

NEO-REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY

Tom's Perspectives

by Thomas Ice

“Supersessionism is the view that the New Testament Church supersedes, replaces, or fulfills the nation Israel’s place and role in the plan of God,”ⁱ notes Mike Vlach, who has written a PhD dissertation on the topic.ⁱⁱ Supersessionism is another term, often found in academic circles, for replacement theology. Today there is a growing trend for some who teach replacement theology to deny that their views should legitimately be classified as supersessionism.

WALKS LIKE, TALKS LIKE

We have a number of expressions within Americana that illustrate one who is not willing to exercise truth in labeling. For example we may say, “If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and smells like a duck, then it must be a duck.” Or, Shakespeare said it more eloquently: “A rose by any other name is still a rose.” That dictum is true when it comes to some evangelicals who teach replacement theology but then will not own up to what they actually advocate.

Amillennial and covenant theologian Samuel Waldron wrote a response to a lecture by John MacArthur in which he made a case for premillennialism. Waldron vigorously denied that he was a replacement theologian, even though he holds the classic beliefs of replacement theology. He says, “the Church *is* Israel in a newly reformed and expanded phase of existence. . . . the Church is really the *continuation* of Israel.”ⁱⁱⁱ How can someone with a PhD in theology, as Waldron has, not realize that the statement noted above and the rest of his book demonstrates that he advocates a form of replacement theology? The fact is he states that the Church represents a new “phase of existence” and then defines the New Testament “phase” of Israel as including Gentiles.^{iv} This is classic replacement theology since the outcome and logic of his position is that ethnic and national Israel have been replaced by the Church. Such a view teaches that Israel has been disinherited and does not have a future that includes a national future for a redeemed Israel. Waldron displays a blindness that does not allow him to see that two plus two equals four.

Hank Hanegraaff is another neo-supersessionist who said, “I have never argued for Replacement Theology.”^v This is a surprising statement since his book *The Apocalypse Code* is filled with replacement theological statements and arguments.^{vi} He gives the following reason for denying that he holds supersessionist views:

God has only ever had one chosen people who form one covenant community, beautifully symbolized in Scripture by one cultivated olive tree. Indeed, the precise terminology used to describe the children of Israel in the Old Testament is ascribed to the church in the New Testament. . . . As such, the true church is true Israel, and true Israel is truly the church—one cannot replace what it already is. Rather than reason together in collegial debate, dispensationalists have coined the phrase “Replacement theologian” as the ultimate silencer.^{vii}

For some reason, the new trend by some today is to reject the label but teach the historic viewpoint of replacement theology.

REPLACEMENT REASONS

Hanegraaff errs in thinking that replacement theology is something invented by dispensationalists by which they might name-call those who disagree with them. “While it is true that Israel occupies an important place in dispensational theology, it is also true that reflection concerning the place of Israel in God’s plan predates this school of thought by many centuries,”^{viii} notes Ronald Diprose. While noting that an early form of replacement theology began in the second century with Justin Martyr, Diprose describes it as consisting of the belief that “Israel has been repudiated by God and has been replaced by the Church in the working out of his plan. A variation of this idea is that true Israel always has been the Church,”^{ix} which is the view expressed by Waldron and Hanegraaff throughout *The Apocalypse Code (AC)*.^x

Mike Vlach, in his Ph.D. dissertation on the subject, describes both the method of replacement theology and the theology or outcome it produces. “In the realm of hermeneutics, supersessionists argue that: (1) the New Testament has interpretive priority over the Old Testament; (2) national Israel functioned as a type of the New Testament church; and (3) the New Testament indicates that Old Testament prophecies regarding national Israel are being fulfilled with the church.”^{xi}

It is obvious that Hanegraaff has adopted the hermeneutics or method, and then the conclusions of replacement theology.

That the New Testament has interpretive priority over the Old is seen throughout AC as Hanegraaff dismisses Old Testament prophecy that has never been fulfilled for Israel by subsuming it into a supposed New Testament fulfillment. For example, by characterizing Israel in the Old Testament as “the prostituted bride” who is replaced in the New Testament by “the purified bride,” which is the church, Hanegraaff reinterprets the Old in light of the New.^{xii} After comparing a number of Old Testament characters with Jesus of the New Testament (for example, Joshua and Jesus), Hanegraaff says, “In each case, the lesser is fulfilled and rendered obsolete by the greater.”^{xiii} I agree that the New Testament often notes God’s progress in revelation by noting Christ’s fulfillment of the Old, but nowhere does the New indicate that Old Testament promises to ethnic Israel are superseded by Christ’s work. Instead, Christ is the basis for the fulfillment of Old Testament promises. Hanegraaff says, the “old covenant shadows find their final consummation in the person and work of Jesus Christ.”^{xiv} It is not an either/or situation; it is best to see the relationship between the testaments as a both/and.

Vlach’s second methodological point is that advocates of replacement theology see national Israel as a type of the New Testament church. “Jerusalem symbolized all that Israel was to be. . . . Jerusalem is typological of the greater purposes of God,”^{xv} declares Hanegraaff. He speaks of Paul illustrating a “typologically heightened fulfillment . . . that all who fixate on an earthly Jerusalem with a rebuilt temple and reinstated temple sacrifices are in slavery to types and shadows.”^{xvi} Hanegraaff speaks of “the typological fulfillment of the temple and the rest of the old covenant.”^{xvii} His views are summarized as follows: “The New Testament’s typological interpretation of the Old Testament thus stands as the ultimate corrective to Zionist zeal.”^{xviii}

The third point, that the Old Testament promises to Israel are fulfilled with the church is also evident in Hanegraaff. He says, “the land promises are fully and finally fulfilled in the final future through Jesus. . . . the promise is typologically fulfilled in the in the Lord.”^{xix} Again he says, “Peter uses the very language once reserved for national Israel and applies it to spiritual Israel.”^{xx} “Furthermore, the land promises are fulfilled

in the far future through Jesus who provides true Israel with permanent rest from their wanderings in sin.^{xxi} Hanegraaff uses the term “true Israel” as a reference to the church.

Vlach also describes the theological arguments that supersessionists construct as follows: “(1) the New Testament teaches the permanent rejection of national Israel as the people of God; (2) application of ‘Israel’ language to the church shows that the church is now the true Israel; (3) salvific unity between Jews and Gentiles rules out a restoration of national Israel; and (4) fulfillment of the new covenant with the church shows that the church is now the true Israel.”^{xxii} Clearly Hanegraaff and Waldron hold to these theological beliefs.

CONCLUSION

Hanegraaff even uses the term “superseded” in the following statement: “History, like the New Testament, reveals that the Holy City—turned harlot city—is superseded by the holy Christ. Jesus is the antitype who fulfills all of the typology vested in Jerusalem.”^{xxiii} Hanegraaff says that Genesis 12:3, which I take to include ethnic Israel, refers instead “to true Israel, which consists of every person who through faith has been adopted into the family of God.”^{xxiv} When speaking of the land promises which have never yet been completely fulfilled, he insists that they are “fulfilled and rendered obsolete by the greater.”^{xxv} Such are classic replacement theology statements.

It is safe to conclude that in spite of their denials, Hanegraaff and Waldron are clearly advocates of replacement theology. Norm Geisler also understands that Hanegraaff’s *AC* teaches replacement theology when he notes the following: “In general *The Code* repeatedly takes the Old Testament promises to Jews out of their original context by replacing Israel with the New Testament church. The ‘Replacement Theology’ is a classic example of taking texts out of their context.”^{xxvi} Even though they vigorously reject the label, both Hanegraaff, Waldron and others today have some form of replacement theology, whether they will admit it or not. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Michael J. Vlach, “12 Reasons Why Supersessionism/Replacement Theology Is Not a Biblical Doctrine,” www.theologicalstudies.org/page/page/4425336.htm.

ⁱⁱ Michael J. Vlach, “The Church as a Replacement of Israel: An Analysis of Supersessionism,” PhD Dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, May 2004.

ⁱⁱⁱ Samuel E. Waldron, *MacArthur’s Millennial Manifesto: A Friendly Response* (Owensboro, KY: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2008), p. 7. [emphasis original]

^{iv} Waldron, *Manifesto*, pp. 35–55.

^v Hank Hanegraaff, “Response to *National Liberty Journal* article on *The Apocalypse Code*,” www.equip.org/site/apps/nl/content2.asp?c=mu11LaMNJrE&b=2616123&ct=3839317.

^{vi} Hank Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code: Find Out What the Bible Really Says About The End Times and Why It Matters Today* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007). For a book-length rebuttal of Hanegraaff’s book see Mark Hitchcock and Thomas Ice, *Breaking The Apocalypse Code: Setting The Record Straight About The End Times* (Costa Mesa, CA: The Word For Today).

^{vii} Hanegraaff, “Response.”

^{viii} Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel In The Development of Christian Thought* (Rome: Instituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, 2000), p. 3.

^{ix} Diprose, *Israel*, p. 31. [emphasis original]

^x Hanegraaff calls the church the “true Israel” (p. 116, 124, 127, 180, 199, 200) or “spiritual Israel” (p. 221) a number of times in *AC*.

^{xi} Vlach, “Replacement of Israel,” p. xvii.

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- ^{xii} Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 124.
^{xiii} Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 201.
^{xiv} Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 174.
^{xv} Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 190.
^{xvi} Hanegraaff, *Code*, pp. 202–03.
^{xvii} Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 223.
^{xviii} Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 223.
^{xix} Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 182.
^{xx} Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 221.
^{xxi} Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 180.
^{xxii} Vlach, “Replacement of Israel,” p. xvii.
^{xxiii} Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 197.
^{xxiv} Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 200.
^{xxv} Hanegraaff, *Code*, p. 201.
^{xxvi} Norman L. Geisler, “Review of Hank Hanegraaff’s *The Apocalypse Code*,”
www.ses.edu/NormGeisler/ReviewApocalypseCode.html.