

Has the Church Replaced Israel

**A brief consideration of 'Replacement
Theology'**

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What is 'Replacement Theology'?

Replacement theology is the belief that the church has replaced Israel. It is considered by a proportion of the church, possibly a large proportion of the church, that due to Israel's rejection of the Messiah God poured out his wrath on the nation of Israel in the AD70's. At this time many Jews were slaughtered, the temple was destroyed and the remaining Jews who were alive fled for safety to other countries. It is considered therefore, that because of their rebellion God replaced Israel with the church. Replacement Theology is based on two distinct beliefs:

- 1) *God has permanently rejected Israel*
- 2) *The Church has replaced Israel in God's plan*

As a result, those who hold to this belief consider that Israel no longer has any spiritual significance. Faced with the fact that there has been a regathering of Jews in the promised land, who have once again become a nation. For those who accept replacement theology this is considered to be a mere accident of history.

Due to the above the church is now considered by many to be the true Israel. But can this way of thinking be justified by scripture? Hopefully the following will give a very clear answer to this important question.

The Covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

The nation of Israel came into being as a result of a covenant God made with Abraham. In order to hold to the belief '*the church has replaced Israel*', it is reasonable to conclude therefore that one must consider the covenant God made with Abraham to have been conditional. Conditional on the basis of their acceptance of Him and conditional with regards to obeying His commandments. It therefore makes complete sense to begin this study by looking at the covenant that God actually made with Abraham.

'Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' Genesis 12v1-3

'Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.
Genesis 12v7

We see from the above verses that God calls Abram (Abraham) to leave his country and family. Not only does He call him to leave but God informs Abraham that He is

leading him *'to a land that I will show you.'* God further explains that he is going to make of him *'a great nation.'* Then a few verses later we find God once again speaks to Abraham about the land He is leading him to *'To your descendants I will give this land.'*

Abraham now realises that not only is God going to 'birth' a great nation through him but as part of the promise, God is giving him a piece of land. A piece of land that won't just be for Abraham and his immediate family but it will be for his descendants.

It is very important to stress at this point the relevance of God including a piece of land as part of the promise made to Abraham.

We now only have to move into the very next chapter to find that God reiterates His promise to Abraham regarding the land He is giving to him and to his descendants. However, this time we find there is an extremely important word that God includes that was not used in the previous verses above.

'And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever.' Genesis 13v14-15

Not only does God reaffirm His promise to Abraham but regarding the land we read He is giving it to Abraham's descendants *forever*. It may only be one word but it is of the most crucial importance in our consideration of God's dealing with the nation of Israel.

We now move on two further chapters where we find that God makes a covenant with Abraham. I would suggest that even at this early stage of our study, the covenant God made with Abraham is key in answering the question *"Has the church replaced Israel"*

'Then He said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it." Genesis 15v7

'And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates, the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.'" Genesis 15v17-21

From the above verses describing the covenant that God made, I believe we can firmly and safely establish the following points.

- The covenant was initiated by God
- It was not a conditional covenant
- It was an everlasting covenant not time limited (**Genesis 13v15** the land is given to Abraham's descendants forever.)
- A described specific area of land was part of the covenant

When we come to Isaac we realise that the covenant God made with Abraham is of such importance that God makes a point of reaffirming it to him.

‘Then the LORD appeared to him (Isaac) and said: “Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My law’
Genesis 26v2-5

And to yet further emphasise the importance of the covenant, we find God now speaks to Jacob regarding it.

‘The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you (Jacob); and to your descendants after you I give this land.’ *Genesis 35v12*

From the above it can be seen that although God made the covenant with Abraham, He reaffirms it to Isaac and Jacob thereby emphasising the importance of it.

Deliverance from Egypt

As we move forward in time we find the Israelites are in bondage in Egypt. As we read about the events that take place we find that the very basis for God delivering them from bondage was because of the covenant.

When God made His covenant with Abraham we were able to note that it was both an unconditional covenant and an everlasting covenant. We come now to a time in the Israelites history when we see the outworking of this unconditional covenant.

‘So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them’. *Exodus 2 v24-25*

Note the wording in *verse 24* *‘God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob’*

God delivered His people at this point in time on the basis of the covenant He had made with Abraham.

It is clear that God did not deliver His people because of their intense groaning due to the bondage they were in, neither does it say He delivered them because of their good behaviour. On the contrary, it makes it abundantly clear why God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt, it was because He *'remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.'*

If we accept that God's dealings with His people are on the basis of an unconditional covenant, then the question of their behaviour has nothing to do with whether God will reject them. Of course their behaviour has everything to do with God's discipline of His people as can often be noted in the scriptures but God's discipline of His people is completely different to God rejecting His people. In fact one can safely say, it is because of God's continued love for His people that He disciplines them.

When we come to **Exodus 32** we clearly see how Moses refers to the covenant when he intercedes for the Israelites.

Moses intercedes for the Israelites

Moses was on the mountain communing with God. The people were concerned that he was taking so long to return and demanded that Lot make them a god that they could worship. Before Moses observed this for himself God shares it with him, explaining that He is going to consume them all in His wrath. When Moses intercedes for the Israelites we read something of extreme significance. During his discourse with God, Moses reminds Him of the covenant that He has made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In other words, he is in effect saying, *"Lord you can't destroy your people you made a covenant and you cannot go back on the covenant."*

'Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: "LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (Jacob), Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.' So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.'

Exodus 32v11-14

What a powerful effective prayer! Why was it so effective in causing God to turn away from destroying the Israelites? The answer is very clear as we see in verse 13.

Moses reminded God of the covenant He had made knowing that God could not break His word and go back on the covenant promise.

Some may say, “*Well yes that was a dreadful sin, making a golden calf to worship, but it doesn't come anywhere close to rejecting the Messiah and wanting Him crucified.*” Of course from a natural point of view that is completely correct, however if God were to reject the Israelites as a result of their rejecting His Son, then the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would have needed to have been a conditional covenant.

By accepting that God cannot go back on His word, by accepting that the covenant God made was both unconditional and everlasting, then I believe we can therefore safely assume that God will continue to deliver His people right to the end of time. And if God has not and will not reject Israel, then the argument of the church having replaced her has absolutely no substance.

God's continued faithfulness towards Israel

In AD70-73 Titus the Roman general, with his armies, destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple. Thousands were slaughtered. When the Temple was destroyed the second exile of the Jews began with them eventually being scattered throughout the earth for a period of time lasting nearly 2000 years. Despite this incredible length of time, they maintained their identity as Jews and returned to the land God had promised to them when He made His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In 1948 they once again became a recognised nation living back in their own land. Throughout history no other nation in the world has equalled this incredible fact. Based on this point alone there can surely only be one reasonable explanation, God has remained faithful to His covenant and has not rejected His people. Not only do we see the return of the Jews to their own land as a fact that took place in history, but we can also note that it was a fulfilment of a prophecy made by Jeremiah.

“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.”
Jeremiah 23v3

We read another prophetic word concerning God gathering His people from all of the nations of the world in **Deuteronomy**.

‘that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, an gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.’
Deuteronomy 30v3-5

These prophecies were made prior to the birth of the church on the day of Pentecost but their fulfilment happened nearly 2000 years after the church began. If God had truly rejected His people and replaced Israel with the Church, we are surely justified in asking the question “*Why has God gathered the Israelites back to the promised land?*”

Romans Chapter Eleven

As **Romans 11** is all about Israel, it is important to recognise that any verses considered in this chapter are considered in the context of Israel. At the very opening of the chapter we read an extremely important verse:

‘I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! Romans 11v1a

Accepting the main emphasis of this chapter is about Israel and not about the church, we can immediately conclude from this verse that God has not changed His mind about His chosen people, neither has He changed His plans, but still has a purpose for the nation.

Of course from a human perspective it is certainly reasonable to conclude that with all the continual rebellion and idolatry committed by the Israelites God would be justified in forsaking them especially when we consider the horror of these two sins in God's eyes.

‘For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft’ 1Samuel 15v23a

These are strong words with respect to the sin of rebellion and we only have to look at one bible reference to note God's attitude to the sin of idolatry.

‘because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands. Therefore My wrath will be poured out on this place, and not be quenched.’ 2Chronicles 34v25

Yet despite God's attitude towards these two sins, we continue to read in chapter 11 that He certainly has not forsaken His people.

‘God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew.’ Romans 11v2a

Continuing further we read:

‘And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; Romans 11v26

Accepting there being varying interpretations about the wording '*all Israel*', nevertheless we can see that God has not given up on His people Israel and will therefore continue to draw them to Himself.

We now reach verse 29. A verse which most Christians are familiar with.

'For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.' Romans 11v29

This verse is often used with respect to a believer not losing his or her gifting or calling. However, having already noted that this chapter is talking about the nation of Israel, we are therefore obliged to put it into context and accept that God's original calling for His people the Israelites has not changed. If we accept this to be true, we cannot justifiably say that God has turned His back on Israel and replaced His chosen people with the church. God called the nation of Israel into being because of His promise to Abraham and His calling is irrevocable.

In conclusion to this section concerning God's continual faithfulness towards Israel, we read another very important verse in Jeremiah.

'Thus says the Lord: "If heaven above can be measured, And the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel For all that they have done, says the Lord.' Jeremiah 30v37

Put another way. It is impossible for man to measure the heavens and equally impossible for man to search out the foundations of the earth. Likewise, it is therefore completely impossible for God to *cast off all the seed of Israel*.

Hatred towards Israel

As we look through the pages of history we see time and again intense hatred expressed towards the Jews. Not only do we see this by looking back in time, but even if we move the clock forward to the end of time we still see hatred expressed towards the Jews. A hatred that has not shown signs of diminishing but on the contrary has increased.

When we look at prophecies related to the end of the Tribulation as well as the end of the Millennium, this intense hatred is displayed. With such hatred shown over and over again even to the end of time, it surely is a completely reasonable question to ask, *"Why has this been the case?"*

In answer to this question I would suggest that the answer is not found by just looking at it from a natural perspective but we need to look beyond the natural realm to the spiritual realm. When we do this I believe we will find there is a spiritual force behind the destructive hatred towards the Jews - namely Satan himself.

We have already seen how biblical prophecy has been fulfilled regarding the nation of Israel particularly with respect to them returning to their land and once again

becoming a nation. It is also clear that there are many prophecies concerning this nation that have yet to be fulfilled. We equally know Satan also knows the word of God. We have only to look at the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness to see how Satan quoted scripture, (albeit quoting it wrongly,) at Jesus.

‘Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’ Matthew 4v5-6

Recognising that Satan knows the word of God he is therefore obviously aware of the prophecies concerning Israel. Satan equally knows that if he can cause the word of God not to come to pass he has in effect made God a liar and as a result would be justified in getting away scot free. It is difficult to see how such hatred throughout time expressed towards Israel could be merely natural. If on the other hand there is a satanic spiritual force behind it seeking to destroy Israel and thereby stopping the fulfilment of bible prophecy, it immediately becomes very clear as to the reason for the continued hatred.

In moving the clock forward to the end of the Tribulation we see the climax of the intense hatred towards Israel expressed with all of the nations coming against Jerusalem.

‘It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. “And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo’. Zechariah 12v9-11

‘Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, And your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; The city shall be taken, The houses rifled, And the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, But the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth And fight against those nations, As He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, Making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north And half of it toward the south’. Zechariah 14v2-4

Although all of the nations come against Jerusalem, God intervenes and fights for His people. Surely hardly the action one would expect if indeed God had rejected Israel.

Moving the clock still further to the close of the Millennium we yet again see Satan seeking to destroy Jerusalem ('**the beloved city**') immediately after his release from being bound for one thousand years.

'Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.' Revelation 20v7-10

God yet again intervenes. If God had truly rejected Israel and replaced her with the church, why would He intervene to save His people at the end of the Tribulation as well as at the close of the Millennium? No, God has not rejected His people but has remained, and will remain, faithful to the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Conclusion

With respect to the church, it is very apparent from scripture that the church was birthed at Pentecost and will continue until the time of the Rapture, meeting Jesus in the air.

'For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.' 1 Thessalonians 4v15-18

However with regards to the nation of Israel, it came into being as a result of God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and scripture clearly demonstrates God's interest in His chosen people even to the end of time. The church the body of Christ, and Israel God's chosen people are two very different groups of people in the bible. They both have a purpose in the great Master Plan of God. Just as we have seen prophecy fulfilled to date regarding the nation of Israel, so will we continue to see prophecy fulfilled for this unique and special people. The church may have been grafted into the olive tree of God's fatness as a result of the Jews rejection of the Messiah, but God's great Master Plan is to graft his chosen people, those who will accept Jesus as their Messiah during the Tribulation period, back into the Olive root of blessing and fatness.

'For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? Romans 11v16- 24

We began this study with the question '*Has the Church replaced Israel?*' I believe that from our consideration of scripture we can see that the covenant and promises to Israel are about land and destiny as the chief nation on earth. This is totally different from the destiny of the Church to be Jesus' bride. So we can now safely answer that question:

'No definitely not – the church has not replaced Israel.'