

REFLECTIONS ON RESPONSE TO FUTURE ISRAEL

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I. Introduction.

To begin with, let me supply some brief background material concerning myself. Over the years as a pastor, my area of specialty has been that of John Bunyan and his setting in the turbulent seventeenth century.¹ I am an Australian, Sovereign Grace in doctrine, and premillennial in my eschatology. This is important since a large part of those with Reformed and Sovereign Grace convictions, with whom I am well acquainted, are quite strenuously amillennial. As a result they have *tended* to be a-Judaic or anti-Judaic in their eschatology, which is merely indifferent or militantly opposed to the Jews and modern Israel. Specifically I am premillennial, sympathetic with dispensationalism, and restorationist regarding the divine destiny of the Jews and Israel, that is concerning their eschatological return to the land as a nation. Then will follow their climactic conversion to Jesus as their Messiah at His return, when “they will look upon Him whom they have pierced” (Zech. 12:10). At the same time, Christ’s church having been raptured and gathered together, there will follow His messianic, millennial reign from Jerusalem over a renewed earth. At that time Israel will be gloriously elevated from its humiliation. Israel does indeed have a glorious future.²

II. The challenge of two questions concerning Israel during the church age.

Over ten years ago, while a pastor in North Brunswick, New Jersey, and having access to the fine library of Princeton Theological Seminary, two questions challenged me in expounding through Ezekiel, Hosea, Zechariah, and Romans.

- A. First, does God have a covenantal interest in the unbelieving Jewish people today, along with the nation and the land, which is as distinct from the believing Jewish remnant. The answer, which I now believe to be beyond serious challenge, came with a strong impression in my study of Romans 11, but especially v. 28. “From the standpoint of the gospel they [the unbelieving Jews] are enemies for your [the Gentiles’] sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice [the election, τῆν ἐκλογὴν, *tēn ekloēn*]³ they [unbelieving Jews] are beloved for the sake of the fathers.” Unbelieving Jews today remain God’s “beloved enemies.” For a sample of this contemporary unbelief, consider Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who I greatly respect and certainly esteem way beyond the preceding Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert. Nevertheless he writes in his enlightening volume, *A Durable Peace: Israel and its Place among the Nations*:

¹ Refer to www.bunyanministries.org.

² Referto www.futureisraelministries.org.

³ Most commentators believe that here “the election,” especially in the light of the logic of vs. 26-28, is concerned with the elect nation, according to the sovereign calling and promise of God. Though Lenski, true to his Lutheran amillennialism, believes that here Paul writes about the remnant of v. 5.

The final guarantor of the viability of a small nation in such times of turbulence is its capacity to direct its own destiny, something that has eluded the Jewish people during its long centuries of exile. Restoring that capacity is the central task of the Jewish people today.⁴

However, in spite of all of the Jews' carnality today, they remain God's elect people. And this being the case, for the Christian they should also be "beloved," even if they remain militantly opposed to Jesus as the Christ.

- B. The second question that challenged me was how Christianity in general, over the centuries, had treated the Jewish people. The answer came to me as if being hit over the head with a mallet of truth. Various authors, whether liberal, conservative evangelical, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Reform or Orthodox Jewish, even secular, came up with the same basic assessment. The church, especially after the Bar Cochbar rebellion of 135-136 AD and the influence of Marcionism, then the united patristic voice from Justin onward, but especially the authoritative formulation of Augustine, led to centuries of humiliation toward the Jew, and right on through the Reformation up to today. So having read and heard of many amillennialists who boasted in their Augustinian eschatology, it suddenly became shamefully clear that they had nothing to boast in. Indeed, their trumpeted belief in replacement theology and supercessionism, via centuries of vaunted proclamation that the church is the new Israel, was something that they ought to weep about! Hence, a vital principle came as a result, and it is this. A good eschatology cannot produce unethical fruit of the magnitude that has come about by means of replacement theology. This blot upon Christianity in general is the result of bad eschatology that has made the Jews fear, and not be jealous, as Paul exhorts should be the case. It is at this point that historic amillennialism is proven to be fundamentally flawed.

Some have attempted to avoid the painful truth of history in this regard by declaring that they would only discuss the issues, with regard to the Jews, by considering the exegesis of Scripture. Yes, we regard what God means by what He says as of vital, fundamental importance. However church history is the response, the lifestyle of Christianity that is derived from biblical truth, and cannot be disregarded, especially in terms of broad movements. We sense that some, in knowing the truth, would prefer to avoid it. We also believe that the right embrace of biblical truth ought consistently to result in biblical virtue. However ungodliness evident in a professing Christian is recognized as hypocrisy. Orthodoxy cannot be divorced from orthopraxy. Hence centuries of church history up to today, the disgraceful record of it all, should cause us to blush in reflecting upon an eschatology that is so terribly stained and so inconsistent with practical righteousness, especially as Paul exhorts us in Romans 11.

III. The publication of *Future Israel*, October, 2007.

Initially *Future Israel* was accepted for publication by *Paternoster Press* in England. However I became unhappy about the editing process and asked for a release from

⁴ Benjamin Netanyahu, *A Durable Peace*, p. xxiii.

the contract. Among other things, an editor suggested that one comment be taken out because Colin Chapman, a leading supercessionist who lived nearby, would not like it. However I am particularly grateful to David Brickner of *Jews for Jesus* who, at this stage, suggested approaching Broadman & Holman. How grateful I am for this new arrangement that worked out so well. They proved to be in sympathy with the basic thesis. Certainly the commendation of John MacArthur was helpful, though there was no collusion. He was preaching on this very matter while the manuscript was being edited. Then, through a friend, we had mutually sympathetic communication.

Certain other thrusts within *Future Israel* worth mentioning.

- A. *The importance of a Judeo-centric eschatology.* The early church was Jewish. According to Eusebius, the first fifteen bishops at Jerusalem up to 135 AD were Jewish, and surely restorationist in their eschatology. They all proclaimed the gospel from Jewish Scriptures concerning a Jewish Savior, who will return while still being Jewish. As an example refer to Matthew 5:5. "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth [τῆν γῆν, tēn gēn]," which should more likely read, "the land." Of course, by way of application, "the earth" is appropriate. A helpful booklet would be David Stern's *Restoring the Jewishness of the Gospel*. Also consider the prophetic revelation of the reversal of roles when the humiliation of the Jewish people will be followed by their exaltation after their conversion and participation in the millennium (Isa. 60:14; Zech. 8:22-23; 14:1). It seems that the Gentile Christian ought to joyfully accept this, but in fact many may not like this prospect.
- B. *The importance of a Judeo-centric hermeneutic.* Over the centuries, a Gentile-focused hermeneutic has predominated within Christendom. However a Judeo-centric hermeneutic is the answer to the problem that we Gentiles have had when attempting to understand, disparate in meaning, quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament (e.g. Matt. 2:14-15; cf. Hos. 11:1). This difficulty caused George Eldon Ladd to suggest the need of "re-interpretation" of Old Testament prophetic passages by means of a Christo-centric hermeneutic. However the Hebrew writer of the New Testament can quote the Old Testament, giving it an applicatory, nuanced shade of meaning, as with Midrash, *without at all nullifying the literal meaning of the original Old Testament passage.*⁵ This principle will also help in our understanding of such passages as Acts 2:16-21, cf. Joel 2:28-32 in context, and John 19:37, cf. Rev. 1:7; Zech. 12:10 in context.
- C. *The importance of the continuity of replacement theology before and after the Reformation.* Modern replacement theology is not a recent phenomenon.⁶ It goes back as far as the second century, especially after Gentile bishops took the ascendancy after 135-136 AD, the result being development of Gentile dominance that ignored the exhortations of Paul in Romans 11. So the Reformation, in general, perpetuated replacement theology according to the

⁵ David Stern, *Restoring the Jewishness of the Gospel*, pp. 31-33.

⁶ Refer to R. E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2000); Michael J. Vlach, *The Church as a Replacement of Israel: An Analysis of Supercessionism* (Ph.D. diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004).

authoritative legacy of Augustine. Thus Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, John Calvin, Francis Turretin, Patrick Fairbairn, Herman Bavinck, and Geerhardus Vos, to name but a few of this eschatological lineage, exercised tremendous influence over Protestantism. They perpetuated the eschatology of Augustine, and thus at best the indifference of a-Semitism.

- D. *The importance of not confusing the bilateral Mosaic covenant with the unilateral Abrahamic covenant.* It is astonishing to find that leading scholars promoting replacement theology are so confused at this point. An example would be from W. D. Davies, Emeritus Professor, Duke University, who is widely quoted by scholars in support of Replacement Theology.

In this way [of universalizing in Christ the covenant made with Abraham], “the territory” promised was transformed into and fulfilled by the life “in Christ.” All this is not made explicit, because Paul did not directly apply himself to the question of the land, but it is implied. In the Christological logic of Paul, the land, like the Law, particular and provisional, had become irrelevant.⁷

The unilateral nature of the Abrahamic covenant, in which the land is such an intrinsic component, is simply ignored or incorporated within the bilateral Mosaic covenant. Yes, the Jew and the Gentile only have hope of salvation, through Jesus Christ since He is the promised seed of Abraham, which promise is one of pure sovereign grace. Yet this same promise upholds the distinction between Jew and Gentile within the one people of God (Romans 11).

- E. *The importance of diversity within unity.* It is astonishing that while there is diversity within the unity of the Godhead, diversity with the twelve tribes of Israel within one nation, diversity according to spiritual gifts within the one body of Christ, yet Augustinianism is so adamant that there cannot be diversity with Israel and the church distinctively comprising the one people of God. Scripture knows nothing of a future clone-like homogeneity, and especially within the economy of the Millennium. There, Moses and David and Elijah and Paul will still be their own individual selves. This is one of the great strengths of Premillennial and Dispensational eschatology.

- F. *The importance of Romans 11.* It is written by a highly educated Messianic Jew.

1. Paul declares himself to be “an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin,” v. 1. He really means it, and not with some tongue in cheek attitude. He also confirms it, again using the present tense, in Acts 21:39; 22:3. As a Benjamite he asserts both demographic and territorial association. Consequently he upholds Jewish ethnicity, nationality, and territory.
2. The remnant according to God’s gracious choice is Israel’s guarantee of a future, v. 5. But God is not ultimately satisfied with a remnant, as the climactic development indicates in vs. 12, and v. 15 which surely alludes to Ezekiel 37. So v. 26 is also climactic. It is not, “And so/in this manner

⁷ W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, p. 179.

Israel *is being* saved," through the accumulation of relatively small additions to the remnant over the centuries; rather it is, "And so/in this manner all Israel will be saved [future tense of σζω, sōzō], in a consummate sense." It is this climactic grandeur of the saving power of the gospel, especially the final triumph of mercy toward Israel, that so excites Paul. However the Augustinian suppresses this because of centuries of a misplaced eschatology.

3. The Christian church is built upon the Jewish remnant. This is something to ponder in the light of the arrogance of the mainly Gentile church over the centuries. Paul seems to suggest this very point in v. 18. The New Covenant was anticipated in the upper room before Jewish disciples (Luke 22:19-20). Then it was cut, according to Jeremiah 31:27, before "the house of Israel and the house of Judah," that is a large number of Jews gathered in Jerusalem. So the initial, believing remnant branches that sprouted from the cultivated olive tree were wholly Jewish. The Gentiles were later grafted in according to pure grace. For this reason they have no reason for "conceit," v. 20.
4. So Paul is primarily addressing Gentile Christians who need exhortation about a bad attitude toward the Jews. Rather they ought to make them jealous, vs. 11, 14. Yet over the centuries the Christian church has pompously ignored this exhortation while claiming to be the new spiritual Israel. Paul's stern warning in vs. 17-20, concerning arrogance, has been largely ignored. Perhaps during the last of the last days a gentle and sympathetic spirit will come to the fore from repentant Gentiles; if it does, evangelistic outreach toward the Jewish people is certain to accelerate and flourish.
5. The significance of v. 28 that indicates God's covenantal interest in unbelieving national Israel, and its related connection with v. 26. Here is clinching proof that God continues to have unfailing interest in unbelieving Israel today that is comprised of His "beloved enemies." Further, working back from v. 28 to v. 27, then v. 27 to v. 26, it becomes virtually incontestable that "all Israel" refers to the eschatological saving of the nation of Israel.⁸ And all of this is because of "the sake of the fathers," Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, which promises are irrevocable, v. 29.
6. The significance of vs. 30-32 concerning the mercy of God being poured out upon Gentile and Jew. There is surely Gentile arrogance in the suggestion that Israel has lost its covenant relationship with God on account of disobedience concerning the old Mosaic covenant, while the New Testament church boasts in the sovereignty of grace through faith alone. But here: "God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all," v. 32. The "these" of v. 31 cannot refer merely to the remnant, but to the unbelieving nation.

IV. Responses.

⁸ Matt Weymeyer has well exegeted this point in, "The Dual Status of Israel in Romans 11:28," *The Master's Seminary Journal* (Spring 2005), pp. 57-71.

- A. The response to *Future Israel* has been overwhelmingly favorable. None of those who have responded unfavorably have attempted to deal with the essential arguments. In England, Steven Sizer, a rabid supercessionist, reluctantly agreed in March of this year to provide a review for *Evangelicals Now*. He wrote: "O dear. I really don't want to have to review this unpleasant little book but those nice people at *Evangelicals Now* have asked me to, so I will, eventually."⁹ As of today, no review has been forthcoming.
- B. There have been many blog responses such as from Dr. Sam Waldron, Professor of Systematic Theology at *Midwest Center for Theological Studies*. Staunchly Reformed Baptist and amillennial, he commented: "I had to pray for grace and patience not to fire it across the room. . . . [I] had over three weeks [during a trip overseas] to calm down and regain my sanctification." A month later, because I had upheld God's distinctive, contemporary covenantal regard for unbelieving national Israel, and at the same time am critical of Gentile bias, therefore I was said to be guilty of "a kind of reverse racism. . . . This kind of language seems to be somewhat 'racist' in its own way. It conveys prejudice against Gentiles. It is like Rev. Jeremiah Wright's rantings against 'White America' which have been all over the news lately."¹⁰ Is Paul guilty of "reverse racism" in Romans 1:16?
- C. However what a delight it was to receive an email from Jeroen Bol, the Netherlands (Holland). He has bought fifty copies of *Future Israel* and distributed them to Christian leaders in Europe. More recently he has described some of the positive effects of this outreach, specifically some who have been persuaded to embrace a Judeo-centric eschatology.

V. Reflections.

- A. *The importance of Judeo-centric ministry.* In Horatius Bonar's significant book, *Prophetical Landmarks*, he makes the vital introductory comment:

The prophecies concerning Israel are the key to all the rest. True principles of interpretation, in regard to them, will aid us in disentangling and illustrating all prophecy together. False principles as to them will most thoroughly perplex and over cloud the whole Word of God.¹¹

By way of illustration, only a month ago I conducted a seminar on the issues raised by *Future Israel* at *Twin Cities Bible Church*, St. Paul. A week before, my daughter in San Jose told me of a forthcoming gathering at *Bethlehem Baptist Church*, Minneapolis, titled *An Evening of Eschatology*. Dr. John Piper chaired the meeting which included three other participants. They were, Jim Hamilton (professor of New Testament at Southern Seminary in Louisville), premillennial, Sam Storms (pastor of Bridgeway Church in Oklahoma City),

⁹ Refer to the *Stephen Sizer* web site: <http://www.stephensizer.com/2009/03/christian-zionism-a-chronological-and-annotated-bibliography/> Referenced, November, 2009.

¹⁰ Refer to the *Mid-Western Center for Theological Studies* web site. <http://www.mctsowensboro.org/blog/?-p=307> Not currently accessible.

¹¹ Horatius Bonar, *Prophetical Landmarks: Concerning Christ's Premillennial Advent*, p. 228. Also go to http://www.futureisraelministries.org/horatius_bonar.html.

amillennial, and Doug Wilson (pastor of Christ Church, Moscow, Idaho), postmillennial. Having arrived at St. Paul, the pastor told me that he attended the meeting. He concluded, that to be quite frank, those who attended would probably have left more confused upon leaving than when they first arrived. However there appears to be a reason for this. I watched the whole two hour session on the internet and was surprised to note that in all of it, there was not so much as one mention of Israel or the Jews, whether with regard to Scripture, history or the present. Horatius Bonar was right! Israel is central to eschatology.

- B. *The importance of Judeo-centric godliness.* While being critical of the ethics of amillennial Augustinianism, we also need to consider the ethics of restorationist premillennialism and dispensationalism. We are by no means blameless, even if more eschatologically biblical. So Peter exhorts us: “Since all these things [with regard to the coming day of the Lord] are to be destroyed [dissolved] in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness” (II Pet. 3:11). It is godly ethics emanating from our eschatology, not prophetic glibness and sensationalism, which pleases God. Certainly it is more likely to make our Jewish friends and enemies both jealous and curious.
- C. *The importance of Judeo-centric evangelism.* I have often heard the suggestion: “Let us put aside our eschatological differences and agree to focus on the evangelization of the Jews.” It may sound a good proposal, but how can the Augustinian honestly face it? Will he tell the Jew that after believing in the Lord Jesus as his Messiah, then he will be absorbed into the Christian church and lose all of his Jewish identity? Surely in Paul declaring that he remained an Israelite, he never disowned Jewish ethnicity, nationality and territory in all of his outreach to the Jews. Rather he proclaimed to them “the hope of Israel” (Acts 28:20). Could the Augustinian evangelize in Israel and tell the Jew that in reality, which is in the sight of God, the land is now passé, an anachronism? It takes a Judeo-centric eschatology to reach out to the Jews and at least gain their attention.

Hence there is the need for opposing replacement theology on account of the cause of Jewish evangelism; it saps the life out of it. The modern awakening of evangelism, especially directed toward the Jewish people, commenced toward the end of the nineteenth century. Ever since, up to the present time, this flourishing movement has had premillennial, dispensational, restorationist underpinning. I also believe that Christian restorationists made a significant contribution toward the formation of the modern state of Israel. By and large, the Augustinians opposed it. Where is there one missionary agency today, based upon Augustinian eschatology, which thrives in its distinctive outreach toward the modern nation of Israel and the Diaspora? Why is this so? Because the Augustinian gospel results in Jewish converts losing their Jewish identity while the Gentiles retain their distinctiveness. Believe me, I say this while being a happy and contented Gentile.

Hence the answer for today is the proclamation of the gospel, to both Jew and Gentile, in its full Jewish context. The reason is that, “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22). I believe that God will especially be pleased to honor this priority.