

Is the Church Israel?

BY JIM McCLARTY

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You can read more of Jim's writing online
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<http://www.salvationbygrace.org>.

This book is dedicated, with no small amount of affection, to the members of Grace Christian Assembly. Your patience, support, dedication and faithfulness are a testimony and witness to the grace of God.

A friend once told me,
“The proof that God has called a man to preach is that He has also called people to hear him.”

Or, as the Apostle Paul put it,
“Ye are our epistle written in our hearts...”

Thank you for putting up with my rants, encouraging my teaching, and being the dearest friends I have on this earth.

I am privileged to be your pastor.

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INTRODUCTION
IS THE CHURCH ISRAEL?

Okay, so let's say you're clicking around this website, looking at the various topics and entertaining yourself with a few mental gymnastics. Good fun. Then you notice the subject heading, "Is the Church Israel?" Instantly, you fall into one of two camps.

Either you are familiar with the debate surrounding this topic and you have an opinion—yes or no.

Or, you respond, "I don't know and I'm not sure I care. After all, doesn't this seem like a fairly esoteric debate in the overall scheme of things?"

If you are in the second group, I understand that sentiment. Your faith in Christ and your eternal salvation are not dependent on answering this question correctly.

I'm also impressed that you used the word "esoteric" in a sentence.

"So, why bring it up at all?" I hear you ask. Well, whether you are aware of it or not, what you believe about God's dealings with Israel has a lot to do with what you believe about God. God's character, nature, faithfulness, and revelation of Himself are all affected by your understanding of His relationship with His chosen people.

An errant understanding of God's dealings with Israel will inevitably lead to an errant understanding of God, Himself. Let me give you classic example from a current article. In fact, it was this article that convinced me that I needed to address this question.

The author of this article is a classic amillennialist. If you are unfamiliar with that word, I'll take it apart for you. In Revelation 20:2-7, John used the term "thousand years" six times. The English word *millennium* is derived from the

Latin word for *thousand years*. So—

If you believe that John was describing a literal period of one thousand years, during which the events of Revelation 20 would unfold, you are a *millennialist*.

If you believe that Jesus will return to earth prior to that one thousand years commencing, you are a *premillennialist*.

If you believe that Jesus will return to earth after the one thousand years, you are a *postmillennialist*.

You're getting the hang of this, right?

In the Greek language, they have a nifty little device that I wish we had in English. By placing the letter “a” in front of most any word, you can negate the word, or turn it 180 degrees, creating an opposite form of the word. For instance, a person who believes in God is a *theist*. A person who does not is an *atheist*. A person who knows things is a *gnostic*. But, the person who just doesn't know for sure is *agnostic*.

In the same way, a person who does not believe in a literal one thousand year reign of Christ on earth is called an *amillennialist*. In other words, “no thousand years.” They understand John to say that Christ will reign, at least in a spiritual fashion, during a large expanse of time.

One of the usual tenets of amillennial theology is the assumption that God has replaced the nation of Israel with the New Covenant Church of both Jews and Gentiles. As such, the promises made to Israel have been and are being fulfilled in God's dealings with the Church. There is, therefore, no future for Israel as a nation.

Now, the subject of this article was the doctrine of God's election and its application in the Church. The author was honest enough with Scripture to recognize that God first used the words “chosen” and “elect” in reference to the nation of Israel (Deut. 7:6-7, 14:2, Ps. 33:12, Is. 43:20-21, Zech. 3:2, etc). However, led by his assumption that God has utterly abandoned the very nation He repeatedly referred to as “chosen” and “elect,” the author was forced to explain how God could refuse those people. So, he wrote:

“In the chosen text of Deuteronomy seven [6-8], the use of the doctrine of election was to remind Israel to be holy as their God that had

chosen them to be a holy people unto himself [sic]. It was also mentioned to remind them of God's peculiar love and care, and to beat down the ignorance of pride. Election in Deuteronomy seven was both practical and useful in Israel's religion. Its failure to accomplish this end was due to it never penetrating beyond mere reason to the heart."¹

Are you a little shocked? You should be. The author admitted that God chose Israel and declared His particular, special (peculiar) love and care for them. However, the author was also forced, by his conviction that God has abandoned Israel, to conclude that God's election failed to accomplish His purpose in electing them! And, why did it fail? Because the Israelites seemed to have some practical knowledge of election, but the truth of the doctrine never "penetrated beyond mere reason to the heart."

The author's words imply that God's sovereign decrees can be negated owing to a lack of proper application of doctrine. In other words, God may elect some people, but if they fail to apprehend some bit of doctrine, God is powerless to enact the intended blessings that would otherwise have accompanied His election. Then, the article went on to say:

"The doctrine of election had its principle use in the days of the Old Testament to encourage, rebuke, inform, admonish, and comfort the people of God. Again, its failure of use was not due to its insufficiency as a useful and necessary doctrine, rather its failure was found in that it did not penetrate the hearts of the people."²

If his language is sounding a bit vague and confusing, it's meant to. The author has painted himself into a theological corner and he is trapped by his assumptions. He is trying to defend the veracity of God's election while at the same time explaining its "failure."

Of course, much of his difficulty stems from the fact that election is not merely a doctrine; it is God's active participation in the salvation of particular people. God's election is, therefore, neither validated nor abrogated by any ability within the "elect." It is wholly dependent on God's power to save.

Nevertheless, my point in quoting this writer is that his entire dilemma is the result of his presupposition that God has replaced Israel with the Church”

“Israel is but a mirror of the true usefulness of the doctrine of election, in the church. While Israel failed to apprehend and ascertain the usefulness of this doctrine in lasting reform, the church is to succeed in its application, by the new principle of the soul called holiness.”³

If you dissect the author’s verbiage, he is claiming that God elected Israel, but—through no fault on God’s part—the Israelites failed to understand the purpose of that doctrine of election. As a consequence, God had no choice but to turn away from them. Had they managed to “apprehend and ascertain the usefulness of this doctrine” they would have accomplished a “lasting reform.” Meanwhile, the Church’s election is destined to succeed where Israel’s election failed, through proper application of the doctrine and a rather obscure “new principle of the soul called holiness.”

So, according to this bit of tenuous theology, God’s election is dependent on the actions and mental capabilities of the people He had the questionable judgment to elect. The superior will of the Almighty can be thwarted by the inferior comprehension capabilities of the creature.

This author is also arguing that personal holiness “of the soul” is present in the Church and was lacking in Israel, causing God’s election to fail or succeed respectively. Unfortunately, the author failed to see his own theological dilemmas. His very own “chosen text,” Deuteronomy 7:6, states, “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God.” So, how is it that Israel lacked this “new principle of the soul called holiness”? God declared them to be “holy.”

But, more importantly, God’s sovereign election is not dependent on our “application” of it. The only thing God needs to perform His decrees is the power to enact His will. And, inasmuch as He is all-powerful (Gen. 17:1, 35:11, etc.), His choices and decrees cannot fail regardless of any misapplication of doctrine on the part of His elect people.

But, lets extrapolate on the writer’s theory for a moment. If he is correct, then mentally deficient people cannot ever see Heaven, due to their inability to properly apply doctrine. And, we cannot ever feel secure in our faith, counting on

God’s promised love and care, if we can lose our election through the misapplication of the finer points of one aspect of God’s teaching.

Okay, I’ve beaten this to death. As I said, the language the author used is both confused and confusing. But, it’s meant to be. He’s trapped. He’s cornered. He started with a faulty premise—that the Church has replaced Israel in God’s history of redemption—and it led him to conclude that God “failed” in His election of Israel.

I don’t know about you, but I do not find any God in the Bible who is prone to failure. More importantly, there is no language in the Bible that even remotely resembles the author’s conclusion. But again, it was a conclusion the author could not avoid.

Now do you see why this whole “Israel versus the Church” debate is important? Have I piqued your interest? Good. Then let’s look at how men like this author arrived at their conclusions, what they use as their Biblical basis and “proof texts,” and let’s examine what the Bible has to say on the subject.

As a good friend once told me, “It’s amazing how much light the Bible can throw on our theology.”

1 Hartley, Kevin. *The Usefulness of the Doctrine of Election—Our Reform*. Sound Of Grace. Vol. 6 – No. 7. April, 2000 Edition. (Published by Grace New Covenant Church of Walkersville, MD.) Pg. 14. www.soundofgrace.com

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

Historically, God has always exercised His right to pick and choose from among the people of Earth. As the Creator of all things, the earth and everything in it belongs to Him and exists for His good pleasure. God chooses people for His own reasons, to accomplish His own purposes. One of the basic tenets of Reformed Theology is that God elects people “unconditionally.” In other words, there is nothing in any particular people that would either impress or obligate God to choose them. God exercises His own free choice among His creation.¹

God’s relationship with the nation of Israel was based on Him choosing them as a line, or race, of people. They were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the forefathers to whom God had promised special blessings:

For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deut. 7:6-8).

For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth (Deut. 14:2).

But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant: I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away (Isa. 41:8-9).

Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and beside me there is no saviour (Isa. 43:10-11).

“Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen (Isa. 44:1-2).

“For Jacob my servant’s sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name [Cyrus]: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me (Isa. 45:4).

Without question, Israel was called, chosen and elected by God, to be His peculiar people. God dealt with the people of Israel in a way that He did not deal with the balance of humanity. However, the Bible is equally clear that Israel was a stubborn nation (Judges 2:19), always turning to their own ways (Isa. 53:6). They were prone to “back sliding” (Jer. 3:6), and rebellion against the commands of God (Num. 17:10).

God gave Israel the Law of Moses and commanded them to follow it. But, they rejected His commandments. God promised Israel that if they followed His statutes, He would bless them above all the people of the earth. But, if they failed to keep His ordinances, He would curse them and scatter them among the heathen nations (Lev. 26:1-39).

Here are the facts: God chose Israel as a peculiar people to Himself because

of the promises He made to Abraham. God gave Israel, in particular, the ordinances of the Law. Israel rebelled against God's law and He punished them for their disobedience. God scattered the children of Israel and drove them out of their homeland into every nation on earth.

So, we have hit a crossroad, of sorts. God chose a people and then He appears to have abandoned those people. God gave Israel promises and covenants unlike any promises made to any other people anywhere. But, if He has abandoned His chosen people, what are we to make of those promises and covenants?

Has God failed to keep His word? Are God's promises empty? Is God powerless to accomplish His purposes among human beings, even when He chooses particular people?

Or, has God accomplished His promises through another group of people, keeping His "reputation" intact, despite turning away from the original recipients of those promises?

Or, are the decrees of God so stable, so immutable, that even the most contrary physical evidence cannot change the accomplishment of God's purposes in the very people He originally ordained to be the recipients of His promises?

That's what we're hoping to settle, here. Stick around; it could be fun.

¹ For a fuller exposition of "Unconditional Election" please refer to the author's book *By Grace Alone*.

CHAPTER TWO

TESTAMENTS AND COVENANTS

This brief section of our investigation may get a bit technical, but it is designed to demonstrate that God's promises are neither capricious nor cavalier. They are rigorous, dependable, and as stable as God's own character.

The Bible is divided into two sections by a literary/historic division, called the Old and New Testaments. The English word term *testament* is derived from the Latin term *testamentum*. However, both the Latin and English words are a translation of the Greek word *diatheke*. *Diatheke* signifies the disposition of property by the will of the property owner. That is why we all write a "Last Will and Testament" to designate the recipients of our property after our death.

Now, during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-247 BC) a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures was begun called the Septuagint, owing to the tradition that it was completed in 70 (or 72) days by 72 Palestinian Jews. In that translation the Greek word *diatheke* was used to translate the Hebrew word *beriyth*. However, *beriyth* and *diatheke* are not synonymous terms.

Beriyth is best translated into English by the word *covenant*. It essentially means *a cutting or separating*. Ancient covenants, leagues, or agreements were made by cutting animals in half and having the participants of the covenant walk between the severed animals. That, however, is quite different from *diatheke*. One is a dispensing of an individual's property, while the other is an agreement established between multiple people via a cutting or dividing. Using the word *diatheke* (testament) to translate the word *beriyth* (covenant) has served to blur the distinction between the two.

W.E. Vine attempted to untangle these words –

“In contradistinction to the English word ‘covenant’ (lit., a coming together), which signifies a mutual undertaking between two parties or

more, each binding himself to fulfill obligations, it [diatheke] does not in itself contain the idea of joint obligation, it mostly signifies an obligation undertaken by a single person. For instance, in Galatians 3:17 it is used as an alternative to a promise.”¹

As a result of this combining of terms in the Septuagint, *covenant* and *testament* are used synonymously in our English Bible, but they are actually quite different. The Bible is divided into Old and New Testaments, properly denoting the dispensing of God’s will. However, within the text of both “Testaments” we find numerous different agreements, called “covenants.”

This is where it gets a bit tricky. Some of those agreements are properly covenants, entered into by more than one party. But, some of the so-called “covenants” are actually a Sovereign disposing of God’s will, regardless of the intended recipient’s agreement or disagreement.

Spiros Zodhiates sorts it out this way –

“In Classical Greek it [diatheke] always meant the disposition which a person makes of his property in prospect of death, i.e., his testament. This is the meaning when used either in the singular or plural...It should be understood that the disposition of God becomes an institution of God. In the N.T. it means a solemn disposition, institution or appointment of God to man (Heb. 9:16-18), to which our word ‘dispensation’ answers adequately; for the religious dispensation or institution which God appointed to Abraham and the patriarchs (Acts 3:25); for the dispensation from Sinai (Heb. 8:9); for the dispensation of faith and free justification of which Christ is the mediator (Heb. 7:22, 8:6) and which is called new [kaine], qualitatively new in that it is a dispensation of faith in respect of the old, the old being the Sinaitical one (2 Cor. 3:6, Heb. 8:8-13, 9:15).”²

A God-breathed “testament” is the distribution, or dispensing (dispensation), of God’s decided, ordained events and their attendant blessing or cursing. God dispenses His will on the human race and we are powerless to resist or deny the facts, details, rules, or attributes of that dispensation.

Now, the promises made to Abraham, commonly referred to as the “Abrahamic Covenant,” are quite rightly a *beriyth*, in that animals were severed and an agreement was established. However, the agreement was between God and God. Abraham was asleep during the establishment of the covenant, and God placed no obligation or condition on Abraham. Abraham was merely the recipient of God’s immutable promise (Heb. 6:17-18). That being the case, Abraham’s promised blessings are also an undeniable dispensing of God’s will – a *diatheke*, a testament.

So, where the promises are concerned, it is a covenant. However, Abraham is not a participant in the covenant. Consequently, his agreement or failure has no bearing on the continuation or validity of the covenant. As concerns Abraham, he is the recipient of God’s *diatheke*. God sovereignly dispensed His will and Abraham (as well as everyone else on Earth) was powerless to accept or reject what God determined to accomplish.

Now, just so there is no confusion, God did call it a covenant –

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee (Gen. 17:7).

However, the language is very specific. It was God’s covenant (“my covenant”) that God established. And, inasmuch as God is everlasting, the covenant He established with Himself is equally everlasting. God determined to establish His covenant between Himself and Abraham’s posterity, but Abraham was never party to the ritual that established or confirmed the covenant. Had Abraham been an active participant in its establishment, then if Abraham, or any of his descendants who inherited the promise, failed to keep their part of the bargain, the deal would be off. God could not have declared such a deal “everlasting.” It would have been extremely temporal.

Likewise, the “Mosaic Covenant,” when the Law of God was brought down from Mount Sinai, was a dispensing of God’s will on people who were forced to act in accordance with God’s command, regardless of their initial agreement to the terms. Granted, the children of Israel did promise, “All that the LORD hath

spoken, we will do. And, Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD” (Exod. 19:7). But, they were powerless to amend the conditions or remove themselves from the obligation of God’s dispensed will. This is properly a “testament,” albeit one that offered a choice of two reactions. Performance of God’s commands would result in blessings, and failure to perform would result in cursing (Lev. 26:1-39, Rom. 10:5). But, the choice to “opt out” altogether was conspicuously absent. Inasmuch as it was God’s property and will being dispensed at Sinai, it was God alone who could delineate the terms to abolish the deal.

Then, when Christ died on the cross, His sacrifice ushered in the “New Testament” in His blood, “which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mat. 26:20). His last will and testament went into effect at the time of His death (Heb. 9:16-17). This was yet another one-sided dispensation of God’s will. Like the Abrahamic Covenant, there were no “terms” or “conditions” attached. Christ’s Testament went into effect regardless of the reaction of sinful men. The only “covenant” established at Calvary was an agreement between the Father and the Son. Christ’s own body became the blood sacrifice that was torn and cut. But, no individual man passed through the body to establish the agreement. The New Covenant was established between God and Jesus, and we are the recipients of that dispensation of grace, just as Abraham was.

However, the qualitatively “new” testament in Christ’s blood superseded the “old testament,” the Law of Moses—the set of regulations imposed on Israel (Heb. 8:9, 9:15, 2 Cor. 3:2, 3:14). Christ’s superior testament set aside the Mosaic Law—the “old covenant” or “first testament”—for every believer.

Hang with me, now. This is where the language potentially gets confusing. Christ’s death did not do away with what we commonly refer to as “The Old Testament”—all the Hebrew books of Scripture written before Calvary. It specifically abolished the Law of Sinai for all those who have faith in the finished work of Christ. The Law was “added” to Israel because of their sin and hard-heartedness:

Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made, and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator (Gal. 3:19.)

However, its addition and abolition did not alter the permanent nature of the Abrahamic Testament:

And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect (Gal. 3:17).

Some theologians refer to the Mosaic Law as a “conditional covenant.” What they mean by that phrase is that there were conditions attached to Israel’s performance of the Law – do it and receive blessings, fail to keep it and receive cursings. However, God never referred to any of His testaments as “conditional.” He simply dispensed them, laid out the attendant blessings and cursing that accompanied them, and set them into motion. The recipients of the Law were never given the opportunity to agree with, or reject, the consequences of God’s law. They never passed through severed animals to form the “covenant” bond of agreement. The Law was imposed on them and they were instantly under its authority.

Meanwhile, there are direct similarities and connections between the Abrahamic and New Testaments. Unlike the temporary—dispensed and removed—Mosaic Law, the other two are “everlasting” (Gen. 17:7-8, 19, 48:4, Heb. 13:20). They demonstrate an outpouring of God’s mercy and grace. And, they both operate under the administration of faith. In fact, the promise of the “New Covenant” was predicated on God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the forefathers of Israel (Jer. 33:25-26, Mic. 7:19-20, Luke 1:54, 72-73, Gal. 3:13-14).

Finally, the promise of salvation through faith in Christ to the elect of God is an utterly unconditional promise. Christ’s vicarious suffering accomplished whatever conditions stood in the way of our complete acceptance before God. So, we are freely saved by grace, and “accepted in the beloved” (Eph. 1:6b).

To review: Covenants are agreements made between two people, usually involving severed animals, by which the parties of the covenant agree to perform and accomplish their part of the deal. The Hebrew word for “covenant” was translated into Greek by the word for “testament,” which more properly desig-

nates the dispensing of one person's property by declaring his will.

God dispenses His will among His people. He may or may not add blessings and cursing to the dispensation of His will. In the case of the Law of Sinai, God "added" it to Israel because of their sin, promising to bless those who kept it and curse those who rebelled against it. That testament was abolished by the superior testament of unconditional grace through the shed blood of Christ.

God also dispenses His grace, where He freely distributes His wealth and blessings without condition or necessary performance on the part of the recipients. Both the Abrahamic and New Testaments fall into this category, and the two are inextricably linked.

1 Vine, W.E. *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. (Westwood, N.J. Barbour and Company, Inc. 1952.) Pg. 250.

2 Zodhaites, Spiros, Th.D. *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*. (Chattanooga, TN. AMG Publishers. 1985.) Pg. 1679.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ABRAHAMIC ‘TESTAMENT’

No, I don't expect to change the language, or the way we use the terms "covenant" and "testament." It is important to understand the difference, though. We will continue to call Abraham's promises "The Abrahamic Covenant," but we need to be very clear that it was God's covenant, made between God and God, and established with Abraham as an act of grace. Now, let's take a closer look at that covenant and how it plays into the Israel/Church debate.

The nation of Israel came into being as the result of an unconditional promise made by God to a man named Abram, whose name God changed to Abraham. Abraham was the first "Hebrew," a sojourner or wanderer. Abraham lived in Ur of the Chaldees. He neither knew, nor was he searching for, the God, Jehovah. God sought Abraham out and announced that he would be the recipient of an astounding prophetic promise:

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: And, I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And, I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12: 1-3).

That series of promises was added to and repeated time and again (Gen. 13:14-17; 15:5-7; 17:1-9; 18:17-18; 22:16-19; 26:2-5; etc.). The particular elements of the promise included:

The physical descendants of Abraham must become as numerous as the dust, stars and sands, until they are virtually, if not literally, uncountable (Gen.

13:16, 15:5, 17:2, 22:17, 28:14).

Not just a single nation, but multiple nations must come from these descendants and many kings over these nations (Gen. 17:4-6, 18:18, 35:11).

These unconditional promises will continue generation after generation, and God will be a God to those descendants everlastingly (Gen. 17:7).

The land of Canaan will be an everlasting possession of the descendants of Abraham (Gen. 13:14-17, 15:7, 15:18-21, 17:8, 28:13, 35:12).

They will spread abroad to the north, south, east and west (Gen. 28:14).

The descendants of Abraham will be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 28:14).

God will curse those who curse the descendants and bless those who bless the descendants (Gen. 12:3).

They will possess the gates of their enemies (Gen. 22:17).

It is an everlasting covenant (Gen. 17:7), based on the immutability of God, Himself (Heb. 6:17-18).

As we explained in the previous chapter, there actually was a blood covenant struck in the establishment of these promises. However, Abraham was not a party to the covenant. Abraham was not a participant. Consequently, no conditions were laid on Abraham in order to complete the performance of the promises. The covenant was struck between God and God.

However, the promises spoke repeatedly of offspring to a man who was upwards of eighty years old, and whose wife was past childbearing:

After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir (Gen. 15: 1-3).

Even though Abraham had the promise of innumerable offspring, he still did not have the first child. So, Abraham figured that his servant would inherit all that he had:

And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be (Gen. 15:4-5).

God responded that Abraham would have a natural child who would inherit the promises, and through that particular child would come countless descendants:

And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6).

The first time in Scripture that God imputed righteousness to someone on the basis of their faith was when Abraham believed the word of God that, despite circumstances to the contrary, the promises would all be fulfilled exactly as God had proclaimed:

And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? (Gen. 15:7-8)

When God declared that Abraham, a Hebrew, a sojourner with no certain home, would inherit this huge expanse of land, Abraham asked for proof. That question led to the immutable promise—the covenant God made with Himself:

And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away (Gen. 15:9-11).

God ordered Abraham to assemble the elements of a covenant, a “dividing.” Abraham split the animals down the middle. Now, if this had been a traditional covenant, the two participants of the agreement would have walked between the severed animals, agreeing that if either party failed to keep their part of the mutual deal, they would be killed and split as the animals had been. This was very serious business. But, Abraham never walked between the bloody animals:

And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him (Gen. 15:12).

Abraham went to sleep. He was a witness to the covenant making. But, he was never a participant.

And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full (Gen. 15:13-16).

God declared the history of Abraham’s descendants in advance. Before the first child was born, God told them what to expect and how they would grow to be a great nation. Eventually, they would return and inhabit the very land Abraham had been promised, exactly as God had said.

And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the

Girgashites, and the Jebusites (Gen 15:14-21).

So, Abraham received the promises as the result of a covenant God made all by Himself. In the figure of two—a smoking furnace and a burning lamp—God passed through the animals and struck a deal based on the unfailing veracity of God’s own unchanging Self. Commenting on this remarkable covenant, the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews said:

For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And, so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater; and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled to refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us (Heb. 6: 13-18).

We have it, then, on New Testament authority that the Abrahamic Promise is immutable, or unchangeable. It truly is an everlasting promise, and every element of it must be accomplished or else God has told a lie. But, the Hebrews author contended that God confirmed His word by an oath and by “two immutable things,” making it impossible that God was lying.

Moreover, the dispensing of God’s promises to Abraham was without condition. Abraham had no part in the agreement. He was the inactive recipient of God’s “Testament,” which would bring about the nation of Israel. He slept while God passed through the animals. This was not a two-person “covenant,” it was the one-sided imposition of God’s will on the course of human history. And, it continues actively working so long as God is actively working.

Diatheke, translated *covenant* gives the misleading idea that God came to an agreement with fallen man as if signing a contract. Rather, it involves only the declaration of God’s unconditional disposition as given to Abraham in regard to

Israel as a nation (Gen. 13: 14-17; 15:18; 17:7-8; 17:19-21; 21:12,14; 22:2,12). God is bringing about His prearranged disposition in regard to Israel in spite of the fact that Israel has not yet believed in the Messiah.”¹

And, even though God added circumcision as a sign, or “token” (Gen. 17:11), of the covenant—just as he had added the rainbow as a “token” of the promise He made to Noah (Gen. 9:13-17)—the promises were never dependent on Abraham’s performance of the token. There was a curse that would accompany the failure to circumcise, but that failure is never said to negate the immutable promise:

“God enjoined upon Abraham the rite of circumcision, but His promise to Abraham, here called a covenant, was not conditional upon the observance of circumcision, though a penalty attached to its non-observance.”²

Now, importantly, this unconditional promise was passed down from Abraham to Isaac; from Isaac to Jacob; and from Jacob to Joseph’s youngest son, Ephraim. However, the promise of a Messiah remained with Jacob’s son, Judah.³

God declared plainly that His promises would remain with Abraham’s descendants, Israel:

And, I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And, I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God (Gen. 17:8-9).

If we recognize anything at all about this unconditional “testament” it is that God declared it to be “everlasting” and that it had a decidedly “physical” tone to it, referring to offspring and land possession. And, its everlasting character rests on the immutable faithfulness of God to His own Word.

CHAPTER FOUR
HERMENEUTIC METHODS

Now we get into the thick of the controversy. God clearly chose the descendants of a particular man and created a nation of people for His own purpose. God gave them unconditional, physical sounding promises. However, He also gave that nation of people the Law of Moses, and they failed to keep that law. As a result, God punished those people, cursed them and scattered them. So, what are we to make of these “everlasting” promises and God’s immutable covenant?

To make matters even more perplexing, from 70 AD until 1948, Israel as a recognized, established nation was all but nonexistent. This does not mean that Israelites or Jews were nonexistent. Nor did the destruction of the Herod’s temple in Jerusalem bring an end to either the Jewish nation or religion. But, they were no longer a unified body politic. Israel was dissembled and scattered among the nations of the Gentiles.

So, God made numerous promises to the nation of Israel that appear to be unfulfilled. And, any writer or Biblical commentator looking at the world as it was between AD 70 and 1948 had a serious dilemma on their hands. They were faced with promises that God had made to the nation of Israel, while Israel not only did not exist; it had not existed for a very, very long time. These facts have led to the development of two basic positions:

Position one attempts to defend the character of God by saying that all the promises made to Israel have been redirected to the Church—the faithful in Christ of every generation, both Jew and Gentile—and have been fulfilled spiritually. The promised inheritance of the land of Canaan is spiritually fulfilled by the promise of Heaven. The innumerable offspring are fulfilled in the great throng of Revelation 5:11, or 7:4. And, the name “Israel” is spiritually transposed to include all believers, the beneficiaries of the promises spread throughout the

Old Testament. In short, the Church has replaced Israel in God's economy and become the "true Israel" or "spiritual Israel."

Position two contends that there is yet a future gathering of Israel promised in Scripture and that the Church is simply one element in salvation history, but not the whole story. God is fully aware of His promises and to whom He made them. He is faithful to His word and will keep every detail of His promises to the specific people who were the original recipients of the promises.

One of these two positions is correct and the other is incorrect. Honest, sincere, intelligent men have divided over these two positions. Both groups seek to serve God in honesty and integrity. But, they are divided by their hermeneutics.

The science of interpreting literature is called *hermeneutics*. Many types of literature demand a certain amount of interpretation, such as symbolic literature, poetry, apocalyptic literature and some forms of prophecy. However, the term "interpret" only appears twice in the Bible. It appears once in connection with Joseph interpreting Pharaoh's dream in Genesis 41, and once in 1 Corinthians where the Apostle Paul gave instruction about speaking in tongues. It was only to occur in the church when there was someone present with the gift to "interpret" (1 Cor. 12:30, 14:5,13,27).

Conspicuously absent from Scripture is any instruction, or command, to interpret the Word of God. We are told to read it, to study it, and to believe it. But, we are never instructed to "interpret" it. The closest we come is Paul's instruction to Timothy:

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

In the Greek, however, the word *orthotomeo*, translated *dividing*, simply means, *to cut straight*. The meaning of the word passed from the idea of cutting or dividing, to the more general sense of rightly dealing with a thing. What Paul intended was not some form of dividing Scripture from Scripture, but teaching it accurately in order to be approved of God. Nevertheless, over time different methods have developed for approaching and understanding the Bible.

Now, everyone who reads the Bible approaches it with an intact set of *philosophical presuppositions*. In other words, there are some things that we each, individually, believe to be true. And, when we read the Bible we bring those assumptions with us. We naturally lean toward those portions of Scripture that appear to reinforce those ideas we hold to be true. One of the most difficult aspects of Bible study is attempting not to let our presupposed truths dictate our understanding of what the Word actually says.

The language of the Bible is full of symbols, similes, metaphors and allegories. Such elements practically beg for interpretation. For instance, how are we to understand Daniel's symbolic beasts if we do not interpret them? But, whatever interpreting we do must be modified by the whole body of Scripture. Daniel's symbols are most always interpreted by other portions of Daniel's own letter. And, when those same symbols appear in the book of Revelation, we must understand them in light of Daniel's interpretations.

Similes and metaphors do not actually require "interpreting" so much as they require basic understanding. For instance, when Jesus said, "I am the door of the sheep" (John 10:7), even a child understands Him to say that He is the method of entrance, not that He is made of wood, has a handle and swings through a doorway. Jesus constructed a simple metaphor.

He also used similes, such as when He stated, "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed" (Mat. 13:31). He took two dissimilar things and explained the less familiar one (the kingdom of heaven) by comparing it to a familiar thing (a grain of mustard seed). The question becomes, "In what way is the kingdom of heaven like a grain of mustard seed?" However, even that question does not require interpretation. Jesus answered His own comparison:

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof (Matt 13:31-32).

Jesus' point is pretty obvious. The kingdom of heaven starts small and grows ever larger. Good simile, easily understood.

∞ THE ALLEGORICAL METHOD

The Bible also uses allegories. Paul pointed out that the story of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Ishmael and Hagar was acted out on the stage of history in order to teach a lesson to future generations.

Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants...
(Gal. 4:24a)

Paul went on to interpret the elements of the story to support his contention that the Law of Sinai had been done away with in the New Testament Church:

Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children (Gal 4:24-25).

The fact that Paul allegorized those historic events, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has led to a form of Bible interpretation, or hermeneutic, that is called the *allegorical method*. This approach is also called the *spiritualized method*. Following Paul's example, the allegorical method allows an individual interpreter to look for "spiritualized" or "allegorical" meaning behind the words and events that are recorded in the pages of Holy Writ. Even if the recorded words make perfect sense on their own, the "allegorist" searches for deeper, hidden truths apart from the more obvious, surface truths.

For instance, when the "allegorist" reads God's promise, "Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies" (Gen. 22:9), he will likely argue that Jesus is the "seed" referred to in that verse, and His death and resurrection, resulting in His possession of "the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. 1:18), satisfies that promise. After all, Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail

against it” (Mat. 16:10).

So, having found a suitable spiritual interpretation of God’s promise to Abraham, the “allegorist” dismisses the more natural, physical aspects of the promise. Hence, Abraham’s descendants, Israel, never actually possess their enemies’ gates, and the church, through Christ, conquers the gates of Hell. Ergo, the Church must be Israel.

Of course, the biggest problem with the allegorical or spiritualized method of interpretation is that there are no ground rules. So, any individual’s interpretation is influenced as much by their philosophical presuppositions as they are by the words that the Holy Ghost actually wrote. This can lead to all sorts of confusion and, in many cases, even a subjoining of ideas and conclusions that are foreign to the actual text. Lewis Sperry Chafer defined the problem succinctly:

“A method of interpretation which is free to spiritualize is a short step away from an actual denial of the authority of scripture. It may be true that the majority of the Church has chosen to follow this allegorical approach, but truth is not determined by majority vote and so this fact proves nothing finally.”¹

∞ THE LITERAL METHOD

The opposite approach to understanding Scripture is called the *literal method*. This method is also referred to as the *natural* reading of Scripture. I prefer to call it the *face value method*. The *literal* hermeneutic assumes that the Holy Spirit is an intelligent being, capable of conveying His meaning through His choice of words. The Holy Spirit was not purposefully obtuse, nor did He hide His meaning and purpose in writing from His intended audience.

As well, the natural reading of Scripture demands that any interpretation of a passage be dictated by the overall context surrounding the passage. Using this method is a simple way to determine whether an interpreter is on the right track or not. I teach people to plug an interpreter’s “spin” back into the context of the passage and read it through, substituting the interpreter’s idea for the actual text. If the end result makes no logical sense, the interpreter has strayed from the intended meaning.

Let me give you a quick example. Read this verse:

The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force (Mat. 11:12b).

A very popular interpretation of this verse concludes that Jesus was exhorting His followers to pray fervently. They were to “storm the gates of Heaven,” so to speak, shaking them with “violent” prayer and earnest expectation. After all, Heaven can take it. The kingdom of Heaven suffers such violence. And, the only people who successfully overtake Heaven are the people who “take it by force.”

That’s an attractive notion, if you want to rev up a congregation and light a fire under their prayer life. Unfortunately, in context, Jesus was saying nothing of the sort. Here’s the whole story:

And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John [the Baptist], What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear (Matt. 11:7-15).

Clearly, this was not Jesus’ treatise on prayer. In fact, He never mentioned prayer in this context. He was talking about John the Baptist, who was in prison, about to be beheaded. And, the last of the prophets, Jesus Himself, was about to

be hung on a tree. Truly the kingdom of heaven was suffering violence. To impose an exhortation to prayer in the middle of Jesus' words makes the entire speech senseless. And, more to the point, if indeed the misguided interpreters were right, this would be the only passage in the Bible where Christians are referred to as "the violent." That is terribly inconsistent with the tone of Paul's teaching about humility and contentment. So, the face value approach to Scripture can unravel some of the confusion caused by over-reaching interpretations.

Words mean things. That's why God invented language. The God of the Bible is a God who desires communication with His creatures in order to reveal Himself in and to His creation. So, according to the natural approach to Scripture, the most common understanding or definition of most any word, or set of words, is sufficient to convey the meaning that the original authors intended. The literal method also recognizes the metaphors, similes and symbols in Scripture. But, it understands those tools of language in their most natural way, considering the larger context and their particular usage in the entire body of Holy Writ.

Now, with that methodology in mind, let's consider a few facts in our attempt to answer the question, "Is the Church Israel?"

First off, the Church is composed of people saved under the New Testament of salvation by grace through faith, both Jew and Gentile. But, nowhere—not one single time—does Scripture make the clear declaration that God has replaced Israel with the Church. The inception of the Church at Pentecost did not erase or negate the nation, as a people or as the recipient's of the Abrahamic Promises. There is no such language in either the New or Old Testament.

Secondly, we never find in Scripture—not one single time—where *Gentiles* are called *Israelites*. Gentiles were allowed to sojourn with the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, but they were called "strangers" (Lev. 17:8). And, Gentiles could convert to the Jewish religion, but they were never called Jews. They were called "proselytes" (Acts 2:10).

Thirdly, nowhere in Scripture—not one single time—do we read that God has abandoned His people whom He loved and foreknew. In fact, Paul argues just the opposite:

I say then, hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew (Rom. 11:1-2a).

God chose Israel and loved them with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3). You can search every syllable of Holy Writ and you will not find a single place where God recanted His love or reneged on His promises. Yes, He punished and scattered Israel, but He never utterly cast them aside and replaced them with the Church. And, as we will see, with every threat of punishment, with every promise of cursing, with each prediction of scattering, God included equally powerful promises to gather Israel, restore Israel, bless Israel and bring to fruition the whole scope of the Abrahamic promise.

These are important points. If God's Word never refers to the Church as Israel, or Gentiles as Israelites, then we are stretching the bounds of credulity when we impose those ideas on Scripture. Nor will we ever find the popular terms "true Israel" or "spiritual Israel" anywhere in God's Word. These are concepts that must be deduced, because they are never proclaimed. They are read into, not out of, the Bible.

1 Chafer, Lewis Sperry. *Systematic Theology*. 8 Volumes. (Dallas, TX. Dallas Seminary Press. 1947.) Vol. 4. Pg. 266-267.

CHAPTER FIVE
THE NEW COVENANT

Throughout Scripture there are two distinct groups, called “houses,” that make up the nation of Israel. The Northern Kingdom, called Israel or Ephraim, is made up of ten of the original twelve tribes. The Southern Kingdom, called Judah, includes the tribes of Judah and Benjamin along with the Levites who served in the temple. Occasionally, these two Kingdoms are referred to by their capitals, Samaria and Jerusalem. Even as they were forming in the land of Egypt, God saw Abraham’s descendents as two distinct houses, or groups.

The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother: And they committed whoredoms in Egypt; they committed whoredoms in their youth: there were their breasts pressed, and there they bruised the teats of their virginity. And the names of them were Aholah the elder, and Aholibah her sister: and they were mine, and they bare sons and daughters. Thus were their names; Samaria is Aholah, and Jerusalem Aholibah (Ezek. 23:1-4).

Hold on to that thought, we’ll get right back to it.

The recipients of Abraham’s unconditional, immutable Testament were placed under the yoke of the Law of Moses, in order to stress their sinfulness.

Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound, but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound (Rom. 5:20).

But, that law—the Old Covenant—was only in place until the particular

“seed” (Gal. 3:16), or offspring of Abraham, should come and institute the new, superior covenant. Then, for all those who are saved by the gracious atoning work of Christ, the Law is abolished in favor of the New Covenant in His blood.

“Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made: and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.” (Gal. 3:19)

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth (Rom. 10:4).

Now, Jeremiah 31:31 is the first place in Scripture where we find the promise of a New Covenant, or as Jesus called it, a New Testament. In order for a covenant to be qualitatively “new,” there must also of necessity be an Old Covenant that the new is either superior to, or replacing.

In that he [God] saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:13).

It is both logical and Biblical that the New Covenant must be established with the exact same people who were under the Old Covenant. Otherwise, the New Covenant does not directly affect the Old.

Allow me to clarify. Suppose that I instructed my children to clean their rooms every evening. We will call that one of my “household laws.” Now let’s say that I decided to change, or even suspend, that rule. If I went to our neighbor’s children and told them that I suspended the “clean room law,” they might be happy to hear it (and even try to persuade their parent to listen to me), but I have not actually released them from any obligation because they were not under my original set of “household laws.” Only if I share my new plan with my own children have I created a qualitatively “new” rule. They are released from my first “household laws” and brought—by force of my fatherly will—into the new arrangement.

Historically, the Gentile nations were never under the Mosaic Law. It was strictly Israel's covenant. Consequently, if God gave the New Covenant to the Gentile Church exclusively, it would have no direct effect on the Old Covenant or Israel's obligation to the Law. It might be experientially "new" to the Gentile Church - inasmuch as they had never been under such a covenant - but it would not be new in any qualitative sense. It could not be "better" or "superior" without also having an Old Covenant with which to contrast it.

By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament (Heb. 7:22).

So, we would expect that the establishment of a New Covenant to replace the burden of the Old Covenant would be made with Israel, in particular. And, that is precisely what Scripture declares. Jeremiah 31:31 begins -

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.

This fact—that the original recipients of the promise of a New Covenant are “the house of Israel” and “the house of Judah”—has posed an enormous stumbling block in the path of the Israel/Church replacement proponents. Knowing that Christ's vicarious death and resurrection ushered in the New Covenant, they determinedly deduce some evidence (through some tenuous tricks of language, which we will explore later) that the Church has replaced “the house of Israel,” and are thereby the sole recipients of the promise of salvation by grace.

However, they are wholly without any argument or evidence—despite their concerted efforts—to demonstrate in what manner the Church has replaced “the house of Judah.” What a dilemma! So what do they typically do?

They ignore it.

For instance, John Reisinger wrote a very enlightening book entitled *Tablets of Stone* that deals with the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant. I recommend the book to anyone dealing with the issue of Law versus Grace. The book addresses the Ten Commandments in a way that is both edifying and educational. However, in order to avoid any confusion when he introduced

his Israel/Church Replacement Theology, Mr. Reisinger quoted Jeremiah 31:31-32 thusly:

“Behold days are coming, declares the Lord when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel...not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hands to bring them out of the land of Egypt...”¹

That’s the verbatim transcript from John’s book, italics, ellipsis, bolding and all. On the next page, he quoted Hebrews 8:8-9 where Jeremiah’s promise is repeated in the New Testament. He rendered it thus:

“...the time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel...It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out Egypt...[sic]”²

Once again, that’s the verbatim transcript. In both the Old Testament and New Testament quoting of the New Covenant, John replaced the phrase “and with the house of Judah” with an ellipsis. Rather than deal with what God said, and who the intended recipients of the New Covenant are, he simply *eliminated* the people that confounded his theology. But, eliminating Biblical words hardly suffices as sound theology.

The inescapable fact is that the New Covenant, quoted in Jeremiah and Hebrews—the Old and New Testaments—was made specifically with Abraham’s physical offspring, the houses of Israel and Judah.

On the other hand, one of the most popular arguments propounded in favor of God’s abandonment of national Israel is the fact that they failed to keep the ordinances of the Mosaic Law. As a nation, they broke the conditions laid out at Sinai. That’s a fact. And, God has indeed punished them in response. However, the Israel/Church proponents argue that Israel’s faithlessness caused God to utterly cast them off as a nation.

This argument is based on the premise that when God gave the law to Moses at Mt. Sinai, that action established Israel’s nationhood. However, as we’ve seen, God considered Israel to be a nation when they were in Egypt. In fact, He saw

them as two separate nations, the northern and the southern. So, God was not establishing national Israel at Sinai. Israel already was a nation as the result of God's promise to Abraham: "And I will make of thee a great nation" (Gen. 12:2a).

The law was added to Israel because of their sin, but national Israel already existed. Granted, if the Sinaitic Covenant established the nation, it is certainly logical that the abolition of the Sinai Law did away with the nation. But, if the nation existed prior to Sinai—and it did—the addition and subtraction of the Law from Israel did absolutely no damage to its national existence. And, importantly, the Scriptures never state that the Law was any sort of "establishment document" for national Israel.

God's reaction to Israel's disobedience was not national extinction. He was well aware that they had broken the Law. That is why a New Covenant was necessary! It was going to be radically different than the Law He imposed on Israel, which covenant they broke.

Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD (scripture cite).

The law could not produce a genuine, lasting righteousness. A *new covenant* of grace was necessary. And, again—the Gentile Church was never under Israel's Covenant, established at Sinai. The recipients of the New Covenant, according to Jeremiah, were the selfsame people who came out of Egypt and were under the Mosaic Law. That does not describe the Church.

Jeremiah continued on, describing the fruit of the New Covenant. Notice that his words reflect a sense of community, always in the "plural." Jeremiah is not talking about individual salvation; he is describing national salvation.

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall

be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:33-34).

The proponents of the Church/Israel Replacement Theology say that these verses apply exclusively to the Church. Since the Church has replaced Israel, the promises made in verses 33-34 are currently being fulfilled in the Church. What they fail to take into account is the contradiction between New Testament theology and the premise of their own argument.

For instance, verse 34a says, “And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD.” If that is the condition of the Church today, then there is neither function nor purpose for teachers within the Church. Nevertheless, Paul wrote to the saints at Ephesus:

God gave some apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:11-13).

There would be no point to having preachers and teachers in the Church if, in fact, we were living in a situation where every man knew the Lord and no man had to teach his neighbor or brother to know the Lord. But, Paul was yet anticipating a time when we would all come to a unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God. That’s why God gifted the Church with ministers and teachers.

This is a prime example of what happens when theologians apply a spiritualized interpretation to Old Testament verses. They end up creating new theological dilemmas. But, the Bible is clearly not in contradiction with itself, so the interpretation must be in error.

The best way to understand Jeremiah 31 is that God declared a coming day when He will reestablish the nation of Israel. When God has gathered them under

this New Covenant, they will have a relationship with Him from the least to the greatest and they will all know Him—a complete reversal of their former state.

Of course, more damaging to the Church/Israel Replacement Theology are the verses that follow Jeremiah’s declaration of a New Covenant:

Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD (Jer. 31:35-37).

Despite the fact that Israel sinned and rebelled against the Law of God, and He has scattered them, they will never cease to be a nation in His eyes. They are never, ever “cast off” and permanently disavowed by their Lord, despite all they have done. And, obviously enough, if they never cease to be a nation before God, then there is clearly no necessity to replace them - with the Church or any other Gentile institution – in order for God to remain faithful to His promises.

Read the following statements, written by an Israel/Church Replacement Theologian, and then we’ll compare them to Scripture:

“These ‘holy, loved, chosen, redeemed, and called people who were God’s sons’ were made up of people, the majority of whom were lost unbelievers. They nearly all died and went to hell. The very people that were spoken of as ‘holy, loved, chosen, redeemed, called, and God’s son’ were cast off and rejected by God.”

“Israel was chosen by God to be his special nation. Amos 3:2 applies here also. However, the very same people that were sovereignly chosen were also rejected and cast off.”³ (Emphasis added.)

Now read these Scriptural statements:

Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD (Jer. 31:37).

I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew (Rom. 11:2,3a).

In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment: but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth: so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed: but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee (Isa. 54:8-10).

These two sets of statements are diametrically opposed to each other, and they cannot both be true. However, the advocates of Israel/Church Replacement Theology are forced to agree with the first set, despite their clear and obvious disagreement with the continuing (Old and New Testament) declaration of Israel's secure standing in the sight of God. Despite the fact that Israel has been scattered and that their national capital and temple have been destroyed, it does not change the fact that God has declared His intention to re-gather and reestablish them.

The essence of faith is that it views God's word as more real and certain than the contrary circumstances of life. "For we walk by faith, not by sight." (2 Cor. 5:7) We ought to view every syllable of God's revealed word as more real, more rigorous, and surer than any earthly circumstances that appear to undermine His revealed plan. We do not need to construct a theology that explains God's apparent "failure;" we need to declare a theology that promotes God's faithfulness to His word of promise.

Now, let's return to Jeremiah 31 for a moment. How does the New Testament approach what Jeremiah had to say about the New Covenant? Well, the longest single extant verbatim quote from the Old Testament found anywhere in the New Testament is found in Hebrews 8 and it is an exact retelling of Jeremiah 31 and the promise of a New Covenant.

What is vitally important to recognize here is that the writer of the book of Hebrews was himself a Hebrew, a descendent of Abraham. And his audience was (stop me when this is too obvious) Hebrews! Hence, the title of the epistle. When the author brought Jeremiah's promise of a New Covenant into the post-Calvary, New Testament Church, he did not interpret it, he did not change it, he did not say that it was invalidated for Israel or Judah, or that it was to be fulfilled in the Church. Writing to first century Hebrews, who were well aware of the national promise of a New Covenant ushered in by the Jewish Messiah, the author did not "spiritualize" Jeremiah's words, or in any way change their original meaning or context. He simply quoted the promise, in its entirety:

"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them [Israel], he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." (Hebrews 8:7-12)

God unequivocally reaffirmed, after the Ascension and Pentecost, that the New Covenant was established with Israel and with Judah. A Hebrew writer, writing to Hebrew believers, reminded his brothers after the flesh that the promise of national salvation and glory remained, unaltered, even as the promised New Covenant was instituted at Calvary. The simple fact that these promises have yet to manifest on the stage of human history is of no consequence. Christ has yet to return, “the times of the Gentiles” is yet to be fulfilled (Luke 21:24), and the reuniting of Israel under the Lordship of Christ has yet to occur.

But, it will.

The House of Israel and the House of Judah retain the promise that God’s laws will be written in their mind and written in their hearts; that God will be their God and they will be His people; that they will not have to teach every man his neighbor, or every man his brother saying, know the Lord, because all of them in the House of Israel and in the House of Judah will know the Lord, from the least to the greatest; and, despite all that they have done and the law that they have broken, God will be merciful to their unrighteousness.

The unrighteousness of Israel in no way negated their nationhood or promises. It was not the cause of their destruction; it was the catalyst for a New Covenant of grace and mercy. And, neither time nor errant theology can change God’s intention to perform His wonders in Israel.

For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more (Heb. 8:12).

The primary premise that the Church/Israel Replacement theologians use to justify the notion that God has cast off Israel as a nation is their lack of obedience to the Mosaic Law, and God’s cursing and scattering in reaction. But, both Jeremiah’s promised New Covenant, and the Hebrews author’s affirmation of that covenant, pulls the rug out from under their argument.

Another popularly touted premise for assuming Israel’s rejection was their failure to accept Christ during His first earthly incarnation. However, this theory is tenuous at best. While Old Testament scripture genuinely does declare that God would punish Israel for their lack of obedience to the Law, nowhere in the New

Testament do we find the theology promulgated that Israel is cast off utterly for their failure to accept Jesus. Rather, we find Paul's declaration that Sovereign God blinded Israel for His own purposes, so that they would instigate the crucifixion and the gospel would go out to the Gentile world.

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it (Acts 2:22-24).

For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins (Rom 11:25-27).

God will keep His word to Israel, not because of their righteousness or their ability to keep conditions, but because of the promise He made with Himself, to Abraham. God will not keep His promises to Israel on the basis of their acceptance of Christ; He will cause them all to recognize their Savior because they are heirs to the promise!

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for this only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn (Zech. 12:10).

Let's put this in simple terms. If God were dependent on people – any people - recognizing, accepting and having faith in Christ (after the flesh) in order to save them, no one at all would be saved. The mercy and grace of God bring us to faith and repentance, to the place of salvation.

It is no more difficult for God to produce faith in a single person, a group of 3,000 Jews (as at Pentecost), or to a nation. Who would limit God's ability to save few or many? And, who would attempt to limit His ability to keep His word? Salvation comes by grace – whether to you individually or to Israel nationally.

It is the same God, same Spirit, and same Savior.

And, while the New Covenant is presently saving the elect Gentiles and Jews who constitute the Church, it is equally promised to national Israel for their future ingathering and conversion. The New Covenant was prophesied by Jeremiah 600 years before Jesus was born. What is 600 years to God? After all that time, He kept His word, delivered His Son, and sent the Spirit. What is 2000 years to God? Is it any more difficult for Him to complete the work of the New Covenant after 2000 years?

Of course not.

The New Covenant in Christ's blood is alive and active, but it has neither finished the work of calling the entirety of God's elect Church, nor has it finished the work of calling God's elect nation. Just as the Church has been – and is being - saved by faith in Christ, Israel will be converted, they will recognize their Messiah, and they will have a glorious future as God fulfills every minor detail of His promises to them.

CHAPTER SIX
THE “PROOF TEXTS”

Our opinions, views and theology must be firmly rooted and grounded in Scripture. And, to be honest, both sides in this debate believe that they have sufficient Biblical proof to defend their view. So, at this point in our discussion, we will examine some of the “proof texts” that the Israel/Church Replacement Theologians use to defend their conclusion. After all, if the Bible clearly declares and defends their position, this series of articles is of no actual value and my theology is in conflict with God’s Word.

What we will find, however, when we read the Replacement “proof texts” in their proper context, is that not a one of them actually declares either the utter destruction of national Israel, or the replacement of Israel with the Church. Remember that I made that statement, and hold me to it. When you reach the end of this chapter, go back and see if you don’t agree. I am so confident of that fact that I will repeat it for emphasis — Not one verse of Holy Writ actual declares either the utter destruction of national Israel, or the replacement of Israel with the Church.

What we will find is that their “proof texts” require a fair amount of questionable exegesis, and conclusions based on assumption, presumption, and interpretive gymnastics. I understand the pejorative nature of that statement, but I am also confident that it is true.

We will address the most frequently employed texts, in no particular order. I acknowledge that is a pretty one-sided form of debate. Nevertheless, we will present the common arguments in favor of the Israel/Church Replacement theology as faithfully as possible, and follow each argument with a rebuttal.

For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.

Every debate must start somewhere, and the first place that most Replacement Theologians turn is not so much to a verse as to a piece of a verse. In fact, it is just ten words. It is the second half of Romans 9:6: “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.”

The argument typically goes something like this -

The Apostle Paul declared that not everyone who is part of national Israel is of Israel. In other words, within national Israel (at least as it existed in the First Century) there were physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who were in some way excluded from Paul’s version of “Israel.” Paul, whose former name was Saul, was a national Israelite, from the tribe of Benjamin, and he understood that everyone born into the physical lineage was considered an Israelite nationally. So, Paul’s use of the word “Israel” in Romans 9:6 could not have been referring to national Israel. Paul was, therefore, speaking of a spiritual lineage within national Israel.

So, within national Israel there were natural descendants who God does not count as genuine, spiritual Israel. They are cast off by God, and removed from any covenantal or national blessings. On the other hand, there is a group of people who are spiritually secure, blessed and saved by God. These people constitute the “true Israel.”

Finally, inasmuch as inclusion in the “true Israel” is determined by faith in Christ and New Covenant salvation, “true Israel” is not limited to believing ethnic Israelites, but is also inclusive of believing Gentiles. Therefore, Gentiles who believe on Christ are considered “spiritual Israelites.”

Since the inception of the New Covenant, national Israel - the blind, or not-true Israel - has been scattered and removed from any form of covenantal relationship with God. They have been replaced with “spiritual Israel,” an amalgam of Jewish and Gentile believers. This inclusion of Gentiles into the once-exclusive nomenclature “Israel” is possible because “they are not all Israel, which are of

Israel.”

And, just as the New Covenant is higher, better and a more spiritual covenant than the Mosaic Law, which was rooted in fleshly performance, the “true Israel” is higher, better and more spiritual than its national predecessor.

The rebuttal:

The first difficulty with this interpretation is that it is dependent on ten out-of-context words. Replacement theology is also dependent on the introduction of terminology that is unbiblical. For instance, the popular term “true Israel.” If you accept the notion of a “true Israel,” it is a small step to create the concept of “spiritual Israel” over and against the whole of “false” Israel. However, despite their popular use, neither the term “true Israel,” nor “spiritual Israel” appear anywhere in Scripture. Grab your concordance and check it out. They are glaringly absent.

Still, those phrases are used with such tenacious frequency that they have taken on a life of their own. But, if we are going to discuss Biblical things, it is vitally important that we use Biblical language. Once we introduce “presumed” language, we muddy the waters considerably.

Secondly, inasmuch as the term “true Israel” is a non-biblical, theological construct, born out of presupposition instead of exegesis, the definition of the phrase becomes very liquid. Without a valid, Biblical definition, any commentator can impose any meaning onto “true Israel” that fits his immediate need. Most often, then, the non-biblical term is used synonymously with the genuinely Biblical concept of the New Testament Church [True Israel = New Testament Church]. However, defining the genuine Church with terminology foreign to Scripture leads to confusion.

The primary question is: What was Paul’s meaning when he wrote this phrase? Was Paul attempting to construct a “true Israel” theology where the Church inherited Abraham’s blessings and national Israel was cast off? Let’s look at what this verse actually says in its proper context. If the context drives us to anything other than the “true Israel” construct, then the Replacement Theologians are misusing this verse.

Paul’s subject in Romans 9 was Israel the nation, the people he called “my brethren, my kinsman according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:3). But, we need to make a

few important distinctions here.

Abraham was the first Hebrew — or “sojourner” - in Scripture. Still, not every descendent of Abraham was a Hebrew. Nor were they all considered the blessed lineage through which the promises would flow and the Messiah would come. Abraham had a child by his wife’s (Sarah’s) bondwoman, Hagar. But that firstborn son, Ishmael, was not counted as “the seed.” The inheritance of the Abrahamic Covenant went to Isaac, the natural son of Abraham and Sarah. That is why it is so important to understand God’s declaration, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Gen. 21:12, Rom. 9:7, Heb. 11:18).

Ishmael’s descendants did not inherit the promises. So, you could be Abraham’s descendent and still not be counted as “the seed.” You could be Ishmael. But, you would not be Isaac.

Isaac had twin sons, Jacob and Esau. God declared, “Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated” (Mal. 1:2-3, Rom. 9:13). So, you could be a descendant of Isaac and still not be counted as the blessed seed, the lineage through which the Messiah would come. You could be Esau. But, you would not be Jacob.

Jacob had 12 sons. The promises of Abraham flowed through Joseph to his youngest son, Ephraim (Gen. 48:1-22), although the Messianic promise flowed through Judah (Gen. 49:8-12, 1 Chron. 5:1-2). So you could be a descendant of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, and still not be part of the promised seed through whom either the blessings or the Messiah would come. You could be Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, or Naphtali. But, you would not be Joseph, Ephraim, Manasseh, or Judah.

That is Paul’s point! The context makes his argument pointed and cogent. Let’s look at it. Starting at Romans 9:3-4a Paul wrote,

For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites.

The focus of Paul’s discussion was Israelites, his brethren after the flesh. And, just so there was no confusion, Paul defined who the Israelites were:

To whom pertaineth the adoption [the election or the choosing of God], and the glory, and the covenants [to Abraham, David, Moses, and Jeremiah’s New Covenant], and the giving of the law [only Israel

was given the law], and the service of God [the temple service that only the Levitical priesthood of Israel had], and the promises [the promises from Abraham that flowed down through Israel]” (Rom. 9:3-4).

Paul was writing specifically about national Israel at this point, not the Church. A point not to be missed is that Paul listed these privileges as present reality, although he wrote them after the establishment of the Church. That alone is clear proof that the Church did not inherit Israel’s blessings. In fact, Paul’s listing of these national covenant blessings is irrelevant if he did not consider them to be continuous, even after Calvary and Pentecost. Romans 9:5a continues,

Whose are the fathers.

The fathers are Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Here is another vital point. Hang on to this point. File it somewhere in your brain. It will become important later. Only descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are ever considered Israelites. It is not sufficient to be a descendant of Abraham — like Ishmael. It is not sufficient to be a descendant of Abraham and Isaac — like Esau. Only if you are a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are you an Israelite. We’ll come back to that later. File it under “important.”

Continuing with Romans 9:5-6a:

Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. Not as though the Word had taken none effect.

Christ was a Jew, a descendant of Judah. So, Paul is determinedly referencing the Israelitish, Jewish nation. This brings us to the essential point of Paul’s discussion. Paul had great heaviness and continual sorrow over the fact that Israel had not yet accomplished the things that pertained to the adoption, glory, covenants, law, service to God, and promises. But according to verse six it was not as though the Word of God had taken no effect whatsoever.

Paul defense? How did Paul prove that God was faithful to His word? By pointing out that God, Himself, had historically limited and guided the lineage, or “seed,” who were destined to receive the promises. “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.” It is the beginning of Paul’s great treatise on election, and he used Israel as his example. God limited the blessed line, choosing whom He would. That’s important to notice. Paul’s argument narrowed the field to a chosen bloodline within the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It did not widen the field to include Gentiles.

A bit of additional confusion stems from the fact that Paul used the word “Israel” twice in that sentence. If you conclude that both appearances of “Israel” refer to the nation, then you are forced to read, “For they are not all national Israel, which are of national Israel.” But, that makes no logical sense. Obviously, Paul is intending two different uses, or meanings, of “Israel” in this phrase. So, the Church/Israel proponents read it this way - “For they are not all spiritual, or “true,” Israel, which are of national Israel.” Or, conversely, “They are not all national Israelites who make up the true, spiritual Israel.” That latter version is a defense for the inclusion of Gentiles.

But, Paul’s definitions can be easily deciphered but plugging that phrase back into it context. Those ten words are followed by a parallel comparison that begins with the word, “Neither.” The rules of grammar dictate that there is a direct correlation - a contrast or comparison - between the two statements that are joined by the word, “Neither.” Paul wrote:

For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children (Rom. 9:6b-7a).

The numbering system in the Bible was constructed by translators; it was not divinely inspired. The appearance of the number “7” before the word “neither” gives the impression that it is a new thought. But, it is the continuation of Paul’s contrast. You must read verse six and seven together. If you stop in the middle you are only getting half of the point.

Paul’s argument is that not every descendent of a forefather (v. 5) was handed down the blessings. So, they are not all Israel - the blessed lineage - that are

from Israel, or Jacob, the progenitor. Neither is physical birth by father Abraham a guarantee of blessed lineage.

Ishmael did not receive the Abrahamic blessing. Why? Paul goes on to answer, quoting Scripture:

... but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh [as was Ishmael], these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise [as was Isaac] are counted for the seed (7-8).

So, in context, it is clear that the little phrase, “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel,” was not meant to develop the notion that “true Israel” is the Gentile Church, to the exclusion of national Israel. It says nothing of the sort. Paul was saying that God elects whom He will, which he defended in the balance of chapter nine. Within the nation of Israel, God had His chosen seed through whom the Messiah would come. And, while that verse does narrow the field, declaring that not every natural descendent of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is counted in the blessed lineage, it does not widen the field to include Gentiles.

Most importantly, nowhere in the context of Paul’s argument does he come to the same conclusion that the Church/Israel Replacement theologians come to. His comments and arguments in Romans 9:1-23 are focused strictly on Israel, without any direct address or comment on the Church. Paul did not even mention Gentiles until verse 24. But, these are details, and vital flaws in their theory, that Replacement theologians seem to ignore.

☞ ROMANS 2:28-29

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

The argument:

In this passage, Paul contrasted two types of Jews. The one was an “outward” Jew, who sought to keep the law and follow it to the letter, looking to justify himself before God on the basis of personal performance and earned merit. The primary outward “show” of his devotion to the law and trust in his physical lineage was his circumcision in the flesh.

The other was a Jew “inwardly,” who had a spiritual circumcision of the heart. He followed the spirit of God, trusting that faith would accomplish his eternal justification, not the letter of the law. And, whereas the “outward” Jew sought the praise of men, the “inward” Jew sought the praise of God.

So then, Paul’s contrast is between a “true Jew” and a “false Jew.” Unbelieving Israel, the majority of the nation of Israel whom God has cast off, makes up the “false Jews,” while Christians, both Jew and Gentile, are “true Jews.” The Church is made up of people who have experienced an inward change, and are “born again.” That is equal to the spiritual circumcision of the heart.

So then, the Church is full of Paul’s “true Jews.” This is yet another example of Paul equating the Church with Israel in a spiritual sense.

The rebuttal:

The most glaring problem with this interpretation is that is founded on the unbiblical phrase “true Jew.” And, just like “true Israel,” the definition is pliable enough to bend to any theologian’s particular necessity. It can mean whatever he wants it to mean. And, since the members of this exclusive group are never delineated in Scripture, it can easily be made to include Gentiles.

Secondly, while Paul is certainly making a distinction within the community of Judaism between those who are seeking to please God through outward acts and those who are seeking justification by grace through faith, the total group that he is dividing is made up of strictly Jews. There are no Gentiles introduced into Paul’s argument.

Here’s another vital point — never once in Scripture is a heathen Gentile (the Hebrew “gowy” or Greek “ethnos”) ever called a “Jew.” That’s the whole point and definition of the word. There are Jews, and then there is everybody else - the

Gentiles, or non-Jews. Just as you must be a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to be an Israelite, you must be a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah or Benjamin to be a Jew. Gentiles are never designated “Israelites” or “Jews.” Scripture does not mix and match those terms.

So, let’s look at the larger context of Paul’s argument and find out what he was and was not saying. The context is established in verse 17 —

Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God.

Paul’s intended target for these statements was an actual, literal, physical descendant of Judah or Benjamin who was attempting to keep the law. He then went on to describe such people - they abhorred adultery, they abhorred idols, and they made their boast of God through the law. His argument was not that a man could lose his Jewish heritage in that manner, or be replaced in God’s economy by faithful Gentiles. His argument had to do with justification by the law and whether or not simply being circumcised and keeping the law could establish a Jew’s standing before God. Paul concluded that what the law could not do, faith could accomplish. And, that was the point of his contrast.

The larger context finds Paul arguing against the Jews of his day who claimed to be wise instructors of the foolish, claiming knowledge in the truth of the law, though they lived unrighteous lives. As a result, according to verse 24, the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles. Paul concluded that simply having the fleshly circumcision was not adequate to keep them under the blessing of God. In verse 28, then, he summarized that a Jew is not a Jew that is simply one outwardly, but a Jew who understood the fulfillment of Scripture would have faith in Christ, experience an inward change of heart, and walk after the Spirit of God instead of the letter of the law.

The total pool of people under Paul’s consideration was Jewish. He divided them into two groups, but they were two groups of Jews. There were no Gentiles introduced into Paul’s paradigm. Paul’s sole comment on the Gentiles, in this context, was that they blasphemed God, not that they had faith and became “true Jews.”

In Romans 3:1-2a, Paul then continued —

What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way.

The context continues to address historic, actual Jews. Paul went on to write about their need to be converted to Christ and to find justification before God, not through the righteousness of the law, but through the righteousness of Christ. His immediate subject remained the Jews until verse nine. Paul never said that there was a form of Judaism that extended to the Gentile nations. In fact, Paul retained the Gentile/Jewish distinction through every one of his epistles.

So plainly, the interpretive deduction that the Church/Israel Replacement Theologians make must be forced onto Paul's words, not drawn out of them.

Paul knew nothing of Gentiles becoming “true Jews.”

∞ GALATIANS 3:28-29

There is neither Jew nor Greek ... for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

These two verses are used separately and collectively, depending on the writer. Several different arguments, and versions of those arguments, arise from this section of Paul's letter to Galatia. So, we will take them one at a time.

The argument concerning Gal. 3:28:

Paul could not be more obvious in his language, here. Once Christ came on the scene and established the New Covenant, the historic distinction between Israel and the rest of the world was done away with. God's people were longer identified by ethnicity. “There is neither Jew nor Greek ... for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Inasmuch as God established the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai and abolished the nation when He did away with the Law, when the term Israel is used in New Testament epistles, it cannot be referring to the nation. Thus, it is referring to the

Church of the redeemed — the very people Paul addressed in his epistle to the Galatians — uniting them in Christ and eliminating any distinction. National identity is of no value. In the body of Christ — the Church — there is neither Jew nor Gentile. And, if there is no longer any national identity, all such designations being erased in Christ, that is further proof that God is no longer involved in any nation called Israel. So, the promises made to Israel must flow to God’s “true Israel” — the Church.

The rebuttal:

Once again, the context of Paul’s dissertation will render that argument moot. In order to make their argument, the advocates of Replacement theology purposefully truncate Paul’s own words. Here is Galatians 3:28 in its entirety —

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Paul did not simply argue for unity between Jews and Greeks. He also eliminated any distinction between a bond slave and a free man, or between male and female believers. Now, historically, experientially, and factually, no person’s social status or gender ever changed as the result of coming to faith in Christ. In the first century, slaves were not automatically set free when they professed Christ. And, it remains that way today. A pauper is still a pauper. A president is still a president. A man is still a man. A woman is still a woman. Christianity does not result in unisexuality.

But, if the Replacement Theologians are correct that Paul was defending the notion that God was finished with national Israel, then He must also be finished with the prior state of the other contrasted pairs. God must have done away with social and sexual distinctions. But, that is simply not the case. Paul’s point was that, concerning salvation, God is “no respecter of persons.” (Acts 10:34) We can see it in the larger context. Paul stated back in verse 26 —

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26).

There is no advantage to being Jewish or Gentile, free or bond, male or female, when it comes to salvation by grace through faith. Every person, regardless of heritage, status, or gender has access to the throne of grace. All are equally counted as God's children through Christ.

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:27-28).

Paul was promoting unity in the Church, but he said nothing in this context to promote the destruction of Israel. Again, the Israel/Church Replacement Theologians start with a deduction, drawn from pieces of a verse. But, when the words are placed back in their context, they actually mitigate against the fallacious deduction.

The argument for verse 29:

And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

This is as decisive a statement as we need to prove that the Church has appropriated the blessings of Abraham. In fact, Gentiles in Christ are plainly called "Abraham's seed." The promises to Abraham were made to him, "and to thy seed after thee." (Gen. 17:8) So, Abraham's promises were intended for the Church. The Church is comprised of "heirs according to the promise," they are "Abraham's seed," and thereby the true, spiritual Israel.

Also, this verse undoubtedly spiritualized the lineage of Abraham, effecting eliminating any physical "blessed lineage." The promises of Abraham in the Old Testament are fulfilled in the Church. And, if Paul was willing to spiritualize "the seed," then "the promise" must also be spiritual in nature. Hence, the land promise, the innumerable seed promise, the gates of the enemy promise, et al. are meant to be understood in a spiritual sense, not a physical sense.

For instance, the promise made to Abraham of an eternal land inheritance [despite the fact that God was very specific about the physical borders of the land, the rivers in the land, and precisely which land Abraham would inherit] is replaced by the promise of Heaven.

We can better grasp this change from inferior “type” to superior fulfillment by means of a parable told to me by a preacher of Israel/Church Replacement theology. If there was a father who promised his son a beat up, raggedy 1975 box-type Honda Civic and the boy walked out into the driveway to find a brand new “Year 2000” Corvette, did the father fail to keep his promise? No! The father kept his word by giving the boy something superior to what he had initially promised.

In a similar manner, God promised Israel, the nation, a physical land inheritance, but He “upped the ante” with the superior offer of Heavenly destiny by faith in His Son. But, there’s more! God initially referred to His people as “Israel,” but then He made them something far superior by making them “the Church,” which will receive the spiritual blessings of which Abraham’s promises were a mere “type and shadow.” God is not guilty of not keeping His promises; He kept them in a far superior way.

The rebuttal:

First, let me address this pastor’s parable. If his story were true to his theology, the father would have promised his son a beat up car, and kept the promise by giving a Corvette to some other boy, in a distant city, who wasn’t even a relative, of whom the boy had no knowledge. The Israel Replacement Theologians want us to believe that when God told Abraham, “I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession: and I will be their God.” (Gen. 17:8) what He actually meant was, “I am offering people who are not your descendents, who won’t even be on earth for a couple thousand years, an eternal residence in Heaven.” And, despite the fact that God repeated the land promise to the forefathers, generation after generation, He never saw fit to explain Himself, or help them understand that they were not the actual heirs of any actual land.

To understand Paul’s intended meaning for Galatians 3:29, we have to get a

quick overview of the book of Galatians. Judaizers (Jews who attempted to subvert Paul's theology of grace and require Gentile converts to Christianity to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses) had infiltrated the church in Galatia. The whole of Paul's letter is an argument against the Judaizers.

Chapter 3 starts with Paul's cry, "O, foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?" As he built his argument against the Law of Moses, in favor of justification by faith through grace, Paul introduced the person of Abraham.

Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness (Gal. 3:6).

Paul beckoned to the deceived church, challenging them to mimic the faith of Abraham, which faith God would accredit as personal righteousness. Then, in verse 8, Paul introduced "the promise," to which he would refer later.

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed (Gal. 3:8).

That's the specific promise that Paul dealt with in this passage — that the heathen, Gentile nations would be justified by faith. He was not addressing the land promise, the gates of their enemies promise, or any other physical aspect of Abraham's Covenant. Paul was declaring the fulfillment of one specific promise.

So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. (Gal. 3:9).

God promised Abraham that through his descendents would come a blessing that would spread to all the heathen nations, justifying them by the same means that Abraham had been justified - faith. Paul was very specific with his language. Verses 13 and 14 read —

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse

for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:13-14).

It is explicitly clear. Christ's vicarious sacrifice was the fulfillment of the promised blessing to all nations. The "blessing of Abraham" came to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ. And, "the promise" is specifically the receiving of the Spirit through faith. So, does that do away with the balance of Abraham's covenant? Does that fulfill the entirety of God's words to him? Nope.

With that understanding, we can read verse 29 easily.

If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:29).

If you belong to Christ, you share a common faith with Abraham, Jew or Gentile, and have inherited the promise of salvation by grace through Abraham-like faith. This is very consistent Pauline theology —

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? When he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith (Rom. 4:8-13).

Now, admittedly, Paul's use of the term "seed," which is synonymous with "offspring" or "descendent," is a spiritualization of the term. It is similar to Paul's use of the term "father" to denote someone who is an evangelist, establishing others in the faith.

For thou ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15).

The imagery of "birthing" and "offspring" is common to Scripture. But, Paul's designation of Gentiles as offspring of Abraham does not create a "spiritual Abrahamic race," nor does it eliminate the nation of Israel. Paul did not do away with a single syllable of Israel's physical promises or blessings. All he did was bring heathens, by grace, into the covenant that Israel already possessed.

So, Galatians 3:28-29 is Paul's declaration that the promised blessing is fulfilled in Christ to all nations, to all strata of people, and to both men and women. In Christ, there is no difference. That's the sum of his argument. And, it is of great significance that Paul did not say that this blessing to all nations — the coming of the Spirit - negates the land promises, the future restoration of Israel, or even the reign of Jesus on David's throne in Jerusalem. Paul did not use the fulfilled promise to preach the destruction of national Israel, or their replacement by the Church --- so, neither should we.

∞ GALATIANS 6:16

And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

The argument:

In this verse, Paul equated "as many as walk according to this rule" with "the Israel of God." In the preceding verse, Paul stated —

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncir-

cumcision, but a new creature.

So, as many as walk according the rule that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any eternal merit, those people have the blessings of peace and mercy upon them because they are “the Israel of God.” Furthermore, unbelieving Israel continued to believe in their circumcision as a point of justification with God, so they are removed from this designation. Consequently, the Church of Jews and Gentiles, who walk by that rule, become “the Israel of God.”

Furthermore, the Greek word, *kai*, translated *and*, is equally translated *even*. So verse 16 ought to read -

And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, even upon the Israel of God.

The interpretation of *kai* as *even* makes it clear that Paul was drawing a direct correlation between those who profess faith in Christ and “the Israel of God.” Ergo, the Church is Israel.

The rebuttal:

The heart of the controversy stems from that little Greek conjunction *kai*. It appears three times in this verse, and each time the King James Version translates it *and*.

And [kai] as many as walk according to this rule, peace on them, and [kai] mercy, and [kai] upon the Israel of God.

It is true, that in the Greek language *kai* has more than one use, and more than one definition. Strong's dictionary says of *kai*—

“Apparently, a primary particle, having a copulative and sometimes also a cumulative force; and, also, even, so then, too, etc.; often used in connection (or composition) with other particles or small words.”¹

Normally, the science of language translation requires that one resort to a

secondary meaning, such as “even,” only when the primary meaning makes no sense. However, in this verse the primary meaning - “and” - makes perfect sense. To translate *kai* any other way would require a textual or exegetical reason to do so. Nevertheless, the NIV translates Gal. 6:16:

Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, *even* to the Israel of God.
(Emphasis added)

Every other reputable translation renders it *and*. It is an inexplicably odd bit of translating, but the NIV gave the Israel/Church Replacement crowd the proof they needed to jump to all sorts of conclusions.

By the way, this is also the only verse that the Israel/Church camp has in their attempt to prove that the New Testament actually applies the term “Israel” to the Church. If this verse falls, the whole house of cards tumbles down. And, their entire view stands or falls on the proper interpretation of one small Greek conjunction.

But, in reality Paul was simply closing his epistle by implementing the common form of Hebrew blessing. Such blessings also appear in the Psalms. For instance -

Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel (Ps. 128:4-6).

Most prayers in the Hebrew prayer book close with that phrase, “peace upon Israel.” In fact, we have a very recent example of such a prayer. Yitzhak Rabin and Chairman Yasir Arafat of the PLO met on the Whitehouse lawn to sign a peace treaty on Monday, Sept. 13, 1993. They shook hands and pledged to return the ancient lands of Judea and Samaria to a time when “the land had rest from war” (Joshua 11:23). On the lawn, Rabin recited the seasons of Ecclesiastes and declared, “The time for peace has come.” Then, he closed with a line from the Hebrew prayer book: “May He who brings peace to His universe bring peace to us

and to all Israel.”

Certainly, no one hearing Rabin's prayer would interpret it to mean that the people gathered on the White House lawn had become “all Israel.” That's absurd logic. Yet, it is the same logic that is applied to Gal. 6:16.

Rabin prayed to the God who made an immutable covenant with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He prayed that God would bring peace between his nation and the Gentile nations that surround him. But, in keeping with the tradition of Hebrew prayers, he closed with a prayer for the peace of Israel, nationally.

If we read Gal. 6:16 the same way, we realize that Paul was making a distinction between two groups, both of whom were believers. First were the “them,” which referred to the Gentile believers Paul had been writing to and about. The second group was “the Israel of God,” who were Jewish believers, or the Remnant of Israel, the genuine Jews of Romans 2:28-29. This is very consistent with the tone and tenor of the entire Galatian letter, where the Jew/Gentile, law/grace issue was Paul's central point.

An important theological reality is that Paul never said anything in any of his epistles about Gentiles becoming “spiritual Israelites.” In fact, proponents of this view consistently fail to produce a single clear and obvious example of New Testament writing where the Church is called “Israel.” And, for such an incredibly important paradigm shift, we would expect it to be mentioned clearly at least once.

Gal. 6:16 is Paul's prayer of blessing on all those who follow after Christ, from the Gentiles and from Israel. He maintained the distinction that permeates his epistles, but he prayed for God's hand of blessing on them both. To conclude more than that from Paul's words is to force him into a theology that he never espoused.

In Chafer's Systematic theology, he wrote —

The use of the passages [Gal. 6:16 & Rom. 9:6] to prove Israel and the Church to be the same is deplored in the light of the truth which these Scriptures declare.²

I'll use more gentle language. When we hunt for something in a passage that

is not there, we are prone to miss the truth that actually is there.

The notion that Paul was somehow identifying the Church as the true Israel, and that the promises made to Israel are fulfilled in the New Testament Church are radical conclusions that cannot be drawn from this text. They are forced onto the text and balanced on the fine needlepoint of one small Greek conjunction.

The Israel/Church Replacement theology stands or falls on this text. Without it, they have no example of the Church ever once referred to as Israel.

☞ I P E T E R 2 : 9

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

The argument:

In Exodus chapter 19, starting with verses 5, we find a wonderful promise to the nation of Israel, via Moses -

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

Then, in 1 Peter 2:9 we read —

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Peter purposefully used the same language as Moses, declaring that the Church had, in fact, become the fulfillment of a promise made specifically to Israel. And, if the Church has inherited Israel's promises, then they must be the

“true Israel.” And national Israel — the original recipients of this promise — have been done away with.

This verse creates a one-for-one direct line between Old Testament Israel and the New Covenant Church.

The rebuttal:

One singularly important facet of Peter’s epistle that is universally ignored by the Replacement proponents is that he was not writing to Gentiles. Peter clearly designated his intended audience—Jewish believers.

Peter was a bishop in the Church at Jerusalem, along with John and James. His primary ministry was to the circumcised — the Jews.

But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me [Paul], as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And, when James, Cephas [Peter], and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision (Gal. 2:7-9).

In fact, Peter initially resisted the idea of Gentile inclusion into the Church. He had to receive a vision from God, with the instruction, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.” (Acts 10:15) Then, for the first time in his life, Peter entered the house of Gentile—Cornelius. He told them:

Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation: but God hath shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean (Acts 10:28).

When Peter preached to that household, the Holy Spirit fell and the Jews who were with Peter “were astonished...because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 10:45). When Peter returned to

report this new development to John, James and the apostles, he was castigated for going in among the Gentiles. Obviously, the early Jewish church was not expecting Gentile inclusion in their promised blessings.

Now, Peter was the speaker on the day of Pentecost when the Church was established and 3000 Jews were converted. By the first century, the Jews were scattered all over middle Asia and parts of Europe. This scattering of the Jews was known as the “Diaspora.” That was a very specific term that referred to Jews living outside of the area of Judah, out among the Gentiles. However, in keeping with the Mosaic Law, any Jews capable of travel were required, three times a year, to journey to Jerusalem for the feast days.

Well, it was at one particular Feast of Weeks, Pentecost, that Peter preached the message that brought about the inception of the Church. His audience was identified thusly—

And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven (Acts 2:5).

Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:9-11).

These were “devout Jews,” the “Diaspora,” scattered among the heathen nations, so much so that they spoke languages other than Hebrew and Greek. Luke took decisive effort to delineate them for us.

Now, when Peter sat down to pen his epistle, he wrote to a very specific audience, the very same audience that had gathered and been converted at Pentecost. He addressed his letter to them.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers [Diaspora] scattered

throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied (1 Peter 1:1-2).

Peter was writing to the elect, chosen by the foreknowledge of God, converted Jews. He was not writing to Gentiles or unbelieving Jews. Gentiles were not his focus; nor were they the intended audience for this letter. In verse five of chapter two, Peter continues to define his target audience:

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:5).

Then he used especially Jewish terminology, quoting a bit of the Hebrew Old Testament:

Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded (1 Pet. 2:6).

A stone laid in "Sion"(Jerusalem) would be of little comfort, or significance, to Gentiles.

Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:7-9).

Then, just so there was no confusion, Peter reached back into Hosea and

identified his audience once and for all:

Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers [Diaspora] and pilgrims... (1 Pet. 2:10-11a).

While that language meant nothing to Gentiles, it was dearly held language among Israelites—

And I will sow her [Israel] unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people: and they shall say, Thou art my God (Hos. 2:23).

Israel was well aware of the prophecy of Hosea, both of their scattering and lack of mercy, and their ingathering and return to mercy. As they were named, “Not My People,” they were also promised to be renamed “My People.”

Those were the people Peter was writing to. His references, his history, and his specific introduction make it certain. Peter’s point, then, was not that the Gentiles had usurped Israel’s promises, or that God was finished with the nation of Israel. Rather, Peter declared that Jewish believers were fulfilling promises that were made to Israel.

The believing “Diaspora” had become “a royal priesthood.” While generation after generation of Israelites had longed for the Messiah, the Jews who lived as Peter wrote were, “a chosen generation.” Being set aside for God’s use, as a testimony to God’s grace among the Jews, they were “a holy nation.” (By the way, Gentiles are not a nation; they are many nations. Only Israel is referred to in singular national status.) All that being true, they were indeed “a peculiar people,” different from all the people of earth. They were special, beloved of God, faithful to His Son, and experiencing the blessings that were promised to Israel in the Law of Moses.

Lastly, let’s quickly see the end of this passage of 1 Peter—

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers [Diaspora] and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation (1 Pet. 2:11-12).

Peter was not beseeching Gentiles to walk honestly among the Gentiles. Gentiles living among Gentiles were not strangers and pilgrims. The Jewish “Diaspora,” strangers amid Gentile nations, were reckoned as “evildoers.” But, Peter admonished them to overcome such hatred with good works, and bring glory to God. Even without our great weight of contextual evidence, that verse alone ought to be enough to convince us that Peter was not writing to Gentiles.

Once again, the argument from the Israel/Church Replacement Theologians falls apart in Peter’s context. Peter wrote to converted Jews. He was not arguing that the Church had attained Israel’s promises, thereby replacing Israel as God’s chosen people. To come to such a conclusion is to ignore Peter’s context, argument, and intended audience.

∞ MATTHEW 21:43

Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

The argument:

Jesus Himself announced to the Pharisees, the leaders of Israel, that the kingdom of God would be taken away from them and be given to another nation. The nation that God replaced Israel with will bring forth the fruit of the kingdom. The only people capable of bringing forth such fruit are born again, spiritually indwelt Christians. So, Christ declared that the kingdom of God would be taken from Israel and given to the Church. The Church inherited the promised Kingdom, which fulfills the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, erasing any need or warrant for a future restoration of Israel, or a literal, earthly kingdom.

Isaiah 66:8 supports this interpretation -

Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.

The church is “a nation born at once,” instituted miraculously at Pentecost. The newly formed Church/nation is then the recipient of Jesus’ promise of kingdom inheritance, to the exclusion of national Israel.

The rebuttal:

Allegorical, or “spiritualized,” language is always confusing. And, most often, it ignores the context and intended recipients of the words in print. If the allegorists are correct in calling the Church a “nation,” then Paul’s theology gets very muddy. For instance, in Romans 10:19, Paul argued that God would provoke the Jews to envy via a people who were “no nation.” And, the Church—particularly the Gentile Church—is exactly that, “no nation.” It is an entity comprised of individuals from all nationalities. And, very importantly, Scripture never once refers to the Church as a nation, despite the allegorical attempts to make it so.

Old Testament history draws a very clear distinction between Israel and the Gentiles. Israel is called a nation (singular), though it is divided into two “houses,” comprised of multiple “tribes” or “families.” When God scattered the northern tribes, after the Assyrian captivity, they were strewn among the “nations” (plural). Every racial, ethnic, or religious group of people who were not part of Israel was referred to as Gentile, heathen nations (plural).

When Jesus was speaking in Matthew 21:43, the Church was a non-entity. Jesus was speaking prior to His crucifixion and the introduction of the Holy Spirit, which established the Church. His statement to the Pharisees would have been amazingly oblique if He were telling them that the kingdom was going to be wrenched from them and given to a future gathering of believing Jews and Gentiles who were mysteriously formed into a “nation.” They would have no reference point for comprehending His words.

It is important at this juncture to quickly define the “kingdom” Jesus spoke

of. He used “kingdom” language frequently in His ministry, but He never took the time to clarify or redefine “the kingdom” for His Jewish audience. The First Century Jewish nation was keenly aware of the prophecies concerning a coming, literal, earthly kingdom, promised to Israel, when David’s greater Son would sit on His throne and establish His dominion over the whole world. That is the kingdom they expected. If Jesus were, indeed, the Messiah, they expected Him to reign as a King and establish their national superiority.

Unfortunately for Israel, Jesus did nothing of the sort during His first incarnation, despite their attempts to crown Him at His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and the providentially significant sign above His crucified head — “The King of the Jews.”

So, what of the kingdom promises? Were they merely spiritual in nature, currently fulfilled by Christ sitting at the right hand of God, reigning over His people, the Church?

Several problems. Not the least of these is that no theologian has been able to explain how the throne in Heaven that Christ sits on is fit to be called “David’s Throne.” David never ruled in Heaven, and never from that throne. David ruled from Jerusalem on a physical, earthly throne. But, all of the kingdom prophecies use that same physical language when they speak of Jesus reigning on earth, on David’s throne, ruling over the Gentile nations in general, and Israel in particular.

Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel (Isa. 9:7-8).

He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:33).

It is significant that the angel of God spoke those words recorded in Luke. Jesus was announced to be the penultimate King of Israel, occupying David’s

throne, ruling over Jacob/Israel.

That reminds me—while the Replacement Theologians love to equate the Church with Israel, and their attendant blessings, they never refer to the Church as Jacob, the heel catcher and supplanter. Why? Because Jacob is the name that God uses for Israel when He speaks to them in judgment, or reminds them of their true nature. Jacob and Israel are one and the same person, and God addresses them nationally as both Israel and Jacob. So, how come they are the Church when they are Israel and not when they are Jacob? And, where exactly is the textual evidence that God considers the Church to be Jacob? After all, the angel Gabriel announced Christ's kingdom over Jacob. If this is strictly spiritual language, referring to Christ on His throne ruling the Church, then the Church absolutely must provide some proof that they are, in fact, Jacob.

But, of course, they cannot.

The typical answer from a Replacement Theologian would be that God did actually intend to establish a physical kingdom, and Jesus offered the Jews an opportunity to fulfill all those promises, but they rejected Him as their King, and thereby rejected the Kingdom. As a result, Jesus did away with the physical aspects of the Kingdom promises, replaced them with superior spiritual aspects, took the kingdom from Israel, and promised it to the future Gentile “nation” of the Church.

And, conveniently, that brings us back to Matthew 21:43.

Jesus' words are best understood in their most natural sense, the way His audience would have understood them. Jesus declared that the kingdom — the future, earthly, literal kingdom that would establish and exalt Israel — was taken away from that generation of Israel and would be established in a future generation of the nation, which would bring forth the fruits appropriate for such an honor. The promise of a kingdom was not removed from Israel; it was simply taken from the Jews of Jesus' day in favor of a future generation. With that understanding, Jesus' words become a guideline for understanding all of the as yet unfulfilled promises to Israel.

When Christ returns to Earth, He will gather and establish Israel in the generation contemporary with His return. He will rule in Jerusalem, from David's

throne. That generation will see Christ as the slain Messiah and weep for Him, looking on Him “whom they have pierced” (Zech. 12:10, John 19:37, Rev. 1:7). The cataclysmic ingathering and mass conversion of Israel will indeed exemplify a “nation born in a day.” That generation will encounter the kingdom that Christ told His apostles was coming, but they were not to know “the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power” (Acts 1:7).

Jesus’ words are clear, and His use of the specific term “nation” drives us to the only logical, Biblically consistent understanding of His meaning. Jesus did not “spiritualize” the kingdom, but used language consistent with the Jewish expectation of a physical kingdom as real as the physical kingdom over which David ruled.

To conclude from Matthew 21:43 that the kingdom was suddenly, inexplicably transformed into a spiritual kingdom is to conclude too much. The natural explanation makes perfect sense and does no damage to the text, the context, or the overall prophetic view of Biblical history.

∞ ROMANS 11:26A

And so all Israel shall be saved.

This phrase, this mere partial verse, is an absolute, hands-down favorite of every advocate of Replacement theology. Virtually every article and commentary I have read on the subject includes this verse, usually with little or no explanation, just a simple recitation with the assumption that we all readily agree with the notion that “all Israel” means “all the Church.”

This is also the verse that causes me the greatest frustration. The writers who use this verse completely ignore the theological conundrum they create by their faulty assumption. And, they do incredible damage to Paul’s supremely logical treatise and inescapable conclusion.

The argument:

As we have seen, the promise of the New Covenant included “They shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.” (Heb. 8:11) Universal knowledge of God, an all-inclusive revelation, is part and parcel of the covenant. However, Israel never attained that state, nor do they all “know the Lord” to this day. The only entity on earth to which such universal knowledge can be attributed is the Church, all of whom—chosen and redeemed—truly know their Lord.

That being the case, a universal declaration such as “all Israel will be saved” cannot be referring to national Israel and is much better suited to the Church. Thus, all the Church — every one of the redeemed, all of Christ’s sheep — the “true Israel - will most certainly be saved.

The rebuttal:

Let me say right at the top that I wholehearted agree with, and fully endorse, the doctrine of full salvation for the entirety of the church. Jesus will appear before His father with His bride, the people given to Him by His Father, and not a single one will be missing (John 17:12). However, that is not what Romans 11:26 is teaching.

Chapter 11 of Romans begins with the question, “Hath God cast away his people?” Paul’s answer? “God forbid.” The balance of chapter 11 addresses that very subject — God’s relationship to national Israel. Paul has already contrasted law-keeping Jews with spiritual Jews. Paul has already dealt with the narrowing lineage within Israel, leading to the Messiah. Now he is addressing the status and future of the rest of the nation.

Starting in verse 13 Paul introduced an instructive parable, utilizing the symbol of an olive tree. He was very precise in identifying his target audience—

For I speak to you Gentiles (Rom. 11:13a).

He was equally precise about his purpose—

If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh,

and might save some of them (Rom. 11:14).

In their current state (as Paul was writing), his fleshly kindred were scattered and disbanded. The King James translators used the phrase “casting away,” providing fodder for those who contend that God has “cast off” Israel. But, Paul mentioned their casting away so that he could announce their glorious ingathering — likening it to a resurrection.

For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? (Rom. 11:15)

Then, he began building his analogy —

For is the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches (Rom. 11:16).

In other words, the first yeast that is mixed into the dough affects the whole lump. Likewise, a tree branch is dependent on the root. If the root is good, the fruit will be good. If the root is dead, the tree will die.

Paul applied this truism to Israel, in defense of their resurrection-like reception. So, it is incumbent on us to identify “the firstfruit,” or “the root.” Several theories have been promoted over the years, but the most satisfying answer is that Paul is referring to the original conception of the nation — Abraham’s Covenant. That covenant was the “firstfruit” of the nation. And, it being a holy covenant, made by God with Himself, the whole “lump” of Israel shares that holy (separated, set aside for God’s personal use) status.

That being the case, Paul is arguing that Israel will be raised from their seemingly dead state, not because of themselves or their works, but because the root that produced and sustained them is “holy.” God’s immutable promise guaranteed their inheritance. It is that root from which the branches grew and are sustained.

And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree... (Rom. 11:17).

Let's follow the development. Some of the branches — parts of Israel — were broken off. That's an obvious reference to the Northern Tribes, called Ephraim, Samaria, or Israel as opposed to Judah. After the Assyrian captivity, the great majority of Israel never returned to their land. Judah, the Southern Kingdom, returned in response to the decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem (2 Chron. 36:22-23).

Judah, the namesake of the Jews, remained an established, united nation until the destruction of 70 AD at the hands of the Roman General, Titus. Jesus was born into the tribe of Judah, and was raised in the Jewish religion. The religious leaders of Judah rejected Him and instigated His death. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:11).

Nevertheless, the Church was established when 3,000 Jews came to faith at Pentecost. (Acts 2:41) On the heels of that event, Peter and John healed a lame man who sat at the gate of the temple. A crowd gathered in the temple after witnessing the miracle, to which Peter preached the resurrection of Christ. The priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees laid hand on Peter and John and put them in a holding place over night.

Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed, and the number of the men was about five thousand (Acts 4:4).

So, the first eight thousand converts to Christianity were Jews. We do not even read about the first Gentile converts until Peter's encounter with Cornelius in Chapter 10.

Meanwhile, the Northern Tribes had apostatized almost immediately after the kingdom was divided (1 Kings 12:20, 26-33). When they were taken into captivity, they embraced the gods of the Assyrians (Ezek. 23:5). By the time they scattered across Middle Europe and lived among the Gentile nations, they had lost their national identity, their religious heritage and any vestige of their promised

inheritance.

So, the “broken off” branches represent Ephraim/Israel, cut off from the root in accordance to God’s punishment for breaking the Law of Moses. Then, “thou” (his target audience — the Gentiles) were grafted into the covenant, and partook of the blessings — the holy root and the flowing sustenance of sap, or “fatness.” But, they were specifically grafted in “among” the good branches that remained connected to the holy root. The genuine Jews, those who had the inward circumcision of the heart, were the good branches who shared the faith of Abraham. And, the wild Gentile branches were grafted in against their nature to share in the blessings that belonged to, and were being fulfilled in, the Jews.

Now, pay attention — this verse begins with an “if.” It is a hypothetical statement designed to emphasize the conclusion. It is certainly true that some of Israel believed on Christ and some were scattered. It is equally true that Gentiles were added in to Israel’s covenant promises. And, since that is true, or “if” that is the case—

Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee (Rom. 11:18).

Get a hold of that warning. Paul instructed the Gentiles not to boast themselves against the natural branches, cut off or not. After all, Paul continued, Gentiles do not establish or affirm the Abrahamic Promise; the Promise establishes and affirms them! But, whose promise is it? Israel’s! Nonetheless, the Israel/Church Replacement Theologians boast proudly against Israel. And, they are in direct conflict with Paul’s explicit instruction to resist any such boasting.

Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in (Rom. 11:19).

That is exactly and precisely the very thing that the Replacement crowd boasts about! They claim that God cut national Israel off entirely and consequently brought the Gentile Church in, making them the recipients of the blessings and destiny originally intended for Israel. Paul knew this argument was

going to come up, and he utterly denounced it!

Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear: For is God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee (Rom. 11:20-21).

Paul's warning took a very serious tone. While it was true that unbelieving Israel was "broken off" from their own covenant promises, and the Gentiles were introduced into the covenant through Abraham-like faith, that is no cause for egocentric boasting against scattered Israel. Think about it, said Paul. If God would declare His loyalty and love for Israel and then chop them out of their own rightful inheritance, how much easier is it for Him to cut off branches that were grafted in against their nature? We should be respectful, and even fearful, to boast against the natural heirs of promise.

Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity: but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off (22).

God is both marvelously gracious and fearfully severe. Cutting stiff-necked Israel off from their own covenant was dreadfully severe. But, engrafting Gentile sinners, bringing them to faith and pouring Israel's spiritual blessings on them, was remarkably kind. And, that state of merciful kindness continues to Gentiles so long as they cling unflinchingly to God's mercy and goodness. Otherwise, God is perfectly able to cut off the rotten branch.

And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again (23).

And with that single stroke of the pen, Paul gave us the key to the whole Israel/Church question. Yes, part of Israel is cut off from their covenant. But, God is completely able to draw them back in and restore them to their original state. And, what is the deciding factor in their potential restoration? Faith.

Now, where does faith come from? Where did your faith come from? How is it that some people exercise a firm confidence in God's Word while others happily ignore and despise it?

For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?(1 Cor. 4:7)

Faith is a gift of God, brought to fruition by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

So, why did the Gentiles believe? God gifted them with faith. Why did unbelieving Israel fail to recognize Christ? Because God purposefully "blinded" them in order to spread the gospel out to the Gentile nations (Rom. 11:25). Can the same God who blinded Israel restore their sight and produce a lasting faith in them? Yes, of course!

The promises of restoration for Israel are plentiful, and in each case we read of their national repentance and conversion - "for God is able to graff them in again." That truth is almost universally ignored by the Replacement Theologians, to their hurt. They boast against the natural branches, refuse to heed Paul's warning, and fail to see God's Sovereign control over Israel's blinding and restoration. But, Paul saw it!

For, if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert graffed contrary to nature into a good olive tree; how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be graffed into their own olive tree?(Rom. 11:24)

Gentiles were "wild," not a cultured, pruned, properly-cared-for tree. Yet, God was capable of grafting certain branches off the wild tree into the "good olive tree." Given the power and grace required to accomplish such a feat, how much

easier is it for God to graft in natural branches that belong in the good tree?

For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in (Rom. 11:25).

Conceit. That is what Paul was concerned about. Gentiles would lead with their ego and fail to understand the whole plan of God. Paul called it a “mystery,” the Greek “mysterion,” a previously unrevealed truth. Paul was conveying vital prophetic information that was essential to a proper understanding of the relationship between Israel and the Gentiles.

Blindness had indeed stricken a good portion of Israel. But, that was by design. And, the blindness was temporary. It would only last as long as it took God to save the full number of elect Gentiles. And, what happens after that?

Well? What happens after that???

And, so all Israel shall be saved (26a).

Whenever Paul referred to Israel in this entire chapter, it was always a reference to national Israel, over and against the Gentiles. The contrast was consistent from beginning to end. So, likewise, Israel in verse 26 must be national Israel. To force the Church onto this verse destroys the flow of Paul’s entire argument, rendering it useless and illogical.

Now, let’s look at these branches. Paul delineated three groups:

The natural branches that were cut off. We identified them as the Northern Tribes, scattered and cut off from their natural heritage.

The natural branches that remained connected to the root. They are believing Jews, the foundation of the Church.

The wild branches, grafted in to the good tree against their nature. Paul defined them as Gentile believers.

Then, Paul observed that the cut off branches would remain in that state until the fullness of wild, Gentile branches were grafted in. Then, because He is

fully able, God will graft the cut off, natural branches back into their good tree.

Failure to understand that mystery makes one “wise in your own conceits.” That wonderful mystery being true: “And so all Israel shall be saved.”

Now, Paul did not just dream up this plan. It is perfectly consistent with the whole of Old Testament prophecy. His use of branches, or sticks, naturally leads us to Ezekiel’s prophecy concerning the two houses of Israel.

The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand. And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew us what thou meanest by these? Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God. And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant,

wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore (Ezek 37:15-28).

God will prove to the heathen Gentiles that He has sanctified Israel when He takes Ephraim from their scattered dwellings and joins them with Judah, establishes the nation as it was under David, and restores the kingdom of Israel. There is no way to satisfy those promises in the Church.

Meanwhile, Paul finished verse 26 with a prophetic quote from Isaiah 59:

And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

I apologize for being strident or overly pedantic on this point, but can anything be clearer? Paul affirmed the prophecy of Isaiah that Jesus, the Deliverer from Zion, would take ungodliness from Jacob (unbelieving Israel), because that was the very covenant He made with them; the New Covenant Promise to take away Israel's sins.

“And so all Israel shall be saved.”

But, wait! There's more...much more!

Many Replacement Theologians, in order to circumvent Paul's conclusion, interpret the words “And so...” to mean “in this manner.” In other words, Paul is not saying, “Given all this, the inevitable conclusion is...” Rather, given his several statements on remaining in the covenant through faith, he was simply saying, “This is the manner in which all Israelites who are saved will be saved.” That way, they get around the notion that Paul's “all Israel” actually means “all Israel.”

Having settled that exegetical matter, they define “all Israel” as the Church, who will all be saved in the manner of lasting, persevering faith.

Of course, that interpretation fails to address the question of how the Church is equated with Jacob, or whether Isaiah had the Church in mind when he wrote those words. After all, when Isaiah said, “For this is my covenant unto them...” the only people on earth who had a God-given covenant was Israel. Paul failed to clarify or interpret those points for us, and the Replacement Theologians are equally at a loss to explain them.

But, here’s the “capper.” All of this really leads up to the single point where the assumptions of the Replacement crowd explode completely. Speaking of “all Israel,” the ones who will be saved, whose sins are forgiven, Paul continued:

As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes (Rom. 11:28).

Now, if “all Israel” is a reference to the Church, the Replacement Theologians must be ready to explain how it is that the Church was peopled with “enemies of the gospel” for the sake of the Gentiles in Rome. “All Israel” is still the subject of Paul’s sentence structure. If “all Israel” are the unbelieving, scattered Israelites, then Paul’s statement makes complete sense. Of course, that also means that they have a destiny of restoration “for the fathers’ sakes.” If we read “all Israel” as “the entire Church,” we are forced to explain Paul’s inexplicable accusation that “concerning the gospel, they are enemies”!

And, being in that the Gentile members of the Church were wild and grafted into a covenant that was not naturally theirs, why would God elect and love them “for the fathers’ sakes?” The fathers are Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the progenitors of the Israelite nation. How is grafting in Gentiles and eliminating Israelites an act of love toward the fathers?

No, that’s just rampant confusion. As concerning God’s right to call, choose, elect and redeem whoever He will, the unbelieving Israelites are beloved of God because God is faithful to His Word of promise, and He will complete it wholly

and completely in the very people who were the original recipients of the promise.

Want Paul to say the very same thing? Okay.

For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance (Rom. 11:29).

God will never “repent,” or “turn from,” the covenant gifts He established with Israel. And, as He elected them and called them, He will never turn from them. Their election is secure, and their future rests on the unflagging faithfulness of God, Himself.

Here is the final nail in the Replacement casket:

For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all (30-32).

There are two groups in this passage, “ye,” the Gentiles who Paul addressed this argument to; and “they” or “these,” who constitute “all Israel,” the subject of this discourse. If “all Israel” in verse 26a is a reference to the Church, then Paul categorically held them in “unbelief.”

He began with his Gentile readers, who had been unbelievers in the past. But, they obtained mercy through Israel’s unbelief. So, Paul admonished the Roman Gentiles that God had purposefully concluded the blinded portion of Israel in its unbelieving state so that, through the mercy extended on the Gentiles, they also could obtain mercy. Paul wrapped it all up by saying that God purposefully concluded both groups—previously unbelieving Gentiles and currently unbelieving Israel — in unbelief so that He could save them both by mercy and grace.

Now again, if “all Israel” in verse 26a is the Church, Paul is utterly confounded. He is comparing the believing Roman Gentiles with the unbelieving Church. But, that is completely illogical and chaotic.

Lastly, theologians of all stripes have wrestled with Paul's "all Israel." For lack of a suitable comprehension of who exactly constitutes "all Israel," theories and debates have run rampant. For instance, if Paul was including every Israelite who ever lived, we can refer to the Pharisees who Jesus said were of the devil, and have a hard time imagining that they are saved by virtue of fleshly lineage. Some theologians suggest that we should understand Paul's "all Israel" in light of Jesus' future generation of Israel who would bring forth the fruit of the kingdom, and all know Him from the least to the greatest. That's a perfectly viable approach. But, it does not take into account the resurrection of Israel predicted in Ezekiel 37 —

Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD (Ezek. 37:11-14).

It is certainly, as Paul stated, a mystery. But, we know this much for certain — Paul was not speaking of the Church when he wrote of "all Israel," and there is genuinely irrefutable evidence in the New Covenant of a future restoration for the nation and people of Israel.

So, I see Paul's "all Israel" in the firm, historic context. Paul, being a Jew, and quoting Old Testament Scripture, would have written from that perspective. Thus, "all Israel" does not have to mean, "each and every Israelite who ever lived." Paul already narrowed that field back at 9:6—7. "All Israel" simply refers to the restoration of the cut off branches in keeping with Ezekiel's prophecy, joining Ephraim and Judah into one kingdom, all twelve tribes represented, "all Israel."

∞ SUMMARY

There are a few other verses that are used in support of Replacement theology, but they are dependent on the suppositions drawn from the above segments. If you take this short list of verses away from the Replacement Theologians, they are left empty—handed. The foundation crumbles and the whole theory comes apart.

The most striking detail of this list of “proof texts” is that it does not include a single, clear, definitive statement that God has abandoned Israel or replaced them. The whole premise is based on conjecture, reading “into” instead of “out of” Scripture, and a dependence of the spiritualization of otherwise very readable, readily understandable phrases.

Inasmuch as appropriate, contextually consistent understanding of these texts is readily available, the allegorical interpretation appears forced and unnecessary. And, as often as not, the spiritualized interpretation results in exegetical chaos.

When I sat down at my computer to begin answering the question, “Is the Church Israel?” I imagined that I would jot down a few thoughts and verses and leave it at that. The answer seemed axiomatic, self-evident. But, the longer I watched the spread of Replacement Theology among my Sovereign Grace brethren and others, the more obvious it became that this question required a reasonably in-depth answer.

Having gone back through the evidence and the history, studying the contexts and overview of redemptive revelation, I am bolstered with confidence as I answer with a resounding “NO!”

Words mean things, and God’s words mean everything. I understand the desire to spiritualize the words of a spiritual being. But, God was, first and foremost, using words to reveal Himself to His people. He communicated with His creation through His choice of words. If those words are open to personal interpretation, or if they change their meaning over time, then we are left with a very tenuous revelation.

God did not leave His revelation of Himself up to our guesswork. He said what He meant and meant what He said, to borrow a phrase. And, that being the case, I am struck by the clarity and magnificent grace of passages such as these:

But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant: I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away. Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the

right hand of my righteousness. Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded; they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel (Isa. 41:8-14).

Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, which swear by the name of the LORD, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness. For they call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel; The LORD of hosts is his name. I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I shewed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass. Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass . . . Yea, thou heardest not; yea, thou knewest not; yea, from that time that thine ear was not opened: for I knew that thou wouldest deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb. For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off. Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? And I will not give my glory unto another. Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last (Isa. 48:1-4, 8-12).

But Zion said, the LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my

hands: thy walls are continually before me (Isa. 49:14-16).

Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away. Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? When I called, was there none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? Or have I not power to deliver? Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because there is no water, and dieth for thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering (Isa. 50:1-3).

Moreover the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, Considerest thou not what this people have spoken, saying, The two families which the LORD hath chosen, he hath even cast them off? Thus they have despised my people, that they should be no more a nation before them. Thus saith the LORD; If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth: then will I cast away the seed of Jacob and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them (Jer. 33:23-26).

These examples barely scratch the surface of the veritable plethora of affirmations from God to Israel, promising them security, forgiveness and restoration. One thing must be apparent from these several verses, God is NOT planning to abandon, or "cast off," His people Israel.

And, of course, if Israel remains Israel, it's rather pointless to discuss replacing them with the Church.

Last words:

My wife is a bright girl...okay, woman. She has quietly observed my years of debate with the Replacement Theologians, sometimes genuinely interested and

sometimes slightly bemused. As I was putting the finishing touches on this series of articles, she asked, “So, what do they get out of this?”

“What?” I responded automatically, the way I answer most of her questions.

“The people who want to replace Israel with the Church. What do they get out of it?”

“What do you mean?” I asked, suddenly intrigued by her logic.

“Even if you could prove that God was finished with Israel and the Church was God’s whole focus, what does that do for them? Why are they so insistent? It’s not like they’re winning a prize, or anything.”

See? Bright girl. I pressed her, “What do you think? Why are they so insistent?”

She didn’t miss a beat. “Ego.”

She hit the nail on the head! She summed it up in one word. For reasons I fail to comprehend, the Replacement crowd insists on making the Church the “crown of creation.” Once God reached the Church, He completed His intended goal. When He gets them all to Heaven, He will make a new Heaven and a new Earth and enjoy His eternity. They steadfastly refuse to reckon themselves as merely an addition - a parenthesis, if you will — in God’s redemptive plan. They cannot imagine themselves as merely wild branches brought into Israel’s blessings against their own nature. They see themselves as the zenith of God’s abilities. They are God’s true Israel, the only ones God ever actually loved with an everlasting love.

That’s boasting against the branches in its purest form.

But, the good wife’s observation got me thinking. What is the opposite effect? What do we get if we’re right? I mean, if this is simply an academic exercise designed to see who can yell the loudest and argue the longest, then it’s a pointless, prideful thing in which to engage.

So, I’ll tell you what I get out of it, and leave you to come to your own conclusions.

If God is faithful to His promises to Israel, then He will assuredly be faithful to His promises to me. If God changed His language, or cast off His people, or turned His back on His beloved elect nation, then I have no security that He will not do the same to me. After all, He used the identical language in my promises

— elect, beloved, redeemed, forgiven — that He used for Israel. If He can ignore His own words on one occasion, what's to say He won't ignore them on other occasions—like, say, my occasion?

Such a God is capricious and frightening. He is not trustworthy. He is a terror to all who trust Him. He says one thing and does another. Or, He speaks a word, cloaked in hidden meaning, and rests our eternity on our ability to sort it out, or properly apply it, or successfully decode it. Israel's failure to understand God's promises to a future Church caused their demise, if that's the case.

No, I'm completely unfamiliar with such a God. He is certainly nowhere to be found in the pages of Holy Writ. The God of the Bible, the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of the New Covenant of Promise, the God of the Church, is a covenant making and covenant keeping God. His faithfulness is beyond question and His character is above reproach.

God is not a man, that he should lie: neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? (Num. 23:19)

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isa. 55:11).

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (James 1:9).

If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself (1 Tim. 2:13).

So, what do I get out of all this?

Peace. Security. Faith. Confidence. And, the indescribable sense of love that comes from knowing that the Creator of all things has cast His love upon me and will never let me go. I like that.