

**6 Errors of
Replacement
Theology**

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Within the church, there are differing views concerning the place and role of the Jewish people. A major issue concerns the right of the Jewish people to live in their ancient homeland, as well as the assertion that the scriptures and prophecies no longer belong to the Jewish people but are now the property of the church.

The above ideas are popularly known as **Replacement Theology** and, as will be illustrated, are based upon a departure from both the scriptures and history.

The following explains the six major areas from whence such errors arise.

Replacement Theology is the erroneous concept that “the church” has supplanted the Biblical role of Israel in the purposes of God. The church is viewed as “spiritual Israel” and “spiritual Jerusalem.” The biblical prophecies, promises, and blessings given to Israel belong to the church, while Israel and the Jewish people retain the curses and judgments. Israel and the Jewish people, according to this interpretation, are now a theological irrelevancy.

One stream of thought in Replacement Theology contends that the Jewish people were used to prepare the way for the Messiah. With the Christ event, this particular period of salvation history came to an end and the church is a new expression of God’s election and saving power. The unbiblical, anti-Semitic teaching of Replacement Theology comes in differing degrees and spans all denominations. Needless to say, the matter was not really an issue until the 20th century, when the question of a national Jewish homeland began to emerge as a reality.

Replacement Theology is not a new phenomenon. The issue finds its roots in the Second Temple Period from 400 BC to 70 AD concerning the question, “Who is the true Israel?” Whereas originally it was an internal question, following the failure of the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome in 135 AD and the break between Jewish and Gentile Christianity, it took on a new dimension.

Replacement Theology finds its first expression in *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* written by the church’s first apologist, Justin Martyr, in the 2nd century AD. According to Justin, the Jews have for-

feited the scriptures and the prophets, which are now the property of the church. In a similar vein, the apocryphal Gospel of Barnabus, written around 130 AD, warns its audience against the Jews and states that the Jewish people have “lost” the covenants.

Four strands of thought from Replacement Theology are either based on theological grounds or upon a misreading of history with attendant post-modernism.

The extreme right wing of Replacement Theology supports the view that as the Jews rejected Jesus, God has now rejected them. The Jewish people have no destiny, no elective distinction, no calling, no future. This view holds that it is not proper to speak of the Jews any more. Jesus ended Jewish history as may be evidenced by the Exile beginning in 70 AD. Jews who live in Israel are Israelis, Jews in America are Americans, Jews resident in France are French, and so on. The only way that a Jewish person has any relevance is when he accepts Jesus as personal savior and becomes a member of the church. Paul commences his discourse on Jews and salvation in Romans 9-11 with the clear statement, **“Did God reject his people? By no means!” (Romans 11:1).**

Replacement Theology insists that passages such as Isaiah 11:11-12, 43:4-8; Jeremiah 23:3-8, 31:7-11, 32:37-42; Ezekiel 11:17-19, 20:41-42, 36:16f ; and Zephaniah 3:19-20 were fulfilled following the return from the Babylonian exile in the 500s BC. This interpretation is a complete misreading of the relevant passages of scripture. The record clearly states that only the southern tribes of Benjamin and Yehuda returned to the Land, along with a number of priests and Levites. The number of returnees is variously numbered from as low as 15,000 to a high figure of 55,000 (Nehemiah 7:8f, Ezra 8:1f). The prophecies of the restoration of Israel concern the whole number of the tribes, not only a representation of the southern tribes and religious functionaries.

In the New Testament, the term “Israel” is used on 79 occasions. In every case, the term is used to refer to physical Israel and is never used as an exchange term for the church, nor can it be legitimately applied in this way. The expression “New Israel” is not to be found within the New Testament. The one reference which is sometimes cited is in Romans 9:5, where Paul uses the expression, “the Israel

of God.” In view of the clear fact that the word “Israel” never refers elsewhere in scripture to the Christian church, it is far better to interpret this passage as referring to the body of Jews who believe in Jesus. A believing Jew is a member of two covenant peoples—the church and Israel.

The second strand of Replacement Theology is in a sense not theology at all, but a misunderstanding, misreading, or revisionist form of history centering on the Arab-Israeli conflict which is dragged into the theological arena under the guise of ethics and justice. The overarching problem with this approach is that it is selective and applies the notion of justice in a secular fashion and not by Biblical standards. The question of justice is only applied to nations and peoples other than Israel.

The third strand is eschatological—concerning the end times—and arises out of the doctrine of dispensationalism. Briefly, this doctrine originated in the 1800s and early 1900s from J.N. Darby, C.I. Scofield, and other Christian clergymen and proposes that there are seven dispensations of God’s dealing with mankind. The teaching maintains that we are living in the sixth dispensation, the seventh being when Jesus returns. In this scheme of things, the Jewish people return to the Land and find salvation after the Second Advent.

To uphold this scheme, the scriptures are divided into three groups: those for the church, the Jews, and the Gentiles—those who are neither Jews nor Christians. The Scofield Bible gives a good example where the chapter heading of Isaiah 40 is “God comforts His Church,” whereas the passage specifically applies to the nation of Israel.

The fourth strand in Replacement Theology is an essential misunderstanding of Biblical terminology and the accompanying theology. The first misunderstanding arises with the usage of the term “covenant.” A covenant is, essentially, a forensic entity. It is something more than a handshake agreement. Covenants were for the safety and protection of the partakers. The covenants made by the Lord imposed upon the people an obligation to worship Him exclusively and obey His commandments. The obligations of the Deity were to protect and defend His people.

God's covenant with Abraham concerning the land was eternal, as is indicated in Psalm 105. The Davidic Covenant, made to him approximately 1,000 years after the promises to Abraham, did not replace the Abrahamic Covenant but was simply added to it. The New Covenant, which is first introduced not in the New Testament but in Jeremiah 31, is not directed to the Gentiles, even though the Gentiles are to benefit from it. As British scholar John Wilkin-son pointed out 100 years ago, long before Israel became a nation again, the Gentiles were not to monopolize the spiritual blessings in Christ—but only to partake of them.

The fifth strand concerns the area of judgment and promise in prophecy. Nearly all Biblical prophecy contains two elements operating in concert with each other. For a prophecy to find its authentic fulfillment, it must in most cases first find an expression of realization within the community that the prophecy was directed towards. Prophecies concerning the land of Israel and the Jewish people cannot simply be removed from their context and setting and then reapplied en bloc elsewhere.

In the same way that the promises are to be realized in the Land, the judgments likewise will be enacted out in the Land or against the people group that are the subjects of the judgment. Supporters of supersession and replacement fall into the same error as the Early Church Fathers, making the two elements of prophecy into separate entities rather than leaving those elements co-joined as originally intended in the prophecy. All of the blessings and promises are allocated to the church who, in their estimation, should now be considered to be Israel. In a like manner all of the judgments are retained or directed to the Jewish people and the nation of Israel, who are outside the scope of any spiritual blessing.

The sixth strand is Replacement Theology that is intentionalist—not the result of distorted Bible teaching or ignorance—but is instead anti-Semitic, heretical, and atheistic, for when we turn to the scriptures we find a very different picture.

The burden of the prophets is the return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel by grace and there to be reconciled to God in the messianic kingdom. Passages such as Jeremiah 32:37-41, Jeremiah 33:24-26, and Ezekiel 36:16 f express the burden most lucidly. One

who holds that God is not faithful in, or capable of, fulfilling His word to Israel has a theology built upon sand.

For a list of scriptures used to support Replacement Theology and their refutation see *Words From the Scroll of Fire* and *Father Forgive Us* by Fred Wright, both available from Ezra International.

To request a copy of these books, please send a message to **ezraint.dev@gmail.com**.

About the Author

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About Ezra International

Since its founding in 1995, Ezra International has assisted more than 70,000 Jewish people from across the globe return to Israel, the land of their forefathers. Ezra International representatives work in Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, Kazakhstan, and other countries of the former Soviet Union, South America, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States.

Ezra International remains committed to assisting the Jewish people in agreement with the promises and prophecies of the Scriptures (Isaiah 49:22, Jeremiah 30:3, Isaiah 14:1, Jeremiah 3:18, Ezekiel 28:25, Ezekiel 37:21).

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