

# EVANGELICAL ZIONISM

## AN EVANGELICAL RESPONSE TO ISRAEL'S EVANGELICAL ENEMIES

### PART V

#### The Denigration of the Old Testament: Old Lie, New Garb

The Hebrew Scriptures - what Christians usually call the Old Testament - was the Bible of the first followers of Yeshua, or Jesus. For them it was more than a sacred text. It was the very foundation of their faith and the means by which they tested and validated many of the teachings of their leaders.<sup>1</sup>

The collection of writings we call the New Testament did not exist at that time. Those documents were written over subsequent decades.

The first followers of Jesus were almost exclusively Jewish. Of course only a minority of Jews accepted Jesus' messianic claim. They did so, in part, because they recognized his fulfillment of some of the very specific predictions recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>2</sup> The movement was one among many sects within the Judaism of the time - it was firmly anchored in the Hebrew Scriptures and it was centred here in Jerusalem. It is quite clear that the hope and expectation of the movement was consistent with the Hebrew prophets:<sup>3</sup> that ultimately the Jewish people would be regathered and restored to their ancient homeland.

However, in the first one hundred years a number of significant events changed the movement profoundly. The massive influx of non-Jewish believers, the destruction of Jerusalem, the second Jewish revolt, the influence of Greek philosophy - these and other factors meant that by the second and third centuries a definite anti-Judaic influence had invaded. And with that, of course, came a change in the way the Hebrew Scriptures were read. What had been obvious to first century believers - that the Jewish people would ultimately be restored to their land - began to be denied or "reinterpreted".

Amongst the most colourful characters to appear on the scene, attempting to change the character of early Christianity, was Marcion. He rejected the God of the Hebrew Scriptures entirely, describing him as a lower deity, inferior in every way to his imaginary, ethnically cleansed version of Jesus. Marcion simply rejected the Hebrew Scriptures - and major portions of the New Testament.

Those who take Marcion's approach *do* exist today. Naim Ateek is prominent within the Christian anti-Zionist movement and is widely quoted by others. Ateek is forthright about his approach to Scripture. He has stated:

---

<sup>1</sup> John 1:45; Acts 17:11.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 49:10; Isaiah 9:6,7; Daniel 9:24-26; Isaiah 53; Micah 5:2.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 24:21-27; Acts 1:6-7; 26:6-7,22-23.

*"When confronted with a difficult passage in the Bible or with a perplexing contemporary event, one needs to ask such simple questions as: Does this fit the picture I have of God that Jesus has revealed to me? ... If it does, then that passage is valid and authoritative. If not, then I cannot accept its validity or authority."*<sup>4</sup>

Ateek clearly doesn't like what the Old Testament states about Israel and her enduring connection to the land, so, he simply rejects it. In this respect I appreciate his honesty. He doesn't need to engage in disingenuous theological acrobatics the way evangelicals must. Like many liberals he simply rejects or ignores many portions of the biblical text - but he is honest enough to acknowledge what he is doing.

Those *evangelicals* who oppose Israel, and yet claim to base their views on both Old and New Testament, have a more difficult path. As we have seen,<sup>5</sup> in rare moments of honesty they will acknowledge that the text really does state what the biblical Zionist claims. So, in order to maintain the evangelical claim that the text has authority and yet to effectively deny what the text *states*, replacement theologians have developed a range of schemes and techniques.

Their theological chicanery is not Marcionism but the end goal of their manoeuvring can be much the same.

One of the most basic biblical ideas is that of accountability. The Scriptures present God as creator - and as one who has spoken. And having spoken, he holds man accountable for that which he has revealed. These concepts are very clear even in the first few chapters of Scripture. God spoke, and revealed what he required. Man failed. There were consequences.

But, accountability requires *comprehensibility*. If God is just it follows that what he communicates and requires us to act on is understandable. He is the creator of language and is capable of communicating clearly.

This creates a serious problem for evangelical anti-Zionists. The concept of accountability for the things revealed is very strong in the New Testament too. And the rejection of the plain meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures is treated, in the New Testament, as *unbelief*.<sup>6</sup>

The first followers of Jesus treated the Old Testament as their validating document and they recognized they were accountable for what God had revealed.

They pointed to the Hebrew Scriptures as justification for their belief that Jesus was the Messiah - and as the basis for their expectation that the promises to Israel would be fulfilled, as written.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Simon Collins, 'Justice put first in Middle East Peace bid', *New Zealand Herald*, 30 November 2001, [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=2&objectid=230998](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=230998)

<sup>5</sup> See Part IV

<sup>6</sup> John 5:46,47; Luke 16:29-31.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 3:18-25.

But for the replacement theologian, their manipulation of the New Testament becomes their means of invalidating the obvious meaning of the Old.

So, for early believers, Document A, the Old Testament, was the means of validating Document B, the writings of the New Testament. But for the replacementist, this is reversed and inverted. Document B, the New Testament - or their manipulation of it - becomes the means of invalidating Document A, the Old Testament.

Their belief system thus becomes incoherent and self refuting.

In the process of denying the biblical promises to Israel they end up undermining the very foundation of their faith.<sup>8</sup>

Such evangelicals may claim to base their views on the biblical text but it is only a claim. It is their *profession*, but it is certainly not their *practice*.

---

<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly, many evangelical anti-Zionists also embrace evolution. Both errors (replacement theology and theistic evolution) involve starting with outside ideas which are then imposed upon the biblical text. For the theistic evolutionist the starting assumption is the “fact” of some form of Darwinism. For the replacementist, long-held theological traditions are the outside ideas or “facts” to be imposed upon the biblical text.