

EVANGELICAL ZIONISM

AN EVANGELICAL RESPONSE TO ISRAEL'S EVANGELICAL ENEMIES

PART III

Replacement Theology: Time-Honoured Error and Foundation of Sand

There are times when outsiders show greater understanding of an issue than many of those considered to be insiders. Robert Louis Stevenson was a poet and novelist, not a theologian. But it is reported that before he himself could read, his nursemaid read him the Bible aloud, from start to finish, three times. He had this to say:

"I cannot understand how you theologians and preachers can apply to the Church... ..Scripture promises which, in their plain meaning, must apply to God's chosen people Israel, and to Palestine; and which, consequently, must still be future."¹

He went on to say that the prophecies, when they are spiritualized by replacement theologians, "become farcical—as applied to the Church, they are a comedy."²

How we wish replacement theology's distortion of Scripture were only a comedy. Ideas have consequences and, for the Jewish people, Christian ideas have sometimes had lethal consequences. Replacement theology³ was not the *only* falsehood with which the ground was prepared for Europe's destruction of Jews, but it was one of the most important.

In recent decades evangelical Christians have often been staunch supporters of Israel and the Jewish people. Why? Because, like Robert Louis Stevenson, they have had the audacity to believe that the biblical text really does intend to convey the meaning contained in its words - the meaning that would have been apparent to its original readers. Where the biblical text speaks of a particular piece of real estate being promised to a specific people group, they have not resorted to theological chicanery. They have not attempted to create a smokescreen to obscure the obvious meaning. And where the biblical text speaks of the Jewish people being scattered⁴ and ultimately regathered⁵ to their ancient homeland they have not aligned themselves against that divine purpose. They have stood with the Jews.

¹ As quoted from personal conversation by S. J. Whitmee, "'Tusitala,' R. L. S.—A New Phase," *The Atlantic Monthly* 131 (March 1923):348.

Richard L. Mayhue, *New Covenant Theology and Futuristic Premillennialism*, *The Masters Seminary Journal*, 18/1 (Fall 2007) p.224, <https://www.tms.edu/m/tmsj18j.pdf>

² *ibid.*

³ Described by Diprose as the view that "the Church completely and permanently replaced ethnic Israel in the working out of God's plan as the recipient of Old Testament promises originally addressed to Israel."

Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church: The Origins and Effects of Replacement Theology*, Westmont, 2004, p2.

Vlach presents a number of definitions of replacement theory or supersessionism.

Michael Vlach, 'Defining Supersessionism', <http://theologicalstudies.org/resource-library/supersessionism/324-defining-supersessionism>

⁴ e.g. Leviticus 26:33; Jeremiah 31:10; Luke 21:24.

⁵ e.g. Isaiah 11:11; Jeremiah 23:8; 31:10.

In addition, those who readily accept the biblical declarations concerning Israel have been inclined to reject the distorted version of Middle East history that paints the Jews as colonialists along with the moral inversion that labels Jewish victims as aggressors.

But, things are changing. Increasingly, evangelical supporters of Israel - biblical Zionists - are being told that their affirmation of the biblical promises to Israel is a heresy⁶ - or even a sin.⁷ And like any lie that is told often enough, the revised historical narrative is beginning to take hold. And so the nation recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures as uniquely chosen by God to be a blessing to the world⁸ (and confirmed as such in the New Testament)⁹ has become a source of great controversy among evangelicals.

But does Israel's status really matter? We think so. We have noted that of all the statements in Scripture attributed to God, none are more emphatic than His promises to the Jewish people¹⁰ - and many of those statements concern the land of Israel (either explicitly or by necessary implication).¹¹

Again, evangelicals claim to base their views on Scripture. If the documents we call the Bible are to be taken seriously, then the status of Israel and the Jewish people is of utmost importance. In fact, if words mean anything, the integrity and veracity of the God of Scripture depends on His faithfulness to the Jewish people and His determination to restore them to Himself and to their ancient homeland.

Of course, replacement theologians each have their pet schemes by which they believe they can negate the plain meaning of the biblical text. While they cannot agree among themselves just how best to avoid the obvious meaning of the text, on one thing they can agree: the text *can not* mean what it says.

Much work has been done in recent years showing the central role played by replacement theology in preparing the ground for the Holocaust.¹² Most Christians are blissfully unaware of the shameful history of Christian anti-Semitism and how the teachings of men like Augustine and Luther helped pave the road to Auschwitz - and our almost universal failure during the Holocaust. Most Jews, however, know this history well.

⁶ Stephen R. Sizer, 'An Alternative Theology of the Holy Land: A Critique of Christian Zionism', Churchman, 113/2, 1999, http://churchsociety.org/docs/churchman/113/Cman_113_2_Sizer.pdf
Bible College of NZ (now Laidlaw College), Glenn Duthie, 'Christian Zionism and Restorative Justice', Reality Magazine, <http://www.reality.org.nz/articles/51/51-duthie.html>

⁷ e.g. In an open letter co-authored, David Gushee of Mercer University and Glen Stassen of Fuller Theological Seminary declared "...American Christian Zionism as it currently stands is sinful and produces sin.", <http://www.rethinkingfaith.com/post/10731922623/two-baptist-scholars-challenge-americas-christian>

⁸ Genesis 12:3.

⁹ See Part VI

¹⁰ e.g. Jeremiah 31:35-37; 32:41.

¹¹ e.g. Isaiah 49:12-26; Jeremiah 23:6-8; 30:16-24; Ezekiel 37:1- 14

¹² e.g. Robert S. Wistrich, *Antisemitism, The Longest Hatred*, New York, 1991.

David A. Rausch, *A Legacy Of Hatred: Why Christians Must Not Forget the Holocaust*, Grand Rapids, 1990.

James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, Boston, 2001.

Michael L. Brown, *Our Hands are Stained with Blood: The Tragic Story of the "Church" and the Jewish People*, Shippensburg, 1992.

The connection between anti-Semitism and replacement theology is becoming better understood. Perhaps for that reason replacement theologians have begun to object to the term *replacement*. Instead they insist that their theology is one of *fulfillment*¹³, *completion*, *realization*, or *extension*.¹⁴

In their *extension*, however, the original structure is demolished. And in their *fulfillment*, Israel's national promises, so clearly articulated in the Bible, will *never* be fulfilled.

We understand that the term *replacement* makes them uncomfortable. But in every case, despite their loud objections to the contrary, their theological schemes functionally dispossess and replace the nation Israel.¹⁵

Their objection is entirely understandable. As understandable as that of a man who divorces his wife, marries another, and yet with self-righteous indignation insists that he has kept his vows - to the second woman.

One who steals his neighbour's property, when caught, may prefer to describe his activity as "nocturnal asset relocation". Nonetheless, he really is a thief and his activity is a crime. Replacement theologians engage in theological identity theft. No amount of creative rebranding will legitimize their actions.

Theologians have for centuries tortured and distorted the text but the promises and covenants of Scripture remain clear - to the honest reader. And now, after centuries in exile, millions of Jews have returned to their ancient homeland.

Hitler attempted to purge the world of Jews. He did not succeed. For centuries replacement theologians have attempted to purge the Jews from the biblical present and biblical future. They too will fail.

It is time for those who profess to be evangelicals and yet deny Israel's enduring connection to the land and her unique status as a people to either abandon their evangelical claim, or to turn and affirm what the Scriptures so plainly teach.

¹³ e.g. 'Burge said he preferred the term "fulfillment theology" to "replacement theology," explaining he believes that Christ and the church didn't replace the Jews in the Abrahamic covenant but are a fulfillment of it.' Art Moore, Politics, Theology collide at 'Anti-Israel' Conference', *World Net Daily*, <http://www.wnd.com/2014/03/politics-theology-collide-at-anti-israel-conference/>

¹⁴ e.g. 'A more precise term which encompasses the biblical reality would be "extension theology."' Phillip Church, *Israel: 5 Views on People, Land and State*, Vision Network of NZ. 2009.

¹⁵ Michael Vlach responds to objections to the use of the term *replacement theology*: 'We find it somewhat hollow for some to argue against the title "replacement theology" when replacement terminology has often been used by those who believe the church is the new or true Israel.' 'Those who argue for "fulfillment," "enlargement," "expansion," and/or "transference" language do not use different arguments than those who argue for "replacement."' Mishkan, Vol 65, 2010. pp 28-42