

Replacement Theology

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What is Replacement Theology? It is a pejorative term used by a growing number of misinformed Christians who unwittingly misrepresent the views of fellow believers. The purpose of this web site is to encourage Christians to cease using this unkind term, for it is theologically inaccurate, divisive, incendiary to honest Christian discourse, and overtly offensive.

Summary

A typical definition of “Replacement Theology” can be paraphrased as such: “Israel has been replaced by the Christian Church, so the promises and prominent position once held by God’s chosen people are now held exclusively by the Church.” Such a view is false. The majority of Christians today and through the years see Gentile believers as grafted in to the vine of Israel. (Rom 11:17-21) There is no replacement. Hence, the term "Replacement Theology" is inaccurate and ought not to be used.

Our Aim

This informational web site aims to reduce or curtail the term “Replacement Theology” in academic and general theological discourse. For those who have newly encountered this unfortunate term, “Replacement Theology,” we aim to provide you *accurate* information to help you understand the underlying issues so that you may decide for yourself. Our highest aim is to address those who employ this pejorative term in web sites, broadcasts, opinion papers or in academic pursuits. We desire such Christian thinkers to re-think their use of this term. We pray they would edit and redact their material and use a more suitable terminology.

Understanding More

Definitions for "Replacement Theology" which assert the church has displaced Israel are deeply flawed. They suffer from being simplistic and inaccurate while mangling historic Christian views. “Replacement Theology” is often used to discredit Reformed or Covenant theologians by ascribing to them a view that they do not hold. When carelessly repeated, the phrase “Replacement Theology” *propagates* this flawed definition. Furthermore, it drives a wedge between fellow Christians. Damage to the unity of the body of Christ occurs when well-meaning, but misinformed people haphazardly employ the term. It is often done to advance their own theological theory of biblical or end-times interpretation.

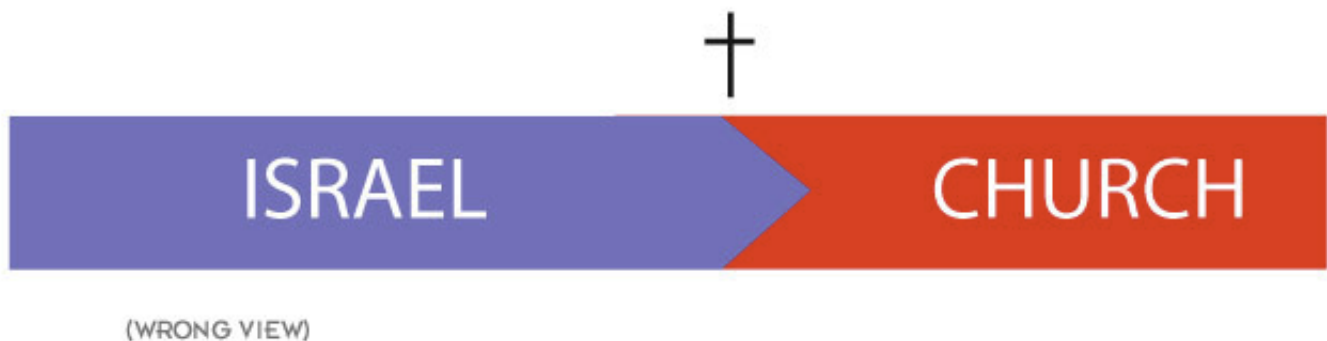
The term “Replacement Theology” is intrinsically pejorative for several reasons. First, it is used by only one side of an ongoing debate to mock and minimize the opposing view. Second, the term “Replacement Theology” is often used simply to make others sound stupid: “Of course God would never replace his chosen people.” Third, it is a straw man argument because it sets up a false and oversimplified opponent then knocks them down with arguments that are misinformed. Fourth, the user of the term “Replacement Theology” unwittingly projects a prideful arrogance. Between the lines one hears an *ad hominem* attack, "I am right, and all other Christians, no matter how well studied, have greatly erred." Finally, “Replacement Theology” has come to be equated with an anti-Semitic mindset which is patently untrue. (Martin Luther’s writings later in life shifted to anti-Semitic themes, but such examples are few and far from the norm.) Today and throughout history, believers who hold views that were birthed during the Christian Reformation are very pro Israel.

How does “Replacement Theology” misrepresent and malign many good Christians? Reformed or Covenant theologians simply do not hold that the church replaced Israel. Reformed theologians believe that God “pruned off” many Jews in judgment for their disbelief; then God grafted in Gentiles by faith. There is no replacement. *Grafting-in* keeps and cherishes Jewish roots and does them no harm. This correct view promotes a *continuity* of God’s faithfulness to both *believing* Jews and Gentiles from the Old Testament and on into the New.

Romans 11:17-32 If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, 18 do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” 20 Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

The Big Mistake

There is no such thing as "Replacement Theology." Critics of historic Reformed theology misrepresent their position by asserting the Church has replaced Israel. This illustration depicts the errant view ascribed to Reformed or Covenant theologians.



So what *is* the mainstream Reformed / Covenant view? They hold that there is one people of God. This singular “People of God” is comprised of people from both Jewish and Gentile descent. The common factor is that they are “saved by grace through faith.”

Here is an illustration that properly depicts the biblical position held by a vast majority of Reformed thinkers.



Better Terminology - People of God

Reformed theologians believe that God has always had one people of faith. Under the Old Covenant (Old Testament), the people of God were comprised of *believing* Jews and *believing* Gentiles. Under the New Covenant, believing Jews and Gentiles are also comprised of one people of God.

Israel means “People of God.” Israel is a conjunction of two Hebrew words: yisra-el. Yisra is a bit complicated but essentially means “people ruled by God.” “El” is a name for God. Therefore, Israel means “People of God.”

The Old Testament is a story of the “People of God.” It is primarily “salvation history.” In the Old Testament, genetic descendants of Abraham are understood to be a blessed nation, from which believing individuals were called to become “*true* Israel.” The true “People of God” (saved) are individuals that have expressed *faith* in God’s promise toward a coming Messiah! Such faith allowed the Jew to move from the ranks of genetic, national Israel to *believing* Israel. A widely quoted verse is: “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.” This distinction is *fully* explained in the New Testament as faith in Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:8 explains justification by faith in Jesus. “So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Hence, Old Testament salvation was based on faith. Salvation was grace not race

In the Old Testament, the Jews were God’s chosen people; but for what purpose were they chosen? Scripture affirms Israel was to be a “Light to the Gentiles.” God’s promise to Abraham was multifaceted. God told Abraham, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: “You will be the father of *many* nations.” In addition, God’s other blessings had the Gentiles in mind. God also told Abraham “through your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” (Gen 22:18) This “offspring” was none other than Jesus Christ - a blessing to both Jew and Gentile - who together make up “all the nations of the earth.”

The Old Testament “People of God” often included Gentiles. One notable example was Ruth, the Moabite woman, who returned to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law Naomi, a Jew. Hear the words of this Gentile, “Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.” Ruth, a Gentile, was the great-grandmother of King David. Yes, this Gentile, along with others, were in the lineage of the messiah, Jesus. The “People of God” in the Old Testament were predominantly Jewish but surely included Gentiles.

Isaiah 42:6 “I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles.

As Gentiles came by faith, they would become included in the “People of God” or “true *Israel*.” Therefore in the Old Testament, the righteous (saved) Israelite believed in the promised Messiah. Sadly, this meant *unconverted* Gentiles and *unbelieving* Jews comprised the *lost* people. At the close of the Old Testament, large numbers of national, genetic Jews were rejected by God, depending on works of the law to save them in place of faith. Nonetheless, God remained faithful to a *remnant* of believing Jews whom He had called.

While some Jews accepted Jesus Christ as their Messiah, most did not. “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” (John 1:11) There is a massive central message found throughout the New Testament that Christ's coming had insured there would be “one people of God.” Being a “light to the Gentiles” was God's original purpose for the Jews and Jesus succeeded where they had failed. “But to all who did receive him [both Jews and Gentiles], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12) Both Jew and Gentile would come by faith / belief.

Biblical Support

This theme of Jew / Gentile unity is replayed so many times in the New Testament. To reject the premise of one people of God is almost to reject the message of Christianity. Here are just a few passages that show this overwhelming theme of unity.

Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

Romans 3:22

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,

The sovereignty of God described in Romans 9 has more to do with God’s choice to make one people out of two!

Romans 9:22-27 What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? 23 What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— 24 even us, whom **he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?** 25 As he says in Hosea:

“I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people;

and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one,”

A verse in Romans 15 makes it very clear that the New Testament Church (made up predominantly of Gentiles) didn’t “replace” the Jews, but shared the blessing of the Jews.

Romans 15:27

They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’

spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. (Underline mine.)

Through the Church, God had made one people out of two.

1 Corinthians 12:13

For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Galatians 3:28

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

Colossians 3:11

Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

The most convincing passage of God's sovereign plan to have one people of God is found in Ephesians 3.

Eph 3:6

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Again, there is no "Replacement" going on here. Gentiles were "heirs together" with Israel. The Gospel made Jews and Gentiles part of the same family as joint heirs. Jews and Gentiles also were "one body" in Christ. One can conclude that neither are Jews and Gentiles "two bodies" with two timelines and two plans of salvation. "Replacement Theology" contends that the Church has taken over the promises given the Jews. How can this be when Eph 3:6 says that the church – made up of believing Jews and Gentiles – are now sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus?

There are many other facets to the debate about the *true* believing Israel being the church. Nonetheless, the point has been made. The people of God come from believing Jews and believing Gentiles. Sadly this means, that most of God's "chosen people" (speaking of the Jews) are non-believers. Therefore, they are not saved. Jews are a mission field. They are a tough mission field because God, in judgment for their rejection of the Messiah (John 1:11) has partially hardened them. "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in..." (Rom 11:25)

Is it theologically proper to separate believing Israel (members of the church) from national Israel? Apparently Paul thought so when he said, "All Israel is not Israel." The context makes it very clear that Abraham's true offspring (Israel) are those who believe.

Rom 9:6 b "... For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 8 In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring."

Covenant / Reformed Theology SUPPORTS the Nation of Israel

National Israel has been remarkably preserved. Quite possibly, the formation of the current day nation of Israel is a preparation for the prophecy found in Rom 11:26 "and in this way all Israel will be saved." Reformed theologians do not discount modern day national Israel but pray for a softening of their hearts, prior to the return of Christ, so that all may come to faith. Paul, a Jew himself by birth, recognized how lost the "chosen people" (national Israel) were. Rom 10:1 says, "Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. 2 For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge."

The theological mindset of some Christians is to treat Modern Israel as "saved Jewish brothers." Their support of Modern Israel seems contingent to the extent which events in the news support their end times views. Modern Israel is treated too often as an entertaining clock that counts down the salvation of the church. Unfortunately, little emphasis is given to their salvation. I would suggest that Modern Israel is *best* supported *and unconditionally* loved without such presuppositions.

The salvation of modern-day Israelis ought to be continually prayed for. Modern day Israel must be seen as a mission field. One *possible* interpretation of Daniel's 70th week must not license Christians to overlook the biblical claim that "Today is the day of salvation." (2 Cor 6:2) May our desire and prayer be overtly biblical as expressed by the inspired words of the Apostle Paul: "my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved." Such a position requires a sincere love and support for Modern Israel.

For example, I often wonder: How do modern Israelis feel when they encounter the fained support from some pre-tribulation prophecy gurus on television? How can these "prophecy profits" not be anti-Semitic as they selfishly look forward to their early trouble-free departure, while Jews miss the boat and sink into Apocalyptic tribulation? This point of intentional irony is to demonstrate that the "anti-Semitic" label is too easily slapped on fellow Christians. Instead of attributing anti-Israel motives to any theological camp, may we all pray for the salvation of modern-day Israelis.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is no such thing as "Replacement Theology." The Gentiles have been grafted in to Israel, and now they are sharers together in the promises of God in Jesus Christ. To propagate this notion of the Church replacing Israel is divisive. It necessitates an ongoing pejorative use of the term "Replacement Theology." This term should be redacted from Christian discourse. Using this device to portray other Christians as anti-Semitic is unfair, and also should find cessation.

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