



# Bible & Life

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## Replacement Theology

by David Dunlap

For the past 150 years, the evangelical church has given great emphasis to God's promises to the nation of Israel. Christians were those who rejoiced the loudest when Israel became a nation on May 14, 1948. Evangelical Christians understood that God would be faithful to these irrevocable promises to Israel. As the ever-faithful God, He has bound Himself to His Word! He will not forsake His people. The apostle Paul reminds us, "I say then, hath God cast away His people? God forbid" (Romans 11:1). However, in recent years, more and more Christian leaders are beginning to turn their backs on Israel. Popular Christian radio preacher Hank Hannegraaf argues in his 2006 book *Apocalypse Code* that Israel has no future in the plan of God. Reformed writer Keith Mathison, in his 2010 book *Post-Millennialism: Eschatology of Hope*, denies that God will fulfill His promises to Israel. In a recent sermon on Romans chapter eleven, prominent Calvinistic Bible teacher John Piper stated:

*The promises made to Abraham, including the promise of the Land, will be inherited as an everlasting gift only by spiritual Israel, not disobedient, unbelieving Israel...the promises cannot be demanded by anyone just because he is Jewish... Being born Jewish does not make one an heir of the promise — neither the promise of the Land nor any other promise.<sup>1</sup>*

Well-known Christian leaders, such as R. C. Sproul, Gary DeMar, John Piper, and others, argue that because Israel has been unfaithful to God, these Old Testament promises are now given to Christians. This doctrine is called *Replacement theology* or "Supersessionism" by Bible scholars and academics. Replacement theology is the view that the church has permanently replaced or superseded Israel as the people of God. The church will inherit all these Old Testament promises. In recent years, Replacement theology has gained more and more popularity among evangelical Christians. Through history, Replacement theology has been the fuel that has energized violent anti-Semitism, Eastern European pogroms, the Holocaust, and disdain for the modern state of Israel.

### Definition and Description

Replacement theology teaches that God has rescinded all His promises to Israel, and has bestowed these promises on the church. Bible teacher and author Dr. Renald Showers explains:

*Replacement theology is a theological view of the world that claims God is forever finished with Israel as a nation. Therefore, God's promises in the*

***"I think we do not attach sufficient importance to the restoration of the Jews. We do not think enough of it. But certainly, if there is anything promised in the Bible it is this. I imagine that you cannot read the Bible without seeing clearly that there is to be an actual restoration of the children of Israel...May that happy day soon come!"***

**C. H. Spurgeon**  
(1834-1892)

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*Abrahamic Covenant to give the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the land of Canaan as an eternal inheritance are no longer in effect with national Israel.<sup>2</sup>*

According to this view, God is finished with Israel and is working only with the church of God. Replacement leaders teach that the church of Jesus Christ replaces racial, national Israel and becomes God's sole focus for the rest of biblical time. Israel has no future in the plan of God. All the blessings of Israel in the Old and New Testaments have become the blessings of the church for the rest of time. Replacement theologians teach that Israel's best days are in her past and she has no future in the plan of God. The Church inherits all the blessings, while Israel is meant to endure only curses.

### **The Rise of Replacement Theology**

The New Testament church began during the first century in the decade between A.D. 30 and 40. It was first centered in Jerusalem and, initially, was predominantly Jewish. Many of these early Jewish believers had little desire to turn their backs on Judaism. They saw Christianity as the fulfillment, not the enemy, of the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They expected that all Jews would embrace Jesus of Nazareth as the true Messiah, as they had done. Sadly, however, the majority of the Jews would reject Christ and, in time, take up arms to severely persecute the early Christians. This persecution forced these Christians to scatter to nearby cities and villages. As a result, many Samaritans and Gentiles were reached with the gospel. Within a short period of time, the church turned from being overwhelmingly Jewish to being predominantly Gentile. The Gentile believers did not view the Old Testament promises to Israel with the same passion as the early Jewish believers. These Gentile Christians began to teach that because the Jewish people, by and large, had rejected God, God had rejected them, and the church now had become the chosen people. They claimed that God had permanently ended His unique relationship with Israel and had replaced it with the church.

By the second century, Replacement theology had become entrenched in the minds of many Christian leaders. Although the church leaders at this time were predominantly pre-millennial in their understanding of future things, they embraced the idea of Replacement theology. Around A.D. 160, early Christian apologist Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165) was the first to write that the Christian church was the true spiritual Israel. In a work called *Dialogue Of Justin Martyr With Trypho A Jew*, he explained that Christians are the true Israelite race and that the "seed of Jacob," when properly understood, referred to Christians. Justin's views laid the groundwork for the growing belief that the church had replaced Israel. By the end of the third century, Replacement teaching became anchored in most of the churches in Europe and the Middle East.

Today, the majority of non-evangelical churches have embraced Replacement theology. Roman Catholic churches since the time of Augustine have rigidly held to this view, along with Lutheran, Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist, and most Reformed and Calvinistic denominations, and now the Emerging Church movement.

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*"The church persists in entertaining the ugly and unscriptural notion that God has cast off His people Israel and replaced it by the Christian Church. Romans 9, 10,11 emphatically forbids us to speak of the church as having once and for all taken the place of the Jewish people."*

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**C. E. B. Cranfield**  
British NT Scholar

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Nevertheless, for the last 150 years, Dispensational and Evangelical Bible churches have vigorously resisted the inroads of Replacement theology. However, in recent years this wall of separation between Replacement theology and the Dispensational-Evangelical church has been breached. Today, popular Evangelical leaders and Bible teachers have embraced and are promoting this view. Christian leaders, such as R. C. Sproul, Christian broadcaster Hank Hannegraaf, along with a host of other influential leaders, are happily teaching this doctrine. The Emerging Church movement is at the forefront in the advance of Replacement theology.

### **Replacement Theology and Anti-Semitism**

Replacement theology has had a devastating effect on the Jewish people, as well as on many important biblical doctrines. From its earliest days to the present time, Replacement theology has been a catalyst for violence and anti-Semitic attitudes in the church. Replacement Christians, since the third century, have been active in persecuting the Jewish people throughout the world. This persecution first began under anti-Semitic Roman Catholic bishops. Later, Lutherans led by the Reformer Martin Luther were involved in stirring up strong of anti-Jewish prejudice in Germany.

When Martin Luther set in motion the European Reformation, he was convinced that the Jewish people would join with him in an assault on the Roman Catholic Church. He was wrong. In the beginning of the Reformation movement, Luther made kind and generous remarks about the Jewish people in his writings. However, when he saw that the Jews did not follow him, his kindness became outrage, and he turned on the Jews with a vengeance that greatly appealed to the German people.

Adolf Hitler read and deeply appreciated Luther's anti-Jewish tracts. His doctrine provided Hitler with many suitable texts for his extermination program. The most vicious, Jew-hating statements Luther ever made were to be found in his tract entitled *Concerning the Jews and Their Lives*. In it he stated:

*"Let me give you my honest advice. First, their synagogues or churches should be set on fire. And whatever does not burn up should be covered or spread over with dirt so that no one may ever be able to see a cinder or stone of it. And this ought to be done for the honor of God and of Christianity in order that God may see that we are Christians... Secondly, their homes should be broken down and destroyed. Thirdly, they should be deprived of their prayer books and the Talmud in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught. Fourthly, their rabbis must be forbidden under the threat of death to teach anymore... Fifthly, passport and traveling privileges should be absolutely forbidden to Jews..."<sup>3</sup>*

Two days after writing this tract, Martin Luther died! Sadly, however, Replacement theology's practice of anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish attitudes is still active in the world.

### **The Impact Of Replacement Theology**

Replacement theology has been the impetus for unsound doctrine in the church. Replacement theology has led to the formation of state churches, the allegorizing of Scripture, the organization of church armies

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*"Both Luther's friends and his foes criticized him for proposing these measures. His best friends begged him to stop his anti-Jewish raving, but Luther continued his attacks in other treatises. He repeated as true the worst anti-Semitic charges from medieval literature: Jews killed Christian babies; they murdered Christ..."*

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**Dr. Eric Gritsch**

*"Was Luther Anti-Semitic?"*  
in *Christian History Magazine*

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the sacrifice of the Mass, and the separation of the church into unbiblical clergy and laity classes. This led the former Professor of Systematic Theology at Wheaton College, Illinois, Henry Thiessen, to write:

*While there is a connection between the saved of all ages, Christianity is new wine poured into new wineskins. What mischief has been done by the Roman Catholic Church through its attempt to continue the Levitical system of the Old Testament! Tertullian was the first to call ministers, priests; and Cyprian the first to introduce the idea that the mass was a sacrifice. Thus, great sanctuaries and an elaborate ritual were introduced into the church to replace the simple meeting places of earlier times and the unadorned preaching of the gospel in primitive Christianity.<sup>4</sup>*

### **Conclusion**

Although Replacement theology has had its champions in the church since the second century, in this case, age does not improve doctrinal quality. Replacement theology has corrupted and degraded both the church's doctrine and practice. Replacement theology has resulted in some of the darkest periods of persecution and anti-Semitism. Today, in many ways, Preterism, Covenant theology, Amillennialism, and Calvinism continue this unfortunate tradition of prejudice and unsound Bible doctrine. Today, may we be aware of dangers of Replacement theology and exhort Christians to be faithful to Bible doctrine and sensitive to the Jewish people.

### **Endnotes**

1. <http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/the-church-israel-and-replacement-theology-part-iii/>
2. Renald Showers, *The Coming Apocalypse*, (Friends of Israel, Bellmawr. NJ, 2010), p. 7-8
3. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, The Christian in Society*, vol. 4, (Philadelphia, PA : Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 268-293
4. Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), p.405