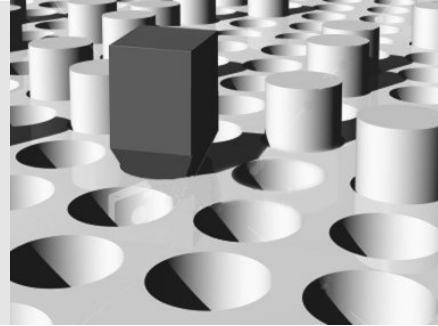




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restoration of Israel  
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## The Replacement Theology Challenge Today

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A dear friend works in a church connected to an apostolic leader who has just published a book that argues for replacement theology. As most teachers who hold to this very wrong theology, he does not like to call his theology "replacement" but "fulfillment."

According to this view, the church is the ongoing meaning of Israel. It is the fulfillment, and ethnic Israel is no longer the elect nation of God. My friend asked me to help him respond. In reflecting on this I thought it worthwhile to write something new on this for all of you. I hope it aids your understanding for both your teaching and your prayers.

### A Brief History Of Replacement Theology

The Apostle Paul anticipated replacement theology when writing to the Roman Christians. There were already attitudes towards the Jews that could lead to this false teaching. **Paul notes in the strongest terms that the covenants and the promises still belong to Israel (Romans 9:1).** He even asserts that Israel, which has not embraced Yeshua, is the elect and beloved for the sake of the Patriarchs. Paul concludes the argument with this ringing affirmation: **"The gifts and call of God (to Israel) are irrevocable." (Romans 11:28, 29)** One wonders how Paul could have been clearer, as well as how one can still support replacement theology in the light of these verses.

### The Church Fathers

**The Church Fathers saw the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as the ultimate proof that God had once and for all rejected Israel as the elect nation.** Even though some taught that at the end of this age the Jews would believe, they still held to the belief that the Jews were never again to be the elect nation or to return to their land. An allegorical method of interpretation developed in order to maintain this view. Christians were taught that the promises concerning Israel that had not yet been fulfilled should be allegorically applied to the church. This did violence to the text because it rejected the natural reading of the scripture in context. The meaning was "spiritually" divorced from the intention of the author and the understanding of the intended audience.

**Text after text about Israel's ultimate re-gathering to the Land and the ultimate glory that would be received were twisted to mean something else.** The justification was that the New Testament speaks of the Church in terms that were used for ethnic Israel in the Hebrew Bible. However, these texts do not speak of Israel's replacement but rather that the Church by analogy, has parallel meaning to Israel.

### The Reformation And The Puritans

The Reformation gave us interpreters who interpreted scripture in context; in a natural and straightforward manner. **This led to the Puritan interpreters writing many books and articles asserting a positive future for ethnic Israel as God's elect people.** Increase Mather of Harvard wrote a book on Romans 9-11, and interpreters like Elnathan Parr and Samuel Rutherford made strong pleas for the Jewish people. Some even predicted a return to the Land. This was the case with the great poet-theologian, John Milton, in *Paradise Regained*.

The classic apologetic textbook written by Joseph Butler in 1732, *The Analogy of Religion*, argued for the Jewish return to the land of Israel. The preservation of the Jews and their return to the Land was one of his arguments proving the truth of the Bible. Lutheran Pietists, Anglicans, Moravians, Methodists and Baptists made this view the consensus of the British Church of the early 19th century. John Nelson Darby in the mid 19th century, founder of Dispensational theology, developed his theology in this context. He agreed that Israel was elect and had a positive future but also added some strange distinctions in defining dispensations or ways of God's working in different ages. Many replacement teachers in the Evangelical world today claim that those who believe in the election of ethnic Israel are Dispensationalists; this is a very wrong claim.

While we can point to the above positive historical trends, both Catholic thought and classical Calvinist thought maintained its replacement orientation, the latter having left Puritan interpretation. However, the Evangelical world in America largely went Dispensational and saw the theology of Israel in the context of Darby's theology. This weakened their argument with replacement teachers.

### **The Post Holocaust Re-evaluation**

After the Holocaust there was a very strong re-evaluation. The positive influence of Karl Barth, who in his *Church Dogmatics* wrote passionately on the continued election of Israel, influenced the mainline Protestant re-evaluation. Though replacement theology was not seen as logically anti-Semitic, it was perceived as a factor in allowing anti-Semitism to exist. Denomination after denomination rejected replacement theology in official documents and claimed that the Jewish people were elect. This led to a very positive feeling for Israel. Finally during the Vatican II Church Council, the Roman Catholic Church became the largest Church body to officially repudiate replacement theology and give ringing affirmation to the continued election of the Jewish people as distinctly chosen from all nations. This is now enshrined in the "*New Catholic Catechism*" and many other documents.

### **Replacement Theology is Re-asserted**

Unfortunately, replacement theology is again rearing its ugly head. The mainline denominations have turned from Barth and his followers who gave us Neo-Orthodoxy and a higher regard for the biblical texts, though not an Evangelical high view of scriptural inspiration. With greater relativism taking hold, they were now subject to Arab propaganda. Palestinian mainline Christians, advocates for replacement theology, have brought mainline denominations to a point where they still hold to some tepid level of election for the Jewish people while turning against Israel and rejecting the present return to the Land. There has been unnecessary Palestinian suffering, but the relentless propaganda goes beyond any justification and has now produced an anti-Israel bias in these denominations.

In addition, in the Charismatic and Evangelical worlds, we find a new replacement theology growing up. Some professors at Wheaton College, the bastion of Evangelical education, are affirming replacement theology. This is of great concern to me. Yet, the bulk of the Evangelical world maintains a strong place for ethnic Israel in its theology, both from Dispensationalists and non-Dispensationalists like me.

### **Replacement Theology in Judaism and in Secular Jewish Thinking**

Startling as it may be, there is a kind of **Jewish replacement theology in Reform Judaism and secular Judaism**. The former no longer holds that the Jews are uniquely elect but that all peoples are equally chosen. If so, the universal election of all people **replaces** the view of the Jewish people as uniquely elect. All cultures have value and Judaism simply is said to be our culture. Secular Judaism has its own replacement view since no one is elect! These are very dangerous views and undercut the survival of our people. They undercut our courage and the reason to strive to survive as a people.

### **How Can People Be So Blind?**

**In a day when God is amazingly fulfilling prophecy and bringing our people back to the Land according to Ezekiel 36:24 and preparing them to receive the New Covenant, this replacement teaching is terribly unfortunate.** It robs the Church of its glorious role in making Israel jealous. It steals our rejoicing in the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. In a day when the saved remnant of Israel is growing steadily in numbers and quality, how can there be such blindness? May replacement theology die! We hope that the Church will see the truth and will show support in prayer and finances for the great move of God among our people.

*By Daniel Juster*