



## **The Message of the Bible: Wasp or Funnel?**

Steven Paas

### **Introduction**

Could the message of the Bible be compared to the shape of a wasp or to the shape of a funnel? I can imagine that the suggested comparisons may seem strange or perhaps inappropriate at first glance. But they are motivated by my desire to do justice to the Bible, in which God reveals: (a) who He is, (b) what His plan is for us and for the whole world, and (c) what He wants from us. In each of these three main subjects, God reveals Himself in Jesus Christ. He shows us the Father (*John* 14:9). That is why Jesus Christ is central in the content of the Bible. This essay is about answering the question who God (in Christ) is for Israel and for the nations, and what He expects from them. Our answer to that question depends on the way we read the entire Bible. How can we get in sight the coherent message of God's Word?

Theologians then say that the answer to that question is determined by our hermeneutics. That term comes from a Greek verb which means 'to explain' or 'to interpret'. It refers to the study of the different methods of interpretation of written texts, in this case the Bible. Reading and understanding the Bible requires a hermeneutical starting point, or in other words, reading glasses. It is good for Bible readers to know that they consciously or unconsciously use reading glasses, that is, a certain principle or model. Which model do we have in mind when we read and try to understand the Bible?

This essay deals with two models of thought. The first compares the Biblical message to the image of a wasp and the second sees the image of a funnel in the Bible. Without always realizing it, many Bible readers usually assume one of those two models of thought. I am trying to explain why the second model is preferable.

## The wasp model

For a long time I thought that God's revelation in the Bible is comparable to the shape of a wasp.



*Apart from wings and legs, a wasp consists of: a wide abdomen, a narrow waist, and a wide front body with head. The abdomen becomes wider and wider from a pointed beginning. It has a sting, but in the image that part is retracted. After the widest part of the abdomen, the waist begins abruptly. Then, almost just as abruptly, the broad front body begins. It ends with the head, from which two antennae protrude, which look a bit like outstretched arms.*

The image of a wasp helped my reading and understanding the Bible. When I tried to explain to others the content of Scripture in a nutshell, I used the wasp as a common thread. Let me elaborate on that briefly.

From the beginning in Paradise, God's plan has been directed toward all mankind. This universal orientation does not end when man falls into sin and becomes subject to devil, death and destruction. Already then, God's plan shows that He has a very special character. Very broadly, to the entire human race, He shows His love and grace. The devil will not win, for Someone is coming to stop him (Gen. 3:15). That promise of salvation is renewed for all people when God makes a covenant with Noah. Its firm validity is still witnessed today in the rainbow (Gen. 9:13). God shows that multi-coloured natural phenomenon to all nations, who have spread throughout the earth since the confusion of tongues in Babylon (Gen. 11:9). The width of God's plan continues in His promises to Abraham. After all, we read that in him 'all the generations of the earth shall be blessed' (Gen. 12:3).

But then, suddenly that broad perspective of God's plan of salvation seems to have been abrogated. A narrowing occurs. The plan of salvation seems to have changed to being limited to one people and one land: Israel. The image of the relatively short waist of the wasp is a bit limping here. Because, the Old Testament history of God's dealings with Israel is very long compared to the waist of a wasp, more than 1500 years. But it is also relatively short, because the periods before and after are much longer. The intention is clear: there is a transition from wide to narrow. In the image of the wasp, the peoples of the world seem to be at a distance. Many peoples are not even in the picture at all.

Wrongly, because almost all prophets involve the nations when describing God's salvific and judgmental dealings. Think of Ruth, Naaman the Syrian, or the Queen of Sheba. The book of *Jonah* is all about it. Think of the *Psalms* that call upon the nations, think of *Isaiah* 56, about the stranger who gets a better place than the Israelite. And yet, when the peoples are pictured in the wasp model, these pericopes are often explained for the purpose of Israel's redemption, as in *Isaiah* 13-24. The love and grace of God are painted in His dealings with Israel and subsequently the Jewish people. It is true that His judgments and punishments also become visible when Israel disobeys. But, despite counter-images in *Jonah* and *Amos* 3:2 and 9:7, that dark side of God's action seems to apply especially to the nations (*goyim*) who do not know God.

In the wasp model, the image then tilts again, this time from narrow to wide. After a great leap from *Genesis* 12:3 ('all peoples on earth will be blessed through you'), in the New Testament the nations come closer again. This climaxes in the birth of the Messiah, Jesus. As the 'Son of David', He is the One who fulfills God's promises to Israel. But He is also God the Son, the Saviour of the world (John 4:42). In Him, the universal perspective is restored, as it were. God's love extends again to all nations in the grace of Jesus Christ. The wise men from the east come to pay homage to Him (Mt. 2:1-12). The worldwide mission of Jesus is imaged by the antennae from the broad head of the wasp, or as the wasp reaching out to the skies, taking with her the whole of her body.

However, at the same time, in that model, Israel, represented by the waist of the wasp, continues to play a dominant role. For the antennae seem to be directly connected with the waist (Old Testament Israel), so that they extend to an expected restoration of ethnic-national-religious Israel and a heyday for the Church. In the image of the hourglass, which some Christians use for the broad-narrow-broad movement to read the Bible, the idea they defend (of a lasting central role for ethnic Israel) does not come into its own. For, when in the hourglass the wide lower part is filled, it leaves the narrow middle part, which represents Israel, empty or without content.<sup>1</sup> But Israel being empty, that is exactly what these Christians do not want to say. Hence, their point of view is better represented by a wasp than by an hourglass. After all, what does Jesus' statement mean in their model: 'salvation is from the Jews' (John 4:22)? For that matter, they want to emphasize that the nations are 'recorded' or 'registered' in Israel (Ps. 87:4, 6) and one day 'all Israel will be saved' (Rom. 11:26). God's elective love is supposed to reach out to Israel. 'We are second-class'.<sup>2</sup> In their view, ethnic Israel, as a modern designation for the state and the Jewish people, still looks forward to an exceptional future of great importance to the world, especially to the Church. Some expect that situation before the second coming of Christ, and others look forward to an earthly government by Christ from Jerusalem after His second coming. The vision is maintained that Israel continues to play a pivotal role ('spilfunctie').<sup>3</sup>

Today, many interpreters of the Bible, in their arguments for an 'inseparable' connection of the Church with Israel, also echo their desire to emphasize the 'Jewish roots' of the Christian faith. This general 'Jewish roots' perception is widely adhered to but is strongest in the Messianic movement, both among Jews and non-Jews. The premise of a lasting exceptional position for the Jewish people or 'Israel' explains why the wasp model is popular among Christians.

### **The wasp has a sting**

The high word has to come out. For me, the Bible no longer evokes the image of a wasp. As a theologian, I have always felt that the application of the image of a wasp somehow clashes with the content of God's revelation. The wasp stung every now and then. After all, how do you get the conviction that God in His love has the world in mind to agree with the belief that He only gives loving priority to Israel, for whom the title 'beloved on account of the patriarchs' (Rom.

---

<sup>1</sup> Despite all possibilities of respectable usage of the hourglass model [see e.g.: <https://www.bijbelseplaatsen.nl/onderwerpen/406>] it is also used to support the theory of a lasting extraordinary status for ethnic Israel, which we oppose in this essay. See: M. van Campen, J. Hoek, M. J. Paul, et al., *Met het oog op Israël: Bezinning en Bijbelstudies* (With a View to Israel: Reflection and Bible Studies), Apeldoorn: Labarum, 2022, p. 72,73.

<sup>2</sup> A. Simons, 'Het vrederijk', in: *RO* [= Reformatorische Omroep] *Magazine - Vertrouwd Geluid*, 2022-4, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> M.J. Paul, 'De plaats van Israël in de uitleg van Bijbelgedeelten', in: M. van Campen, et al., *Met het oog op Israël*, p.18.

11:28) would continue to apply in an exclusive sense? For a long time, that uncomfortable feeling has been in the parking garage of my thinking about what the Bible says regarding Church, faith, and theology. How have the garage doors opened?

Around the turn of the century, my wife and I lived and worked in Malawi for about ten years. Living and functioning in a completely different culture and dealing with African Christians and non-Christians triggered much in me. It taught me something about myself and about the Western culture to which I belong. I probably would never have said goodbye to the wasp model without that experience. Before, I had been convinced that I was far removed from any racist feelings, but living (sometimes surviving!) in an African context taught me that forms of racism were hidden in my head and heart, although under a (sometimes wafer-thin) covering. Then, I learnt this important lesson: whoever, as a Christian, wants to approach his or her multicultural environment with the redemptive message of Jesus Christ, must be healed by Him of every form of racial pride and preference.<sup>4</sup> Gradually, I came to understand that the wasp model is apt to feed a wrong thought, namely that God operates from a certain ethnic preference by putting Israel above all other nations in His plan of salvation. Furthermore, I began to realize that the idea of an exceptional and lasting expectation for and from ethnic Israel, represented here by the wasp model, is actually relatively young. I discovered that it comes from certain seventeenth-century British Puritans,<sup>5</sup> who then influenced Christians in, for example, the Netherlands and Germany.<sup>6</sup> During study trips with ‘Christians for Israel’ and ‘Sabeel-Kairos’ I came into contact with groups of people who had completely opposite Israel-views; both with unsatisfactory answers to the questions raised by the image of the Bible as a wasp. My main reason for abandoning the wasp model is the conviction that this image at best shows a chronological order of the Scriptures, but it falls short of the Christ-culminating meaning of the Bible including the universal purpose of God’s plan.

### The funnel model

The three-fold content of God’s revelation in the Bible, mentioned in the introduction, is in my opinion more comparable to a funnel. I am not thinking of its normal use from above, but of its shape from below.



*A funnel starts narrow, but from bottom to top the device becomes wider and wider. There is no interruption due to a narrow part in between, as with the wasp. The opening at the top is the widest*

Not everything can be imaged by a funnel. Its narrow beginning is to fully honor *Genesis* 1-11, where God begins with all creation and all nations. The narrow beginning and the ascending width of the funnel image the increasing transparency and clarity of God’s self-revelation and

---

<sup>4</sup> See my article, ‘Racisme penetreerde het Westers Christendom’, CIP 13-8-20 <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/racisme-penetreerde-westers-christendom-steven-paas-steven-paas/?trk=pulse-article&originalSubdomain=nl>

<sup>5</sup> M. van Campen summarizes his extensive earlier study of the origins of this particular Israel theory in the chapter ‘Christelijke visies op Gods weg met Israël: Een historisch overzicht in vogelvlucht’ (Christian Visions of God’s Way with Israel: A Historical Overview at a Glance), in: M. van Campen, et al., *Met het oog op de Bijbel: Bezinning en Bijbelstudies* (With a View to Israel: Reflection and Bible Studies), p. 38-64.

<sup>6</sup> See my: *Christian Zionism Examined: A Review of Ideas on Israel, the Church, and the Kingdom*, Eugene Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2020, chapters 4-7 (p.51-98). Also see my: *Israëlvisies in beweging: Gevolgen voor Kerk, geloof en theologie*, Kampen: Brevier 2014, chapters 9-14 (p. 90-226).

the progression of His plan of salvation for mankind and the world. The widening funnel also represents the gradual growth and spread of humanity throughout the earth. The image of the ever-widening funnel can help to explain that the Bible has Christ as its centre and is focused on the salvation in Him of all people of all times and places, uninterrupted and ever less shadowy. The Old Testament is already 'Book of Christ', as Luther put it, when he applied its rich message to the need of the world.

The Bible is God's love letter to the world and humanity. This love letter is not addressed to a perfect world and lovely people. The special thing is that God loves a corrupt world with erring and sinful people. To such a world, to such people, He promises salvation. Why? Not because He has found a reason in us, but because He is God and because the motive for His love is residing in Himself. Unfathomable to us. Stronger and more incomprehensible: God *is* love! (1 John 4:8). His identity is love. From that identity of love, God promises salvation and eternal bliss to everyone. This promise of salvation is the supporting element of the covenant He made with mankind immediately after Paradise. Other attributes of God are His faithfulness and His sovereign omnipotence. He faithfully keeps His word, and He has made it possible in His omnipotence for everyone to be saved. He has joined together that saving love, faithfulness and omnipotence in God the Son, through whom He makes Himself known. Jesus became the Heir of Israel through suffering, cross, and resurrection (Mk.12:7. In doing so, He has placed all the promises of restoration and salvation at the hearts of all people (2 Cor.1:20). The condition He attaches to His promises is voluntary obedience. He wants people to accept His promise by surrendering to Jesus Christ in faith. And He wants that they, in doing so, acknowledge that they are guilty of rebellion against God, which the devil initiated and through which they became slaves to the power of death and sin. Deliverance from that dark power requires faith in Christ.

The wide-open mouth of the funnel images the generous offer of God's saving grace to the world. It is an image of the advanced progress of the Gospel in the world. The Gospel of the Kingdom begins at a very small scale (a mustard seed, Mt.13:31,32; Mk. 4:30-32; Lk. 13:18,19) and expands further and more multiculturally throughout the world. Deeper down in the funnel, in the Old Testament, that universal message of salvation is already emerging in the shapes of God's covenants with Adam, Noah, and Abraham. God's covenant with Israel (Ex. 19, 20, 24) actualizes the missionary intent of His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:3). Old Testament Israel is to function as a demonstration of God's salvation to the nations. If obedient to that calling, they will 'always be at the top, never at the bottom' (Dt. 28:13). In our image: the wide opening of the funnel has resulted from the process of the funnel becoming wider and wider. Throughout history, the scope of God's love and grace is increasingly revealed. In the renewal of the covenant with Israel, described by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31), again the emphasis is on the universal aspect. It refers to God's covenant of grace with all mankind. As it is written, 'Rejoice. O nations, with his people' (Dt. 32:43; Rom. 15:10). Pagan kings like Nebuchadnezzar and Darius proclaimed the message of God's worldwide purpose (Dan. 4:34-37; 6:26-28). Prophets like Moses and Isaiah saw Christ in God's message (Dt. 18:15; Is. 53; cf. Hebr.12). On His way to the widest part of the funnel, God himself becomes man in His Son, and He descends into the deepest reality of our hopeless submission to sin and death. But in His humiliation, the exaltation and victory are present through Him! Old Testament believers already recognized the contours of the reality that would become fully visible in Jesus Christ. Believing in God is believing in Jesus! The believers of the Old Testament had already begun to realize, by way of a shadow, that personal surrender in faith means accepting that the Messiah's sacrifice is necessary to make use of God's promise of salvation, that is, of His offer of justification and sanctification. But an Israel-centered, narrowed, and inward-looking vision

of salvation, for which some use the model of a wasp (or an hourglass), does not do enough justice to the universal orientation of God's promise of salvation.

Thus, the wide mouth of the funnel marks the promise of God's grace in Christ, which offers to all human beings a wide-open door to salvation and eternal bliss. At the same time, that gracious offer presents us with the awesome reality that not everyone surrenders to Him and His promise in faith. Not everyone to whom God's offer of love is addressed comes to voluntary personal acceptance of Christ. The fact that not all believe His Gospel is a dark mystery that we ultimately cannot fathom. People's lack of faith aroused the amazement of Jesus Himself when, in the synagogue of Nazareth, He explained in vain to His acquaintances and relatives who He wanted to be for them (Mk. 6:6).

### **God's love and faithfulness**

In order to deal with this mystery of salvation, faith, and unbelief, Christians depend not only on the history of Jesus and on the testimonies of the Gospel writers and the Apostles, but also on the content of God's revelation in the Old Testament. The first eleven chapters of the Bible are decisive for understanding the structure of all Scripture. We have seen that from the beginning it appears that Scripture is God's love letter to the world.<sup>7</sup> Also in *Genesis* 12, where God's special choice falls on Abraham and his descendants, His plan of salvation continues to remain focused on 'all peoples of the earth' (:3). In the rest of the Old Testament, at first sight, God's dealings with Israel take the most important place. It comes down to how we understand God's actions. His association with Israel is based on His covenant with the people of Israel (Ex. 19, 20, 24). That covenant has two main aspects: love and faithfulness. First, God loves Israel in a unique and special way (Dt. 7:7,8). Second, God is faithful to His covenantal promises to Israel (Dt. 7:8). The result of God's action is that He looks upon Israel as chosen out of all nations (Dt. 7:6; 10:14,15; 14:2; Ps. 105:6; Is. 41:9; 43:10), as 'My people' (Ex. 3:7), that is, as His 'own' personal property (Ex. 19:5; Dt. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Mal. 3:17), as a precious possession (Ps. 135:4), as the apple of His eye (Dt. 32:10; Zach. 2:8,9), as His inheritance (Dt. 4:20; 9:26-29; Micah 7:14). Therefore, God wants Israel to be a holy people, that is, set apart (Ex. 19:6; Lev. 19; Dt. 7:6; 14:2; 26:19; 28:9). The people of Israel must be holy and pleasing to Him because He is holy (Lev. 19:2, 5). Only in this way can Israel fulfill the calling to set the priesthood example for the world (Ex. 19:6).<sup>8</sup>

Significantly, God's love and faithfulness are not based on the qualities of Israel itself. 'The Lord did not set His affection on you and chose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery' (Dt. 7:7,8; cf. Ez. 36:22,23). God is loving and faithful, not because Israel is, but because He Himself is. He did not set Israel apart for the purpose of satisfying nationalist claims of the people, or of giving them ethnic privileges, or of promising salvation to all Israelites of all times and places. God has chosen the Old Testament people of Israel in view of His offer of grace to the whole world. His covenant with Israel is a transient shadow (Heb. 8:13) of that global overarching covenant of grace, from Paradise onward. As a priestly people, Old Testament Israel was subservient to the purpose of God's plan of salvation for all nations. God's purpose is not to religiously separate or uplift Israel but to create and offer

---

<sup>7</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching*, Nottingham: Intervarsity Press, 2009 (first 2000), p. 97-114, 'What is the Structure of Biblical Revelation'.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Kees van den Boogert, 'Israël, het persoonlijk eigendom van God', in: *Verbonden*, april 2015, p. 8,9.

a salvation route for people of all nations, including Israel, through Jesus Christ, the promised Saviour. The people of Israel need as much grace and salvation as all other nations.

God's love, faithfulness, and promises to Israel represent His love, faithfulness, and promises for all nations, which He has made valid for them in Christ (Rom. 11:29; 2 Cor. 1:20). God wants every human being to personally enter into a relationship with Christ in the way of being born again, being justified, being sanctified, and of daily repentance. His goal is not the religious-political resurrection of ethnic Israel, but He wants (preferably all! 2 Pet. 3:9) people of all nations to accept His offer of grace in Christ and to live in His Church or Congregation as children of Him (Rom. 8:19), fully equipped for all good work, especially for proclaiming the Gospel (2 Tim. 3:17), and to inhabit the new earth (2 Pet. 3:11-15; On. 21:1-8).

### Israel as an example history

The only difference with all other nations in God's plan of salvation is that Old Testament Israel was chosen to show the nations an example of God's dealings with the world. Until Christ's fulfillment of God's covenant with Israel, the people have served as a special instrument or a model of demonstration. As evidenced by for example *Isaiah* 45-55, Old Testament Israel was meant as God's missionary 'pilot project' to show the nations who He is in His love and faithfulness and also in His punishments and judgments if that love and faithfulness are rejected.<sup>9</sup> The meaning of the names for people in Hebrew *am* (plural *ammim*) and *goy* (plural *goyim*) are usually used for respectively Israel and the Gentile peoples. But the difference in meaning is not so great that there are no exceptions to this use of those words. In other words, the more general term *goy/goyim* can also refer to people/peoples (under the blessing) of God (Gen. 18:18; 26:3,4; Jes. 2:3,4; 49:6), and the more specific *am/ammim* can also refer to nations in general or to people who behave like Gentiles without God (Dt. 2:25; Ps. 2:1,2;<sup>10</sup> 22:28; 56:7; 1Kgs 4:34; 8:60; Is. 2:3,4; Micah 4:1-3; Zach. 12:1-3). Moreover, in *Hosea* 1:9,10, the reality of judgment reflected by *Lo Ammi* (not My people) changes into the reality of grace by *Ammi* (My people). Striking for the relationship between Israel and the nations in this regard is what God says to the prophet *Ezekiel* when He promises to restore Israel after the captivity: 'It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD (Ez. 36:22,23; cf. :32, 36). God uses His judgments and grace regarding Israel as visible tools to make known to the nations who He is and what He wants from them. Israel's participation in God's mission (*Missio Dei*) is the priestly and prophetic mediator-role that Israel or the Jewish people was to fulfill in the midst of all the nations in the Old Testament (Is. 42:6; 49:6; Acts 1:8; 13:47).

The image of the funnel recognizes both the reality of God's love and faithfulness for Israel and His love and faithfulness for the world and humanity. They are not played off against each other. That does happen in the wasp model. It mistakenly suggests that Israel's Old Testament exemplary role in God's plan of salvation grants to the Jewish people and the land of Israel a permanent exceptional position in God's plan of salvation and in the world. But God's dealings

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Michael A. Grisanti, 'Israel's Mission to the Nations in Isaiah 40-55', in: *The Master's Seminary Journal*, spring 1998, p. 39-61 <https://tms.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/tmsj9c.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Martin van Veelen, 'Who are the goyim?', in: Steven Paas (red.) *Israelism and the Place of Christ: Christocentric interpretation of Biblical Prophecy*, Zurich: LIT Verlag 2018, chapter 13, shows in a comparison of *Psalms* 2:1 with *Acts* 4:27 that Israel is being transferred from *am* to *goyim*. <https://www.lit-verlag.de/isbn/978-3-643-90981-7>

with Israel are not separate from His dealings with the world as if they were competitors. Israel and the world do not compete for private particularity or exclusivity. They are not mutually exclusive. God's special inexplicable love for the world, for now under occupation of Satan, has been displayed by His special love and faithfulness for Israel and, after the return from exile, for the Jewish people. The climax of that great love is Jesus Christ. The reality of the Incarnate Son of God abrogates Israel's Old Testament exemplary function. The end of Israel's exceptional instrumental function in God's universal plan of salvation, as a result of Christ's fulfilling work, was painfully demonstrated in the year 70 when city and temple were destroyed. A cruel and tragic event. God used the Roman Empire to mark the end of Israel's Old Testament mode.<sup>11</sup> But the destruction of Jerusalem and the forced Diaspora do not abrogate God's love for Israel and the Jews. It is as great and wonderful as His love for all nations, from which He gathers His Church.

### **Fulfillment and promise**

The funnel model expresses the belief that in Christ the Old Testament calling of Israel or the Jewish people has been completed. It must be emphasized that this conviction does not mean that God wanted to punish them more than any other people for a specific disobedience or for a particular complicity in the death on the cross of Christ. We believe that humanity as such, including every people and every human being, is responsible for the guilt of sin that required the atoning suffering and death of Jesus, and that humanity, therefore, collectively and individually bears the blame for His death on the cross. That guilt is as universal and personal as the universal and personal validity of the remission of sin, the reconciliation, and the redemption acquired through the cross and the resurrection. The call to faith in Christ and His work of salvation applies to the Jewish people no less and no more than to any other people. In the plan of salvation of God in Christ, there are no unequal positions for the nations. In this sense, the differences have been eliminated. In the funnel model, nothing extra is stolen from or given to the Jewish people. The work accomplished by Christ has absorbed the exceptional Old Testament position of Israel and it makes that position superfluous. At the same time, the fulfillment and thus the completion of Israel's Old Testament exemplary function means that in Christ as many particularly rich promises apply to Israel or the Jewish people as to all nations.

### **Abusing God's election**

Unfortunately, this basic premise is not sufficient to satisfy, let alone convince, fellow Christians who nurture the idea of a specific lasting religious position and future for or from Israel. What we have described as the funnel model, they reject as a reprehensible expression of replacement theology, or worse, as a signal of (potential) antisemitism or hatred of Jews. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Because, it is precisely the wasp model they usually adhere to that images their unfounded view of Israel and the origin and nature of antisemitism. The wasp model can lead to an interpretation of the Bible in which Church, theology, and personal faith become dependent on exceptional expectations for and from Israel or the Jewish people. The idea of an exceptional position and future of and for ethnic Israel often consciously or unconsciously puts pressure on Christ as the centre of Scripture. As a result, there is room for a shift from the spiritual intention that God in Christ has for humanity

---

<sup>11</sup> That has been concluded by: Philip Mauro, *The Seventy Weeks and the Great Tribulation: A Study of the Last Two Visions of Daniel and of the Olivet Discourse of the Lord Jesus Christ*, Ravenbrook, 2014 [first 1921] [<https://www.amazon.com/Seventy-Weeks-Great-Tribulation/dp/1499703686>]



and the world to a materialistic interpretation with claims expectations of a nationalistic and ethnic nature. Harbingers of this shift in perspective already showed themselves throughout the course of the history of the people of Israel. After all, much of that history is characterized by abusing the high calling to be a holy priestly people who would acquaint the world with the Name and work of God. We see that usually a majority of the people misused the God-given position for their own nationalist and religious goals.

At the same time, we see that many have sincerely loved and served Him. The *Psalms* sing about that. Even in the darkest times of apostasy, God left seven thousand in Israel 'all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal' (1 Kgs. 19:18). Before, during, and after the exile, the Bible prophets continued to call for return to the Lord. At the advent of Jesus, He appears to be recognized and honoured as the Messiah by faithful believers such as Anna, Simeon, and the shepherds. Great interest in the preaching of the Lord's herald John the Baptist paves the way for many who want to quench their spiritual thirst through Jesus and be helped by Him against demons and disease. It is true that He was rejected by (most) Jewish leaders, but that should not close our eyes to the many who, in accordance with the true believers of the Old Testament era, loved Him and eventually came to recognize Him as the promised Son of David and the Saviour of the world.

However, the majority of Old Testament Israel and later the Jewish people, had no connection with the loving faith and fear of God, let alone that it would lead them to embrace Messiah Jesus. Against God's intention for them, they followed the example of other peoples, and developed a self-elevating nationalism aimed at maintaining their own independence, race and status. The division of the kingdom after Solomon should have warned them against continuing erroneous ways. But that painful separation between the 2 and the 10 tribes did not prevent them from believing that God, because of their qualities, had reserved a position for them, more exceptional and higher than that of other peoples, and that eventually they would rule over the nations. This racial and nationalistic pride has cost the Israelites dearly. They clashed with large empires, which did not accept such an attitude of small nations. This resulted in submission and exile, first by the Assyrians, later by the Babylonians and the empires that followed them. The Jewish people, as a political entity, finally fatally clashed with one of the greatest world powers that ever existed, the Roman Empire. The Romans did not tolerate peoples on their side like the Jewish people with their own nationalistic claims, let alone with the claim that Israel as a chosen people would one day be restored as a power that under the Messiah would control the world. Jewish revolts in 66-73 and 132-136 AD were bloodily suppressed and this made an end to the Jewish nation in Canaan. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed; the Jews were deported and ended up in the lands to which many of the other tribes had already been dispersed.

## **Racism**

However, the Jewish claim of a national restoration of Israel persisted in the Diaspora. This became a particular challenge to the Roman Empire when it became Christian. After emperor Constantine granted freedom to Christians in 313 by the Edict of Milan, Christianity developed into a state religion. Consequently, a growing need for its own 'Biblical' identity was felt in the Roman Empire. The predominant political-religious ambition, depicted by the wasp model, played an important role in this. However, in a different way, because not the ethnic descendants of Old Testament Israel or the Jewish people were to fulfill that role in Roman thought. After all, they were supposed to be finished. The post-Constantine Roman Empire saw

itself as called to replace Biblical Israel. The sentiment of ‘We are Israel’ became popular in the Western world.<sup>12</sup>

After the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, that derived Israel consciousness was adopted by the Frankish Empire, the German Empire (‘Das heilige Römische Reich deutscher Nation’) and the early nation states of Western Europe, such as England and the Netherlands. The ‘we-are-Israel’ sentiment was not only political but also theological in nature, and it penetrated the Church, the theology and the personal faith of many. It gradually became embedded in a more general sense of Western white supremacy. The Western world from Constantine onwards looked upon itself as a politico-religious ‘corpus christianum’ of unity of State and Church as the new Israel. This necessarily manifested itself in two ways: the elevation of one’s own people and the humiliation of other peoples. As far as the latter is concerned, the ‘corpus christianum’ has a sad reputation in dealing with its own Jewish minority. In the Modern Age of Europe, more and more peoples in all continents came under the control of the colonial empires of the West. This history developed hand in hand with the harbingers of the phenomenon that from the nineteenth-century evolutionary race theories of Darwin would be called racism.

In the traditionally ‘Christian’ world of the West racism manifested itself in various ways. Imperialism, colonialism and extreme nationalism acted as its allies. The ‘own white’ continents of Europe and America have sometimes been referred to with a racist connotation as the ‘boreal world’. In those areas themselves and in the countries of other continents, the soil is drenched in blood by many Western attempts to subjugate, exterminate or enslave peoples. Perhaps, the Holocaust is the most terrifying example, but anyone who knows history is aware of genocidal crimes against many peoples. The sentiments of looking down on another race or other races and looking up to a certain people or race has mixed with Christianity in Western history. The unbiblical idea that a particular race or people possesses an exclusive ‘divine calling’ puts other races or peoples lower on the ladder of God’s supposed preferences or priorities. This looks like social Darwinism in a Christian jacket. In my opinion the damage caused by this error is a major cause of the decline of churches and Biblical faith in the West. I repeat that anyone who, as a Christian, wants to approach his or her multicultural world with the redemptive message of Jesus Christ must be healed of all traces of racism. A Dutch pastor and his Malawian wife optimistically said on this: ‘Racism has been learnt. If racism has a beginning, then it also has an end. It does not survive Jesus’.<sup>13</sup> Racism and faith in Jesus cannot mix. If Christians had always disapproved of racism, the history of the West would have turned out differently. This applies to racism in general, but it is also true for its particular forms.

### **Antisemitism and Philosemitism**

Characteristically, within this Western racism, all kinds of racial theories about the Jewish people naturally arose. First, it led to the ideology of antisemitism. It confirmed the dislike of the Jews, who with their exclusiveness and expectations of restoration seemed to rival the Western powers, as a kind of fifth column. Anti-Jewish sentiments also penetrated theology and Church, and this did not change much by the Reformation. After the Reformation, however, a counter-movement arose, especially in the currents of Pietism within Protestantism, namely the movement of philosemitism. This phenomenon expressed a special love for Israel or the

---

<sup>12</sup> For a more detailed sketch of the ‘we-are-Israel’- idea, see my: *Israëlviesies in beweging*, p. 113-117.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Folkert de Jong en Thandi de Jong-Soko, ‘Wie geworteld is, kan er beter tegen als mensen iets tegen je afkomst hebben’, in: *De Nieuwe Koers*, 2020-2 (March), p. 15.

Jewish people because of a supposedly exceptional blessed position and future for that people, and the expectation that a great blessing for the Church would be attached to it.

Hatred of Jews and exaggerated love for the Jews are products of Western racial dislikes and raving sympathies. They are each other's opposites, and at the same time they are two sides of the same coin. Both stem from the same racial thinking in Western traditionally white 'Christian' culture, perhaps because the 'white' Jewish fellow citizens were always around. They evoke each other. Antisemitism sometimes stems from disappointed philosemitism, and philosemitism is sometimes the product of shame because of an antisemitic past. Both are overstressed sentiments toward Israel or the Jewish people. I refer to these two phenomena together under the term 'Israelism', and understand them as related attempts to put Israel outside the general concept of the unifying love and faithfulness of God, as it applies to all nations without distinction. Israel is put outside the nations, because God does not love them, or Israel is excluded from the nations, because they enjoy a special love by God. This exclusion is fatal, because it inevitably leads to a caricature that makes any other view of Israel suspicious in advance. This complex religious ideology of 'Israelism' has manifested itself at two seemingly opposite sides: debasing or exalting the Jewish people in God's plan of salvation, putting it lower or higher than other peoples. Or the nations replace the scorned Israel. Or Israel is exalted above the nations. As a typical aspect of it, Israelism illustrates that Western racism is (also) deeply religious in nature. The octopus of Israelism, however, represents a religiosity that finds no support in the revelation of God. From their essence in Christ, the Scriptures prescribe equality of all nations and races and unity of all believers gathered from them (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11-14).

## **Conclusion**

The wasp model does not provide us with a correct image of the Biblical message. In any case, it is (as well as the hourglass model) susceptible to misuse. In the alternation of hating and idolizing, it tends to facilitate an overstressed focus on Israel, resulting in the dislocation of the Biblical vision, at the expense of the universal orientation and the Christocentric main emphasis of the Scriptures. Together with Israelism, this hermeneutical wasp image can (gradually) obscure the perspective of the equality in Christ of all nations, and of the unity of Christians in His Body, the Church.

The funnel model is more suitable, because it assist us to recognize the equality between Israel and the nations and the unity of Christians. Precisely because of this fundamental equality and unity, the funnel model helps us to understand that antisemitism and philosemitism spring from the same racist source. These ideologies have proved capable of evoking each other. Both are harmful to Jews and non-Jews. Most importantly, the funnel model helps us to improve our understanding of why Christ, God the Son, must always occupy the unique central place in Church, theology and personal faith. The interests of Israel or the Jewish people and the interests of all other peoples are most respected and served when they submit to the reign of King Jesus. Where that truth is grasped in faith, there is a greater understanding of the secret of the greatness of God and of His love and faithfulness to the world (John 3:16-21; 17:21-23; Eph. 3:6-11).

Finally, the image of the wide opening of a funnel is too limited for this infinitely wider perspective. The Biblical image of a spring and a river is more helpful here. From the throne of God and the Lamb, in the image of the Holy Spirit, a river of life-giving water flows over the new earth (Rev. 22:1). The Samaritan woman was already allowed by Jesus to see a vista of the

function of that living water of God's Spirit. It is received by all who believe in Him. Then, in every believer who participates in the mission of Jesus to people near and far,<sup>14</sup> it becomes a source, 'welling up to eternal life' (John 4:6-15; 7:38). Jesus remains the central Source. How unsurpassably, promising is this missionary perspective, for Jew and Gentile!

*Dr. Steven Paas (1942) published on the phenomenon of 'Israelism' in the interpretation of Biblical prophecy, on European and African church history and mission, and on the lexicography of Chichewa, a widely spoken language in Central Africa.*

---

<sup>14</sup> Steven Paas, *Challenging Western Christians and Their Neighbours: Be Participants in the Mission of Jesus, At Home and Abroad*, Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock 2020 [<https://wipfandstock.com/9781725275843/challenging-western-christians-and-their-neighbours/>]