

The Jews' crucial role in the Messianic Age...

A biblical repudiation of so-called 'Replacement Theology'

*“And in those days, people from every nation will
take hold of the garment of a Jew saying,
'We will follow you, because we know God is with you.' ”*

From a Jewish perspective, one of the most contemptuous teachings of evangelical Christianity is the idea that God has *replaced* Israel (or the Jews) with the church. In so-called “Replacement Theology,” the church is now the *new* Israel. To say the least, the doctrine seriously offends Jewish claims of being *the* chosen people of God.¹ The teaching insists that, because of the Jews’ rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and their disdain for the Gospel, God has *revoked* the covenants He made with the nation of Israel. As Galen Peterson explains, Replacement Theology teaches that the church has “replaced Israel in every way and that the scores of [covenant] promises regarding the messianic kingdom must [subsequently] be interpreted symbolically” (*The Everlasting Tradition*, p. 100).²

Indeed, Replacement Theology subverts the very Gospel message. Jesus and His followers taught the good news of a *literal* messianic kingdom—fully geopolitical in every way. As we will see, that world-encompassing kingdom is to be built on the foundation of the *nation of Israel*. Thus, to supplant Israel in any way would prove disastrous to God’s plan for mankind.

But stop and think: The idea that the church has *replaced* Israel immediately suggests that God’s plan for Israel has in some way failed, leading to the need for a “plan B.” That notion, of course, makes the church merely an afterthought, a backup. But did God really conceive of a plan that would have to be drastically altered because of unforeseen complications? And if “plan A” *has* failed, how do we know “plan B” will work—or that God might not yet need a “plan C”? If God cannot be trusted to fulfill His promises to Israel, how do we know we can trust Him to fulfill His promises to the church?

The absurdity of this line of reasoning should be obvious. Indeed, if the Jews are no longer God’s chosen people, then they never were. God’s plan is perfect; everything is taking place exactly as it was designed. But this does not mean that Israel’s failures were in some way “predestined”—as nations, like individuals, exercise the God-given right of *choice*. Rather, as we will see, God has anticipated the inevitability of such failures and actually incorporated them as key parts of His plan. This will become clear as we later go through the apostle Paul’s treatise in Romans 11. As this paper will show, the church has not replaced Israel—for *both* have indispensable roles in God’s plan.

Replacement Theology originated with so-called “early church fathers.” These proto-Catholic leaders taught that the Old Covenant had been abolished and was thus *replaced* by the New Covenant

in Christ. The earliest was Marcion from northern Asia Minor, who reached the peak of his influence around 144 AD. Marcion rejected the Hebrew Scriptures, alleging their incompatibility with Jesus' teachings; moreover, he denounced the God of Israel as "wrathful"—insisting that Jesus revealed the true God via the New Testament. This line of thinking would greatly contribute to antinomianism, widespread anti-Jewish sentiment, and the eventual development of Replacement Theology. Though Marcion was declared a heretic, later proto-Catholic leaders actually built on his ideas: Justin Martyr (about 100 to 165 AD) called the church the "true Israel." Hippolytus of Rome (died 235 AD) said the Jews had been "darkened in the eyes of [their] soul with a darkness utter and everlasting." This blindness was presumably the result of their rejection of Jesus. Tertullian (about 155-240 AD) wrote that the "old law" (i.e., Old Covenant) had been abolished in favor of "the new law and the spiritual circumcision." Augustine (354–430 AD) followed these views, adding that Jesus' work and sacrifice rendered the Old Covenant void. Collectively, these "church fathers" taught that the Jews had forfeited their covenantal relationship with God by executing the Messiah.³

Many of the early "church fathers" were staunchly anti-Jewish, holding in contempt anything they deemed to be "Jewish"—the Sabbath, the Torah, the Old Testament in general. To them, the God of the Old Testament was unapproachable, unforgiving, even vengeful; but Jesus, as mediator of the New Covenant, was just the opposite: personable, kind, forgiving. Covenantal law was seen as harsh, burdensome, impossible to obey—hence modern Christianity's general disdain for "the law."⁴

But was the Old Covenant itself actually flawed, its terms impossible to keep? Was the Old Covenant destined to become "obsolete" through Jesus' death? Has the Jews' *unbelief* forced God to abandon His covenant with Israel? The writer of the book of Hebrews, in citing the prophet Jeremiah, says God will in the age to come enter into a "new covenant" with *Israel*—not the church (Heb. 8:6-13).⁵ Importantly, this so-called "new covenant" actually features the *same* Torah that was handed down to ancient Israel!⁶ Notice what God declares: "The days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.... [Unlike with the previous covenant,] I will actually put my Torah *in their minds* and *write it on their hearts*. Thus, I will truly be their God and they will indeed be my people. People will no longer need to admonish others to 'know me'—because everyone from the least to the greatest *will genuinely know me*. I will forgive Israel's unrighteousness; I won't even remember her sins" (Jer. 31:31-34). The prophet Ezekiel echoes this: "I will give you a new heart—a new spirit. Indeed, I will take away your hardheartedness and give you a heart that is yielded, responsive. I will even put *my spirit* within you, thus inspiring you to walk in my ways and live by my teachings" (Ezek. 36:26-27).⁷

This lack of a *fully yielded mind* was behind the "failure" of the Old Covenant—thus, as Hebrews 8:8 says, *Israel* itself was at fault. Such a mind and heart can only exist among those who have entered into an intimate relationship with God through the ongoing work of the Messiah. So yes, the church has thrived where Israel has failed—but only for a time! As the passages above clearly show, God's plan calls for *all of Israel* to one day enter into that same intimacy. Where does this leave so-called Replacement Theology?

Passages suggesting Replacement Theology

At first glance, certain biblical passages do *seem* to support Replacement Theology. For example, in a parable aimed right at the heart of the Jewish leadership, Jesus labeled the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees as “evil vinedressers” who had *failed* to “deliver to God the harvest of His own vineyard.” The result would be that the “vineyard” would be “leased to other vinedressers who would bring forth the desired fruit” (Matt. 21:33-41). Those “other vinedressers” would be oriented around the prophetic “stone that the builders rejected” (verse 42)—the rejected Christ. Jesus concluded, “Because of this”—because of their rejection of the Messiah and their refusal to genuinely follow the Torah—“the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given instead to a ‘nation’ that produces the fruits of that kingdom” (verse 43). That “nation” is *spiritual*, the *elect* of God—the church (I Peter 2:4-10).⁸

Of course, “the chief priests and Pharisees knew [Jesus] was speaking about them” (Matt. 21:45). Jesus had previously told His disciples, “Every plant my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots” (Matt. 15:13)—a not-so-subtle warning that the Jewish leaders’ days were numbered. Much earlier, John the Baptist had warned the Jewish leaders that the axe was “already laid at the root of the trees” (Matt. 3:10). In a passage similar to Matthew 21:43, Jesus later warned: “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door to the kingdom of heaven right in people’s faces! You won’t enter that kingdom—and you hinder those who would enter!” (Matt. 23:14).

But these passages do not actually support Replacement Theology. Rather, they demonstrate the failure of the Jewish leadership to point people to the Kingdom of God. While the kingdom would not fully materialize until Jesus’ second coming, people could at that time come under God’s rule—and live as genuine representatives of that kingdom. As occupants of “Moses’ seat” (Matt. 23:2), the Jewish leadership had failed miserably in their obligation; thus the responsibility to lead people to the kingdom has subsequently fallen to the church, made up of “ambassadors” of that future kingdom. But as we will see, the Jews will yet turn to their Messiah in the age to come—when they will become *the premier representatives* of the Kingdom of God to all the world.

Another passage often used in support of Replacement Theology is found in Galatians 3: “The covenant promises were made to Abraham and to his *seed*. The passage doesn’t say ‘seeds’ as if there are many people involved, but uses the singular ‘seed’—meaning Christ alone” (verse 16). Paul’s statement is taken to mean that the promises God made to Abraham were never really meant for Abraham’s descendants, but find their fulfillment in Jesus alone (and perhaps the church). Thus God has little use for Israel, now “replaced” by Jesus and the church.

But isolating Galatians 3:16, without any connection to the rest of the Bible, is a good example of irresponsible exegesis. So let’s put things into perspective. In Genesis 15:5, God makes the following promise to Abraham: “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—as if it were possible. This is how numerous your seed [*zarah*] will be.” The Hebrew *zarah*—the same word Paul refers to in Galatians 3:16—is singular in form but is frequently used with a plural meaning, just like *collective* English words such as *team* or *church*.

So obviously, “seed” in Genesis 15:5 is to be understood as *plural*. Likewise in Genesis 26: “And I will make your offspring [*zarah*] as numerous as the stars of heaven, and I will give all these lands to your offspring. And through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed” (verse 4). Again, *zarah* is obviously plural. Now look at a similar passage in Genesis 22, from which Paul draws his Galatians 3 reference: “I will indeed bless you and make your descendants [*zarah*] as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants [*zarah*] will take possession of their enemies’ gates, and through your offspring [*zarah*] all nations on earth will be blessed—because you have obeyed me” (verses 17-18). Again, *zarah* is obviously plural.

How could Jesus ever fulfill these passages? How could *He* be as numerous as the stars of heaven or the sands of the seashore? How could *He* occupy vast lands or possess His enemies’ gates? Indeed, these physical, *national* promises become nonsense when applied to Jesus or the church.

Paul was not ignorant of the fact that Abraham’s seed was to be *many*, not one. So what was he thinking? Paul was fond of using analogies, metaphors—even wordplays. And it is the singular *form* of the word *zarah* that allows Paul to make his exceptional point in Galatians 3:16. The overall context of Galatians 3 shows that just as the Abrahamic blessings are founded on faith-based promises, so too is salvation. Noting the singular form of *zarah*, Paul is employing a wordplay of sorts: Abraham’s descendants were to be a source of tremendous blessings—“through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.” But the ultimate blessing of eternal salvation would come through that *singular* Abrahamic seed—the Messiah.

In no way does Galatians 3:16 upend scores of biblical passages and nullify the many national promises God has made to Abraham’s offspring—*Israel*. Rather, the passage is specifically referring to Jesus’ redemptive work: He is not the only seed of promise, but the *ultimate* seed of promise. Plus, Galatians should be viewed in light of Paul’s related statements, particularly in the book of Romans, written several years later. For example, how could God say to Israel, “Your calling is irrevocable!” (Rom. 11:29), if it has been fulfilled in Jesus alone? And how could Paul write that Jesus came to “confirm the promises made to the patriarchs” (Rom. 15:8) if those promises were actually to find their fulfillment in the Messiah alone?

Israel’s “gifts and calling”

Paul’s treatise in Romans 10-11 leaves no room whatsoever for Replacement Theology. Indeed, the apostle holds out great hope to Israel when he proclaims that “the gifts and the calling of God for Israel are *irrevocable*” (Rom. 11:29). Let’s look at that *calling* and those *gifts*—and see how they are central to Israel’s destiny.

In Exodus 19 we see that it was God’s intent for Israel to be a *model nation*—to which the whole world would ultimately look. “If you will genuinely obey me and remain faithful to this covenant, then you will be my treasured possession out of all the nations. Indeed, the whole earth is mine—but you, Israel, will serve me as a kingdom of priests and as a holy nation” (verses 5-6). The

purpose of Israel's Levitical priesthood was to represent God to the people, to teach and instruct in God's way. The same would be true of a "priestly nation": that nation—*holy*, i.e., set apart for a special purpose—would represent God to the rest of the world.

Had ancient Israel actually succeeded in this role, the surrounding nations—and ultimately the whole world—would have been drawn to God's way of life. Notice what Moses said about the teachings and instructions God had given to Israel: "Observe these teachings carefully, for this will demonstrate your wisdom and understanding to the nations around you. They will learn of these teachings and say, 'Israel is a great nation—look at their wisdom and understanding!' Indeed, what other nation is this blessed—to have its god so near, the way Jehovah our God is near us whenever we call out to Him? And what other nation has been blessed with such righteous teachings as contained in the Torah—which I am setting before you today?" (Deut. 4:6-8).

This leads us to the central *gift* God has given to Israel: the Scriptures. Paul asks, "What advantage is there in being a Jew?" He answers: "There are many, but foremost is the fact that God has entrusted the Jews with the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2). The term *oracle* is derived from the Greek *logos* and simply means "that which God has spoken"—through His prophets, etc. In other words, the Old Testament (see Acts 7:38; Heb. 5:12; I Peter 4:11; there was no New Testament when Paul wrote Romans).

Yet Israel failed in her calling to be that standard or model nation for the world, becoming instead a source of Gentile contemptuousness toward God (Rom. 2:24). Moreover, she has never faithfully followed the teachings of the Old Testament, choosing instead to reverence rabbinic tradition via the Talmud.⁹ And what of the physical, material blessings (*gifts*) promised to Israel? Those blessings reached their zenith during the Solomonic kingdom, but Israel's ultimate potential of becoming a "blessing to all nations of the world" can now find fulfillment only in the age to come.¹⁰

Romans 11—the temporary blindness of the Jews

In Romans 10 and 11, Paul deals with the issue of Jewish *unbelief*, for the Jewish leadership—the scribes, Pharisees, and priests—had not accepted the Gospel message (Rom. 10:16). He also shows that God had all along allowed for the contingency of Israel's failure—by preparing to offer salvation to Gentiles. Paul begins by refuting any Jewish claim of ignorance: "Did the Jews not hear? Yes, for that Gospel message went throughout the land!" (verse 18). He goes on: "Did not Israel understand what would happen?" (verse 19). Paul continues, introducing the idea of God passing over the Jews and turning instead to Gentiles: "Yes, they knew! God had long ago warned through Moses, 'I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not even a nation. I will anger you by a people who have no knowledge of me.' And later Isaiah boldly predicted, 'I will be found by those who were not even looking for me, and I will reveal myself to those who were not asking about me.' But to the Jews, God has said, 'All day long I have stretched out my hands in an offer of mercy to a people who are disobedient and contrary'" (Rom. 10:19-21; see Deut. 32:21; Isa. 65:1-2).

Paul continues his discourse in Romans chapter 11: “So now I ask, ‘Has God rejected His people?’ May it never be! God has *not* rejected His people—the very ones He planned as His own. What then has happened? The righteousness the Jews have sought through their own Talmudic works has never been realized. Instead, an *elect* has obtained genuine righteousness through God’s favor, and the Jews have been *temporarily* left to their stubbornness—*blinded*, just as was foretold by Isaiah: ‘God has given them a spirit of slumber, eyes that are not able to see, and ears that are not able to hear,’ even as it is to this day” (verses 1-2, 7-8, abridged; see Deut. 29:4; Isa. 29:10; Jer. 5:21; etc.)¹¹

As this passage clearly shows, the Jews, even in wholesale unbelief, have *not* been utterly “rejected”—let alone replaced. Even the “elect”—the church—has not replaced the Jews. Again, as we will see, both the *Jews* and the *elect* have distinct roles in the millennial age to come.

But who is this elect? For purposes of contrast with unbelieving Jews, Paul refers to the spiritual “people of God” as *Gentiles*—even though the calling of the *elect* (Rom. 11:7) actually began with Jews. Of course, as the church grew it became predominantly non-Jewish.¹² Moreover, from a New Covenant perspective, that “nation” is neither Jewish nor Gentile—for all are one spiritually (Rom. 10:12; Gal. 3:28). So the elect is the *church*, now opened to non-Jews. And it is the fact that God has temporarily *avored Gentiles over Jews* that will ultimately provoke the Jews to jealousy and act as a catalyst for the Jews’ repentance.

Paul continues: “Now, did the Jews stumble to the extent that their failure is permanent? May it never be! But in their failure, salvation has come to the Gentiles—*why?*—to provoke the Jews to jealousy!” (verse 11). Thus, Gentiles, who as a people had never even thought about “becoming righteous,” are now able—upon being *called* by God (John 6:44)—to attain the very redemption that the Jews rejected (Rom. 9:30). Paul predicts this turn of events will ultimately provoke envy and rage among the Jews. (Keep in mind the tremendous contempt Jews have for non-Jews.)

Continuing: “Moreover, if the Jews’ stumbling means *spiritual* riches through the Gospel for the world—and if their condition of being *temporarily less favored* brings such riches to the Gentiles—then how much greater riches will ultimately result from the Jews’ full restoration? And if their temporary ‘dismissal’ opens up spiritual reconciliation to the world, what will happen when the Jews are fully reconciled to God? It will be like one raised from the dead!” (verses 12, 15).

The existing Jewish condition of *unbelief*—manifested in their ongoing rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and in their idolatrous obsession with Talmudic tradition—is not permanent. Clearly, as foreseen here by Paul, the Jews’ condition will be *reversed*—once they are “provoked to jealousy” and repent. Then, as Paul also indicates, the Jews will become a *tremendous blessing to all mankind!* After all, Jesus did say that salvation is “*through* the Jews” (John 4:22; the preposition *ek* denotes *origin*).

Meanwhile, God is able to use the Jews’ unbelief to further His plan of salvation. Using the analogy of an olive tree, Paul continues in Romans 11 showing that as some of the natural branches (Jews) were “broken off,” others from a “wild tree” (Gentiles, or the *elect*) were “grafted in”—to then partake of the nourishment of the root (verse 17). The *root*—which “bears the branches” (verse 18)—refers to the covenant promises God made to Abraham. As verse 28 notes, these Jewish “cast off

branches” are *still* “beloved for the fathers’ sakes”—that is, Israel’s “election” as God’s model nation continues unabated and, contrary to Replacement Theology, will ultimately find fulfillment. Thus, while non-Jews can now become co-heirs of the blessings of the New Covenant, the Jews—as long as they “do not continue in unbelief”—will be *readily* “grafted back in again” (verses 23-24) in the soon-coming messianic age.

In Romans 11:25, Paul begins to hold out marvelous hope for the Jews (and for all of Israel). “Now I don’t want you to be ignorant of this previously hidden knowledge, lest what has happened to the Jews cause you to become arrogant and self-important. So understand this: There has been a partial hardening of the heart of the Jews, a blindness—but only until the *elect* is fully prepared.”

The final phrase of this verse—“until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in” (*KJV*)—is quite vague in most translations. Keep in mind that throughout this section of Romans Paul is using *Gentile* synonymously with the *elect* (Rom. 11:5, 7, 28)—the church of God (Col. 3:12; II John 1). Paul’s use of the term is intentional, for it is the realization that messianic salvation has been offered to *Gentiles* that will, in the age to come, provoke the Jews to repentance. Clearly, the phrase does *not* mean that the composition of the church would be entirely Gentile, for it obviously began with Jews and maintained a large number of Jews; nor does it mean that the church must grow until it encompasses *all* Gentiles, for the elect would always be a “little flock” (Luke 12:32). A good rendering would be, “but only until God has brought in the full number of ‘Gentiles’ He has intended.” Ultimately, this phrase shows that the problem of Jewish unbelief will be resolved at the return of Christ, when His bride—the church—will have fully *made herself ready* (Rev. 19:7).

Redemption and restoration in the “Age to Come”

In temporarily *bypassing* the Jews, to whom salvation had come *first* (Rom. 1:16), God opened the Gospel to non-Jews. The astonishing realization that God has indeed *passed over* the Jews and offered salvation through Jesus the Messiah *to Gentiles* will ultimately provoke the Jews to both anger and jealousy. That anger and jealousy, coupled with genuine *repentance* (Zech. 12:10), will be the catalyst for Jewish salvation. Thus, Paul continues in Romans 11 with this hopeful proclamation: “And so all of Israel will yet be saved—for it is written concerning the Messiah: ‘Out of Zion shall come the Deliverer, and He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob [Israel]. For this is my covenant, which I [God] will make with Israel when I have taken away her sins’ ” (verses 26-27). For, as noted earlier, the one-of-a-kind calling that God has given to the Jews (as well as to all of Israel) “is in no way revoked” (verse 29).

Romans 11:26-27 is taken from Isaiah 59:20-21. However, Paul does not quote the latter part of verse 21: “[And in that day,] my spirit that is upon you shall not depart from you, and my words [the Scriptures *alone*, as opposed to the Talmud], which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouths of your children, nor out of the mouths of your children’s children—from this time on and forever.” This is similar in tenor to God’s promise of a *new covenant*

with Israel in the millennial age, as noted earlier from Jeremiah 31: “The days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah [then rejoined as one nation or kingdom]. It will be different from the covenant I made with their forefathers—back when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt—because they broke that covenant, even though I was like a husband to them. No, in this new covenant that I will make with Israel, I will actually put my Torah in their minds and write it on their hearts. Thus, I will truly be their God and they will indeed be my people. People will no longer need to admonish others to ‘know me’—because everyone from the least to the greatest *will genuinely know me.* I will forgive Israel’s unrighteousness; I won’t even remember her sins” (verses 31-34).

Jeremiah 31 continues with verification of God’s absolute faithfulness to Israel. The God who appointed the sun to shine by day and the moon and stars to shine by night, who designed the roaring waves of the sea—that same God says of Israel: “If these very laws of nature fail before me, *only then* will the nation of Israel cease to be. Indeed, if the heavens can be measured and the depths of the earth searched out—*only then* will I reject Israel, even considering all that they have done” (verses 35-37).

Even after having “disowned” Israel and the Jews for a time, God declares through Hosea that “the population of the children of Israel will yet be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or counted. And while it was once said to Israel, ‘*You are not my people,*’ it will instead be said to them, ‘*You are the sons of the living God.*’ At that time the children of Judah [the Jews] and the children of Israel will be gathered together as one nation, and will have one ruler [a king of the Davidic line], and they will come up out of the land [of their end time captivity]...” (Hosea 1:10-11).

Israel—basis for the Kingdom of God

Replacement Theology seeks to dismantle any meaningful purpose for the nation of Israel. But without Israel, without the Jews, there can be *no* Kingdom of God. Jesus’ inner circle had been announcing the “good news” of that kingdom alongside the Messiah for many months. And just before His ascension into heaven, they asked Him the ultimate messianic question: “Will you now, finally, restore Israel’s kingdom?” (Acts 1:6). Jews saw the Messiah as a conqueror, one who would restore the Kingdom of Israel to her former glory—and then rule that kingdom forever. So for Jesus’ disciples, a restored Israel free of the Roman yoke *was* the Kingdom of God—at least in nascent form.

Identifying a restored Israel with the Kingdom of God is entirely biblical. As Messiah, Jesus will rule over the Kingdom of God forever. And in Luke 1:32-33, the angel Gabriel identifies that kingdom as the *house of Jacob*—Israel. He tells Mary, “He will be great, and He will be called the Son of the Most High. And God will give Him the very throne of his forefather David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end.” So Jesus’ kingdom, the Kingdom of God, is actually the Kingdom of Israel—destined to eventually fill the earth (Matt. 13:31-33).

Daniel would agree. In describing the great crisis on Israel at the close of this present age, the prophet has Israel—called here “saints,” but not to be confused with the church¹³—in the clutches of a

terrible “fourth beast,” facing *certain destruction* (Dan. 7:21, 25). Jesus warned of this same event: “Then there will be a time of great distress.... And unless those days are curtailed, *no Israelite will survive*—but for the sake of Israel, God’s chosen nation, those days will be cut short” (Matt. 24:21-22). Luke says there will be “great distress in the land, and wrath upon *this people*”—Israel (Luke 21:23). But as Daniel’s prophecy shows, God steps in at the last moment and not only delivers Israel (Dan. 7:22), he *extends to them* the very kingdom He has just granted to the Messiah in a heavenly coronation ceremony (verses 13-14, 18, 22, 27). Thus, in the so-called “great tribulation” a remnant of modern Israel is delivered and “given” a kingdom—that is, they *become* a kingdom—that will never end, ruled over by Jesus sitting on David’s throne.

What does all of this mean? A rescued and fully restored Israel in the “age to come” is the *basis* for the Kingdom of God. The idea of Israel as *God’s kingdom* stems from David’s time. Solomon sat on *God’s* throne (I Chron. 29:23). David said Solomon was chosen “to sit upon the throne of the *kingdom of Jehovah* over Israel” (I Chron. 28:5). The Jewish king Abijah spoke of “the *kingdom of Jehovah* in the hand of the sons of David” (II Chron. 13:8). Clearly, the throne of Israel was God’s throne, and Israel was God’s “kingdom” on earth. At least it was meant to be in *type*.

All of this hearkens back to Exodus 19:5-6, where, as we saw earlier, Israel was originally “set apart” to model God’s way of life to the world. But Israel never fulfilled that purpose, and this restored-kingdom theme subsequently became the focus of all the prophets.¹⁴

The Jews’ Ultimate Destiny

The idea of *destiny* is central to the religion of Judaism. However, as author David Ariel notes, “the question of Jewish destiny remains unresolved, as the fundamental issues concerning the Jews’ place in the world are under continual [rabbinic] revision.” Indeed, the rabbis are “constantly posing new approaches” to the Jews’ “struggle with the issue of Jewish destiny and distinctiveness” (*What Do Jews Believe?*, p. 133).¹⁵

It seems Jews have lost sight of their original purpose of being a *model* nation. Instead, looking *inwardly*, Judaism has focused on being “treasured” by God—as opposed to being *used* by God. According to Ariel, Jewish distinctiveness is today found in “personal spirituality”—a direct reflection of rabbinical teachings. Thus, a biblically-defined destiny that finds purpose and meaning for the people of Israel as a whole has given way to a self-seeking destiny centered on Judaic *religious practice* (pp. 50-51).

Unfortunately, this popular view of Jewish destiny compromises the idea of the Jews being God’s “chosen people,” and effectively lumps the Jews in with the rest of humanity in its search for “spiritual enlightenment.” But from a biblical perspective, it is a huge mistake to confuse the destiny of the people of Israel with the destiny of the rest of the world. God calls no other nation “my elect” (Isa. 45:4; 65:9, 22); to no other nation has God said, “But you, Israel, are my servant. You are Jacob, whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham, who was my friend. I took you from the ends of the earth,

and called you from its remotest corners. And I declare, ‘You are my servant; I have chosen you, and I have not cast you away’ ” (Isa. 41:8-9). What other nation has been called to *model God’s way of life* to the world (Ex. 19:6)? What other nation has teachings so profoundly wise that the nations of the world would seek after them (Deut. 4:6)?

Without question, in the age to come, the nation of Israel *will fulfill* their original God-ordained role as a *model nation* for the world. But they will do so under the *direct leadership* of the then-glorified church—those “grafted” in as “spiritual Jews” because of the Jews’ unbelief. As noted earlier, the Jews and the *elect* have distinct roles. As spirit-composed immortal children of God, the church will rule as kings and priests over the earth with Christ (Rev. 5:10; 20:6). Under their leadership, the Torah will go forth from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:3) and the knowledge of God’s way of life will cover the earth like the seas (Isa. 11:9). The twelve apostles will each rule over a tribe of Israel (Luke 22:30)—as the nation, in turn, fulfills its role as the premier “model” that all humanity will ultimately desire to follow. Thus, the glorified “bride of Christ”—the church—will serve under Jesus as the ruling upper echelon of the Kingdom of God, while a restored and redeemed Israel will serve as the “model nation” for all the world. Two distinct, yet complementary, roles—and both forming the kingdom.

Meanwhile, observant Jews continue to practice a “form of righteousness” (Rom. 10:3) as slaves to rabbinic codes of law. Following in the footsteps of their Pharisaic progenitors, they remain blinded by *unbelief*. In this age, Jews *as a whole* will never experience the genuine righteousness that comes from a true Scripture-based relationship with God through the mediatory role of Jesus as the Messiah. Indeed, Zechariah prophesied that the Jews would not recognize Jesus until He returns as the “Conquering Messiah” to rescue them in the “latter days.” In utter repentance, they will also understand that He is the *same* Jesus their ancestors had killed. “And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the Jews and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that when they see the one whom their own fathers had killed, they will in repentance mourn for Him—just as one mourns for an only child who has been lost; and in bitterness they will weep over Him, just as one weeps over a lost firstborn child” (Zech. 12:10).

Those who espouse Replacement Theology should sit up and take note: God has not abandoned His plans for Israel (Rom. 11); they will *still* be the model nation He always intended. In fact, Israel’s *ultimate destiny* is captured in a single, profound statement made by the prophet Zechariah concerning the messianic age: “In those days *ten men* out of all the nations will take hold of the garment of a Jew, saying, ‘We will follow you, because we have heard that God is with you’ ” (Zech. 8:23). In the culture of Zechariah’s day, taking hold of another’s garment meant looking to that individual for guidance and protection. The *ten men* are representative of all nations—thus, the *entire world* will follow the then-righteous example of the nation of Israel.

Then, Jesus’ words in John 4:22 will never be more true—that “*salvation is through the Jews*”!

NOTES:

1. Biblical prophecy overwhelmingly revolves around God's chosen nation, Israel. Typically, other nations are involved only as they come into contact with and influence that key nation. *But who is Israel? And who are the Jews?* Is the modern Jewish nation known today as the "State of Israel" the *same nation* God established through the biblical patriarchs? Astonishingly, most people, including Christians, carelessly make this very assumption. In fact, one of the most significant *misrepresentations* in Judaism is the claim that the Jews are the *sum total* of the people of Israel.

Scripture, however, shows that "Jews" are actually descendants of the distinct nation of *Judah*, which was composed primarily of *three* of the twelve tribes (Judah, Levi, and Benjamin) that originally made up the ancient Kingdom of Israel. As for the remaining tribes—the so-called "lost ten tribes"—Jewish and Christian scholars alike have relegated them to the pages of history, claiming that their assimilation into various Gentile nations (following their captivity) has rendered them *nonexistent*. A few Jewish scholars insist that the ten tribes were somehow *reunited* with the Jews and that all twelve tribes are collectively represented by those called "Jews" today. But not only is there *no* historical proof of such a reunion, the idea goes against the clear scriptural record. Indeed, the Bible shows that the "lost" tribes of Israel have not utterly vanished, nor have they returned to Palestine. Rather, they migrated over time to new lands and, having lost their identity as Israel, became established nations with new names. Moreover, the Bible emphatically speaks of the "lost" tribes of Israel being restored to Palestine in the messianic "age to come." (Today, these "lost" tribes are represented primarily by America and the UK. Please refer to our book *America and Britain—Their Biblical Origin and Prophetic Destiny*, available through this website.)

As can be easily shown from the Old Testament, the original nation of Israel was composed of twelve tribes. Following the death of Solomon, the nation was divided into two kingdoms—north and south. The southern kingdom, referred to as *Judah*, the "House of Judah," or by its capital, Jerusalem, was made up of three tribes—Judah, Benjamin, and Levi—blended as if one. In close proximity to Jerusalem, most of the tribe of Benjamin was politically part of Judah. The Scriptures also show that most of the tribe of Levi, because of their association with the Temple, migrated to Judah after the kingdom became divided. Hence, in II Kings 17:18, Judah is said to be the "only" remaining tribe after the northern kingdom was removed—meaning it was the only *full* tribe left.

The northern kingdom, referred to as *Israel*, the "House of Israel," or by its capital, Samaria, was composed of the remaining tribes. The half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (representing the tribe of Joseph) were each counted separately, thus making a total of *ten* tribes. For their evil in God's eyes, the entire "House of Israel" was taken into captivity by the Assyrians in the eighth century BC and never allowed to return. The Israelites were resettled initially in areas north and east of the Euphrates River, while pagan peoples were brought in to replace them (II Kings 17:23-24).

By Jesus' time the exiled northern tribes had long migrated out of the Middle East, and the land north of Jerusalem continued to be settled by Gentile "Samaritans." Thus, in Matthew 10:6, Jesus instructed His disciples to take the message of the Gospel to the "lost sheep of the House of Israel," which proves that both their *identity* and *whereabouts* were known to the early church. Jesus' use of the term "lost" was merely indicative of Israel's exilic, migratory status—as the so-called "lost" tribes of Israel had by this time migrated into parts of Europe, forming well established communities.

The southern nation of Judah—referred to as "the Jews" for the first time in II Kings 16:5-6, where they are actually *at war* with the northern nation of Israel—also went into captivity (II Kings 24:10, 14), only to return some 70

years later to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. Ezra refers to the returning exiles—those of “Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites” (Ezra 1:5)—as “Jews” of Judah (Ezra 5:1). In the most literal sense, a Jew may be viewed as a direct descendant of the *tribe* of Judah (the term *Jew* is a derivative of the Hebrew *Judah*). From the post-exilic period on through the first century AD, a Jew was any Israelite indigenous to the land of Judah. Today, in common usage, one may be considered a Jew based not only on lineage but on adherence to the religion of Judaism. Thus, *all* Jews are Israelites, but only *some* Israelites are Jews.

2. Peterson, Galen. *The Everlasting Tradition*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1995

3. wikipedia.org/wiki/Supersessionism. Marcion’s contribution to Replacement Theology (and other aberrant teachings) must not be underestimated. Notice this telling passage by biblical scholar John D. Garr: “In Marcion’s view, Christianity had no connection whatsoever with the past [i.e., the Old Testament], whether of the Jewish or the heathen world, but had fallen abruptly and magically from heaven. Jesus, too, was not born, nor did he die. His body was a phantom to reveal the good God, and his death was an illusion. This Christ was not the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament; he was a totally new and unforeseen manifestation of the good God of Greek dualism. Because the rest of the apostles were Judaizing corrupters of pure Christianity, Christ called Paul as the apostle to preach the truth of Marcion’s extreme antinomianism and anti-Judaism....

“Marcion invented a [private] canon of Holy Scripture, which included only an abridged Gospel of Luke and ten of Paul’s epistles, some of which he edited. He wrested the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:17 to declare, ‘I am not come to fulfill the law and the prophets, but to destroy them.’ ...

“Marcion’s extreme antinomianism [anti-Torah approach] spread through the [proto-Catholic] church, planting the seeds of an abundant harvest—first of Judaeophobia, then of anti-Judaism, and finally of anti-Semitism—a harvest that continues to this day.... Some of the ideas of [Marcion’s] heresy [have] so permeated the [Catholic] church’s corporate psyche that it has not yet fully recovered its spiritual and scriptural equilibrium.” (John D. Garr, Ph.D., “Torah—Bane or Basis of Christian Faith?”). Unfortunately, much of this anti-Jewish/anti-Torah sentiment has been carried over into Protestantism.

4. The contempt held by the proto-Orthodox “church fathers” for anything Jewish—the “Law” and especially the seventh-day Sabbath—created fertile ground for Martin Luther’s massive error in his approach to “works and grace.” Luther rightly rejected the Catholic practice that one could essentially “buy” salvation through donations (“indulgences”) to the church or through performing certain physical rituals. He understood the vital role of God’s grace in salvation. But Luther went too far in his proclamation that salvation is through “faith alone”—insisting that one’s *works* have nothing to do with salvation. This premise became a foundational teaching of Protestantism, and continues today in one form or another. Apparently, mainstream Christianity cannot grasp the fully-biblical idea of *conditional* salvation: it is by the *freely given grace* of God that the reconciled believer enters into a relationship with Christ. But the actual *gift* of eternal life—which is only granted at Jesus’ return—*still* hinges on whether the believer lives a life of obedience, developing the mind of Christ. None of this *earns* one salvation; it is still a *gift*. The Bible is quite clear on this. For example, consider Hebrews 5:9, where Jesus is said to be the “author of eternal salvation” for those who *obey* Him—not those who simply “profess His name.” Do you really think God will *give* you salvation if you prove yourself unwilling to obey Him?

Calling on Jesus as “Lord, Lord” is insufficient: one must *do* the will of God (Matt. 7:21). Once a “convert” enters

into a relationship with God through the reconciliation made possible by Jesus' sacrifice, he or she must go on to *prove themselves*. They can still fail, fall away, abort, etc.—*lose salvation* (Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-27). Note these critical passages: Salvation hinges on *holding fast* (I Cor. 15:2); it is possible to *drift away* from God and *neglect* our salvation (Heb. 2:1-3); we remain members of the household of God only as we *hold fast* to the end (Heb. 3:6, 14); we receive the promise of God (salvation) *after* we have “done the will of God” (Heb. 10:36); we must overcome (our sinful nature, Satan, the world) and continue to *do* the “works of Jesus” to the end (Rev. 2:26); we must *hold fast* or risk *losing our crown* (Rev. 3:11). Even Paul acknowledged that it was possible for him to become *disqualified* for salvation (I Cor. 9:27). Yes, conditions must be met—right up to the end. Salvation is clearly a *process*: we are *first* reconciled to God through Jesus—then, *ultimately*, saved by His “living in us” (Rom. 5:10), *which changes us*. Thus, only the *doers* of the Torah are righteous before God (Rom. 2:13).

5. The church is already operating under the New Covenant (Luke 22:20; II Cor. 3:6; etc.).

6. *Torah* rightly means *teaching* or *instruction*. Indeed, to translate *Torah* as *law* is often misleading and tends to represent God as a harsh taskmaster as opposed to a loving, *nurturing* Father. As parents, we don't go around “commanding” our children to do things and emphasizing “parental law.” Instead, we teach, instruct, nurture—and yes, we “lay down the law” when we need to. There is no single English word that captures the Hebraic idea behind *Torah*. Thus, many writers, myself included, prefer to use *Torah* where possible and *law* when the context requires it. *Torah* is also commonly used to refer to the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch.

7. Also see Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 32:40; and Ezekiel 11:19. The Holy Spirit was not generally available under the Old Covenant, thus eternal salvation itself was offered only to a few. Under the New Covenant, salvation will ultimately be open to all nations—but through Israel.

8. After noting the Jews' *lack of belief* (verses 7-8), Peter says of the *elect*, the church: “But you are a chosen people, a ‘royal priesthood’ in the making, a ‘holy nation’ as it were, a community uniquely belonging to God—so that you might proclaim His excellent virtues [bring forth fruit worthy of the kingdom], and demonstrate the goodness of the one who called you out of darkness and into His wonderful light. In the past, you didn't even exist as a group; but now you are the people of God. You had never known God's mercy, but have now been shown great kindness” (I Pet. 2:9-10). Peter is referencing Hosea 1:9-10 and 2:23, also cited by Paul in Romans 9:25-26. But as with the passages quoted above, Peter is in no way supporting Replacement Theology. As you will see, the church has her *own* unique role in God's plan, which will work in harmony with Israel's role in the age to come.

9. Paul accurately describes the Jews' pursuit of “righteousness” via the Talmud: “What does all of this mean? Just this: Gentiles, who have never pursued a ‘right standing’ with God (as they had no prior knowledge of God or the Torah), now have access to such a ‘standing’ with God, made possible by faith”—because they have come to *believe* in Jesus as the Messiah, through whom they have *reconciliation* for past sins and through whom they can learn to *obey the Torah* according to its spiritual intent. “But the *Jews*, though they followed a course which *they* believed would lead to a ‘right standing’ with God, have nevertheless failed to attain that ‘forensic righteousness.’ Why? Because they pursued a ‘form of righteousness’ and justification through Pharisaic *works of law* instead of through a living faith in Christ.” From Paul's perspective, belief in Jesus as the Messiah would have led the Jews away from their Judaic traditions and into genuine,

heartfelt obedience to the Scriptures. “In fact, they were offended by that ‘stumbling stone’—exactly as Isaiah foretold: ‘Look, I am going to place in Zion a Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offense, but those who believe in Him will not be ashamed on the day of judgment’ ” (Rom. 9:30-33). Accordingly, the Jews “did not understand the justification that comes from God through Christ and thus sought to establish their own”—and failed to “submit to God’s plan for reconciliation. Indeed, for those who believe, trusting in Christ puts an end to ‘self-justification by works of law’ ” (Rom. 10:3-4).

10. As modern descendant nations of Israel, America and Britain have already brought unparalleled blessings to the world. But such blessings are only a token of the positive impact Israel will have in the messianic age to come.

One of the primary *gifts* God gave to Israel was the land promised to Abraham. “And I will give to you, Abraham, and to your descendants [Israel] after you, all of the land in which you now sojourn, all of the land of Canaan, for an *everlasting possession*. And concerning your descendants, I will be their God” (Gen. 17:8). And God always keeps His word, for He cannot lie (Heb. 6:18). God’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—with all the nation of Israel—is for a “thousand generations”: i.e., *forever* (Psa. 105:8-11). Verse 10 says the land promises have been confirmed to Israel by an “everlasting covenant.”

11. Paul explains in Acts that the Jewish problem was of their *own* making: “Through the prophet Isaiah, God rightly declared to your forefathers: ‘Tell these people, “You will hear quite well—but never understand! And you will indeed see—but never perceive!” For their hearts have become calloused. They’ve become dull of hearing; they’ve closed their *own* eyes! Otherwise they might actually listen, might see, and even gain understanding—and then turn to me and I would make them whole.’ So know this: God’s salvation is being revealed to Gentiles—and they will listen!” (Acts 28:26-28; from Isa. 6:9-10).

12. There are millions of professing Christians in America who think they are “Gentile believers.” But as a nation, America is actually *Israelite* in origin. So while these Christians are not precisely “Jewish,” they are not necessarily *Gentile*.

13. *Saints* is an archaic term that can be quite misleading. Here in Daniel 7, the Aramaic (like the Hebrew) simply means those God has “set apart” or *chosen* for a special purpose. Depending on the context, this could apply to angels, *Israel*, or the church. But the context here in Daniel 7 is *entirely geopolitical*: Daniel’s “saints” are end time *Israel* (see Dan. 12:7 were “holy people” has the same meaning). Yet *saints* does at times refer to the church (e.g., Rev 19:8). As always, context is everything. The terms *saint*, *holy one*, and *elect* all have a similar meaning: those God has specially chosen or “set apart.” Notice that God calls Israel His *elect*: “For my servant Jacob’s sake, for Israel my elect...” (Isa. 45:4; also Isa. 65:9, 22).

14. Numerous passages speak of a restored, united Israel as the basis of God’s kingdom on earth (some of these passages have already been mentioned): Jeremiah 30:3, 9; 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27; 37:21-28, for example, describe Israel’s restoration to glory following the “great tribulation.” Isaiah 2:2-3 shows that all nations in the age to come will *look to Israel* as God’s premier nation. God will “once again choose Israel” (Isa. 14:1). In the age to come, “Jacob will again take root; Israel will bud and blossom and *fill all the world* with blessings” (Isa. 27:6). In the messianic age, every Gentile nation will *emulate Israel*—will “take hold of the garment of a Jew saying, ‘We will follow you, because we know God is with you’ ” (Zech. 8:23). And of course, Paul vigorously argues in Romans 11 that the whole world will tremendously benefit from Israel’s restoration in the age to come (e.g., verses 12, 15-16, 29).

15. Ariel, David. *What Do Jews Believe?* New York: Schocken Books, 1995