

ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

PART 40

REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY, PART 4

Most Replacement theologians, however, will never admit that literal hermeneutics leads to understanding the Bible in the way dispensational theology as it flows from literal hermeneutics understands it.

Any book you read written by a Replacement theologian has to deny literal hermeneutics. Some are more open and transparent about it than others. Some of them try to hide it a bit so it's very important to be wise and discerning whenever reading any literature claiming to be a relevant scriptural treatment of any topic but that is very important concerning Israel and the church. A theologian named Chapman is an example of a blatant denial of literal hermeneutics. When discussing Ezekiel 48:15-16 concerning the priest's portion of land, Chapman questioned the prophet's intent. Obviously, at the same time this is also questioning the inspiration and truthfulness of the Word of God. "Does the prophet really intend to give us an architect's blueprint of the new Jerusalem? If so, we must interpret the visions very literally and see them as a kind of visual preview of history. The alternative [meaning the alternative to literal interpretation] is to try to interpret the language of the vision and translate it into a message which was relevant to the original hearers and is relevant to anyone who wants to listen today." His alternative interpretation is founded on the presuppositions of Replacement Theology and amillennial Eschatology. He believes all the restoration prophecies in the Bible relate to the restoration after the Babylonian captivity; none of them are still future. He also recognizes he has a problem with that interpretation because the Babylonian restoration involved only Judah, and not Israel, and he admits Zechariah 10:6-10 and Ezekiel 37:15-23 prove that both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms are to be restored together. "When we are faced with this kind of dilemma, we have to make a choice: *either* we insist that we must continue to look for a literal fulfilment in history—in which case we may see the return of Jews to the land in the twentieth century and the establishment of the State of Israel as the intended fulfilment, *or* we look for other ways in which these prophecies could have been fulfilled already in the past or could yet be fulfilled in the future." He doesn't believe that prophecy can refer to the distant future because he doesn't think the people of the time could understand it. But wasn't God's purpose for the people at the time to give them hope for the future? Of course, it was. "When the prophets spoke the message they believed God had given them for the people of their day, they must have expected that it would mean something to their hearers at the time and in the context in which they were living. It is hard to think that a prophet would be given a message to his people in the eighth century BC which related to events that would not take place until the twentieth or twenty-first centuries." [Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land? The Continuing Crisis Over Israel and Palestine*, pp. 288-289, 292]. Isn't that exactly what prophecy is doing, which is presenting a

preview of history? Weren't all the prophecies of Christ's First Advent written centuries before they were fulfilled? If prophecy that has been fulfilled was predicted centuries before it was fulfilled and all the people who heard the original prophecy were long gone, why can't as yet unfulfilled prophecy be fulfilled in the future long after the original recipients are dead? These theologians can't have it both ways. Prophecy was completely relevant to the Jews to whom Ezekiel was writing; it was confirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant. That's not hard to imagine at all. The prophets frequently made promises to the Israelites about their blessed future that would not be fulfilled for millennia, but it gave them hope for the future. They didn't know when these things would be fulfilled, but they knew they were being promised ultimate fulfillment. We can't discount the fact the prophets didn't even completely understand some of the prophecy the Spirit revealed to them at the time. Why should we assume then, that the people would fully understand everything at the time? They probably didn't understand it all but prophecy gave them hope for the future. Theologians who think in this way seem to be denying the role of the Spirit in the creation of Scripture, which is a denial of the inerrancy and the inspiration of Scripture. They act like the prophets are completely independent agents simply writing down what they think as opposed to writing down what is being revealed to them by the Spirit.

Luke 10:23–24 ²³Turning to the disciples, He said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, ²⁴for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them."

1 Peter 1:10–12 ¹⁰As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, ¹¹seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. ¹²It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.

Goldingay, who writes numerous commentaries being published today, had this to say. "But when Ezekiel declared that such and such a return to the land or such and such a battle was to take place, he was not announcing events scheduled for two and a half millennia after his day. He was addressing and bringing God's word to people in his own day, warning them of calamities and promising them blessings that could come about in their day. He was not revealing a timetable or fixture list of events that had to unfold over thousands of years; he was bringing a specific message to a particular context. A fulfillment in 1948 of a prophecy given by Ezekiel to people who lived in the 580s BC is thus nonsense: it is not a fulfillment of promises and warnings that were part of God's relationship with those people. Prophets did sometimes speak about the End of all things, but there are relatively few of these prophecies. The ones applied to the recent history of the Jews are prophecies that relate to the circumstances of the Jews in

particular contexts." [John Goldingay, quoted in *Whose Promised Land? The Continuing Crisis Over Israel and Palestine*, pp. 292-293]. What in the world does this guy think prophecy is? It is at times, depending on context, referring to events far in the future and it is in more than just a few instances in the Bible. Ezekiel's message in context was a message of hope. That's a very relevant message to the people living at the time. It's also an affirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant. How can he say that end times prophecies are few? That's absurd. The saddest part is men like this have a huge Christian platform and they lead many people astray. The root of the problem here is failure to understand dispensational distinctions; those distinctions are obliterated by Replacement theologians. If Israel is replaced by the church, then numerous adjustments have to be made to the rest of the Bible in order to accommodate the replacement error.

Stephen Sizer, a virulent opponent of Zionism also criticized literal hermeneutics. "Christian Zionism is constructed upon a novel hermeneutic in which all Scripture is interpreted in an ultra-literal sense; the prophetic parts of Scripture are seen as pre-written history; and eschatology fulfilled in the interpreter's generation.... "[T]he origin of this ultra-literal and futurist hermeneutic can be traced to the early nineteenth century... Based on his own form of literalism, Darby developed his doctrine of dispensationalism with its rigid distinction between Israel and the church which forms the basis of much contemporary Christian Zionism." [Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* pp. 108-109].

It's easy to see how far off track people can get when literal hermeneutics are abandoned and that is nowhere more apparent than when dealing with Israel. Despite what these men think, the Bible lays out a solid case for an Israelite future.

Replacement Theology developed very early in Christianity. Augustine's system of theology became solidly entrenched in the church when the Roman Catholic Church was built on an Augustinian doctrinal basis. Augustine did not interpret the Bible according to literal hermeneutics and he hated the concept of a Millennial Kingdom. This was due to the pagan Manichean and Stoic asceticism and Neo-Platonic duality he brought with him into this theology and he could never rid himself of it. The result is Augustine changed his theology from premillennial dispensational to amillennial. The Reformers correctly, but only partially, changed their interpretive methods to literal hermeneutics, but they never applied that system to prophecy and Israel. They simply accepted Rome's Eschatology without question. Luther and Calvin were both Augustinian theologians; therefore, much of Augustine's pagan theology, dressed up in Christian language, was, without question, brought into the church. It's still with us. Part of all that is Replacement Theology. Departing from premillennial Eschatology not only affects one's understanding of prophecy, the future, Israel, and the church, it affects every other area of Systematic Theology as well.

“While the Protestant Reformation under Luther rightly used the historical-grammatical contextual method of interpretation to rescue salvation passages in the New Testament from Catholic mysticism, it failed to apply the same sound hermeneutical methods with regard to the prophetic portions of the Scriptures. The numerous prophetic passages throughout the Old and New Testaments, which promise a future national restoration of Israel in the promised-land as prescribed by the Abrahamic, Palestinian [Land], Davidic, and New Covenants respectively, were simply ignored. This unfortunately continued the Anti-Semitic sentiments of Catholic eschatology since Augustine. Many Old Testament prophecies which bespeak of Israel’s future national salvation were confusedly interpreted as references to the church, however problematic and inconsistent with sound hermeneutical principles this was.” [R. Mark Musser, *Nazi Oaks: The Green Sacrifice of the Judeo-Christian Worldview in the Holocaust*, p. 422]. I would take issue with Musser over one thing he’s written here. I don’t think the Scriptures concerning the covenants and Israel have been ignored; I think they have been changed in order to suit various theological systems. In other words, this was a deliberate distortion and abrogation of the Scriptures that became so deeply ingrained into Replacement systems of theology that they are accepted without question. I do agree with him that much of the basis for Replacement Theology was developed out of anti-Semitism. For centuries, the Roman Catholic Church mercilessly persecuted the Jewish people.

Concerning hermeneutics, there are key presuppositions that provide the interpretive basis for Replacement Theology.

The primary presupposition is belief in the interpretive priority of the New Testament over the Old Testament. These theologians have a heavily Christological view of the Scriptures and they use that as a filter through which all of the Bible is viewed. George Eldon Ladd is a good example of this. “... The fact is that the New Testament frequently interprets the Old Testament prophecies in a way *not suggested by the Old Testament context*.... This [discussing Isaiah 53] clearly establishes the principle that the ‘literal hermeneutic’ does not work. For *literally*, Isaiah 53 is not a prophecy of Messiah but of an unnamed servant of the Lord. Old Testament prophecies must be interpreted in the light of the New Testament to find their deeper meaning. This principle must be carried further. I do not see how it is possible to avoid the conclusion that the New Testament applies Old Testament prophecies to the New Testament church and in so doing identifies the church as spiritual Israel.... Paul avoids calling the church Israel, unless it be in Galatians 6:16, but this is a much disputed verse. It is true, however, that he applies prophecies to the church which in their Old Testament setting belong to literal Israel; he calls the church the sons, the seed of Abraham. He calls believers the true circumcision. It is difficult therefore to avoid the conclusion that Paul sees the church as spiritual Israel.... Dispensationalism forms its eschatology by a literal interpretation of the Old Testament and then fits the New Testament into it. A nondispensational eschatology forms its theology from the explicit teaching of the New Testament.... Any millennial doctrine must be consistent with its New Testament context, particularly its Christology.” [George Eldon Ladd, “Historic Premillennialism” in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, pp.

20-29). The ancient rabbis knew Isaiah 53 was a Messianic prophecy; it didn't need the New Testament to reinterpret it that way. What the New Testament did, by means of progressive revelation, was to reveal the identity of the Servant in question.

One of the things Replacement theologians fail to understand is just how the Jewish New Testament authors used the Old Testament in the New and Ladd makes it very obvious he fails to understand these issues. Fruchtenbaum has identified four ways the Jews did this. Without elaborating on them, they are: 1) literal prophecy plus literal fulfillment, 2) literal plus typical (Typology), 3) literal plus application, and 4) summation. [Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Messianic Christology*, pp. 146-152]. When these four uses of the Old Testament in the New Testament are understood as the Jewish authors understood them, the questions concerning that use are sufficiently and adequately answered.

An Amillennialist named Riddlebarger also argues for New Testament priority. "Historically, Protestant interpreters have argued that the New Testament provides the controlling interpretation of the Old Testament. The goal of the interpreter of eschatology is to determine how prophecies made in the Old Testament are treated and applied by writers of the New. If the New Testament writers spiritualize Old Testament prophecies by applying them in a nonliteral sense, then the Old Testament passage must be seen in light of that New Testament interpretation, not vice versa. Moreover, a major step toward finding an answer to the millennial question is to develop a contextual framework of interpretation from the New Testament itself.... The historic Protestant (or the amillennial) position holds that the New Testament is the final arbiter of the Old Testament. We must interpret all such prophecy in the redemptive-historical context if we are to interpret it correctly. The historic Protestant hermeneutic sees eschatology as more closely linked to the ebb and flow of redemption than do many popular dispensational writers." [Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times*, pp. 37-38].

I wanted to point out some issues in this quote so you can recognize them if you come across them. His first supporting argument involves history but the problem is he uses history in a selective fashion. Just before this quote he mentioned that the historical priority he uses is Reformed theological history. Reformed theology has only been around since Calvin, and much of what passes for Calvinism was developed by some of his disciples after his death. Secondly, he equates the historic Protestant position with amillennialism. The only way he can do that is to ignore church history before Augustine. Perhaps history isn't so important after all? He too fails to understand how the Jewish authors of the New Testament used the Old Testament. They didn't spiritualize the text. He also prioritizes redemption as the purpose for God's plan in history. Most theologians don't have an honest view of history. They simply accept that what was done is acceptable and simply because it was done then, it should be done now. History is obviously very useful in understanding Systematic Theology, but only as history is honestly understood can its usefulness be properly evaluated.

Closely related is the presupposition that national Israel is a type of the New Testament church. This is largely an issue of typological interpretation. Many interpreters see Christ Jesus and/or the church in almost every little detail of the Old Testament. Certainly, the Old Testament contains types the antitypes of which are revealed in the New Testament, but this system takes types to a whole new level that is outside the bounds of sound hermeneutical practices. Things such as the land of Canaan, the city of Jerusalem, the temple, the sacrifices, the throne of David, and the Israelites are all considered to be types of the church. Both Origen and Augustine believed that national Israel was a type of the Christian church or put another way, the Israelites in the flesh were the type for the spiritual Israelites who are the church which is the antitype.

One other issue that needs to be addressed is the issue of the so-called Palestinian Christians in the Middle East in Israel and the surrounding area. When discussing this issue, I am going to be speaking in broad generalities and there will obviously be many exceptions to this broad context. Many of the Arab Christians in the area are cultural Christians, that is, their family has been Christians for hundreds of years so they are Christians too. Their denominational culture has largely departed from the Bible and literal hermeneutics; many of them are Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox. It is an open secret that most of these Arab Christians don't like the Jewish people any more than the Arab Moslems like them; both groups detest the Jews to one degree or another. Arab Christians have largely adopted liberation theology and abandoned sound doctrine.

"In some Christian circles, the theological justification for gaining freedom from Israeli 'occupation' is Christian Palestinianism, a form of liberation theology that emphasizes Jesus' humanity and portrays Him as the great liberator of the poor and oppressed of this world. It replaces the Jewish Messiah of the Bible with a Palestinian martyr.... [P]urveyors of Christian Palestinianism redefine God. No longer is He the God of Israel presented in Scripture but a God of their own making. They adopt a low view of Scripture's authority and fail to develop their views of God and Israel from a thorough study of God's Word.... Ateek spoke of the Old Testament as needing to be 'de-Zionized' and saw the unique role God assigned to Israel for His sovereign purpose as racist." [James A. Showers, "Jesus, the 'Palestinian'" in *Israel My Glory* (Jan/Feb 2013), p. 35].

There is an Arab Anglican priest serving at St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem named Naim Ateek. He wrote a book entitled *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* published in 1989. He founded an organization called Sabeel, the Palestinian Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center. Almost every Replacement Theologian will quote this man at one time or another and he is rabidly anti-Israel. Many of the Replacement theologians and denominations in America support this man and his ministry.

They not only redefine God but they also redefine Christ Jesus in order to support their theology. "Palestinian liberation theology focuses on the humanity of Jesus of Naza-

reth, who was also a Palestinian living under an occupation.'" ... Comparing Christ's suffering with present day Arab Christians is a popular message. "Jesus is the powerless Palestinian humiliated at a checkpoint.... It seems to many of us that Jesus is on the cross again with thousands of crucified Palestinians around him. ... Palestinian men, women, and children [are] being crucified. Palestine has become one huge Golgotha. The Israeli government crucifixion system is operating daily. Palestine has become the place of the skull." Ateek also argues for a new hermeneutic. "When confronted with a difficult passage in the Bible ... one needs to ask, ... Does this fit the picture I have of God that Jesus revealed to me? ... If it does, then the passage is valid and authoritative. If not, then I cannot accept it as valid or authority." [James A. Showers quoting Naim Ateek in "Jesus the 'Palestinian'" in *Israel My Glory* (Jan/Feb 2013), p. 35). The Bible is not the authoritative source for the Arab Christians in Israel at least among those for whom Ateek is representative.

By now, you should be able to spot the biblical and theological errors in Replacement Theology. I'm going to read some of Boettner's Replacement doctrine because he is very representative of their teaching and he has numerous biblical errors throughout this text. He is also quite critical of dispensationalism. Bear in mind, Boettner is one of the men I mentioned earlier who admits dispensational theologians are correct about Israel if the Bible is read according to literal hermeneutics. The superscript numbers in the text quoted below were inserted by me to correspond with the list of errors noted after the quote.

"This New Covenant Israel is therefore identical with the Christian Church¹ ... [I]n or about the spring of the year 30 A.D., the mass of those who then called themselves Israelites ceased to be such for prophetic and covenant purposes, having forfeited their citizenship in the commonwealth of Israel by refusing to accept the Messiah,² and that after this event all the privileges of the Abrahamic Covenant and all the promises of God belonged to the believing remnant, and to them only; which remnant was therefore and thereafter the true Israel and Judah, the Seed of Abraham, the Christian Church.³ Thus the promise was fulfilled strictly and definitely to the designated parties.... It may seem harsh to say that, 'God is through with the Jews.'⁴ But the fact of the matter is that He is through with them as a unified national group having anything more to do with the evangelization of the world. That mission has been taken from them and given to the Christian Church (Matt. 21:43)⁵.... This does not mean, of course, that the Jews will never go back to Palestine—as indeed some of them have already established the nation of Israel, a little less than 2 million out of an estimated world Jewish population of 12 million now being in that country. But it does mean that as any of them go back they do so entirely on their own, apart from any covenanted purpose to that end and entirely outside of Scripture prophecy⁶. No Scripture blessing is promised for a project of that kind. The prophecies that Premillennialists point to as indicating a return to the Jews to Palestine are found in the Old Testament and either were given before the return from the Babylonian captivity and so were fulfilled by that event,⁷ or, as in the case of Zechariah 8:7,8,⁸ were given while that return still was in process, it having occurred over a pe-

riod of years. It is particularly significant that no New Testament writer mentions a future return—for the very obvious reason that the return of which the prophets spoke was behind them.⁷ Had such a return been still future their failure to mention it would have been inexcusable.¹⁰ It may be that in the years to come the Jews will possess a larger part, or even all, of Palestine. We do not know. But if they do they will secure it as other nations secure property, through negotiation, or purchase, or conquest, not by virtue of any as yet unfulfilled prophecies or promises.⁹ There are no such prophecies or promises. In the meantime Premillennialism must bear part of the responsibility for the evil and dangerous situation that has arisen in the Middle East,¹¹ since it has encouraged the Jews to believe that they are the rightful owners of that land and that it is divinely ordained that they are again to possess it, not merely the small portion that they now occupy but all of Palestine and great areas of the surrounding territory from the Euphrates River to the border of Egypt.... Inherent in the dispensational system is the idea that the Jews bear some special relationship to God so that they are in themselves a people favored above all others in the world, that are to be blessed for their own sake and because they are Jews.¹² [Lorraine Boettner, *The Millennium*, pp. 318-319, 321-322].

This a very good summary of Replacement Theology. Here is my assessment of it concerning the errors it contains.

1. Error: The New Covenant is a covenant to, with, and for the church. Rebuttal: The covenant is made with Israel and with Judah, not with the church.
2. Error: Israel as a nation was done away at Christ's crucifixion. Rebuttal: That is theology being imposed onto the text. Remember, Boettner knows a literal reading of the text refers to Israel.
3. Error: The Abrahamic Covenant belongs to the church who is the new, true Israel. Rebuttal: All the New Testament proof texts used to claim the church is the new or true Israel actually pertain to the nation of Israel and not to the church (see Galatians 6:16, "the Israel of God").
4. Error: God is through with the Jews. Rebuttal: Even Boettner admits a literal reading of Scripture proves that Israel will be restored and have a prominent role in the Kingdom, but he doesn't use literal hermeneutics and he denies a literal Kingdom and therefore denies that national Israel has a future role in history at all.
5. Error: Matthew 21:43 is a proof text for understanding the church is now the people producing the fruit of the Kingdom of God; this is the standard Replacement Theology interpretation. Rebuttal: He does not believe this verse refers to a future generation of Jewish leadership who will lead the nation into a saving faith in their Messiah. The church is not in this Scripture; the Lord is dealing with Israel's leadership and the fact they led the nation into rejecting their Messiah. There will be a future generation of leaders who will be faithful and who will lead the nation into believing in their Messiah and into the Kingdom of God.

6. Error: Israel in the land today is an accident of history. It is not prophecy being fulfilled in any way. Rebuttal: The Bible emphatically declares otherwise and this was discussed in the lesson on "Israel in the land."
7. Error: The return to Israel from Babylon fulfills all the Old Testament prophecy concerning a return to the land of Israel. Rebuttal: Since Boettner acknowledges Scripture actually says otherwise, this doctrine had to be made up and imposed on the text in order to confirm Replacement Theology.
8. Error: Zechariah wrote his book during the time of Israel's return to the land which fact should nullify the argument that he was not writing about the distant future but instead writing about his present time. Rebuttal: But Zechariah's book was written after the return which means it cannot be referring to the return from Babylon. He may have started out talking about current events in Israel, but he finished by writing about future events.
9. Error: The prophets were not speaking about Israel's restoration and there is no prophetic proof that Israel's restoration in unbelief is anything other than the Jews individually deciding to move to Israel. Rebuttal: We've dealt with this position at length and the Bible is full of such promises.
10. Error: It would be inexcusable for Israel's presence in the land to be biblically meaningful if the prophets never mentioned it— Rebuttal: but they did mention it and Boettner ignores and changes the revelation they wrote for the benefit of future generations. Perhaps he would understand these issues if he read the Olivet Discourse without putting the church in it.
11. Error: Premillennial dispensationalism is responsible for the violence and warfare in the Middle East today. Rebuttal: Can anyone even reasonably think that the Jews and dispensationalists cause the trouble in the Middle East? At this very moment, if the Moslems of the world would stop trying to murder every Jew and destroy Israel, does anyone think that peace wouldn't immediately break out all over the Middle East—at least as it concerns Israel? Men like Boettner do not understand Islam and the inbred nature of bloodshed inherent to their system.
12. Error: There is no special recognition due the Jews during the Kingdom. Rebuttal: The Bible makes it clear they will be the lead nation of the world. Boettner denies a literal Kingdom so he has to deny the biblical truth concerning Israel's role in the Kingdom.

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