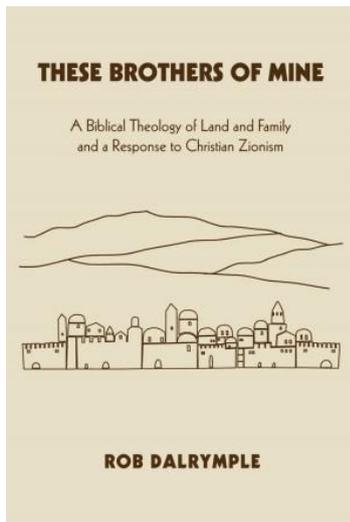


Looking for the Brothers and Sisters of Jesus

Challenging the Ideas of Israelism (including Christian Zionism and Replacement Theology)

Steven Paas

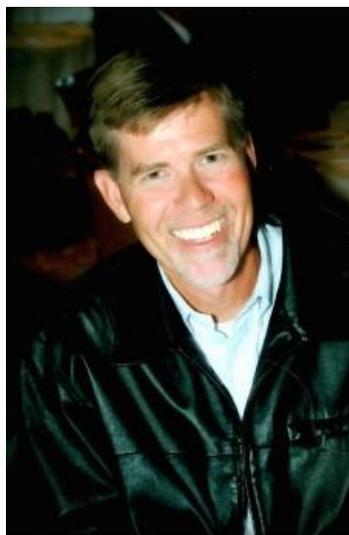
1. 'These Brothers of Mine'



This article is meant as an introduction to Dr. Rob Dalrymple's *These Brothers of Mine*,¹ The author of that book is a Presbyterian minister in California and a member of an Evangelical Network, which looks for peace and justice in the Middle East. The book contributes to the debate in the Christian world about the relationship between Israel and the Church. As such, it is a call for Christian love in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially but not exclusively for those whom Jesus in Matthew 25:40 named His 'least brothers': 'Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of Mine, you did for Me'.

I am not reviewing or summarizing the book here, but I am just drawing the attention of a wider readership to it. Because the Israel issue is a hot item in the Netherlands too, the American publisher, Wipf & Stock, has permitted Rob to have the book published by a Dutch publisher. I have worked on a translation and have found KokBoekencentrum/ Boekscout prepared to publish the work in June 2019.

The book's core chapters consist of Bible study, which interprets the nature and purpose of Israel, especially Israel's fulfilment in Christ. In my view, this study has resulted in an effective answer to the ideas of Christian Zionism and Replacement Theology. Dalrymple has shown that these two seemingly mutually contradicting movements have much more in common than their adherents would have liked. After all, both have failed to recognize the meaning of Israel according to Scripture, the former by elevating Israël's place and the latter by downgrading it.



Dr. Rob Dalrymple

2. Christian Zionism in a wider perspective

However, the author practically covers a wider field than just Christian Zionism and Replacement Theology. This especially concerns the varied phenomenon of Christian

¹ Rob Dalrymple, *These Brothers of Mine: A Biblical Theology of Land and Family and a Response to Christian Zionism*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2015. <http://www.determinetruth.com/about-me.html>

Zionism, which can be simply understood as the expectation of a restoration of Israel in 'Zion'. The term 'Zion'² then stands for: Mount Zion, Jerusalem, the temple, the land, and the people. Dalrymple particularly focuses an influential kind of Christian Zionism. It is one of the thought systems within a wider phenomenon that has become known as *pre-chiliasm* (pre = before; chilioi = 1000). In general, pre-chiliasm is the idea (according to some interpretation of Rev. 20) that at Christ's Second Coming history will continue and Christ will physically rule a Messianic Kingdom on earth for 1000 years, preceding the last judgment and the transition to eternity in a re-created new heaven and new earth. But it should be noted that not all pre-chiliasmists have included Israel in their thought system; hence not all are Christian Zionists.

a. An Israel time after the Second Coming

A very specific and radical branch of pre-chiliasm has emanated from the theology of Dispensationalism. It asserts that during the 1000 years physical/ ethnical Israel will be restored to the land and that Christ's throne will be in today's geographical Jerusalem, from where He and Israel will rule the world. Especially the Dispensationalist appearance of Christian Zionism has been in the author's mind, when he showed how Christian Zionist views contradict the Scriptural meaning of Israel.

However, it should be noted that not all Christian Zionists adhere to the assumptions of Dispensationalism and pre-chiliasm. Practically, Dalrymple's arguments have also responded to other Israel theories, including other appearances of Christian Zionism, although he has not always explicitly referred to it.

2

b. An Israel time before the Second Coming

Another type of Christian Zionism that expects some future restoration of Israel, is the so called *post-chiliasm* (post = after; chilioi = 1000). In this thought system history and time end at Christ's Second coming. The Lord's return is supposed to be preceded by a period of restoration and revival of physical Israel. Some expect this to happen in 'Zion' (the land of Israel), which makes them to be Christian Zionists.

Others think that such a restoration and revival may even happen outside the state of Israel among the various communities of Jews in the world without the intervention of a human policy of re-establishment of Jews in the modern state of Israel. They do not want to be called Christian Zionists. At least in theory, they cannot be coined like that; yet their Israel eschatology remains debatable.

In both cases the assumed future restoration and revival of Israel is supposed to consist of a mass conversion or even a national conversion of Jews to Jesus Christ. This is expected to result in a worldwide revival and numerical growth of the Church and a flourishing of the Christian faith. Varied grades of post-chiliasm and related thought got momentum after the sixteenth century Reformation in the movements of Puritanism (Great Britain), Pietismus (Germany), and Further Reformation (The Netherlands). Its heirs are among today's Protestants of almost all strands in the Western world. For example, its ideas are influential in the orthodox Reformed and Evangelical denominations in the Netherlands.³

c. 'Israel has been realised now'

Many Christians despite their specific expectations for and from Israel, have lost keen interest in Israel-connected chiliastic theories, because they consider the events of 1948 and 1967 as a realisation of such expectations. Therefore, focus on the future has partly shifted to focus on the past. They are greatly motivated by the 'searching for the Jewish roots' of Christianity.

² Hebrew: צִיּוֹן, pronounced: Tsion.

³ Steven Paas, *Israëlvisies in Beweging: Gevolgen voor Kerk, geloof en theologie*, Kampen: Brevier, 2014, p.90-131, 165-190.

For defining such roots many value the ideas of rabbinical and Talmudic Judaism, rather than being enlightened by the Word of God only. Consequently, there is a growing interest in celebrating the Sabbath and the Jewish Feasts and in adopting other Jewish customs. Some derive inspiration from theologians of the *New Perspective on Paul* (NPP), who assert that the apostle Paul was closer to Judaism and the Jewish perspective of obedience to the law, than Martin Luther derived from Paul in his teaching on justification by faith.⁴

d. Israel in Romans 9-11

Many Christians who maintain a special theological appreciation for post-biblical Israel are not interested in using the arguments of the abovementioned chiliastic and non-chiliastic movements. Sometimes they reject them explicitly. However, they may think that the Scriptures including those of the New Testament recognize a distinction between Israel and the other peoples and maintain that the distinction between Jew and heathen has never been abrogated, although they generally admit that apart from Christ there is no other way to salvation.

From this stance, they derive their conviction that post-biblical Israel, in a religiously unique sense, still is 'God's people'. Very often they appeal to their specific interpretation of chapters 9-11 of Paul's epistle to the Romans. In that pericope Paul refers to the Old Testament privileges of Israel (Rom.9:4,5), to 'all Israel' that will be saved (Rom.11:26) and to God's irrevocable 'gifts and call' (Rom.11:29). They also point to Revelation 7:4-9, where according to them the '144,000 sealed' ones of verse 4 only pertain to the saved people from Israel, whereas 'the great multitude' of verse 9 in their 'white robes' would only pertain to the saved people from heathen (i.e. non-Jewish) origin.

3

e. 'Israel has been replaced'

Finally, within the complex field of specific Israel views there is the theory of *Replacement Theology*, which – contrary to the abovementioned groups – rejects a positive theological status for post-Biblical Israel. It is duly included and addressed in Dalrymple's study. Replacement theology is the idea that physical Israel has been replaced by the Church, and theologically has no right to exist anymore. According to an extreme consequence of this line of thought, by some adherents individual Jews were even deprived of the possibility of salvation.

Much of the nasty and often caricatural picture of Replacement Theology has been made by its opponents, the Christian Zionists and related groups. We should realize, however, that those who are supposed to be representatives of this thought system rarely follow this theory to the extreme. In popular opinion it is mostly the Christian Zionists etc. who decide who is a replacement theologian, i.e. anyone who does not adopt their views on Israel.

3. Israelism as an all embracing term

Dalrymple is right in rejecting Replacement Theology (or its caricature) and Christian Zionism in all its appearances, implying the rejection of some other Israel views that do not necessarily harbour Zionist and chiliastic aspirations. He chooses a different position, based on the Christocentric reading and understanding of the Scriptures. In other words, he looks for the light of Jesus Christ, whose fulfilment of the Scriptures includes His fulfilment of Israel.

I agree to this position. Therefore, in this essay I am trying to build a bridge between Dalrymple's work and my own studies, in which I am denoting a wider field than 'Christian Zionism' as such, either or not in a Dispensationalist jacket. In fact, Dalrymple effectively invalidated not only Christian Zionism as such but also the wider phenomenon, including its

⁴ Idem, *Liefde voor Israël nader bekeken: Voor het Evangelie zijn alle volken gelijk*, Kampen: Brevier 2015, p.136-142.

above mentioned branches. In my publications I have suggested a name that applies to them all: 'Israelism'.⁵ Let me stress the term is not meant to classify adherents of the above mentioned movements in a patronizing or any other disrespectful way. We do not want to hurt people who may be our brothers and sisters in Christ, but we desire to investigate thought systems in the light of Scripture. The wider term of 'Israelism' has enabled me to address various aspects of the entire phenomenon, not least those of Christian Zionism and Replacement Theology. We should realize that all Christian Zionists are Israelists, but not all Israelists are Christian Zionists.

In this introductory article I want to make clear that, in the final analysis, in the theological field of 'Israelology'⁶ there are only two positions, which exclude each other. One is the position Israelism in its various appearances and intensities, which have much in common but do not necessarily always recognize or appreciate one another. The other position is the conviction that Israel has been completely fulfilled in Christ. In this essay I used elements from two previous articles; the one briefly summarizes the message of my publications on the matter,⁷ the other is my review of a recent defence of Christian Zionism by an influential Dispensationalist writer in the Netherlands.⁸

4. Christ is the heart of the Bible

Now, having a discussion of this multifaceted phenomenon in mind, which I believe is implied in Dalrymple's work, let me draw a sketch of some fundamental objections against Israelism, and follow Dalrymple in pointing out a different way. Let us start with a statement by the Apostle Paul, who says about us, human beings: 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:23). It is very important indeed to realise in the light of Scripture that basically we have missed the purpose of life. Therefore, originally we have no peace with God and have been caught by death.

This unpopular truth concerns Jews and non-Jews of all times and places. However, it is equally true that the Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished the work of reconciliation, which is perfectly and fully sufficient for the redemption of all people. All who surrender to Him in faith have been saved (Rom.3:24-31). In spiritual peace with God they are looking forward to the new heaven and earth that He will completely realize at His Second Coming. This Good News is the heart of the Bible. Only through the person and the work of Jesus can we access God's revelation in the Bible, and only through His Holy Spirit we can understand it. In Him the meaning or message of the whole of the Scriptures has been fulfilled.

This is the overarching message of *Israelism and the Place of Christ*, a collection of Bible studies by theological experts, which I edited.⁹ It is also the emphasis in my preceding publications on this issue.¹⁰ Basically, 'the Bible is God's love letter to humanity.'¹¹ It is the

⁵ Steven Paas (Ed.), *Israelism and the Place of Christ: Christocentric Interpretation of Biblical Prophecy*, LIT Verlag, Berlin, Munster, Vienna, Zurich, London, January 2018. See my explication of the term in chapter 1, 'Israel and the Bible'.

⁶ The term has been derived from: Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, Ariel Ministries, 1994.

⁷ Steven Paas, 'Challenging the Fiction of a Specific Spiritual Status of post-Biblical Israel in Faith, Theology and Church', <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/israelism-place-christ-what-your-view-spiritual-status-steven-paas/?published=t>

⁸ Idem, 'In Israëlboek bestrijdt dr. Ouweneel karikatuur', in: *Reformatorsch Dagblad*, 28-2-19.

<https://www.rd.nl/opinie/in-isra%C3%ABlboek-bestrijdt-dr-ouweneel-karikatuur-1.1550419>

⁹ Idem (Ed.), *Israelism and the Place of Christ: Christocentric Interpretation of Biblical Prophecy*, LIT Verlag, Berlin, Munster, Vienna, Zurich, London, January 2018;

<http://www.lit-verlag.de/isbn/3-643-90981-7>

<https://www.ipgbook.com/israelism-and-the-place-of-christ-products-9783643909817.php>

<https://www.amazon.com/Israelism-Place-Christ-Christocentric-Interpretation/dp/3643909810>

Idem (red.), *Het Israëlsisme en de plaats van Christus: Christocentrische interpretatie van Bijbelse profetie*, Utrecht/ Soest: Boekencentrum & Boekscout, november 2017;

<https://www.boekscout.nl/shop2/boek.php?bid=8349> ; <https://www.bol.com/nl/p/het-israelsisme-en-de-plaats-van-christus/9200000086209845/?suggestionType=browse>

¹⁰ Idem, *Christian Zionism Examined: A Review of Ideas on Israel, the Church and the Kingdom*, Nürnberg/ Hamburg: VTR/ RVB 2012;

https://www.amazon.com/Christian-Zionism-Examined-Review-Kingdom/dp/3941750860?ie=UTF8&*Version*=1&*entries*=0

Word of God and it can only be interpreted from Christ as its centre. I am convinced that this rule also pertains to the prophetic statements about the restoration of Israel. God's plan of salvation has been unfolded in the Old Testament in the first instance. For the world and the Church the Old Testament has come to its complete fulfilment and deepest meaning in the Christ, or the Messiah, as the New Testament presents Him. He is leading salvation history to its final destination. His words and the words of His apostles never point to some extraordinary future that Israelists (especially Christian Zionists) have pictured for ethnic Israel as a national people or state. For that matter, such a notion would have contradicted the spiritual and universal character of Christ's Kingdom – realized in principle, and approaching in its completeness – which had been announced by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2).

The Lord Jesus Christ has been sent by God the Father as His eternal Son *and* as a man of flesh and blood to save the world. In His humanity He was born as a Jew, originating from the people of Israel. His appearing as a Jew showed that the Son of God had entered the material world physically, not as a vague spiritual being but as a real fellow human being. His coming as a Jew also showed that God expressed Himself in Him, in order to fulfill the promises for salvation of the world that He had made to His instruments, Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Israel. From the beginning of history, described in *Genesis* 1, God has focused on the redemption of the world. In a special way He focused on the world in His acting through a unique relationship with Biblical Israel. Old Testament Israel's task was to represent God as a light for the world. Jesus Christ perfectly completed, fulfilled and widened this relationship and task. He is the ultimate light of the world, for all peoples, thus for the Jewish people too. From all peoples He assembles His one and only people, the communion of all believers, the people of Christ, the body of Christ. This saving work will be completed at His Second Coming. Then He will award with the 'crown of righteousness ... all who have longed for His appearing (2 Tim.4:8).

5

5. Anti-Semites and Philo-Semites

In this Good News, Christ takes the central and most comprehensive position. What does this say about the current state of Israel and the Jewish people? It has to be emphasized that they have a right to be fully respected. Therefore, we reject and abhor all anti-Semitism and any theology or ideology that is inclined to anti-Semitism. Where it surfaces again today it should be decidedly and forcefully opposed.

Anti-Semites collide with the Gospel. But isn't that also true for *Philo-Semites*, i.e. extreme worshippers of post-Biblical Israel?¹² This attitude too has far reaching consequences. In personal faith, theology, and the Church, the confession of Christ cannot be joined to a positive appreciation of the religion of Judaism that is rejecting Christ, without causing damage. For example, such an appreciation may lead to explaining away political and military injustice towards the original Palestinian population, including Christians, and to a very special but unfounded expectation for only the people and the country of post-Biblical Israel.

Idem, et al., 'Open Brief aan Nederlandse Christenen over Israël', September 2012, <http://strengtholt.blogspot.com/2012/09/open-brief-over-israel-aan-nederlandse.html> ;

Idem, *Liefde voor Israël nader bekeken: Voor het Evangelie zijn alle volken gelijk*, Kampen: Brevier 2015; <http://www.brevieruitgeverij.nl/boeken/9789491583353/israelvisies-beweging.html>

Idem, *Israëlvisies in beweging: Gevolgen voor Kerk, geloof en theologie*, Kampen: Brevier 2014; <http://www.brevieruitgeverij.nl/boeken/9789491583728/liefde-voor-israel-nader-bekeken.html>

¹¹ Cf. P.J. Lalleman, 'De Bijbel is Gods liefdesbrief aan de mensheid', about the basic meaning of the Scriptures, in: *Reformatorsch Dagblad* 3-11-18.

¹² Cf. Paas, *Christian Zionism Examined*, text on the backside of the cover: 'Study of the Scriptures and of Church History led me to this concept: Christian Zionism is a fascination with the people, the land and the religion of post-Biblical physical Israel, which particularly in its reactions against the shameful Holocaust events, in contradiction to Scripture, gives today's people of Israel key roles in the history and the order of salvation, thus decentralizing Christ and undermining the Church's universal mission. The movement has distorted the pictures of Christianity and the Jewish religion and has failed to avoid anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism, despite its objective of combating the former'.

In my view such a perspective would necessarily be at the expense of the expectations that in Christ have been made valid for all peoples. Essentially, the meaning or position of the Lord Jesus Christ is incompatible with a theology that facilitates extraordinary salvific expectations for specific ethnic groups, geographical territories and religions. Jesus is not glorified by Israel as such, but by all – Jews and non-Jews in all countries of all times – who in faith belong to Him and have become new creatures.

6. Consequences for the whole of Biblical theology

Cherishing racial or ethnic preferences belongs to the characteristics of the wide movement of Israelism, especially the narrower but more radical stream of Christian Zionism and its seemingly opposing counterpart, the Replacement Theology. But do such preferences still count in the manner in which God in His love has bowed down to fallen humanity? The whole-hearted and unequivocal Biblical answer to this question is: No! This dogged idea, which surfaces over and over again, has been abrogated for good. The dividing wall has been destroyed (Eph.2). The Gospel does not assign any special status to races, peoples or nations. Israel's basic spiritual status is not different from the spiritual significance of other peoples. Therefore, the insistence of Christian Zionists and Israelists in general, however subtle, on an exceptional and privileged position of Israel in salvation doctrine is misleading, both for Jews and non-Jews. Then, to the Jews faith in Jesus Christ is wrongly presented as a part of their own religious nationalism. In the minds of all other people this feeds the error that Christ can only be Saviour if they accept Him within the framework of special religious expectations for or from the earthly Israel.

6

This harmful idea may negatively influence the whole of theology. It dislocates Christ as the only source of salvation. Consequently, it damages the Christocentric and catholic (universal) nature of the Church, the theology and the personal faith. Therefore it cannot but compromise the unambiguously carrying out of the universal mission of Christ to all peoples, including rebellious 'Babylon' (Rev. 16, 17) and unbelieving 'Jerusalem' (Gal.4:25). Might it not imply a kind of anti-Semitism which is characterized by a weakening of Christian witness or a desisting from the proclamation of the Gospel among the Jews?

7. Replacement Theology

As we noted before, within the widely spread phenomenon of Israelism, including the narrower but more radical Christian Zionism, there is another position that misreads the Bible concerning the people of Christ (the Church) and Israel. It has become known as *Replacement Theology* (some prefer the names: Supersessionism or Substitutionalism).

Supporters of Replacement theology are said to believe that the Church of the New Testament has replaced the Old Testament Israel in the plans and ways of God. Consequently, there is no hopeful future for Israel. Some have even claimed that Jews cannot be saved. Israelists, especially Christian Zionists, are fond of accusing the position taken by theologians like Dalrymple and me of supporting Replacement Theology and of being intrinsically anti-Semitic.¹³

In my publications, however, I have reiterated the assertion that the entire phenomenon of Israelism, including Christian Zionism and Replacement Theology, is at variance of the meaning of the Scriptures.¹⁴ Dalrymple and I are adhering to the opposing position, the conviction that Jesus Christ has fulfilled all God's promises to Israel (2

¹³ Cf. Willem J. Ouweneel, *Het Israël van God: Ontwerp van een Israëltheologie* Gideon, 2019, p.23, 77, 270f, 367, 475, 507.

¹⁴ Paas, *Christian Zionism Examined*, passim (see: index, p. 134); *Israëlvisies in beweging*, passim (see: Index, p. 315); *Liefde voor Israël nader bekeken* (p. 174-178); *Het Israëlisme en de plaats van Christus* (chapter 1, 'De Bijbel en Israël', p. 12-45).

Cor.1:20). He became the embodiment of 'Israel' as temple, people, king, and land, and widened it to all the nations, including Israel itself, from which God chooses the people of Christ (the Church).

8. The Phenomenon of Israelism includes Replacement Theology

Israelists, particularly Christian Zionists, oppose any kind of what they define as Replacement Theology. Yet the two schools of thought are much less different than they assume.¹⁵ They have at least one important characteristic in common. Both systems suggest a separation between physical Israel and the people of Christ (the Church). Most Israelists do so by claiming a specific extraordinary future for today's Israel, apart from the Church, before and/or after the Second Coming. Replacement theologians do so by claiming that Israel has forfeited any place in God's plan and has been replaced by the Church.

Dalrymple and I reject both views. Old Testament Israel and the people of Christ (i.e. those who have Abraham's faith; the Church) have been destined to honour God and to be instruments in the realization of His plan of salvation for the world. They are not to be separated. Yet they are to be distinguished as different categories in God's plan. As such, despite these israelistic views, today's physical Israel should realize that in Christ its extraordinary function as the revelatory vehicle has ended and that it cannot hope for a future without Christ. The Church has not taken Old Testament Israel's place, but in Christ today's Israel, just like any other nation, may experience that all their citizens have been called by the Gospel to become followers of Jesus.

7

9. Differences between Israel and the Church

Israelism – including Christian Zionism and Replacement Theology – have often separated Israel and the Church. Consequently, they have failed to consider the reality of continuity and discontinuity between physical Israel and the Church. This raises the question of how Israel and the Church should be rightfully distinguished from one another without denying their shared Biblical calling. In my view this is fundamental to a desired Christocentric hermeneutical approach of the Scriptures. Let me therefore briefly indicate some differences between physical Israel and the Church.

a. Different elections

Old Testament Israel was a unique instrument, chosen by God, which He intended to use to make Himself known to the world. He has entered human history in a special way through Israel in order to reveal Himself tangibly to His fallen creation. In the history of land, people, kingship and temple of Israel He shows to all nations the contours of His identity, in particular His grace and judgments. In His unique dealing with Old Testament Israel He demonstrates to us, inhabitants of the earth of all times and places, who He is and what He wants us to.

God's self-revelation through the history of Israel is, in many ways, shadow-like and symbolic, but in Jesus Christ it has accomplished its substantial concrete meaning. Not Israel,¹⁶ but Jesus – as the embodiment of all that Israel was called to – is the fulfilment of all God's promises to Israel. Each resident of this world who believes in Him, is called to rely on His mercy and salvation from judgment. In Christ, revelation history through Old Testament Israel has reached a climax and a conclusion. That is no loss for today's Israel or the Jewish people, but rather a confirmation of the Abrahamic blessing, which Israel in Christ is called to share with all nations. In the Old Testament presentations of Israel, we continue to discover

¹⁵ As Dalrymple has shown, in his *These Brothers of Mine*, passim, especially chapters 10 and 11.

¹⁶ Cf. Ouweneel, p.611

who Christ is (*Psalms 22; Isaiah 53* and so on) and in the New Testament light of Him God's self-revelation in the Old Testament remains indispensable for us.

The Church is the total of people of all times and places that are chosen by God to be connected in faith with Jesus Christ (and therefore with each other) to eternal salvation. In Israel and the Church, God elected two different categories (not: two peoples on the basis of ethnicity!). Ethnic Israel, including those who physically had descended from Abraham and those who were of a different descent ('strangers'), was God's Old Testament means of self-revelation to the world. It reached its destination and finality in Christ, who is the embodiment of the true Israel. Distinguished from but not separated from Old Testament Israel, the Church is the community of elected persons rescued in Christ from around the world in all its history.

b. Different times

In the course of salvation history Israel as the specific people of God is an interlude, a special temporal form of God's eternal covenant of grace, which has been perfectly fulfilled in Christ. Outside of Christ Israel would be without hope for salvation, but in Christ, we should be sure that Israel can count on an equally rich salvific reality as for all other nations.

Distinguished from but not separated from Old Testament Israel the Church, as a community of true believers, chosen from all areas, from Jerusalem until the end of the earth, has existed throughout the entire history of salvation, from Paradise¹⁷ to the Second Coming.

c. Different scopes of faith

Ethnic Israel demonstrates the real situation of the world's humanity towards God, because always only a 'rest' has been accessible for the true faith in Him and ultimately for getting united with Christ as Saviour. Unfortunately, due to their disobedience to Him not all people will be saved.

The Church as meant by God, however, has always consisted for one hundred percent of true believers, the redeemed, the 'body of Christ' (1 Cor.12:27; Eph. 4:12), sometimes also called: 'whoever does God's will' (Mk.3:35); those who are of 'the faith of Abraham' (Rom. 4:13, cf. John 8:39); the true Israel, i.e. the second 'Israel' in Rom. 9:6; 'all Israel' in Rom.11:26; or 'the Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16).

d. Different ethnicity

According to God's promises – given through the (largely ethnic) line between Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – Old Testament Israel is the people and the land that was chosen by God as an instrument to make Himself known to the world. The day of Pentecost in *Acts 2*, however, confirms that ethnicity is not a determining factor. After all, here and elsewhere, Israel demonstrates God's intention with the world, in that it has never consisted of only Israelites or Jews. The presence of the added strangers or foreigners among them breaches the ethnic boundaries of Israel to the world!

In the fulfilment of Israel through Christ the Church fully shows this global perspective. The Church, from Paradise onward, has never been limited to faithful Israelites or Jews only. Before, during and after the Old Testament period of Israel in salvation history, the Church has always consisted of believers, whom God has drawn from all mankind, that is, within and outside the boundaries of Israel.

e. Different focuses

How can we know that God is faithful to his promises of salvation? For finding evidence, should we pay attention to Israel or to the Church? We should fix our eyes on Jesus alone! (cf. Hebr. 12:2). The history of Israel from the Old Testament onward teaches us that He has

¹⁷ Cf. *Confessio Belgica*, article 27.

come to the earth. Particularly, Jesus Himself and His prophets and apostles teach us that the Israel, as meant by Him, has reached perfect fulfilment in Him.

And therefore Israel has been fulfilled in His people, the Church, and in His realized (in principle) and still advancing Kingdom, pictured in *Revelation 21* as the heavenly Jerusalem, descending from God. Jesus Christ, the Church and the Kingdom do not take the place of Israel, for they are the supreme realization of God's ultimate purpose with Israel. That reality is too big to fit 'instead of' something else. Nothing is big enough to be matched or replaced by it.

Special events regarding the current earthly state of Israel and the Jewish people do not provide human beings, who struggle with sin and death, with any consolation and assurance of God's existence or of the reliability of His promises. But the miracle of God's 'irrevocable' faithfulness in Christ exactly does so! (cf. Rom.11:29). It is noticeable by anyone, on a daily basis and worldwide, by His Word and Spirit, when He converts and regenerates unwilling and hardened people, and adds them to the innumerable crowd that is saved. Let us focus on Him and His work.

f. Different as a 'people of God'

I consider this aspect of the distinction between Israel and the Church as a summary and a conclusion. Because of being created in Christ, all nations in their rich variety are peoples of God, (Ps.24:1; Ps.82:8). He created their languages so that they would honour and serve Him.¹⁸ The extraordinary position of Old Testament physical Israel as the 'people of God' has been completely and gloriously fulfilled by Christ, who widened it to all the peoples of the earth. The 'dividing wall' between Jews and heathen has been destroyed (Eph.2:14). In Christ, for receiving salvation, Jew and Greek are in the same position (Gal.3:28). Therefore, both in the sense of the Old Testament and in the sense of the New Testament, every ethnic people is a people of God and is destined to receive the Gospel and obey it.

The Church is the people of God in a different sense, because of her bond of faith with Christ, which breaches all dividing walls and all ethnic boundaries. Being obedient to the Gospel, the Church is the spiritual and most essential community of Christ, the communion of saints. She consists of His relatives and family, and as such she is the unique people of God.

10. Objections summarized

Representatives of Israelism in their rich variety – with Christian Zionism and Replacement Theology as seemingly mutually opposing core movements – separate the Church and Israel and reject the way in which we have distinguished them from each other in section 9. Israelists may be convinced of having taken the Bible seriously, but Dalrymple and I are of the opinion that they fail to read the Scriptures according to their meaning and purpose. I am granting Israelists that they are right in saying that the Church and physical Israel are different issues. But at that very point their mutual agreement and my agreement with both of them ends. Our focuses differ.

Replacement theologians are mistaken. Not any nation can be put at a lower level in God's plan of salvation, or be eliminated and excluded from it. This also applies to the Jewish people. Other Israelists, especially the Christian Zionists, emphatically oppose the Replacement Theology, which according to them radiates antisemitism or hatred of Jews. They are equally mistaken, but in a different sense. Instead of defending a lower status for Israel many misread the Scriptures in suggesting an elevated position or an extraordinary

¹⁸ Cf. my speech on the occasion of the presentation of the *Oxford Chichewa Dictionary* in Lilongwe, Malawi, on 29 September 2016.

https://chichewadictionary.org/media/Speech_Launch_Oxford_Chichewa_Dictionary-LLW_29-9-16.pdf

religious status for present day physical Israel, because of Old Testament prophecy and because Jesus was a Jew.

Although this idea cannot be concluded from Scripture, they derive from it the expectation of a special future restoration and national conversion for Israel and an impressive flourishing of the Church. As we noted before, many Israelists think that such a glorious development will happen before the Second Coming of Jesus. Many Evangelical, Pentecostal and Reformed Christians belong to those who have been attracted by this idea.

We also noted that the dispensationalist Christian Zionists foresee the restoration of an earthly Israel beside the Church, at and after the Second Coming, following the era (dispensation) of the Church, in the so called Messianic Kingdom, which in their view is preceding the ultimate new heaven and new earth. In their teaching of several separate earthly dispensations (periods) and covenants the continuing line in God's revelation history consists of Israel, with the present dispensation of the Church only as a temporary phenomenon.¹⁹ Again we should realize that this type of Israelists, particularly the Christian Zionists, are often apt to label anyone as replacement theologian who dares to doubt their views.

More recent types of Israelists consider the post-war events in the Middle East as a fulfilment of Biblical prophecy and of the above mentioned chiliastic expectations. Many think that the Church has to renew its focus on its 'jewish roots' and to rediscover its supposed relationship with the Jewish religion.

In the present dialogues with Israelists we have to realize that many, in particular the Christian Zionists, like to label anyone who disagrees with their views as a 'replacement theologian'. Practically the term has come to function as an abusive designation.

10

11. Continuity only in Christ

In my opinion these approaches by the various kinds of Israelism cannot be derived from the Scriptures. The continuing line in God's work from Paradise to the Parousia we essentially observe in Jesus Christ, not in Israel. He was foretold by the prophets and witnessed by the apostles. He realized His people (the Church), and at His Second Coming, in the consummation and completion of His eternal Kingdom, He will finalize time and history by the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem, and the beginning of eternity in the new heaven and on the new earth.

To my understanding of God's plan of salvation, Old Testament physical Israel is subject to this continuing line in Christ. Actually, Christ has become the Israel that God had desired. He has completely performed what Israel was called to do, and far beyond. In Christ as the fulfilled Israel all the peoples of the world have been equally included in God's offer of salvation. From them He continues to elect His own people, all those who have 'the faith of Abraham'. Physical Israel of today and the Israel of Abraham's faith should not be conflated. For, in rejecting Christ physical Israel as a people has abandoned Abraham's faith. But in saying so, I am far from implying that, as a consequence of this, contemporary physical Israel, or the Jewish people, has been stopped, exchanged or excluded from salvation. Also, I am not trying to smuggle my idea of Israel into the Church.²⁰

But Old Testament Israel has been wonderfully fulfilled and led to its final destination in the riches of Christ, from which present day physical Israel, or the Jewish people, and all the nations of the earth are graciously allowed to benefit. In God's plan of salvation Israel has been gloriously blessed and realised by Christ in His saving message to the entire world. It is precisely this perspective, carried by God's love, which cannot coexist with (potential) anti-Semitism. A consistently Christocentric interpretation of the Scriptures is the best protection

¹⁹ Ouweneel, p.75, 87, 607.

²⁰ See Ouweneel's reproach, p. 85, 142.

against anti-Semitism and against any other ideology that endangers the Jewish people and the true identity of the Church. Exactly this criterion the varied movement of Israelism – including Christian Zionism and Replacement Theology – has failed to understand. Dalrymple’s book is a helpful tool for challenging the errors of Israelism with biblical answers.

Veenendaal, updated June 2019

The author of this article, Dr. Steven Paas (1942,) is a theologian and a linguist. He published about European and African Church History, the phenomenon of Israelism in the interpretation of Biblical prophecy, and the lexicography of Chichewa, a widely spoken language in Central Africa. See for his profile: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/steven-paas-9122ba14/>