke–Acts* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 134.

<sup>4</sup> Scot McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in National Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 130–31.

<sup>5</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975-79), 2:448.

<sup>6</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 314.

<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 35.

<sup>8</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 471.