

In Celebration of Israel's 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

ISRAEL  
THE  
CHURCH  
AND THE  
MIDDLE  
EAST

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO THE CURRENT CONFLICT

Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser, Editors

 Kregel  
Publications

*Israel, the Church, and the Middle East: A Biblical Response to the Current Conflict*  
© 2018 by Chosen People Ministries

Published by Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel Inc., 2450 Oak Industrial Dr. NE,  
Grand Rapids, MI 49505-6020.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system,  
or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, re-  
cording, or otherwise—without written permission of the publisher, except for brief  
quotations in printed reviews.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New  
International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™  
Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com)  
The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United  
States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®  
(NASB), Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995  
by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. [www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org).

Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English  
Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News  
Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked HCSB® are taken from the Holman Christian Standard  
Bible®, Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used  
by permission. HCSB® is a federally registered trademark of Holman Bible Publishers.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture quotations marked NET are taken from the Christian Standard Bible. Copyright  
© 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible®, and  
CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers, all rights reserved.

The Hebrew font, NewJerusalemU, and the Greek font, GraecaU, are available from  
[www.linguistsoftware.com/lgku.htm](http://www.linguistsoftware.com/lgku.htm), +1-425-775-1130.

ISBN 978-0-8254-4577-4

*Printed in the United States of America*

18 19 20 21 22 / 5 4 3 2 1

This volume of essays is dedicated to the nation of Israel in honor of her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. It commemorates the creation of the modern Jewish state that rose out of the ashes of the Holocaust in 1948—a mere three years after the conclusion of World War II as the mass destruction of 6 million Jews was uncovered and revealed to a horrified world. Had Hitler been victorious, the entirety of world Jewry may very well have perished. Yet, the God of Israel would not allow the people of Israel to be destroyed.

As the prophet Jeremiah promised,

*Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: "If this fixed order departs From before Me," declares the LORD, "Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever" (Jeremiah 31:35–36, NASB).*

By honoring Israel in this milestone year, we pay homage to the pioneers who created the modern State of Israel out of rock, dust, and sand. But more importantly, we honor the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who has promised to preserve his people for the sake of his everlasting glory.

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:*

*“May they prosper who love you.”*

—Psalm 122:6, NASB

# CONTENTS

---

Editors and Contributors..... 9

Introduction

**Dr. Mitch Glaser & Dr. Darrell Bock** ..... 11

## PART 1: BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Israel, the Jewish People, and God's Covenants

**Richard E. Averbeck**..... 21

Israel and Her Neighbors: Isaiah 19

**Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.** ..... 39

Israel and the Story of the Bible

**Mark Yarbrough**..... 47

The Hermeneutics of the Conflict

**Michael Rydelnik**..... 63

## PART 2: THEOLOGY AND THE CONFLICT

A Theology of Israel and the Church

**Craig Blaising**..... 85

The Dangers of Supersessionism

**Mitch Glaser**..... 101

Israel and the Land in the Writings of the Church

**Michael J. Vlach**..... 119

## PART 3: YESHUA IN THE MIDST OF THE CRISIS

The Messianic Jewish Movement in Modern Israel

**Erez Soref**..... 137

The 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Palestinian Church within Israel

**Tom Doyle**..... 151

Biblical Reconciliation between Jews and Arabs

**Darrell Bock**..... 165

## PART 4: CURRENT CHALLENGES TO PEACE IN ISRAEL

Should Christians Support the Modern State of Israel? <b>Mark L. Bailey</b> .....	187
The Legal Challenges at the Nexus of the Conflict <b>Craig Parshall</b> .....	203
Is It Sinful to Divide the Land of Israel? <b>Mike Brown</b> .....	217

## THE LIFEWAY SURVEY

Introduction to the LifeWay Survey.....	228
Executive Summary .....	231
Methodology.....	233
Quantitative Findings.....	234
Alliance for the Peace of Jerusalem—Statement .....	257
A Conclusion and Way Forward—Dr. Darrell Bock.....	262
Bibliography.....	268
Scripture Index.....	278
Name Index.....	284
Subject Index.....	287

## EDITORS AND CONTRIBUTORS

---

**Richard E. Averbeck** (Ph.D., Annenberg Research Institute) is Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages and Director of the Ph.D. program in Theological Studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

**Mark L. Bailey** (Ph.D., Dallas Theological Seminary) is the President and Senior Professor of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary. For more than forty years he has served in theological education, pastored various churches, and led numerous tours to Israel and the Middle East.

**Craig Blaising** (Ph.D., University of Aberdeen, Scotland) is Executive Vice President and Provost, Professor of Theology, and Jesse Hendley Chair of Biblical Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and has written many articles on Israel and the Church.

**Darrell Bock** (Ph.D., University of Aberdeen) is Research Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, a Humboldt Scholar (Tübingen University in Germany), former President of the Evangelical Theological Society, and corresponding editor-at-large for *Christianity Today*.

**Mike Brown** (Ph.D., New York University) is a Messianic Jewish apologist and author of various books, such as the five-volume series *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*. He has served as visiting and/or adjunct professor at many schools and seminaries, including Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Denver Theological Seminary, Regent University (Virginia Beach), and Trinity (Deerfield, IL).

**Tom Doyle** (Th.M., Dallas Theological Seminary) is the Vice President and Middle East Director of e3 Partners, a licensed guide for the State of Israel, and has authored eight books including two best sellers.

**Mitch Glaser** (Ph.D., Fuller Theological Seminary) is President of Chosen People Ministries and speaks and writes widely on Jewish evangelism and Messianic Judaism. He is coeditor with Darrell Bock of five academic volumes published by Kregel Publications, including *To the Jew First: The Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History*.

**Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.** (Ph.D., Brandeis University) is the Colman M. Mockler Distinguished Professor of Old Testament and former President of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Throughout his career, he has published considerably in the field of biblical studies.

**Craig Parshall** (J.D., Marquette University Law School) is a constitutional lawyer serving as Special Counsel to the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) on Supreme Court matters and an author who frequently writes on Israel and the Middle East.

**Michael Rydelnik**, (D.Miss., Trinity International University) is Professor of Jewish Studies and Bible at Moody Bible Institute and Host/Bible teacher on Open Line with Dr. Michael Rydelnik, answering listener Bible questions every Saturday morning for more than 230 stations on Moody Radio. He also is the coeditor of and a contributor to *The Moody Bible Commentary*, author of *Understanding the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, as well as other books. He has also contributed to numerous books, journals, and study Bibles.

**Erez Soref** (Psy.D., Wheaton College) is the President of One for Israel, based in Netanya, Israel. He also serves on the board of directors of several Israeli and international NGOs.

**Michael J. Vlach** (Ph.D., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) is Professor of Theology at The Master's Seminary and specializes in the areas of Systematic Theology, Historical Theology, Apologetics, and World Religions.

**Mark Yarbrough** (Ph.D., Dallas Theological Seminary) is Vice President for Academic Affairs, Academic Dean, and Associate Professor of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary and has been published in various magazines and written several books.

# INTRODUCTION

---

## DR. MITCH GLASER & DR. DARRELL BOCK

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHURCH and Israel has been the source of passionate debate among Christians throughout much of Church history. More recently, however, the issue has moved beyond the exegetical and theological spheres to encompass the political realm, with the publication of a number of books by evangelical authors who champion the Palestinian cause and are highly critical of both Israel and Christian support for the Jewish state. The debate surrounding the relationship between the Church and Israel has evolved from mere disagreement over doctrine and now includes areas of both historical and political debate regarding the current Middle East that further divides Christians.

In recent years it has become apparent that the traditional pro-Israel stance of evangelicals has come under fire by those who support the Palestinian cause, calling for a new perspective and more nuanced approach by Christians who believe that the Land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people by virtue of God's covenants and promises. As the apostle Paul writes, about the Jewish people of his day:

*As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable* (Rom. 11:28–29).

The books, articles, and videos of resources has, by and large, been limited to the popular sphere, so that there is a notable paucity of academic works by evangelicals advocating the view that God retains a plan and purpose for the Jewish people (and by extension a divine interest in the Jewish state and the wider Middle East conflict). There is also a significant lack of objective academic responses to books by Christian authors critical of Israel and Christian Zionism. In addition, those that do defend Israel are sometimes not sensitive to or aware of the legitimate concerns of Palestinians, especially those who are Evangelicals. This book is an effort to bring balance to these topics.

The debate over how the Church should respond to the situation in the Middle East has produced volumes of literature that are polarized and

pejorative toward both sides, which is unfortunate as many Christians are seeking guidance on how to better understand the Middle East crisis and more particularly, the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, including the believers on both sides of the debate.

Therefore, the editors seek to provide readers with an alternative approach. The proposed volume will challenge the Supersessionist drift of the modern Church, arguing that God retains a plan and purpose for the Jewish people while also addressing a number of the divisive issues raised by authors critical of Israel, including justice-related issues which so many of young adults are concerned with regarding the Middle East conflict.

The book will explore hermeneutical issues touching upon God's plan and purpose for the Jewish people as well as the wider effects of the conflict, such as the growing antipathy within the Church toward the evangelization of the Jewish people. The authors will also attempt to discover whether support for Israel has hurt efforts to reach Muslims, and whether adequate attention has been given to the question of reconciliation between the offended parties. Given how extremes on both sides are driving the current debate at times, an important aim of the book is to provide readers with an interdisciplinary and nuanced treatment of the issues. It attempts to eschew partisanship, in a way that is irenic and respectful in tone.

The book is directed toward pastors and global Christian leaders as well as theological students, together with lay Christians who are actively seeking guidance and resources regarding the Middle East conflict. It may also be of interest to anyone interested in how a significant group of Christians see discussion about the region. Contributors have been invited who represent a broad evangelical spectrum and yet no single denomination or tradition is dominant. The book appeals to as wide a readership as possible, although the authors share a common view regarding the ongoing election of the Jewish people.

## PART 1: BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The editors believe this is the proper way to begin a book of this nature. All too often, believers in Jesus develop a set of political or even ethical and moral beliefs but fail to ground these beliefs in the Bible and to further allow themselves to be influenced by Scripture. Therefore, it is important to make sure that we square our perspective on controversial issues, like the Middle East conflict, with a solid understanding of Scripture. We still might come to the table with differing views, but at least we have plumbed the depth of Scripture on the topic; and then, as brothers and sisters in the common faith, we will be able to have more irenic and productive discussions about our differences.

The Bible must impact and inform our views on contemporary issues, like the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. We asked six well-qualified authors to help us delve deeper into what the Bible teaches us about the conflict. The authors leave it up to the individual to then try and apply what was learned

to the ways in which we process the opinions, news reports and to evaluate the positions of those who on both sides of the conflict.

Dr. Richard Averbeck writes on the topic, “Israel, the Jewish People, and God’s Covenants.” This is a theological core to the conflict under discussion. It deals with the traditional ways in which the role of Jews and Gentiles in God’s plan and, in particular, the biblical understanding of the Land; its ownership, sharing and future are understood. Covenant theology traditionally believes the Land promises to be fulfilled in one way or another in the Church, and Dispensationalism views ethnic Israel as the literal recipients of the Land’s promises. Averbeck takes a more biblical-theological tact rather than systematic approach to these questions. He presents the promises and treats the fulfillment of them through the great covenants God made with His people. This provides a superior way to examine the role of Israel in God’s plan and her relationship to the Land. Looking at these issues through the lens of God’s covenants enables the student of Scripture to go beyond a particular theological system. An approach through biblical theology proves useful for uncovering some of the core issues in the Israel/Palestinian conflict.

Dr. Walter Kaiser draws our attention to the biblical question of “Israel and Her Neighbors: Isaiah 19.” He examines God’s purposes for Israel in relationship to the nations of the world—especially Israel’s current neighbors. Drawing on Isaiah 19, he argues that God’s ultimate goal for Israel and the nations consists of an Israeli state present and at peace in the land. Furthermore, a day will come when Israel and her neighbors will live in harmony, worshipping the same Lord and King. This chapter of Isaiah is largely unexplored within academic theological circles, yet arguably should have an important impact on how Christians today might view and respond to the Middle East conflict. As believers in Jesus, we live life today in the shadow of the future.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough believes that without understanding “Israel and the Story of the Bible,” we are missing a piece of the very heart of Scripture. The story of the Bible, beginning in Genesis and concluding in the Book of Revelation, is the expression of God’s love for humanity. It is important to understand the grand sweep of Scripture and to understand the different elements of the narrative in light of the whole. Themes of redemption, kingdom, regeneration, and holiness build upon one another. As the story progresses so does the ongoing significance of Israel, the Jewish people, and the unfolding of God’s plan throughout time and Scripture.

We are provided with a necessary tool to unlock the mystery of the current conflict in the Middle East and beyond by understanding the breadth of His story and focusing on the role of Israel, the Jewish people, the fulfillment of prophecy, the destructive nature of sin, and the emergence of the Jewish Savior.

Dr. Michael Rydelnik covers the critical issues of biblical interpretation in his chapter, “The Hermeneutics of the Conflict,” answering key questions that span both testaments about the relationship of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel. For example, does the Abrahamic covenant promise a particular land to the Jewish people, or is the Promised Land to be viewed more universally?

How are the boundaries outlined in the Book of Genesis to be understood? Are there passages of Scripture which point to the Jewish people returning to the land after dispersion? Can today's state of Israel be the fulfillment in part of these land promises? Why is the land of Israel rarely mentioned in the New Testament? Did the land promises pass to the Church in a spiritual sense, or should we expect that the land promises are literal and would be fulfilled in a regathered Israel? Are there additional land promises to be fulfilled in the future and if so, for whom and under what conditions? Will non-Jews have access to the land promises or even be able to live in the Land of Israel?

Dr. Rydelnik all of answers these questions, but also helps the Bible student understand the principles of Bible interpretation that enables the reader to study Scripture and answer these questions more effectively for themselves.

## PART 2: THEOLOGY AND THE CONFLICT

The second part of the book focuses on the theological interpretations of those biblical foundations covered in the first part of the book.

Dr. Craig Blaising develops a more in-depth "Theology of Israel and the Church" by tracing the theme of God's ongoing calling, purpose, and plan for the Jewish people. He works from ancient times throughout Scripture to the present and into the future. He covers issues such as the use and understanding of the term "Israel" in the Old and New Testaments; the election, mission, and ongoing calling of the Jewish people; and the place of the land of Israel in the promises of God.

The relationship of the Church and Israel is developed throughout the Bible, especially in the Pauline epistles. Passages such as Romans 9–11, Ephesians 2–3, as well the prayers of Jesus and Paul describe a unity within diversity that is at the very heart of the Gospel. Resolving conflicts, reconciliation, and living in unity is important to God, but this cannot be achieved without a fundamental understanding of the particular roles God determined for the Jewish people, the nations, and the Church.

This chapter attempts to articulate the unique roles God has given to both Jews and Gentiles in the Body of Christ and the expanded relationship that the nation of Israel and the Church have to one another. By understanding these roles and relationships we will better be able to parse our way through the Middle East conflict. Most importantly, this chapter will answer the question as to whether or not the God of Israel has completed the purposes for which He created the nation of Israel, or if in fact the role of Israel in the plan is God is yet to be completed with the promised venue for completion in the land of Israel.

Dr. Mitch Glaser addresses the almost hidden issue of replacement theology in his chapter, "The Dangers of Supersessionism." He focuses on the ways in which this view has shaped the Palestinian narrative and the views of those who tend to be pro-Palestinian while opposing the modern state of Israel. Unfortunately, these views have widened the chasm between Israeli

and Palestinian believers, but are not often sufficiently discussed to show their negative impact.

This chapter focuses on the impact modern Supersessionism has on today's Church in Israel, the Middle East, and the West. The author zeroes in on the negative impact Supersessionism has had on the Jewish people. This impact is especially the case with Jewish evangelism over the past century. Issues covered will include how negative portrayals of Israel by some sectors of the Church have a detrimental impact on Jewish responses to the Gospel, and how a high view of Israel aids Jewish evangelism. The writings of some of the better-known Supersessionist authors of our day receive particular attention and analysis. Solid principles emerge that might lead toward less acrimonious, healthier dialogue.

Dr. Mike Vlach specializes in how the Church Fathers understood the Bible regarding Israel, the Church, and the land. So he explores the topic, "Israel and the Land in the Writings of the Church." Many have charged that the relationship of Israel and the land in the writings of many theologians are "new" or recent theological concepts and therefore invalid. Dr. Vlach ably responds to these challenges.

His chapter explores the ways the promise of the land has been understood throughout Church history. Modern Supersessionism argues—on the basis of writings from the early and medieval Church—that the Church is now Israel, while also claiming that the concept of God's continued plan and purpose for the Jewish people (together with Christian Zionism) is a relatively modern invention. The chapter will challenge and critique such views, exploring how certain Church Fathers were influenced by their culture, as well as tracing support for the view that God retains a plan and purpose for the Jewish people throughout the Church's history. This demonstrates how such a view is not limited to a particular millennial viewpoint or doctrinal tradition or more recent time period. The reader will better understand the ways in which some Church Fathers, and those influenced by them, dispensed with the land promises of the Old Testament.

### PART 3: YESHUA IN THE MIDST OF THE CRISIS

The third part of the book focuses on the practical issues related to the conflict, especially the relationships between Israeli and Palestinian believers.

Dr. Erez Soref writes on "The Messianic Jewish Movement in Modern Israel," giving a brief overview of the today's growing Messianic movement in Israel. This includes a focus on the views Israeli Messianic Jews have on the state of Israel, their relationships with Palestinian believers, and other aspects of the Middle East crisis; as well as providing the most up-to-date survey-based projection as to how many Jewish believers there are in Israel today. In preparation for this chapter, a professional study of the leaders of Israeli Messianic congregations was undertaken, and the results of this survey are shared and discussed in the chapter. Dr. Soref leads us to a better understanding of the state of the indigenous Israeli movement for Yeshua within Israel.

Tom Doyle spends months each year serving both Palestinians (both believers and nonbelievers) and Israeli Jewish believers. He writes about his experiences in his chapter entitled, “The 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Palestinian Church within Israel.” The editors chose an American missionary to the Middle East to gain the perspective of how a pro-Israel Westerner could appreciate and deeply love the Palestinians, yet still be favorable toward Israel.

Tom describes the growth of the Palestinian churches on both the West Bank and in Gaza, and to some degree within Israel as well. The chapter also focuses on the internal struggles of the Palestinian church and how they relate to Israel and the Jewish people on a spiritual and political level. Does the Palestinian church reach out to Jewish people? Do they sympathize with the Palestinian Authority or with Hamas? How do the individual Palestinian churches get along with one another? What is the general view of the Palestinian church regarding the variety of solutions under consideration?

Are there Palestinian believers who deeply care about the Jewish people and the state of Israel? Tom introduces us to a variety of opinions on this topic in a warm and very personal way that has much experience behind it. He tells these stories through interviews and his own reflections.

Dr. Darrell Bock investigates the biblical teaching on reconciliation in his chapter, “Biblical Reconciliation for Jews and Arabs.” He develops a theology of reconciliation from both the Old and New Testaments and applies these principles to the Middle East crisis, providing guidance for those who want to pray for and support reconciliation efforts. The chapter will also outline and discuss some of the “good things” that are happening between Jewish and Arab Christians in Israel to give the readers more hope and optimism. Yet, this chapter does not avoid the very real issues that make reconciliation difficult (e.g. Israel’s security, the demonization of Israel, Arab hostility, the ideology behind settler activity, and the common minority status of both Jewish and Palestinian Christians).

Dr. Bock is a New Testament theologian and a Jewish believer in Jesus, who has had many experiences with both Palestinian and Israeli Jewish believers. Having been on both sides of the wall, he writes with both biblical authority and practical experience on this most difficult issue.

#### PART 4: CURRENT CHALLENGES TO PEACE IN ISRAEL

The fourth section of the book explores the more profound historical, theological, and practical issues that need to be solved, or at least better understood by both sides in the conflict. Additionally, those who love Israel and the Palestinians also need to be made aware of the complex issues that are ingrained within the cultures of Jewish people and Palestinians embroiled within the conflict. All too often, those outside of the situations have “easy answers” and solutions to the conflicts between others of a different culture. In order to become better peacemakers and to serve as more effective prayer partners, the difficult everyday issues that impact the conflict needs to be better understood. This section attempts to do this

by exploring the historical and theological issues that divide Israelis and Palestinians, especially within the church.

Those of us who care about the conflict but live outside of Israel will benefit greatly from this section. One of the key questions covered in this section will be to help Christians better understand the Jewish side of the narrative. Can you be “for Palestinians” and “for Israelis”? We propose a both/and solution in this book, and believe this section will be helpful in guiding us toward this end. Yet, in the current climate where the church in the West has become so influenced by those impacted by a more “pro-Palestinian” narrative—especially among our younger generations of Jesus followers—it is critical to gain a better understanding of the Jewish Israeli narrative as well. This narrative which influenced the Church during previous, post-World War II generations is being lost and needs to be recast without being tied to a more extreme Christian Zionism. That retelling allows for a greater concern for all those who live in the Holy Land.

Mark Bailey engages with the church to discover a more balanced approach to the conflict in his chapter “Should Christians Support the Modern State of Israel?”

Dr. Bailey explores the convergence of theology and politics, addressing issues that answer provocative questions, including to what extent can one be biblically and even politically supportive of Israel, yet not necessarily affirm every action of the Israeli government. It critiques the “Israel right or wrong” approach, and how this has impacted the witness of the Western church to Muslims and Palestinians. He explores the contribution of Jews to the world and reviews the biblical account of Israel’s role in the world.

Human rights attorney Craig Parshall, in “The Legal Challenges at the Nexus of the Conflict,” covers the many of the legal issues at the very heart of the conflict. This chapter calls for a rehearsal of the history of the various agreements leading to the Balfour Declaration and onward that gave the Jewish people a legal right to the land. Also examined are the attempts to forge some type of accord through negotiations between the parties, as brokered by the United States and other nations.

A critique emerges with an assessment of more recent arguments against Israel in the International Court of Justice and the United Nations, in a reversal of a previous pro-Israel position. The chapter effectively examines the sweep of history regarding Israel and their legal right to the land. Readers should then be able to share the key points in the arguments with others.

Finally, Dr. Michael Brown discusses the very controversial topic, “Is It Sinful to Divide the Land of Israel?” The two-state solution is still a possible solution to the conflict. Many Bible-believing Christians are against this solution, of dividing the land God gave to the Jewish people. They see it as an anathema. Therefore, believers find the two-state solution problematic; they view the modern state of Israel as the fulfillment of prophecies predicting the land would be given to the Jewish people in the last days. On the other side, there are followers of Jesus who are in favor of the two-state solution,

as they believe this solution is a political necessity for the present—and that eventually, the Jewish people will enjoy the full Abrahamic boundaries at a future date when Jesus returns to reign as King. The chapter examines these options without making a decision on the matter. By reading this chapter, a Bible-believer should be able to understand the issues and the arguments both for and against the two-state solution, from a biblical and even practical perspective.

The editors are hopeful that the book will lead to greater unity at many levels: in the Body of Christ between Jews and Arabs, between Supersessionists and those who are not, between those who want to reach Muslims and those who want to reach Jewish people, and for those who want to reach all these groups. The book's conclusion will also call upon all sides to make sure their politics are subservient to their view of Scripture. Our prayer is that you will learn much, enjoy the journey, and be better equipped to think about and discuss the role of Israel, the church, and the nations in the Middle East!

—**Dr. Mitch Glaser**

—**Dr. Darrell Bock**

# A THEOLOGY OF ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

---

**CRAIG BLAISING**

A KEY QUESTION THAT UNDERLIES THE VARIOUS ARTICLES of this book is how to understand Israel and the church in the plan of God. This question must be answered in order to make sense of the story of the Bible from Old Testament to New Testament. To answer the question requires a theology of Israel and the church.

In order to sharpen the question, it is important to define Israel and the church within those portions of Scripture in which they are especially featured. In the Old Testament, Israel is an ethnic, national, territorial (ENT) reality that God created among the nations and to which He covenanted promises of everlasting ethnic, national, and territorial blessing. In the New Testament, the church is a Spirit-indwelt communion of individual Jews and Gentiles that is brought into existence in and through Jesus Christ with forgiveness of sins and the promise of everlasting life. The question is how to understand the relationship between Israel and the church as one traces the story of the Bible from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Are they ultimately the same thing? Is one simply a version of the other? Are they utterly different realities? Are they different but related in some way? Do they compete with one another? How do they fit into the ultimate plan of God?

Two well-known ways of understanding Israel and the church theologically are supersessionism and dispensationalism. Supersessionism sees Old Testament Israel as replaced (superseded) by another reality in the New Testament. As such, supersessionism is also known as *replacement theology*. Dispensationalism, traditionally understood, sees the New Testament church as a completely new people that is unrelated to Israel—a people that belong to a completely different story line in the Bible. While quite popular, supersessionism and traditional dispensationalism are both inadequate to explain the theological difference yet interconnection of Israel and the church in Scripture. However, in order to see this, some further explanation of each one is necessary.

While there are various forms of supersessionism, two may be highlighted here: ethnic supersessionism and economic supersessionism.<sup>1</sup> Ethnic supersessionism argues that Israel as a people has been replaced in the divine plan by Gentile peoples (some versions emphasize a particular Gentile people while others speak of Gentiles in general).<sup>2</sup> The reason for this replacement is said to be the failure of the Jews as a people to trust and obey God. As a result, God cancelled the promises made to Israel and turned to the Gentiles. The church, in this form of supersessionism, is a Gentile reality. When Christ returns, unbelieving Gentiles will be judged and only the Gentile church will remain to enter its consummate glory.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, Jews who come to believe in Jesus lose their Jewish ethnicity and essentially become “Gentile” Christians. Obviously, ethnic supersessionism is strongly anti-Semitic, since in its view God has ultimately rejected the Jewish people as a people and has replaced them in the divine plan.

On the other hand, economic supersessionism argues that Israel, the “earthly” people of God in the Old Testament, has been replaced in the divine plan not by another “earthly” people or peoples, but by a “spiritual” people, the church of the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> In this form of supersessionism, Israel was never in God’s mind more than a temporary reality ultimately to be superseded by “a new Israel,” the church.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, the ethnic, national, and territorial promises to Israel have to be spiritually interpreted in order to discern their true meaning.<sup>6</sup> Their fulfillment is to be found in the

- 
1. A seminal work analyzing supersessionism is R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996). Soulen’s classification of different types of supersessionism has been adopted by others writing on this topic. A more recent work dependent on Soulen but developing the analysis further is Michael Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel: A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville: B&H, 2010).
  2. My category, *ethnic supersessionism*, refers to what Soulen and Vlach call *punitive supersessionism*. See Soulen, 30–31; Vlach, 13–14.
  3. Not all forms of ethnic supersessionism expect a literal return of Christ. For purposes of comparison, this article will focus on those views that affirm a consummate state brought into existence by the personal return of Christ. Such views would also, of course, carry implications for the understanding of Christ and his messiahship.
  4. The term *economic supersessionism* was proposed by Soulen and has been adopted by others. See Soulen, 29–30. Also see Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel*, 13–16.
  5. It should be noted that the adjective “economic” in this use carries the meaning of its Greek root, *oikonomia*, referring to an administrative or management order. This must be distinguished from the current, more limited use of the English word *economy* to refer to a financial order of money and wealth. Economic supersessionism refers to a change in God’s administrative order of human beings, from a particular earthly structure to a universal spiritual order. This view of supersessionism is most common in traditional Christian theology.
  6. Classical presentations of supersessionist hermeneutics may be found in: Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1947); and Patrick Fairbairn, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1865). For a critique of supersessionist hermeneutics see Craig Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” in *The People, the Land and the Future of Israel: A Biblical Theology of Israel and the Jewish People*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 151–67; idem, “Biblical Hermeneutics: How Are We to Interpret the Relation Between the

spiritual realities of the church, not in a particular national and territorial future for ethnic Israel. While economic supersessionism allows a place for individual Jews in the church alongside Gentile believers, neither their ethnic identity nor that of any other peoples has any ultimate theological significance. In the consummation, the church replaces the entire multi-corporate (multi-national, multi-ethnic) structure of historical humanity. There will be only one “nation” of redeemed humanity, a “spiritual Israel” which replaces Israel and all Gentile nations. It should not be surprising that economic supersessionism has been criticized as anti-Semitic due to its rejection of the ENT aspects of corporate Israel, and this is not without consequence in the church’s relationship with individual Jews.

Dispensationalism, traditionally understood, sees Israel, Gentiles, and church as distinct and exclusive groupings of humanity, each having its own purpose and place in the plan of God.<sup>7</sup> The church is a new people group that comes into existence in the New Testament as a spiritual or heavenly humanity formed from, but not in replacement of, the existing earthly peoples, Jews and Gentiles. The church is not a “new Israel.” The church does not replace ENT Israel in the plan of God. It does not “spiritually fulfill” the promises covenanted by God to Israel. Rather, its appearance in history is more properly understood as an interruption in God’s dealings with Israel. God’s “earthly” plan for ENT Israel is temporarily suspended during the formation of the church.<sup>8</sup> In God’s appointed time, the interruption will cease.

---

Tanak and the New Testament on This Question? In *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Downers Grove: IVP, 2016), 79–105. Also see, Barry Horner, “Israel and Christian Anti-Judaic Hermeneutics in History,” and “Israel and Christian Anti-Judaic Hermeneutics Today,” in *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged* (Nashville: B&H, 2008); Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel*, 79–120.

7. For an overview of dispensationalism, see Craig Blaising, “Dispensation, Dispensationalism” in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 248–49; also see Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993; reprint Baker Books). What is called traditional dispensationalism here can be further distinguished as classical and revised dispensationalism. The term “traditional dispensationalism” is used by many today to refer especially to what is described as revised dispensationalism. The term *traditional* is used primarily to distinguish an earlier dispensational theology from *progressive dispensationalism* which in this article is being called Redemptive Kingdom Theology. The book *Progressive Dispensationalism* presents this view in comparison and contrast to earlier forms of dispensationalism.
8. Seeing the church as an interruption of the divine plan for Israel is crucial for traditional dispensational theology. For some, it was not strong enough. Lewis Chafer preferred the term *intercalation* to emphasize the absolute disconnect between the church and Israel in the biblical narrative; Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:40. The church has no relationship to God’s promises, plans, and providence for Israel. A consequence of this view is the utter disconnectedness of the New Testament theology of the church from covenant promises given in the Old Testament (although note some modifications of the dispensational view in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 37–39). Traditional dispensationalists also decidedly rejected any connection between the church in New Testament theology and the kingdom of God in its holistic sense. This obviously creates problems for interpreting the many connections to Old Testament promise and prophecy found in the New Testament, see Darrell Bock, “Covenants in Progressive

The spiritual people will be removed (raptured) and God's purpose for the earthly people Israel will resume.<sup>9</sup> All three people groups, Israel, Gentiles, and the church, have a place in the consummation of the divine plan. When all is completed, redeemed humanity will be composed of church, Israel, and Gentiles. Consequently, all three, but especially Israel and the church, are of ultimate theological significance.

Understanding the church as a distinct people group is crucial for the traditional dispensational view. The term, people group, as it is used here would normally refer to an *ethne*, which might seem inappropriate for a "spiritual" people. However, in traditional dispensationalism, while Jews and the various Gentile peoples are distinct *ethnes*, the church is construed as a quasi-ethnic group in the sense that identity in the church is theologically exclusive of the ethnic identities of Jews and Gentiles. If one is part of the church, that one is neither Jew nor Gentile from a theological point of view. This was the traditional dispensational understanding of Paul's description of the "one new man" in Ephesians 2. Jew, Gentile, and church are mutually exclusive identities. One can only belong to one group. The consequences of this are most apparent in the case of Jewish believers. Jews who believe in Jesus, according to traditional dispensationalism, do not participate in the inheritance of Israel. As a part of the new people, the church, they have a separate place, a heavenly place, in the consummation of the divine plan apart from Israel *per se*.

A third way of viewing Israel and the church theologically may be described as Redemptive Kingdom Theology.<sup>10</sup> *Redemptive Kingdom Theology* has also been called *progressive dispensationalism* because of its similarity to and difference from traditional dispensationalism.<sup>11</sup> It is similar to traditional dispensationalism in its rejection of supersessionism. The church as a new

---

Dispensationalism," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 169–203, 211–23. It also creates an identity problem for Jewish believers in the church since it disassociates them from the inheritance of Israel.

9. Redemptive Kingdom Theology, explained below and also known as progressive dispensationalism, is not opposed to a pre-tribulational rapture. But, it would not see a pre-tribulational rapture as intrinsic to the definition of the church as is the case in traditional dispensationalism. For a defense of a pre-tribulational rapture from a Redemptive Kingdom standpoint, see Craig Blaising, "A Case for the Pretribulational Rapture," in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pretribulation, Prewrath, or Post-tribulation*, ed. Alan Hultberg (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 25–73, see also pp. 103–08. For a traditional dispensational defense of the pretribulational rapture, see Paul D. Feinberg, "The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture Position," in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* Ed. Richard Reiter et al (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 45–86.
10. The adjective *Redemptive* is necessary to distinguish this view from the use of the label *Kingdom Theology* by some to emphasize signs and wonders as indicative of kingdom presence. Redemptive Kingdom Theology sees the presence of the kingdom in the application of redemption to the peoples of the world who believe in Christ forming them into a spiritual communion which as such constitutes a present inaugural form of the coming Kingdom of God.
11. See Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 46–54.

spiritual communion in the New Testament neither ethnically nor economically replaces or supersedes ENT Israel in the plan of God. However, RKT differs from traditional dispensationalism in that it does not see the church as a distinct people group, a quasi-ethnic people separate from the ethnic peoples of Israel and the Gentiles in the plan of God. To be included in the church does not mean exclusion from the inheritance of Israel for Jewish believers or exclusion of Gentile believers from God's plan of blessing for Gentile peoples or nations. Jews who believe in Jesus still belong to the people of Israel and have a heritage as redeemed Israel in the consummation of the divine plan. They are in fact evidence that Israel's redemption remains vital in the plan of God.

If the church is neither the divinely intended replacement of ethnic Israel nor a third people group designed to stand alongside ethnic Jews and Gentiles in the consummation, what is it? Redemptive Kingdom Theology would say that to answer this question, one must look to the Kingdom of God. The divine plan for Israel and for the Gentile peoples and nations is a future worldwide kingdom of nations—a multi-national kingdom—ruled and blessed by God through His Messiah on earth forever.<sup>12</sup> In this future kingdom, God's covenanted promises to Israel will be fulfilled and secured forever. Also, in that kingdom, under the reign of the messiah, Gentile peoples and nations likewise come under the everlasting blessing of God. This future worldwide kingdom is a progressively developed theme in biblical theology, which is linked to a future salvation prophesied for Israel and for all peoples.<sup>13</sup> The prophesied salvation makes possible the future fulfillment of Israel's promises. The extension of its benefits to Gentile peoples as well secures the stability of the kingdom forever.

The New Testament reveals two mysteries about the kingdom and the salvation associated with it. First is the appearance of an inaugural form of kingdom blessings after the ascension of Christ and prior to his return. These kingdom blessings are precisely the salvific blessings, which are now granted to Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus. They are granted to individual believers now in advance of the return of Jesus and the full establishment of his kingdom on earth over all nations. The second mystery concerns an

---

12. Redemptive Kingdom Theology does not deny a future millennial kingdom. But, contrary to some forms of premillennialism, it sees the final fulfillment of kingdom promises not in a temporary order but in one that is in fact everlasting. The millennial kingdom fulfills a line of prophecy predicting a future kingdom under mortal conditions as well as the explicit millennial vision of John in Revelation 20. However, the repeated prediction of an everlasting kingdom of nations and an everlasting messianic reign together with John's final vision of the new earth and new Jerusalem in Revelation 21–22 locates the final fulfillment of kingdom prophecy not in a penultimate order but in the final consummation. For a defense and framing of premillennialism that affirms both the future temporary (millennial) and eternal forms of the prophesied kingdom, see Craig A. Blaising, "Premillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 155–227.

13. For a presentation on the development of the theme of the kingdom in Scripture, see *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 212–83.

aspect of these salvific blessings, the equal gifting of the Holy Spirit to Gentiles as well as Jews who believe in Christ. The equal gifting of the Holy Spirit unites both Jewish and Gentile believers directly to Christ and to one another forming a spiritual communion in Christ. This reveals something new about the kingdom: God's plan is to dwell not only with but also in all redeemed humanity. This in turn clarifies what makes the kingdom stable and secure forever. And the appearance of this reality in its inaugural form after the ascension of Christ is what the New Testament calls the church. The church is the spiritual unity, the spiritual communion, of kingdom peoples. It is the spiritual communion and unity in Christ of persons of various *ethnes* and nations. It does not replace the multi-ethnic, multi-national corporate reality of humanity but rather permeates it with the presence of God. It is a spiritual unity that is intended to characterize an anthropologically diverse worldwide kingdom, one in which the particular promises of God to the particular people Israel are secured and fulfilled forever.<sup>14</sup>

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD PROGRESSIVELY REVEALED IN CANONICAL THEOLOGY: ISRAEL, THE NATIONS, AND THE CHURCH

It is impossible within the scope of this article to fully develop the kingdom theme in canonical theology. However, a sketch of that development may help elucidate the points made above about Redemptive Kingdom Theology. It is hoped that readers will take up the challenge to see the church as an aspect of the greater revelation of a kingdom in which the promises and purposes of God are fulfilled in Christ.

#### *The Old Testament*

The divine plan for a worldwide kingdom is first indicated in the creation mandate for human dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26), a plan that is renewed after the Fall with the promise of a future seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). Further revelation of the plan comes with the promise covenant to Abraham, first to bless him and his seed, forming of him and of them a people to be a great nation with a specific territorial location on earth as an everlasting possession, and secondly to bless in him all the nations of the earth (Gen. 12:1–3; 18:18; 22:17–18). Here the ENT promises to Israel are anchored, promises that are repeatedly affirmed in the rest of Scripture.<sup>15</sup> However, the final element of the promise to Abraham—the promise to “bless all nations in you”—expresses a universal intent for all nations including Israel.<sup>16</sup> This intent comes to be described in

14. For the church as a phase of the kingdom, see *ibid.*, 251–62.

15. The biblical data on this is too numerous to cite. For the covenant foundation and prophetic repetition of promises to ethnic, national, territorial Israel, see the treatment of the biblical covenants in *ibid.*, 130–73. See also Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel*, 177–201.

16. The plan for universal blessing is expressed in the Old Testament side by side with the particular

the ongoing narrative as a multi-national kingdom whose rule is to be assigned to one from the tribe of Judah:

The scepter shall not depart from Judah  
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,  
until tribute comes to him;  
and to him will be the obedience of the peoples (Gen. 49:10).<sup>17</sup>

While Exodus and the subsequent books of the Old Testament develop the history of God's formation of ENT Israel, the next major step in the plan for a universal kingdom comes in the covenant with David (2 Sam. 7:8–17; 23:5; 1 Chron. 17:3–15; cf. Pss. 89; 110). To David of the tribe of Judah and his descendant God covenants the promise of an everlasting kingdom in which Israel will be secure and at peace with the nations (2 Sam. 7:9–11; 16). In Psalm 2, the Lord declares that the kingdom of His king, His messiah, His Son (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14), will be worldwide and multi-national:

Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage  
and the ends of the earth your possession (Ps. 2:8).

The kings and rulers of the earth are warned to serve him and delight in him (Ps. 2:10–12) with the promise:

Blessed are all who take refuge in him (Ps. 2:12).

Likewise, Psalm 72 sees the Abrahamic universal blessing channeled through the Davidic King:

May people be blessed in him  
[May] all nations call him blessed! (Ps. 72:17).

Of course, the Old Testament also narrates the problem of sin and the threat it poses to the peoples of the world. Because of sin, the shroud of death lies upon all people. However, sin threatens not just individual persons, but also the corporate and collective dimensions of human life—the character and even the continual existence of whole peoples and nations. Because of sin, the entire human race save for one family perished in the flood of Genesis 6–9. Nations have come and gone on the face of the earth. Sin continually posed a threat to the people of Israel throughout their history—the people

---

divine plan for Israel. It is necessary to stress this point against misrepresentations of the biblical narrative as a transition from an Old Testament focus on a particular nation to a widened focus in the New Testament on all nations. This misrepresentation can be found even in recent publications by otherwise respected scholars who claim to present the theological narrative of Scripture.

17. All citations of Scripture are from the English Standard Version.

who were called to be holy and who were warned that sin would destroy the nation and remove them from the promised land. Those warnings, of course, were realized climactically in the Assyrian and Babylonian destructions of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. The drama of Israel's failure on the national level was the object lesson chosen by God to reveal the gravity of sin. But Israel was also to be a people in and through whom God would reveal His mercy, His grace, and the truth of his covenant promises in national and territorial restoration. Their restoration, however, would require the redemption and spiritual renewal of the people. It would require the forgiveness of sins and a divinely instituted change of the human heart.

Three observations need to be noted concerning OT prophecy as the story of the Bible moves toward the New Testament. First, the kingdom plan revealed to the Patriarchs and then later covenanted to the house of David is restated and reaffirmed by the later prophets. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the other prophets foresee a future Davidic king who will be given sovereignty over Israel and the Gentile nations to rule the world in righteousness and peace forever (e.g., Isa. 9:6–7; 11:1–12; Amos 9:11–15; Zech. 9:9–10). The same prophets clearly predicted that ENT Israel would be restored to be an essential feature of that kingdom, and they foresaw that the Gentiles would join themselves to the Lord and His messiah (Isa. 11:10–12; 49:14–52:10; 54:1–17; 60:1–62:12; Jer. 30:1–31:37; 32:36–33:26; Zech. 2:11; 8:7–15, 20–23; 10:8–10; 14:9, 16–19).

Second, the prophets speak of a coming redemption by means of a divinely provided atonement, the forgiveness of sins and renewal by the Holy Spirit. Isaiah speaks of a coming Servant who will bear “our transgressions” and “make many to be accounted righteous” (Isa. 53:4–12). Jeremiah predicts a new covenant in which God will write His law on the hearts of His people Israel and forgive their sins (Jer. 31:31–37). Ezekiel speaks of a cleansing from sin and the gift of a new heart (Ezek. 36:25–26). Isaiah speaks of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit giving life (Isa. 32:15; 44:1–5) and Ezekiel speaks of enablement by the gift of the indwelling Spirit (Ezek. 36:27).

Thirdly, these same prophets link the prophesied redemption to the restoration of ENT Israel and to the kingdom plan for all nations. The Servant who will bring redemption will not only restore Israel to God but will be a light to the Gentiles (Isa. 49:1–8). In Isaiah's prophecy, this Servant is the coming king of all the earth prophesied in Isaiah 11, the one who establishes righteousness on earth, restores Israel, and draws Gentiles to himself.

### *The New Testament*

The New Testament carries forward and advances the theme of the coming eschatological kingdom and the redemption associated with it by identifying Jesus of Nazareth as the messiah, Son of David, Son of God. Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man, referencing the figure of Daniel 7:13–14 who will receive an everlasting world-wide kingdom over all peoples and nations (Matt. 16:27–28; 24:30; 25:31–32). But he also linked the title to

the prophesied servant who would give his life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). Even before his birth, Jesus was designated by an angel in reference to both themes of redemption and kingdom:

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21).

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:32–33).

The kingdom was the theme of Jesus' preaching and ministry in the Gospels in anticipation of which he called people to repentance. It was what he taught people to seek above all else along with the righteousness that repeatedly describes it in Old Testament prediction (Matt. 6:33, cf. Isa. 9:7; 11:4–6; Jer. 23:5–6; 33:15–16). To enter the kingdom, or even to see it, one would have to be born of the Spirit (John 3:3, 5). And rebirth by the Spirit would only be given to those who placed their faith in the redemptive death of Christ (John 3:14–16). Jesus explicitly described the future kingdom in Matthew 25 as a worldwide reign over all nations to be established at his coming in glory (Matt. 25:31–46; cf. 19:23–30). The commission at the end of Matthew to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18–20)—a commission issued by the one who has all authority in heaven and on earth—is given in light of this previously announced reign over all nations.

The New Testament epistles develop the theology of redemption accomplished by Christ and given as a gift to those who trust in Him (e.g., Rom. 3:21–26). These are the blessings of the forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; 1 John 2:12), imputation of righteousness (Phil. 3:7–11; Rom. 4:1–8; 2 Cor. 5:21), and adoption into the inheritance of Christ (Rom. 8:15–17, 23; Gal. 3:26; 4:5–7). They also include cleansing from sin (1 John 1:9; Eph. 5:26), regeneration (Titus 3:5; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:4, 18) and sanctification in Christ (1 Cor 1:2; 6:11) by the Holy Spirit who baptizes (1 Cor. 12:13), seals (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13), and indwells believers (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Rom. 8:1–27). Believers receiving these blessings of redemption are thereby said to be transferred presently into the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13–14) even though the kingdom in its fullness is still seen as coming with Christ in the future (1 Tim. 4:1).

The book of Acts presents the apostles of Jesus preaching the redemption accomplished by Christ and offered to those who believe in Him together with the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. However, all this takes place with respect to the coming kingdom. The kingdom theme is introduced at the beginning of the book where Jesus instructs his disciples for forty days on the topic (Acts 1:3). At the close of the book, we find Paul preaching the kingdom in Rome (Acts 28:30–31). The question raised by the apostles in Acts 1 regarding the restoration of the kingdom to Israel is

discussed only as a matter of time (Acts 1:6–7). Prior to the restoration of the kingdom, the disciples will be empowered by the Holy Spirit for a mission from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:7–8). The certainty of the future restoration of Israel in the prophesied consummation is proclaimed by Peter in his sermon in Acts 3 in two points: (1) Jesus will remain in heaven until the time for the restoration of all things predicted by the prophets (2) when Jesus comes, that restoration will take place (Acts 3:20–21).

The future restoration of Israel is also affirmed by Paul in Romans 11, the same epistle that clearly presents the redemption and justification of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus. Paul expects that “all Israel,” that is, the corporate people Israel, will be saved when the Redeemer comes (Rom. 11:26). “He will banish ungodliness from Jacob” and “take away their sins” (Rom. 11:26–27) because “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29). The plan of God for Israel and the Gentiles will be fulfilled through Christ, as Paul says in Romans 15:8–9:

For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

Gentiles glorify God in accordance with kingdom prophecies in which they are featured (Rom. 15:9–12), including the noted prophecy of Isaiah 11, the coming Davidic king who will rule all nations on earth (Rom. 15:12; cf. Isa. 11:10).

Elsewhere, Paul speaks of the kingdom as a future inheritance (1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; 1 Cor. 15:50), as that which is coming with Jesus (1 Tim 4:1) and into which the redeemed will enter (Acts 14:22). The kingdom is also seen as future in Hebrews (Heb. 12:28), James (James 2:5), and the book of Revelation.

In Revelation 1, John writes that the redemption accomplished by Christ has led to the present creation of a kingdom people. In Revelation 5:9–10, the Lamb has redeemed “a people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” and has “made them a kingdom.” But importantly, John adds, “they shall reign on the earth,” pointing to the yet future manifestation of that kingdom. The coming of the kingdom is delayed, but the delay will be ended “in the days of the trumpet call of the seventh angel” (Rev. 10:6–7) when it will be announced, “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). Revelation 19:15 foresees Christ coming to rule the nations. Revelation 20:4–6 envisions the commencement of that reign in a millennial order. Revelation 21:22–22:5 concludes the prophecy with the eternal reign of God and the Lamb over the nations of earth from a new and holy Jerusalem (whose gates are always open to Israel and the nations; Rev. 21:12–13, 24–26), on a new earth (Rev. 21:1–2) with all things made new (Rev. 21:3–5). This is the kingdom that will be forever (Rev. 22:5).

To summarize to this point, the themes of a worldwide multi-national eschatological kingdom is progressively revealed and developed from the OT to the NT and is linked in the latter to the person of Jesus, the messiah predicted in the former. This kingdom is a redemptive kingdom, in that its establishment requires the redemption of peoples—Jews and Gentiles—by God from sin and death. Redemption is the key to the fulfillment of Israel’s promises. It is a blessing extended to Gentiles as well. The full revelation of the kingdom over Israel and the Gentiles is linked to the future coming of Jesus the Messiah in glory.

### *The Church and the Kingdom*

The church is not introduced in the New Testament as the completion of the kingdom plan or as a “spiritualization” of its expected reality but as a phase of its revelation. Jesus spoke before the cross of the church as something he would build *in the future* (“I will build my church,” Matt. 16:18), and Ephesians speaks of the church as that which God brought into existence after the ascension of Christ “when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion . . .” (Eph. 1:20–21):

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (Eph. 1:22–23).

The church comes into existence in the present age subsequent to the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ in keeping with a plan that God has “for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:10). The union of “all things on earth” in Jesus is the worldwide kingdom of biblical prophecy. The union of all things in heaven as well as on earth reveals a cosmic, angelic addition to that future kingdom anticipated in Christ’s declaration that “all authority *in heaven* and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18). On the basis of that authority, he commissioned his followers to “make disciples of all nations [on earth]” (Matt. 28:19). Those disciples from all nations—Jews and Gentiles—are formed into a union that reveals to heavenly authorities “God’s eternal purpose” (Eph. 3:10–11), that is, the union of all things in Christ. The kingdom can still be described as a future reality (Eph. 5:5). However, the church is being formed in the present time under the sovereign authority of Christ. And, in that sense, Paul can speak of believers in Christ in the present time as already members of Christ’s kingdom:

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13–14).

What marks the church as a present form of the kingdom is its formation in Christ, under his sovereign authority, through the redemption accomplished by him, in accordance with the divine kingdom plan. The kingdom as an

administration of the polities of Israel and the Gentile nations is yet to be instituted at the coming of Christ. But an inaugurated form of the spiritual communion that unites peoples of the kingdom—of whatever ethnicity or nationality—is now being revealed as the body of Christ, the church.<sup>18</sup>

The newness of the church is due to the fact that the blessings of the Holy Spirit given to those who believe in Christ are said to be new. John 7:39 says that the Spirit was not given prior to the glorification of Christ through the cross and the resurrection. In Acts 1, Jesus, just before his ascension into heaven, declared to his followers that they would soon be baptized by the Holy Spirit. After his ascension, Acts 2 records the giving of the Holy Spirit to believers on the day of Pentecost. Paul notes the significance of this gift of the Holy Spirit for the church in 1 Corinthians 12:13:

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks; slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

The church, the body of Christ, comes into existence by the Holy Spirit newly “baptizing” believers into Christ, joining them to Christ and thereby to one another. And this begins to take place after the ascension of Christ into heaven and exaltation over all authority (Eph. 1:20–23). Further, the Holy Spirit indwells the resultant union filling it with His presence. This new spiritual communion in Christ is the church.

A major question regarding the church and the kingdom can be raised at this point: Does the spiritual formation of Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ remove their ethnic identities so as to disassociate them from the ethnic and national promises of the kingdom. Do Jews lose their inheritance in Israel when they become Christians? Are Gentiles changed so as to no longer be Gentiles from a theological standpoint? What does Paul mean when he says of those who are baptized into Christ that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28)? Or again, he says that Christ created in himself “one new man in place of the two” (Eph. 2:15).

Two considerations may be brought to bear on this question. The first is the affirmation of ethnic diversity in the church given in the book of Acts on the basis of Old Testament kingdom prophecy. The spiritual communion in Christ was seen to transcend but not replace ethnic, national differences. In other words, while distinctions are recognized, such as the “Jewishness” of Jews, and the “Gentileness” of Gentiles, the distinctions are transformed in Christ (a “Christian” Jewishness and a “Christian” Gentileness) and are permeable by the spiritual communion instituted in and by Christ. The second consideration is the New Testament’s affirmation of Israel’s particular

---

18. This is why the book of Revelation speaks of believers already having been made into a kingdom (Rev. 1:6; 5:10) while yet expecting the kingdom to come on earth in the future when Jesus comes (Rev. 5:10; 11:15; 19:15; 20:4–6; 21:22–22:5).

election and future restoration, especially in Acts and in Paul. For, if the particular promises of Israel are yet to be fulfilled by Christ at his future coming, it can hardly be the case that redemption in Christ is meant to remove Jewish ethnicity or otherwise cancel out the multi-corporate aspects of the promised kingdom.

Consider, first of all, the theological explanation offered at the so-called “Jerusalem Council” in Acts 15 for the phenomenon of Gentile believers receiving the Holy Spirit. Pharisaic Jews saw salvation restricted to Jews and insisted that Gentiles, in order to be saved, must become Jews by proselytizing into Judaism and being circumcised. In other words, they could not be saved as Gentiles. However, the apostolic decision was that *God had accepted the Gentiles as Gentiles in accordance with the Old Testament prophecy of a multi-national eschatological kingdom of ENT Israel and Gentile peoples under the name of the Lord*. The prophecy in Amos 9 speaks of the rebuilding of the Davidic house, the restoration of Israel (Amos 9:11, 14), and also of “all the nations who are called by my name” (Amos 9:12). God’s cleansing of the hearts of Gentile believers in Jesus by the Holy Spirit without requiring them to become Jews was seen to be in accord with the plan to have *Gentiles as Gentiles* in the messianic kingdom (Acts 15:8–17a; cf., 11:1–18).

It would certainly have seemed strange to this early Christian church to question as some do today whether Jewish believers have an inheritance in the kingdom as Jews. It certainly would not have occurred to any of those at the Jerusalem Council. The kingdom prophecy which they cited for accepting Gentiles as Gentiles speaks of the restoration of Israel as Israel and could just as easily be cited for God’s acceptance of Jews as Jews (Amos 9:14–15). While Jesus and Paul both clearly challenge and reject the particular way Jewish identity was being promoted by Jewish leaders at that time, their criticism does not constitute a rejection of Jewish ethnicity per se. Rather they point to a renewal of Jewish and Gentile identities in the new creation that is formed in Christ.

Galatians 3:28–29 speaks of being “one in Christ Jesus” which in Paul’s argument is a development of the promise “in you shall all the nations be blessed” (Gal. 3:8). They are all blessed in Christ. However, there is no reason to think that “neither Jew nor Greek” means a removal of ethnicity from humanity any more than “neither male nor female” teaches androgyny in Christ. What Paul is referring to is the equal privilege of justification and reception of the Spirit by faith in Christ which he finds in the universal blessing revealed to Abraham (Gal. 3:8–9, 14, 22), the blessing to be fulfilled *in his seed*. All are blessed *in him*. The “him” referred to here is not Israel but the King of Israel and all nations, who was already being distinguished in biblical prophecy from the rest of Israel as early as Jacob’s blessing on Judah in Genesis 49 and was later narrowed further to the house of David. Jews and Gentiles are blessed “in him,” in that seed of Abraham not because they are amalgamated into a new Israel but because they are being prepared as people of his coming kingdom (Gal. 5:21). Both Jews and Gentiles are blessed in him, the king (Ps. 72:17; Isa. 11:12; 49:6; Amos 9:11–15).

The issue in Ephesians 2:13–21 is not genealogy per se but hostility and alienation. *Both Jews and Gentiles* are reconciled to God through the body of Christ and are thereby put at peace with God and with one another. Both have access through Christ to God in one Spirit. Both are together being built into a dwelling place for God. They have become *in Christ* “fellow heirs.” They are being formed into a kingdom under the Lordship of Christ (Eph. 1:22–23), a kingdom that is yet coming in the future (Eph. 5:5), and they are being built into an extended “temple” (Eph. 2:21) permeated by the presence of God. Gentiles formally alienated from Israel are not being added to Israel, rather Jews and Gentiles are both being redeemed and re-made in Christ, transitioning from an old humanity into a new humanity (Eph. 2:15–16). The Old Testament predicted a unified multi-ethnic, multinational eschatological kingdom at peace. The New Testament reveals how that unity and peace comes about in Christ. Jewish believers and all kinds of Gentile believers are “being built” together in Christ as they are redeemed by him and formed by Him into a new humanity that is united and sanctified by the indwelling Spirit to be a spiritual communion in Christ. In this way, the house which God builds for David coincides with the “house” that the Son of David builds for God (2 Sam. 7:11b–13).

### *The Church of the Kingdom and Its Local Expressions*

What are the implications of Redemptive Kingdom ecclesiology for the church in its local expressions? Here we can only address one issue, which is much discussed in Evangelicalism. Is it biblical for a local congregation to be mono-ethnic in its composition? Or, do texts like Ephesians 2 and Galatians 3 require congregational composition always to be ethnically diverse?<sup>19</sup>

From the standpoint of Redemptive Kingdom Theology, both are possible. One has to note, first of all that a text like Ephesians 2 is not a prescription for the demographics of a local congregation. It speaks of the Body of Christ and the inaugurated spiritual communion that unites believers of whatever ethnic identity in the kingdom of Christ. But since ethnic identity is not just a personal matter but is also a collective reality, which is affirmed in the kingdom, the possibilities for local congregational composition are more varied than some allow. It is certainly possible to have a congregation of people who share a common ethnicity. The NT church located in Jerusalem was composed of Jews, although it had internal subgroupings of Hellenistic Jews, those of the Pharisaic party, etc. On the other hand, it is certainly possible to have congregations that are varied in their ethnic or social composition as some other NT churches demonstrate. The key, as noted in the Jerusalem debate about Gentile believers and developed especially by the Apostle Paul in his letters, is that even

19. This issue often debated with respect to this is the so-called “homogeneous unit principle” of church growth advanced by Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner. For a discussion of this matter both pro and con see “The Pasadena Consultation: Homogeneous Unit Principle,” *Lausanne Occasional Paper 1*, accessed at <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop-1>.

in *de facto* homogeneous congregations, acceptance must be extended to any believer of whatever *ethne* who wishes to fellowship because the spiritual communion of the kingdom permeates all anthropological distinctions.

Consequently, Redemptive Kingdom Theology would affirm the existence of Messianic Jewish Congregations today and numerous churches composed of a majority Gentile ethnicity—not because the church is a particular ethnicity but because ethnicities are redeemed in the kingdom. A gathering of believers of a particular nationality or ethnicity in common worship reflects this reality. But RKT would also affirm the many multi-ethnic, multi-social, even inter-urban congregations as reflective also of a key reality of the Kingdom, the interconnection and interrelatedness of kingdom peoples of whatever ethnicity or nationality. The inter-ethnic relationality will especially be seen in the future Jerusalem (Rev. 21–22) where the nations and peoples of the earth gather in common worship. It is reflected now in many mixed ethnic social settings into which the gospel enters and begins reforming inter-ethnic relationships through the redemption that is in Christ. Inter-ethnic congregations reflect the trans-ethnic nature of the spiritual communion, which is in Christ. Congregations predominately mono-ethnic are to reflect the transformation that permeates collective identity. The commonality of kingdom identity in all these cases means that believers of whatever ethnicity or social group are welcomed into any fellowship at any time because of the unity that all have *in Christ*.

### *Israel, the Church, and the Kingdom*

As has already been stated, Israel is an ethnic, national, territorial reality in Scripture. At times, Israel may exist as a people, an *ethne*, without national or territorial status, but by covenant grant, this condition is only temporary. A return to national and territorial status is repeatedly promised and prophesied in keeping with an eschatological consummation in which a redeemed Israel is a signature piece of the truth, mercy, and grace of God.

“I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O Jacob, are not consumed” (Mal. 3:1).

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jer. 29:11).

This declaration of a future hope in Jeremiah is followed by promises that the Lord will “restore the fortunes” of his people by bringing them back to the land covenanted to them and restoring their national status. The prophets speak of a restoration in which Israel will be fully forgiven, cleansed from sin, indwelt by the Spirit of God, in accordance with a plan to renew all things, a plan which envisions a humanity united in a multi-personal, multi-corporate everlasting kingdom.

At this present time, Israel as a people exists partly in national and territorial identity and partly dispersed among the peoples of the world (the Gen-

tiles). But they are also only partly a people of faith in Messiah and thereby only partly a people who know the forgiveness, cleansing, and renewal that is found in Christ. In this they are like the other peoples and nations of the world during the time of Christ's ascension in heaven. A national fullness for Israel is expected in the future coordinate with the fullness of the Gentiles and the return of Christ (Rom. 11:25–27).

The portion of Israel which is the Israel of faith is, in prophetic terminology, a remnant that signals hope for the whole of the people (Rom 11:1–16). It is also that part of Israel in which is found the inaugurated spiritual communion that connects Jewish believers to Christ, to one another, and to Gentile believers. This spiritual communion traverses ethnic and national boundaries to renew the distinctive personal and corporate differences of humanity while creating a Spirit-formed unity in Christ among the persons and communities so renewed. This Spirit-formed communion in Christ is the Body of Christ, the church, which manifests itself in local gatherings, local congregations or local churches, among the various *ethnes* into which it has penetrated. It is an inaugural form of the kingdom, which is coming with Jesus.

Theological clarity on Israel, the church, and the kingdom is necessary to understand the plan and purpose of God as it is progressively revealed in the story of the Bible. The church's own self-perception in this theology is necessary to avoid both misunderstanding and improper or inadequate relations to corporate Israel and other peoples on earth that are due to supersessionist or traditional dispensational ecclesiologies. Keeping the kingdom central in the redemptive work of God clarifies both the identity and the mission of the church that manifests and proclaims the love of God for persons (Jews and Gentiles) and peoples (Israel and Gentile peoples and nations) of the world.

Until the day that Jesus comes and the nations of the world, including Israel, come fully under his direct administration for a yet glorious manifestation of the presence of God, the church, the communion of kingdom peoples, has been given this mission to proclaim the good news of the kingdom. And in that proclamation, the power of God is at work, to bring salvation—forgiveness of and cleansing from sin, re-creation, renewal, enlivening by the Spirit of God, and sanctification for everlasting life. With redemption in Christ comes the inauguration of a peace among and between peoples, the peace of a kingdom that will endure forever, one in which all the promises of God—for Israel and Gentile peoples—will be affirmed, fulfilled, and established forever in Christ!