

A Response to Fulfillment/Replacement Theology

The New Testament Expectation for Israel's Restoration

by Ron Cantor

In this paper, I will seek to:

1. Show through Scripture that fulfillment (and replacement) theologies are false theologies.
2. Effectively, deal with difficult passages that are used by their proponents.
3. Establish that the New Testament has a clear expectation that ethnic Israel will be restored *in their own land*.¹

The Problem

Theologians have wrestled for centuries, seeking to understand Israel's place (or lack thereof) in the post-New Testament era. I've struggled with this theological conundrum myself. Some scholars say Israel was all type and shadow; every prophecy from the Hebrew Bible has been fulfilled in Yeshua. New Testament scholar, Gary Burge, teaches, "The New Testament understands that the Abrahamic Covenant has come to fulfillment in Christ."² In other words, ethnic Israel is no longer the chosen people—just the ecclesia. This has been termed fulfillment theology. T. David Gordon says, "the *temporary* covenant made only with Abraham's descendants *must* become obsolete and disappear...."³

The Hebrew Bible is full of type and shadows pointing to Yeshua, but does that nullify Israel? Dr. David Rudolph shared an excellent response to this question which I shall paraphrase. We see in Ephesians that the husband/wife relationship is a picture of Messiah and his bride.

¹ "Restored" is probably too weak of a word, as she will be more than restored. She will become the capital of the world in Messiah's Messianic kingdom.

² Gary Burge, Paper presented at the "Christ at the Check Point," (Bethlehem, Israel, February, 2014).

³ Bryan D. Estelle, *The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant*, (P & R Publishing: January 12, 2009), p. 243.

"This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Messiah and the ecclesia" (Eph. 5:32). We do not throw out the institution of marriage because the fulfillment is Messiah and the Church. Marriage is still needed in this age. In the same way, Yeshua can be the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures and yet not do away with the Jewish people.

How strange it would be for God to use Israel for 1,600 years, make incredible covenantal promises, fulfill some of them, and then suddenly reject the rest. Michael Rydelnik rightly says, "The Bible progresses in its presentation of revelation, *without canceling the previous revelation or canceling the commitments God has previously made.*"⁴ The New Testament is an inspired commentary on the Hebrew Scriptures. There is nothing *new* in the New Covenant when speaking of theology. The Bible is moving forward in revealing the greater meaning of these ancient texts, not canceling them out. The New Testament is an inspired commentary on the Hebrew Bible.

The Fathers

That was not the view of many of the Church fathers. They saw no more need for Israel—the people or the land. Speaking of Origen (3rd century) and Irenaeus (2nd century), scholar David Burrell writes, "The only Jerusalem relevant to that faith was the 'new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, adorned as a bride'" (Rev 21.1).⁵ Origen interpreted Yeshua's words,

⁴ Michael Rydelnick, *Israel, the Church and the Middle East, A Biblical Response to the Current Conflict*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2018), 64.

⁵ David B. Burrell, *Jerusalem after Jesus*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl, (Cambridge University Press, December 3rd, 2001), Chapter 16, Kindle.

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24), as referring to *spiritual Israel*, all lost souls—not the Jewish people.⁶

Fulfillment theology says it has *all been fulfilled*. To the Jewish people, they say, "Your job is finished. Join the *new Israel*." *Replacement theology* says, "All has not been fulfilled!" Hang on; it gets worse. "We, the Church, have replaced you. All the promises that were once given by God to you now belong to us. He has rejected you for us."

I'll argue from Romans 11 and elsewhere that God is faithful to his promises to Israel and will even bring a national revival before the *Parousia*.⁷ This includes the land promises he made to Abraham and his descendants *forever* (Gen. 13:15, 15:18, 17:8). Paul is very clear in Romans 11:1, 11, *God has not rejected Israel*.

"I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin...Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious." (Rom. 11:1, 11)

When Paul says, "by no means," (v. 1) or "not at all," (v. 11), he is using the strongest negative words in Greek, saying *no*, "*may it never be*," as the NASB puts it. If Paul were writing

⁶ Origen: "Since we have been taught by Paul that there is one Israel according to the flesh and another according to the Spirit, when the Savior says: 'I was sent only (see below) to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt 15:24), we do not understand Him as [referring] to them who have an earthly wisdom ... Rather, we understand that there is a nation of souls, named Israel." (On first principles 4.1.22, Origen 1979:194–96). When he uses Israel here he is not referring to Israel, but to the ecclesia. They are the new Israel in his mind.

Of course, then, saying only is confusing, as all souls were lost at the time. Thus, only the lost sheep at the time would mean all humanity, making the world "only" perplexing. It would be like telling someone drowning on the Titanic, "I only came for people drowning." Well, that is everyone! A quick reading of Matthew 15 shows that Yeshua could have only been referring to physical Israel.

⁷ (Zech. 12:10, Rom. 11:26, Ezek. 36:24-28, Hos. 3:4-5)

today, he might say, "Perish the thought." Then he goes on to show how 1) Israel's rejection of Messiah is not final and 2) God will use it to bless the Gentiles.

God can bless the whole based on the obedience of a remnant. Elijah thought he was the only one faithful (Romans 11:3), but there were still 7,000 (v. 4). "So too, at the present time, *there is a remnant* chosen by grace" (v. 5). God obeys his own laws, and if there is a remnant of believing Jews, he'll honor his covenant to Abraham. If God intended to spare Sodom based on the obedience of 10 people, how much more will he spare Israel when there are tens of thousands of Jewish followers of Yeshua?

The Land Testifies

Israel's restoration to the land (1948) and then again to Jerusalem (1967) was proof of God's faithfulness to his promises. God's reputation as *faithful* hinges on his faithfulness to Israel (Jer. 33:35-37). When God says forever (*ad olam*) (Gen. 13:15), he means forever! But even stronger language is used elsewhere. *Min olam v'ad olam* literally means *from forever and until forever* or in our vernacular, *forever and ever*. Rydelnick⁸ points out that this phrase is used to describe the unchanging character attributes of God, such as his eternal existence, "from everlasting to everlasting, you are God" (Ps. 90:2). God will not cease to exist. That is why such strong language is used. So when the same language, *min olam v'ad olam* (forever and ever), is used to describe God's commitment to Israel, you can know that it is serious. In fact, the only

⁸ Ibid, Rydelnik, 67.

two times this phrase is used in Scripture where it is *not* referring to God is when God is referring to his giving of the land to Israel!⁹

"...the land I gave your ancestors *forever and ever*." (Jer. 7:7)

"... you can stay in the land the Lord gave to you and your ancestors *forever and ever*." (Jer. 25:5)

But other respected theologians like Dr. Burge, and even the renowned N. T. Wright, teach that God was using Israel *only* to bring forth the Messiah—a great honor, indeed. Once that was accomplished, there was no longer any purpose for Israel. There has been a fundamental change in the definition of *the people of God*, they claim. That would be like me using my wife to bring forth children and then divorcing her because she was no longer needed.

Wright says in Jesus' death, by dealing with sin, "God has done what he always promised to Abraham, namely, to give him a global family who will inherit the world."¹⁰ Sounds great, *except that is not all God promised to Abraham*. Before he promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, God told him that he would make him into one great nation (Gen. 12:2), Israel. He promised that the land of Canaan would be an *everlasting possession* to Abraham *and his descendants*. How can Wright hold on so dearly to one promise while so carelessly discarding the others?

David Rudolph writes:

"Wright argues that through the coming of Christ, God's relationship with the Jewish people has been reconfigured so that Israel's covenant blessings, responsibilities, and

⁹ Ibid, 68.

¹⁰ N. T. Wright, "N. T. Wright on the Messiah and the People of God." Fuller Studio, Oct. 12, 2020, YouTube Video, 59:24, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMyenQv_IYA.

calling have all been "transferred" to the Church as a whole, thus resulting in the erasure of divinely given Jewish boundary markers of identity. Or to put it in more politically correct language, these boundary markers have all been universalized . . ."11

Around 2,500 years ago, most of the Hebrew prophets prophesied that God would bring the Jewish people back from *all the nations* of the world (not merely Babylon or Persia), where he had scattered them, into the land that he had previously promised to Abraham and his descendants forever.¹² How was that fulfilled in Yeshua? If you could've convinced me of that before 1948, you sure lost me after Israel was rebirthed as a nation. What do they say since, *he who scattered them, did indeed regather them*—as the prophet predicted (Jer. 31:10)! Augustine was credited with saying that the only reason God left the Jewish people on earth was "to wander the earth to witness the victory of the Church over the synagogue!"¹³ (They had to come up with a reason that the Jewish people didn't get swallowed up into other nations—because it sure could not have been that God was being faithful to his promises! [Jer. 31:35-37])

"Augustine wrote that God had dispersed the Jews but had not destroyed them. In his view, God had kept Jews alive as a permanent reminder that Christianity had replaced Judaism as the true faith. He argued that the humiliated, defeated Jews showed what happens to those who reject God's truth.

"Although Augustine did not want the Jews to be murdered, he did want them to suffer for what he claimed they had done to Jesus. And he wanted them to be present at the 'end of days,' when Jesus returned so that they could see that they had been wrong."¹⁴

¹¹ David Rudolph, "Zionism in Pauline Literature," in *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land*, ed. G. R. McDermott, (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, July 20, 2016), 167.

¹² Ezek. 36:24, Is. 11:12, Jer. 30:10, Zech. 10:8-10, Is. 43:5-6, Jer. 16:14-15

¹³ "Has the Church Replaced Israel? Guest Blog by Dr. David R. Reagan," *One for Israel*, June 1, 2016, <https://www.oneforisrael.org/bible-based-teaching-from-israel/has-the-church-replaced-israel/>.

¹⁴ Phyliss Goldstein, *A Convenient Hatred: A History of Anti-Semitism, (Facing History and Ourselves; 1st edition, December 6, 2011)*, 37.

Rhetoric led to violence. "As early as 414, church leaders in Alexandria led an assault on synagogues that destroyed the city's Jewish community for a time."¹⁵ Hitler didn't need to look any further than the Church for ample rhetoric to stir up the masses of 'Christians' in Germany against the Jewish people. Martin Luther was one of his favorites.

The greatest anecdotal proof for this *theology of Jew-hatred* was surely the dispersion from the land. But 1948 was a theological gamechanger! If only they could have been as longsuffering as God.

A Coincidence?

Was it just a coincidence that before Israel was reborn in 1948, there were Jewish people all over the world, just as the prophets predicted? Jews could be found all over the globe. Despite 52 attempted genocides against the Jewish people,¹⁶ somehow, without a country, she remained an identifiable people group.

And is it just a coincidence that suddenly, these people, many of them secularists, felt *drawn* back to the land of their ancestors? The very thing that fulfillment theology claims is merely allegorical has taken place in the last 73 years.

From Ignorance to Arrogance

Romans 11 predicts what would happen if the Church failed to understand the *mystery* of Israel.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ This claim was made by Israeli tour guide Hannah Ben Chaim, who said she learned it at Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem.

"I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way, all Israel will be saved." (Rom. 11:25–26)

1. Paul does not want Gentile believers to be ignorant
2. ...of a mystery.
3. Because ignorance of this ministry will lead to pride.
4. The mystery is that Israel has been spiritually blinded in part to the truth of the Messiah.
5. Yet, after the gospel has prospered amongst the Gentile nations,
6. the blindness will be removed from the Jewish people
7. and the result is that all Israel comes to faith.

If all of God's promises to Israel are fulfilled, why does Paul speak of God's *future* work with Israel as a *theological mystery*? The most arrogant theologians against Israel are those who believe that God is finished with her. This arrogance was what Paul warned against. Conversely, theologians who look to Israel as the older brother have a humbler disposition towards the Jewish people, recognizing that it is through Israel that they have the Messiah. Therefore, they seek to bless Israel and "provoke her to jealousy" (Rom. 11:11). Paul says ignorance regarding the mystery will lead to arrogance against Jews.

A lot hinged on this mystery being understood. Misunderstanding it could lead to pride and being broken off of the tree to which they had been grafted in.

For if God did not spare the natural branches [Israel], *he will not spare you either* [if you judge them harshly]. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness [towards Israel]. *Otherwise, you also will be cut off.* (Rom. 11:21-22)

Despite this hardening, God's will is that the Jewish people embrace the New Covenant as well—after all, it wasn't promised to Mongolia or Brazil but to the Hebrews. "I will make a New Covenant with the people of Judah and the people of Israel" (Jer. 31:31).

There are so many Scriptures¹⁷ that speak of national Israel experiencing a revival in the end-times. We see this even now with the emergence of Messianic Judaism and the rediscovering of the Jewish Jesus among scholars—both Jewish and Christian. Seventy-two of Ezekiel's prophecies (mostly of Israel) end with, "then they will know that I am Yahweh."

Dr. Walter Kaiser claims, "the term 'Israel' never loses its unique national, geo-political, or ethnic flavor. This is not because God has favorites or that he is chauvinistic, but rather because God is faithful and true to his word."¹⁸ The rebirth of the nation of Israel and the regathering of the Jewish exiles from all over the earth is the greatest fulfillment of prophecy in modern history, bar none. It testifies to the world of God's faithfulness to his covenant.

Difficult Passages

There are several passages upon which fulfillment theology stands. But do they really say that God has moved on from Israel?

Seed or Seeds?

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Messiah. (Gal. 3:16)

¹⁷ Rom. 11:26, Zech. 12:10, Hosea 3:4-5, Jer. 31:31-33, Ezek. 36:25ff

¹⁸ "What's so Important about Premillennialism?" Walter Kaiser, Jr., September 2006, <http://www.walterckaiserjr.com/Israel%20and%20pre-millennialism.html>.

When Paul speaks about the promise being to a seed *singular* in Galatians, he was merely being creative in his usage of words. We often forget the writers of the New Testament were skilled at their craft. As Westerners, we tend to think that everything must be literal. We are a very *fact-oriented* culture. But in ancient literature, there was license for hyperbole¹⁹ and even exaggeration. Did Jesus really want us to cut off our hands or gouge out our eyes? Were there exactly 5,000 people eating the fish and the loaves? Of course not. These were all literary devices to make a point. The reader understood the intent of the writer.

Paul could not possibly be saying that the *one and only* fulfillment of the promises to Abraham's seed is in Yeshua.

1. Paul knows in Hebrew, the word seed, *zarah*, is just like English. It has one form for both plural and singular—a collective singular—just like offspring or fish. Imagine someone arguing that "a dozen deer" actually means one deer because deer is singular.
2. The seed promised to Abraham is often said to be as the sand of the seashore or the stars of the sky (Gen. 22:17). There is no way that sand or stars could be interpreted in the singular.
3. Such an interpretation would contradict the plain meaning of literally dozens of passages in the Hebrew Bible. It turns God into a very fickle, unfaithful Father. If he can turn his back on the Jewish people after making such powerful covenants and promises, how much more the Church?

¹⁹ "Personification, Hyperbole, and Metaphor," Ligonier Ministries, February 22, 2017, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/personification-hyperbole-and-metaphor/>.

Paul is merely using a *Midrashic hermeneutic*, where one looks for the underlying significance of a text to communicate something hidden in the plain reading.²⁰ Some have called it a homiletical interpretive device. In the PaRDeS mnemonic for the four types of biblical exegesis, it would be "D" (*Drash*, see footnote 32). He is simply saying that *the greatest fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham was in the one man, Yeshua*. People in the first century would have understood this.

Another example is where Matthew interprets Hosea 11:1 differently than how the prophet perceived it: "... out of Egypt I called my son." Though clearly, it is referring to Israel, there is a hidden meaning, pointing to the Messiah: "my son," coming with his parents out of Egypt. (Matt. 2:15) "The biblical text has an obvious or plain sense," in this case, Israel coming out of Egypt, "but its deeper meaning was there to be discovered."²¹ This is a midrash. The fulfillment in Yeshua does not cancel the former meaning.

Paul is saying that God strategically used the Hebrew word *zarah*, or *seed*, which, as noted, is a collective singular, to refer both to a covenant people with a unique calling and to his Messiah, who would bring salvation to the nations. He's not saying this is the only fulfillment, any more than he wanted Galatians to emasculate themselves (5:12)! The fact that Paul often exaggerated to make a point was an accepted literary device in his day and is in ours as well. We

²⁰ Joseph uses the same technique when he interprets Pharaoh's dream. He says the fact that Pharaoh had a dream twice means that it is definitely going to happen. It is fixed.

²¹ David Stern, "Midrash and Parables," in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, eds. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 707.

simply wrongly assume that the Bible cannot employ such devices. (Don't tell Jesus, who told people to hate their family members!)

If we conclude that Paul canceled every use of the word *seed* as a singular collective and we must now view the word seed in all cases as singular (If you take the fulfillment theology view of this verse, that must be your conclusion. Seed must be "seeds" to be plural!), then we should surely take note that Paul uses seed as a collective singular just 13 verses later! "If you belong to Christ, then *you* (Plural) are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (3:29)

The promise of the land was not only made to Abraham but reaffirmed to his seed, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 26:3, 35:12). And if the promise was *only to Yeshua*, how did the Jewish people ever possess the land in the first place? How did the Jewish people remain an identifiable people group for 2,000 years in exile, only to return and "possess the land?"

Paul is saying to the Galatians, who were being compelled to be circumcised, that such acts are futile. They are not part of the covenant of circumcision. But they are part of the other seed promises to Abraham that are fulfilled in Yeshua.

- "...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Gen. 12:3)
- "You will be the father of many nations." (Gen. 17:4)
- "...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Gen. 22:18)

These speak of the body of Messiah worldwide, of the Gentiles coming into the kingdom from every nation. Paul is merely using a literary device to emphasize this mystery (see

Ephesians 3:1-10). But he clearly is not rejecting the land promises, as he confirms them elsewhere (Rom. 3:1-4, 9:4, 15:8).

Who is a True Jew?

One of the passages often quoted to suggest that Paul is distancing himself from Judaism and circumcision is the latter verses of Romans 2.

"Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.

"A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God." (Rom. 2:25-29)

The general idea is that circumcision is only profitable if you keep the entire law. Since none of us have been able to perfectly keep the law, clearly, circumcision is useless. That is not what Paul is saying.

In the verses that precede these, Paul speaks about certain Jewish people who, despite having a pious appearance, live ungodly lives. This pushes away Gentiles from God, to whom Jews were called to be a light. He quotes Isaiah 52:5 in Romans 2:24, saying, because of their actions, "God's name is blasphemed amongst the nations." He is saying it is tragic that some Jews, despite having the outward mark, are poor witnesses.

For instance, the custom of not eating with Gentiles certainly didn't help the Jews in becoming a light for the Gentiles. This was not forbidden in Torah but was a Pharisaical

development in hopes of limiting contact with *unclean people*. Since they could not know for sure if a Gentile had done something to make them unclean, they decided just to cut off all contact. "Jesus does not reject the dietary laws of the Torah but rather dismisses the Pharisaic requirement that food be consumed in a ritually pure fashion."²² God addresses this as being against Torah in Peter's vision: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (Acts 10:14). Peter initially struggles to understand the meaning (v. 17) but declares days later: "But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean."

Again, because we live in a society that expresses most things literally, we assume that Paul does too. So, when he says a real Jew is not someone who is circumcised outwardly, but inwardly as well, he is not saying that a Jewish unbeliever is no longer Jewish or that the real Jews are Christians. So, what is he saying?

Imagine I go to Maine for pineapple. Because the pineapple is *from Maine*, it's just not good. I say to everyone around me, "You people need to go to Hawaii. This isn't a pineapple! You've never tasted a *real pineapple* until you've been to Hawaii." No one is going to take me literally, thinking that I am saying that what I am eating is not a pineapple. It just doesn't taste nearly like a Hawaiian pineapple. Paul is saying that the highest form of being a Jew is not physical circumcision alone. But it is a heart committed to God.

Part of the problem here is that we have a chapter divider between Romans 2 and 3. The very next verses make it clear that circumcision is of *great value*.

"What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of

²² David M. Freidenreich, "Food and Table Fellowship," in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, eds. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 650.

God. What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar." (Rom. 3:1–4)

When Paul asked this question, "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew?" anyone reading this for the first time, having just read those verses in chapter 2, would be expecting Paul to say, "None. There is no advantage in being Jewish or being circumcised." But he says there is much value. In fact, he says that God will be faithful to his covenant of circumcision and his promises to Israel even when Israel, or most Jewish people, are in unbelief.

Neither Jew nor Gentile?

Galatians 3:28 is another key verse for replacement/fulfillment theology.

"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Messiah Jesus."

Some use this verse to say there are no longer Jews or Gentiles. They look at believers as a "third race" to borrow the term coined in Epistle of Diognetus. There are so many problems with that interpretation. First, you must deal with the fact that Paul refers to Israel in the present tense all throughout his writings. Second, he includes himself in that group many times, including in Romans 11 when he says, present tense, "I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham" (Rom. 11:1).²³ Third, there are still men and women all around us, yet Paul says there are *no men and women* in the Messiah?

²³ See also "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees." (Acts 23:6) In Romans 9 he refers to Israel as his own people, as he expresses his anguish over their lostness. And Philippians 3, while he is clear that his pedigree in Judaism is nothing compared to knowing the Messiah, he is very clear that he is still a Jew.

This really isn't a difficult verse. Paul is speaking of our identity in Messiah, not our roles. He's talking about how God views people in the ecclesia. There's no longer a hierarchy. Those of the tribe of Levi are no better than those of the tribe of Asher. In Messiah, men are no longer better off than women. The teenager can draw as close to God as the scholar.

Imagine basic training in the Marines. There are whites, blacks, and Hispanics. Their race/color is very real—real enough that people over the centuries have been killed because of it. The leadership does some exercises to get the new soldiers to put aside differences and build brotherhood. The sergeant says, "Here, there are not whites, blacks, or Hispanics—*just Marines*. When you are out there in battle, you will not care what color the man is next to you, just the flag on his uniform." He is not denying their different races but minimizing them in light of their identity on the battlefield as Marines.

This is Paul's intent. In Messiah, our identity is not connected to race, status, or gender. Those things have no value in bringing you closer to God. But men and women still have differences (despite what culture says). No biological male has ever produced offspring! This is the true meaning of the Joel 2:28 prophecy of God pouring out his Spirit on all flesh. Theologians have wrongly understood this. The "all flesh" designation means despite gender, age, position, or ethnicity, God will empower any human who comes to him with a humble heart.

It does appear that some will retain their ethnic identity in the millennial age (Zech. 14:16, Is. 2:2-4). The Hebrew Bible has prophecies about the nations of the world interacting with Jerusalem during the millennial kingdom (Is. 2:3-4, Zech. 8:23). John was able to distinguish ethnicity in heaven: "Before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from

every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev. 7:11). Yeshua inherits *the nations*, not a gigantic generic blob.

But no one will enjoy an advantage based on ethnicity. God abhors all supremacy movements, whether white, Jewish, or black. We are all made in the image of God.

Is the Second Coming an Allegory?

I asked a Ph.D. amillennialist friend how he sees Zechariah 14—which clearly depicts the *Parousia*. This passage shows Yahweh coming to Israel's rescue and then setting up his kingdom over all the earth. The nations then come to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh. My Ph.D. friend said the amillennialist would see it as "fulfilled in Christ." Simple as that.

How can Zechariah's incredible picture of the Messiah coming to the Mount of Olives (and John's view from heaven [Rev. 19:11ff]) be fulfilled already? They see such a passage as allegorical and fulfilled in the first coming of Messiah: Jesus came, and he conquered sin, death, and hell—and that is what the prophets were speaking of when they preached a future kingdom. Zechariah 14's picture of God rescuing Israel is a symbolic picture of Jesus rescuing all the peoples of the earth and becoming king. After Jesus's ascension, Israel's role was fulfilled, and the definition of the "people of God" changed from *ethnic* Israel to *spiritual* Israel. But is this Biblical?

And we must ask, "Is there anything about *spiritual Israel* turning murderously against ethnic Israel?" *Because that is the fruit of replacement/fulfillment theology!* Thousands of Jews have been put to death directly and indirectly by *spiritual Israel*. They bought into the idea that

God had rejected Israel, and they should too! Replacement theology is one of the most destructive misinterpretations of Scripture that exists.

Dan Juster writes, "Replacement theology is a necessary (but not alone sufficient) cause of antisemitism. If it did not exist, the house of antisemitism could not have been built."²⁴ Jewish leaders Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin wrote:

"Christianity did not create the Holocaust—indeed, Nazism was anti-Christian—but it made it possible. Without Christian antisemitism, the Holocaust would have been inconceivable... Hitler and the Nazis found in medieval Catholic anti-Jewish legislation a model for their own, and they read and reprinted Martin Luther's virulently anti-Semitic writings. Both (Catholic and Protestant) traditions were saturated with Jew-hatred."²⁵

Believing that Israel's role was fulfilled in full after the resurrection is to deny history—considering the historical events of 1948 (Israel rebirthed) and 1967 (Jerusalem reunited).

Trump and Israel

Millions of Christians expected the 2020 United States elections to be overturned before January 20th. They were convinced that God had spoken through hundreds of *prophets* that Trump would win. When this didn't happen, they predicted Biden's victory would be overturned. When that didn't materialize, they said Trump would be reinstated.

²⁴ Daniel C. Juster, Email message to author, August 21, 2021.

²⁵ Michael Brown, *Our Hands are Stained with Blood*, (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, September 17, 2019), 21.

I found this ludicrous. However, if suddenly, very soon, Trump is somehow restored as president, it would be utterly foolish for me to continue believing that the prophecies were wrong. Why? The evidence would be in the unprecedented event of Trump being reinstated!

Yet as unlikely as a Trump reinstatement is, the Jewish people remaining an identifiable people group for 2,000 years in exile, only to come home and be "reinstated" as a nation in her own land is far more unfathomable. And the difference is this, the Bible says nothing about U.S. presidents, but there are hundreds of prophecies about Israel's restorations! To deny that the modern state of Israel is a fulfillment of prophecy is to deny Scripture.

Juster adds, "Douglas Harrink accuses [fulfillment theologians] of portraying God as doing a bait and switch. All the passages that would produce hope and expectation, you now discover they did not mean what they seemed to say at all. You thought you were promised a car and put down the money, but in the end, it is not even a bicycle."

Juster continues:

"In one of his books, the famous New Testament Bishop N. T. Wright summarizes the thinking of replacement theology. Wright says that if we read the Old Testament straightforwardly, we would conclude the continued election of the Jewish people, their return to their ancient Land, and all of the other promises about them that would be literally fulfilled. However, Wright argues, due to the interpretations in the New Testament, we have warrant to radically reinterpret these texts about Israel and apply them as being fulfilled in a higher better way for the Israel of God, the Church.

"The original given meaning provides parameters to keep interpretation on track. No interpretation that undercuts the straightforward meaning of the original text in context can be right, or the whole authority of the Hebrew Bible is radically undercut. Romans 9-11 provides the interpretative key to prove that such re-interpretation is wrong, that we

are to read the Hebrew texts and their promises as part of the continued gifts, calling, promises, and election of the Jewish people."²⁶

Again, these prophecies are coming to pass—they are not theoretical! Dr. Stuart Dauermann writes that "five contextual factors [identify] five signs that these are eschatological times."²⁷

1. Israel rebirthed.
2. Jerusalem restored.
3. Massive immigration from the "land of the north." (Jer. 16:14-15)
4. Jewish people embracing Yeshua.
5. Jewish believers maintaining a Jewish identity.

To that last point, there is no hint in the Gospels that Jesus expected Jewish believers to stop identifying as Jews—that God had redefined "Israel." There is no expectation in Acts that the Jewish apostles would live as Gentiles. They dealt with racial superiority in Acts 15. Paul does rebuke Peter for not being willing *to have table fellowship with Gentiles* in Galatians 2, but this had nothing to do with *kashrut*.²⁸ When Paul is accused of not living according to Moses and the Jewish traditions, the apostles speak with one voice that these rumors are false (Acts 21:21ff).

²⁶ Ibid, Juster

²⁷ "What Is The Gospel We Should Be Commending - To All Israel In These Times Of Transition?" Stuart Dauermann, April 4, 2008, <https://www.kesherjournal.com/article/what-is-the-gospel-we-should-be-commending-to-all-israel-in-these-times-of-transition/>.

²⁸ To be clear this is not a kosher/non-kosher issue. There is no evidence that the apostles ever ate non-kosher food. The issue here is not over what they ate, but who they ate it with. The Pharisees forbid Jewish people from having table fellowship with Gentiles, for fear of becoming unclean. When Peter has his visions of the unclean foods, his conclusion is not to go downstairs and eat pork chops, but he wonders about the meaning of this vision. (Acts 10:17)

And furthermore, the prophecies that speak of his first coming were quite literal: born of a virgin (Is. 7:14) in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). He is the Son of David (Is. 11:1). He will be a light to the nations (Is. 42:6-7). He will take on our sins (Is. 53:4-6). He would die with sinners and be buried with the rich (Is. 53:9). He would be innocent (Is. 53:9b). He would not resist (Is. 53:7). He would be rejected (Is. 53:3), and he would rise from the dead (Is. 53:11-12).

All of these prophecies were very literal and fulfilled by Jesus during his first coming. So why would we suddenly take the remaining promises of "restoring the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6) and assume they are allegorical? The answer is clear: There's a demonic plot against the people of Israel, and Satan has found a willing ally in many theologians. Going all the way back to the 2nd century, the church fathers sometimes railed against the Jewish people with quite venomous language. Its crescendo came in the 4th century with John Chrysostom, who said it was every Christian's duty to hate the Jews.²⁹

Paul never suggests that he sees these future promises to Israel as allegorical. In fact, he says that God's calling on Israel is still valid, even in unbelief (Rom. 11:29, 3:1-3).

"...the Old Testament prophets abound with kingdom age expectation. In Isa 2:2, the prophet sees a day coming when the mountain of the Lord's house will be established, and all the nations shall flow into it. In Isa 11:6, the domesticity of all animals is revealed when the wolf dwells with the lamb, the leopard lies down with the young goat, the calf

²⁹ John Chrysostom wrote these words in a series of sermons against the Jews: "The Jews sacrifice their children to Satan... They are worse than wild beasts. The synagogue is a brothel, a den of scoundrels, the temple of demons devoted to idolatrous cults, a criminal assembly of Jews, a place of meeting for the assassins of Christ, a house of ill fame, a dwelling of iniquity, a gulf and abyss of perdition..."

The synagogue is a curse. Obstinate in her error, she refuses to see or hear; she has deliberately perverted her judgment; she has extinguished within herself the light of the Holy Spirit...

[The Jews] have fallen into a condition lower than the vilest animals. Debauchery and drunkenness have brought them to the level of the lusty goat and the pig. They know only one thing: to satisfy their stomachs, to get drunk, to kill and beat each other up like stage villains and coachmen...

I hate the Jews because they violate the Law. I hate the Synagogue because it hates the Law and the Prophets. It is the duty of all Christians to hate the Jews."

and a young lion feed together, and all are led by a child. In Isa 19:23–25, a day is anticipated when there will be a highway running all the way from Egypt to Assyria and, therefore, directly through the land of Israel. That will be a day when God will say, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance.' In Isa 35:1–2, Isaiah the prophet anticipates a time when the desert shall blossom like a rose."³⁰

For religious Jews, the prophetic hope is not about dying and going to heaven but the coming Messianic kingdom. This is precisely why the apostles asked Yeshua about "restoring the kingdom to Israel" in Acts 1—this was the great prophetic hope embedded in every first-century Jew. To suggest that this great hope is suddenly divinely upended is to impugn the character of God, who can neither God lie (Heb. 6:18) nor break his covenant (Jer. 31:35-37).

New Testament Confirmation, not Replacement

The New Testament has an expectation that Israel will fulfill her destiny, that the nation will be restored, the prophets' words will be fulfilled, and that she will experience national revival. Let's go through the passages one by one.

1. Yeshua's last conversation with his disciples before the ascension reveals this expectation:

"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

"He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.'" (Acts 1:6-7)

The disciples clearly think the prophecies from the Hebrew Bible are still valid. Why wouldn't they?

³⁰ Paige Patterson, *Revelation: The New American Commentary*, (Nashville: Holman Reference, September 1, 2012), Logos edition, (2) The Reigning of Believers (20:4–6).

There can be little doubt that the prophets themselves and certainly those who read their prophecies anticipated a literal fulfillment ... This seems to be the intent of the question by the disciples ... "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Jesus did not tell them the question was irrelevant but rather that it was not for them to know the times or the seasons (*chronos* and *kairos* respectively), which made up the timetable of God; rather they were to be witnesses until that time came.³¹

When they asked him about Israel's future, he did not say, "Guys, don't you know that all those prophecies were fulfilled in me? They were allegorical, and I fulfilled them through my victory on the cross. Israel has done her job in getting me in place. There is no more future role for Israel. Go and be my witnesses." No, he affirms the promises; the only question is *timing*.

2. The apostles understood the Acts 1:6-7 message. In Peter's sermon after the healing of the paraplegic beggar, he speaks of this coming restoration and confirms the prophets are to be taken literally.

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Yeshua. Heaven must receive him until *the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.* (Acts 3:19-21)

3. Romans 11 predicts a progression of events that lead to a revival in Israel.

1. The gospel is preached.
2. While many Jewish people accept it, the majority reject it.
3. The gospel goes to the Gentiles.
4. The Gentiles are called to provoke Israel to jealousy (v. 11).
5. Israel's acceptance leads to a "greater riches" awakening in the nations (v. 12) and "life from the dead" (v. 15).

³¹ Ibid.

6. The fullness of the nations leads to Israel's blindness being removed (v.25).
7. "All Israel Is saved." (v. 26)

4. In Matthew 23, he tells the religious, "You will not see me again until you say blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." (v. 39)

This phrase has great meaning.

1. In a Jewish wedding, the cantor will use this phrase to call in the bridegroom. Yeshua is our bridegroom!
2. In Israel, this phrase "Baruch haba" is a greeting. It is how I would greet someone if they arrived for Shabbat dinner, "Baruch haba...welcome, come in..." Yeshua is saying to the Jews of Jerusalem, "You'll see me when you welcome me back as your bridegroom, your Messiah!"
3. The Feast of Tabernacles points to the Second Coming. Jewish people sing Psalm 118:25-26, "Blessed is he who comes..." during *Sukkot*. Yeshua predicts they will sing this of him in the Zechariah 14:16 *Sukkot* celebration.

5. John alludes to the Zechariah 12:10 prophecy in Revelation. In 1:7, he says, when Yeshua comes in the clouds, "every eye will see him, *even those who pierced him.*" He continues, "and the peoples on earth will mourn, thought the Greek says, *"tribes of the land."*

In Hebrew, the phrase "the Land" is how we say Israel. If someone asks me if I am in Israel, they will ask, "are you *in the Land?*" And "tribes" points to the tribes of Israel. I believe

the inspired John slipped this double meaning into the passage.³² The Jewish people, as Zechariah prophesied, will grieve as they understand Yeshua, the one they rejected, is the returning king of Israel.

6. The great mystery of the New Testament is not that God has decided to break his with Israel, but that the Gentiles, through Jesus, gain access to all the covenant benefits without becoming Jewish. Look how Paul makes his argument in Ephesians.

Remember that at that time, you were separate from Messiah, *excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise*, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Messiah. (Eph. 2:12-13)

The Gentiles don't *replace* Israel but join *with* Israel. He says, "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens *with* God's people and also members of his household." (Eph. 2:19) God's "household" here is the "One New Man," the Romans 11, olive tree, and we know that God is able to regraft the Jewish people back into their own olive tree (Rom. 11:23-24).³³

³² "Beginning in the late thirteenth century, Jewish biblical interpretation was often divided into four categories, summarized through the acronym PaRDeS: peshat, the simple or contextual meaning; remez, literally "hint," an allegorical meaning; derash, a homiletical meaning; and sod, a secret mystical meaning." Amy-Jill Levine; Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Bible With and Without Jesus*, (New York: HarperOne. Kindle Edition, October 27, 2020), 29-30

Seeing both an application to Israel and the nations in Rev. 1:7, would be the remez or hint method of interpretation, though I think I could even make a claim based on the Greek used, that it is the peshat, the plain meaning.

³³ Many scholars see the Gentile inclusion into Israel in the same way that the nations of British Commonwealth enjoy their connection to Great Britain, without losing their identity as Canadians or Australians or any of the other member states. Another good example is Paul. He was not ethnically Roman, but had Roman citizenship. Gentiles remain connected to their ethnicity, while enjoying citizenship in the commonwealth of Israel. In fact, the NKJV translates Eph. 2:12 as "being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel," translating the Greek *politeias*, not as citizenship, but uses the surrounding context to come up with commonwealth of Israel.

7. At the end of Paul's life, *after* he's written Romans 2 and Galatians 3:16 and 28, he calls the Jewish leaders of Rome to meet with him. In seeking to explain himself—why he's in chains—he says, "For this reason, I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the *hope of Israel* that I am bound with this chain." (Acts. 28:20)

Is the *hope of Israel* that Israel would be replaced by the Church? Was it that all the promises they thought would be fulfilled were already allegorically fulfilled in Messiah on the cross? Of course not! Paul is speaking to them as if they all agree on what *the hope of Israel* is: the Messiah ruling in the age to come. Yes, some of them could not comprehend a crucified king or a martyred Messiah and went away offended. But others believe. Paul is preaching the Messiah *of Israel*, "from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets" (v. 23). And what did he share? That Israel had been replaced? That the Messianic kingdom prophecies were allegorical? He was "explaining about the kingdom of God" (v. 23). To these rabbis, that means according to the historical Jewish understanding.

8. Peter tells *unbelieving* Jews they are "heirs of the covenant" (Acts 3:25). How can they be heirs of something that was canceled or already fulfilled? Paul, in seeking to show the Romans that God will be faithful to Israel, affirms the covenants belong to Israel by referring to them in the present, not the past.

"Theirs *is* the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs *are* the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised!" (Rom. 9:4-5)

Why even mention Yeshua's *human ancestry* (v. 5) if it is irrelevant? He is writing about unbelieving Jews for whom Paul was burdened, yet he says, "*Theirs* (unbelieving Israel) is the covenants."

Conclusion

Yes, there is a clear expectation in the New Testament that God will fulfill his promises to Israel. We have dealt with the difficult passages. We have shown that the apostles, both before and after Shavuot 30 CE, had an expectation of the kingdom being restored to Israel. We have made the case that the prophetic fulfillment of Israel in 1948 should have sounded the death knell for both replacement and fulfillment theologies. The conclusion: God has been faithful to his covenant with Israel while at the same time opening up the door to the nations to *join* his great household (not replace it!).