

EVANGELICAL ZIONISM

AN EVANGELICAL RESPONSE TO ISRAEL'S EVANGELICAL ENEMIES

PART VII

The Ethnically Cleansed Messiah of Christian anti-Zionism

We have seen that replacement theologians and anti-Zionists will occasionally admit that the biblical text really does teach the restoration of Israel, just as we claim.¹ The issue, they say, is not what the text *says* but what it ultimately *means*.

Frequently they will argue that the New Testament *reinterprets*² the Old and that the Old Testament no longer means what it obviously meant to its original readers. We have seen that such an approach not only disinherits Israel but it also undermines the very foundation of evangelical faith.³

A common ploy is to say that the many clear predictions of the restoration of Israel and the regathering of the Jewish people are fulfilled "*Christologically*".⁴ That means that all the detailed and specific promises to restore Israel to her land are combined into a shapeless, vague, unverifiable fulfillment in their imaginary Jesus.

Of course for anybody who is paying attention this is not fulfillment at all - it is a *failure* to fulfill.

Such a scheme stretches the link between prediction and fulfillment beyond breaking point. Such a misuse of Scripture could be used to prove almost anything - and cults have done this for centuries. Is it any wonder that such an incoherent version of Christianity is so readily dismissed by unbelievers? It ought to be dismissed by believers too.

¹ See Part IV

² [Christian Zionism] "ignores, marginalizes, or bypasses New Testament passages that reinterpret, annul, or describe the fulfillment of these promises in and through Jesus Christ." Stephen Sizer, 'Modern Israel in Bible Prophecy: Promised Return or Impending Exile?', *Christian Research Journal*, volume 29, number 06 (2006), <http://www.equip.org/article/modern-israel-in-bible-prophecy-promised-return-or-impending-exile/>

NT Wright: "...Jesus spent his whole ministry redefining what the kingdom meant. He refused to give up the symbolic language of the kingdom, but filled it with such new content that, as we have seen, he powerfully subverted Jewish expectations." *Jesus and the Victory of God*.

³ See Part V

⁴ Christological, Christification, Christocentrism are among several terms used (illegitimately) by exponents of the view here described. Irrespective of the terminology used, such an approach strips prophecy of its specificity. "In the Christological logic of Paul, the land... ..had become irrelevant." WD Davies quoted by Horner, *Future Israel* p71. '...the New Testament locates in Christ all of the expectations once held for "Sinai and Zion, Bethel and Jerusalem"' Burge, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to "Holy Land" Theology*, Grand Rapids, 2010, pp. 129-30. "The one and only fulfillment of all the promises and prophecies was already there before their eyes in the person of Jesus." Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?: The continuing conflict over Israel and Palestine*, p262.

Moses told his people exactly how they were to test a prophet.⁵ If the prophet predicted something that did not come to pass that man proved to be a false prophet. There needed to be a direct correspondence between prediction and fulfilment. If we apply such a test to replacement theologians and their God they do not do well. Either their God is duplicitous or perhaps the theologians themselves are just engaging in *theobabble*.

The credentials of the true Messiah are spelled out in great detail in the Hebrew Scriptures. Not only do we find specific details of Messiah's family line⁶, the period⁷ and location⁸ of His birth, His enigmatic status⁹, His rejection by His own people¹⁰, but we also find that he must ultimately restore Israel and regather his people.¹¹

And any messianic contender who ultimately fails to fulfill every detail of the messianic mission will prove to be a false messiah.

To some degree, we can agree with those religious Jews who today say that Jesus was a false messiah - *if* they are referring to the Jesus of replacement theology.

That Jesus would have been rejected in the first century and ought to be rejected today.

In the Gospels alone we find Jesus 25 times referred to as *king of the Jews, king of Israel, king of Zion*, or something similar.¹² But this means little to those determined to purge him of all connection to his people and his land.

As has been the case for centuries, many theologians seem determined to ethnically-cleanse the historical Jesus. But today many Jewish scholars are reclaiming him.¹³ They may reject his messianic claim but they recognize that he lived and died deeply connected to his Scriptures, his people and his land.

Of course replacement theologians claim the high ground by their rather pompous profession of *Christological* fulfillment. To the casual observer such a noble notion as *Christocentricity* may seem difficult to question. But let us not confuse *profession* with *practice*. On examination, we find that theirs is a pseudo-Messiah purged of his ethnic identity and destiny (and thus stripped of his authentic humanity). *Christological* fulfillment is usually little more

⁵ Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:22.

⁶ Isaiah 9:6,7.

⁷ Daniel 9:25; Genesis 49:10.

⁸ Micah 5:2.

⁹ Isaiah 9:6,7; Micah 5:2.

¹⁰ Isaiah 49:7; 53:3; Psalm 118:22.

¹¹ Isaiah 11:1-12; 49:5,6; Jeremiah 23:5-8.

¹² Matthew 2:2, 6; 21:5; 27:11, 29, 37, 42; Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32; Luke 23:3, 37, 38; John 1:49; 12:13, 14; 18:33, 39; 19:3, 14, 19, 21.

¹³ Recent examples include: David Flusser, Shmuley Boteach, Daniel Boyarin, Amy-Jill Levine. See also: <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/04/05/jews-reclaim-jesus-as-one-of-their-own/>

than a means by which to avoid the plain meaning of the text and to deny Israel's unique standing.

No, anti-Zionists are not truly Christocentric. It is those believers who allow the biblical text to speak and understand that Israel will be restored to her land and will ultimately be ruled over by a Messiah king from Jerusalem, who are truly Messiah centred. It is they who embrace the biblical Messiah and place him at the centre of prophecy - with His identity intact.

Every evangelical should in some sense be a Zionist. Why? Because everyone who believes in the Messiah should seek to honour him as he is, not as he has been misrepresented by centuries of anti-Judaic theology. According to the Scriptures the Messiah is a Jew, the son of David. And his mission on this earth is described in great detail in those same Scriptures. A significant and essential part of that mission is the ultimate restoration of Israel and regathering of the Jewish people.¹⁴ To deny this is to not only to deny the direct teachings of Scripture. It is also to distort the mission and identity of the Messiah.

And to the degree that we misrepresent the Messiah, we embrace a false Messiah.

Error does not become truth merely by its popularity, by repetition or by the strength of its tradition. Replacement theology is as erroneous now as it was when it emerged to infect and distort Christian theology in the second to fourth centuries. Ideas have consequences and ideas as fundamentally flawed as replacement theology can have appalling consequences.

Many theologians blunder on in wilful ignorance, paying no attention to the role played on history's stage by their errors. But the Jewish community knows no such ignorance. Holocaust museums give pride of place to icons like Augustine and Luther, the forbears of today's replacement theologians. Today, the rather thuggish and unveiled antisemitism of former paragons has given way to a more sophisticated opposition to the covenant people - Christian anti-Zionism. Even the torturing of the biblical text necessary to advance replacement theology has been refined. Increasingly sophisticated arguments are now offered for why the myriad of scriptures declaring Israel's future restoration cannot possibly mean what they say.

Some have called replacement theology or Christian anti-Zionism the black sheep of theology.¹⁵ This is no black sheep. It is a goat.

Christians who attack Zionism while claiming no ill will toward the Jews are deceiving themselves. To malign Israel is to malign the Jews. For evangelicals to behave in such manner toward the people-group to whom they are uniquely indebted,¹⁶ is shameful. They will find themselves on the wrong side of history - and on the wrong side of the God of history.¹⁷

¹⁴ Isaiah 9:6,7; 11:1-12; 43:5,6; Jeremiah 33:15-26.

¹⁵ James A. Showers, "Replacement Theology: The Black Sheep of Christendom," *Israel My Glory Magazine*, Sept/Oct 2010.

¹⁶ Romans 11:17, 18, 20.

¹⁷ Genesis 12:3