

FUTURE ISRAEL

&

PRETERISM

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IS REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY VALID?



BARRY E. HORNER

THIS paper follows on from the previous presentation concerning *The Olivet Discourse: Matthew 24*. To this writer it became obvious that the preterist mindset, being controlled by an early date for Revelation and the inclusive nature of Matthew 24, of necessity would incorporate all things eschatologically Jewish into the vortex of the destruction of Jerusalem, allegedly in 70 AD.

It is standard fare for preterists to claim that in 70 AD the Jews and Israel were forever covenantally disenfranchised because of disobedience. The covenant people of God in the Old Testament lost their election. For those of Reformed convictions, this is strange doctrine indeed! As examples, David Chilton writes that: "Although Israel will someday be restored to the true faith [that is presumably become engrafted into the church as Christians], the Bible does not tell of any future plan for Israel as a special nation."<sup>1</sup> He adds that "ethnic Israel was excommunicated for its apostasy, and will never again be God's kingdom."<sup>2</sup> Gary DeMar and Peter Leithart have written that, "in destroying Israel, Christ transferred the blessings of the kingdom from Israel to a new people, the church."<sup>3</sup> Ray Sutton teaches that Christ has permanently divorced Israel. Concerning Matthew 21 and 22, he says: "For the next several chapters [in Matthew], one section after another pronounces judgment and total discontinuity between God and Israel . . . total disinheritance."<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Gentry says that: "In His divorce of Israel God disestablishes her."<sup>5</sup>

Consequently modern preterism, in alignment with modern reconstructionist postmillennialism, believes that any person claiming to be a Jew as the carnal seed of Abraham today in fact employs voided nomenclature. There may be nominal acknowledgment, a convenient inoffensive tokenism when a Jew is spoken about, that yet has no covenantal significance whatsoever in the sight of God. In fact it seems inescapable to conclude that a preterist, with this conviction, in reality looks upon a Jew, indeed the Jews today, as pretenders. Read of Loraine Boettner's sharp anti-Judaism, FI 40-44. Furthermore there is no such thing as the nation of Israel, or Jerusalem as its capital, in the sight of God. The modern state of Israel today, including the land and Jerusalem, has no present biblical significance, nor is there any related eschatological future for the distinctive nation of Israel and the land.

However, in *Future Israel* it has been historically demonstrated, from a wide variety of sources, that, from the fourth century onward to today, this doctrine of replacement theology or supercessionism has led to varying degrees of anti-Judaism that has resulted in shameful ethical behavior. There has been little heeding of Paul's warning in Romans 11:18, 20, "Do not be arrogant toward the [unbelieving Jewish] branches; . . . do not be conceited, but fear."

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<sup>1</sup> David Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, p. 224.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Gary DeMar and Peter Leithart, *The Reduction of Christianity*, p. 213.

<sup>4</sup> Ray Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion by Covenant*, p. 242.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, p. 394 , n2.

Because of the shortness of time available, our focus will be on Romans 11 in relation to the present validity of the Jew, even in unbelief. We will especially consider Gary DeMar's short study: "*All Israel Will Be Saved*": *Notes on Romans 11:26*, and particularly several of His key propositions.

The whole matter of God's abiding covenantal interest in the Jewish people has been dealt with in detail in this writer's *Future Israel* published in 2007 (416 pp.). For this reason, there will be a number of references to this volume and, if time allows, emphasis on several of the key issues that it raises. However, we endeavor to consider supercessionism and replacement theology as they more distinctively arise out of a preterist perspective. Even so, preterist eschatology finds itself essentially connected to the roots of Augustinian eschatology.

#### A. Introduction.

According to preterism, it is crucial to understand that in such a scheme of things, Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*, having been written from Corinth in approximately 57 AD,<sup>6</sup> in terms of its eschatology, mainly addresses a short time frame that ends with the alleged complete destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. This is especially true with regard to Romans 11 and the future destiny of national Israel. So James Stuart Russell writes concerning Romans 8:18-23.

We cannot mistake the exulting anticipation expressed by St. Paul of a coming day of deliverance from the sufferings and miseries of the present; a deliverance which was at hand, and not far off. . . . It would indeed have been cold comfort to men writhing under the anguish of their sufferings to tell them of a period in some future age which would bring them compensation for their present distress. The apostle does not so mock them with hope deferred. The day of revelation was *at hand*; the glory was just *about to be revealed*; and so *near* and so *great* was that "weight of glory" that it reduced to insignificance the passing inconveniences of the present hour.<sup>7</sup>

The argumentation here is breathtaking in its inconsistency, chiefly due to self-imposed blindness that the presuppositions of preterism produce. In the light of the foregoing, in some contorted way, Russell presumably believes that at 70 AD, "the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. . . . we ourselves, having the first fruits of the body, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body," vs. 21, 23. According to Russell then, we would ask exactly who are the "we" here who Paul writes about? All Christians up to the point of 70 AD? It would seem so. Further, if God would not be so cruel as to have the saints at Rome wait for "some future age" for

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<sup>6</sup> D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 242.

<sup>7</sup> James Stuart Russell, *The Parousia*, pp. 222-223.

their relief, nevertheless upon death would they then still be subject to the time consciousness that Russell suggests here? Furthermore, what then of the saints following 70 AD? Would they be subject to the divine cruelty of waiting for the near 2000 years that Russell bemoans, *without* the eschatological comfort of Romans and so much of the New Testament which Russell repeatedly confines to the 70 AD era?

At the outset, it is frankly confessed that such a perspective, in which the eschatology of *Romans* has reference to only a period of approximately thirteen years immediately following its composition, borders on the absurd, and especially with regard to careful exegesis as well as the overwhelming general consensus of conservative scholars. But more than this, the preterist would rob believers of over 2000 years up to today of the precious promises that are said to have been fulfilled near 2000 years ago. What a depressing prospect for the future this scenario presents.

Sad to say, Gary DeMar also follows this same essential preterist course. We take up then some of his expressions in this regard concerning Romans 11 and consequently see how much he is in alignment with Russell.

B. *“All Israel will be saved”*: Notes on Romans 11:26 by Gary DeMar (quotations underlined).

1. “Paul is describing the remnant in *his day* (11:5),” along with other “time indicators.” So “the remnant is alive at ‘*the present time* (11:5),’ that is in Paul’s day. It is this remnant that Paul hopes to save through the preaching of the gospel, many of whom have already been saved (cf. Acts 2:5-12, 37-41).” “Paul wants to save ‘some’ of his ‘fellow-countrymen’ (11:14). He is speaking of the present.”

But what then of Paul in the New Testament directly writing, not only to the Romans (Rom. 1:7), but also the Corinthians (I Cor. 1:2; II Cor. 1:1), the Galatians (Gal. 1:1), the Ephesians (Eph. 1:1), the Philippians (Phil. 1:1), the Colossians (1:2), the Thessalonians (I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:1), then Timothy (I Tim. 1:2; II Tim. 1:2), Titus (Tit. 1:4), and Philemon (Philem. 1)? These also were written by Paul in *his day* at *the present time*. However consider Romans 15:4; cf. 4:23-24; I Corinthians 10:11.

Concerning the remnant of Romans 11:5, in Paul’s day, which will continue *during* the times of the Gentiles, it is the guarantee that “God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew” (11:1-2, cf. vs. 3-4). However, God is not ultimately satisfied with merely a remnant. Rather He tells us through Paul that *following* “riches for the [Gentile] world,” there will come Israel’s “fulfillment” (11:12), after Israel’s rejection will come “acceptance” as “life from the dead” (11:15); it will be like Israel as a full “lump [of dough] following the “first piece of dough” (11:16).

So Romans 11:25 confirms this order. “A partial hardening has happened to Israel until [ἄχρις οὔ, *achris hou*, as in Luke 21:24] until the fullness of the Gentiles has

come in.” Consequently, “in this manner, all Israel will be saved [future tense]” (11:26)<sup>8</sup> How harmonious this scenario is with Ezekiel 36-37. In this passage Paul is plainly, excitedly eschatological, that is unless an Augustinian, supercessionist presupposition gets in the way, that is the supposed nullification of the Jews.

2. “The salvation of a remnant of Jews at the end of history. This is the position of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Q. 191 LC).” This is not so. The answer of the Larger Catechism is: “Answer: In the second petition (which is, Thy kingdom come [Matt. 6:10]), acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with all gospel officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate: that the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed, and made effectual to the converting of those that are yet in their sins, and the confirming, comforting, and building up of those that are already converted: that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of his second coming, and our reigning with him forever: and that he would be pleased so to exercise the kingdom of his power in all the world, as may best conduce to these ends.” Among the *Westminster Assembly*, between Presbyterians and Independents, there was considerable divergence among the three major schools of eschatology. “One of the most prominent themes in Puritan writing of this period was the ‘conversion of the Jews’ motif, the doctrine that a massive influx of Jewish converts into the Christian church in the last days would herald an unprecedented revival of Protestantism among the Gentiles.”<sup>9</sup> Gribben also writes of confusion with regard to the eschatology of the *Westminster Confession*: “Modern theologians have cited the *Westminster Confession* in support of their preferred eschatology.”<sup>10</sup>
  
3. “Two thousand years have passed since *Romans* was written. The Jews have had plenty of time to be ‘jealous’ (Rom. 11:11). The Jews in Paul’s day were jealous. That’s why Jews were persecuting the church.” However Gary believes that the Jews completely lost their covenantal inheritance at 70 AD. In other words, today they have no divine status, no divine inheritance, and no divine future whatsoever. Hence the use of the term “Jews” here appears to be condescending tokenism. Surely the “jealousy” of the Gentiles in 10:19 resulting in “disobedience” and “obstinacy” (10:21), bringing about God’s anger, describes His response, not His design. Whereas

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<sup>8</sup> The non-temporal use of καὶ οὕτως, kai houtōs here in v. 26 does not alter the clear temporal order of v. 25. Though consider the temporal setting of houtōs in v. 5 where the present contrasts with the past of vs. 2-4.

<sup>9</sup> Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature & Theology, 1550-1682*, p. 108.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

in 11:11, 14, Morris comments that the “jealousy” Paul has in mind is intended “to arouse in Israel a passionate desire for the same good gift [of grace and mercy].”<sup>11</sup> Moo likewise writes that “the Jews, as they see the messianic blessings promised first of all to them, will want those blessings for themselves.”<sup>12</sup> So the anger of the Jews toward the church was not God’s intent. Even so this anger needs to be understood from a perspective that Gary totally ignores, and that is with regard to the attitude of the Gentile church toward the Jews down through the centuries. When Gary writes that “the Jews have had plenty of time to be ‘jealous,’ there is a tone here that does not sound good. There seems to be the suggestion that the tragedy of the Jews is all their fault; in their illegitimacy they are a nuisance, without there being any necessity for confession of shocking Gentile anti-Judaism. He needs to study Appendix E in *Future Israel* where a wide variety of resources is provided, being evangelical, liberal, Jewish, and secular. They all tell the same shameful story. Especially refer to the quotation of Edward Flannery, FI 365. It may be hard to swallow, yet it remains true that the Roman Catholic Church has taken greater steps to confess and rectify its sordid past than have conservative Christians who continue to uphold a legacy of Augustinian replacement or supercessionist theology.

4. “Save them from what [Rom. 11:26]? Save them from the coming judgment upon Jerusalem that took place in AD 70.” Such an interpretation is almost beyond the pale; it really suggests a poverty of options and the extent to which the preterist system will go to uphold the 70 AD fortress mentality. Paul here is writing to Rome, not Jerusalem which was to suffer judgment, not salvation! Consider the use of “save/saved/salvation” in 5:9-10; 8:24; 9:27; 10:1, 9-10, 13; 11:11, 14, 26; 13:11-12. The salvation here is that free righteousness of God in Jesus Christ’s atonement that saves, through faith alone, from man’s personal unrighteousness which offends God.

C. Key issues that arise out of *Future Israel*.

1. The example of C. E. B. Cranfield, Emeritus Professor of Theology, the University of Durham, England, author of the two volume ICC *Commentary on the Greek text of Romans*. FI xx-xxi. If he can turn from supercessionism and humbly confess his error, then there is no excuse for anyone because of intellectual/exegetical objections.
2. Augustine, converted through anti-Judaic Ambrose of Milan. Consider his tragic mis-interpretation of Psalm 59:11 in *The City of God*: “Do not kill them [the Jews]; otherwise, my people will forget. By Your power, make them homeless wanderers.” FI 3-6.

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<sup>11</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 407.

<sup>12</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 688.

3. The shameful treatment of the Jews by Christianity, FI 15-36. Remember that Martin Luther was an Augustinian monk who adored Augustine. Refer to Heiko Oberman in his, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Age of Renaissance and Reformation*. FI 372. Calvin, less vociferous against the Jews than Luther, also adored Augustine witness the prolific references in his *Institutes*.
4. The principle of unity with diversity in the people of God (Col. 3:11, 18-22; cf. Gal. 3:28). So unity with diversity is true for the church as the body of Christ, having distinctively gifted members that comprise one body. The same is true of the one living God who is economically revealed by means of distinctive Trinitarian relationships. So the unity of distinctive Jew and Gentile within the redeemed people of God in no way denigrates inherent oneness brought about through the gospel.
5. The need of a Judeo-sensitive hermeneutic for the Jewish Christian New Testament, rather than long-standing Gentile dominance in this field. Redeemed Christians will not be homogenous clones any more that the Messianic kingdom will be a totally egalitarian, homogenous society (Matt. 19:28). Concerning the likes of Hebrews 11:16, cf. Galatians 4:25-26, desiring "a better country, that is, a heavenly one," refer to FI 247-252. A question to think about: When Jesus returns, will He be a Jew?
6. The significance of Romans 11:28. When Christians declare that God is finished with unbelieving Jews today, that He could not have any interest in the unbelieving modern state of Israel, this verse gives a climactic answer. So does Hosea 3:4-5.
7. The issue of tone. Consider first Martin Luther toward the end of his life, Albertus Pieters and Herman Bavinck, having a Dutch Reformed heritage, and Presbyterian Loraine Boettner. Then consider Presbyterian Horatius Bonar, Baptist C. H. Spurgeon, Anglican J. C. Ryle and the Messianic Rabbi Paul. The former group have varying degrees of intolerance, even disdain for the thought of a contemporary Jewish nation. The latter group have untiring love for the Jewish people in their troubled history, of course chiefly because of their salvation by the greatest of all Jews. After all, He himself declared that "salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22).

#### D. Conclusion.

In the serious study of eschatology, it is one thing to consider the identification of the Antichrist, Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week, the nature of the rapture as well as the great tribulation. But it is quite another thing to consider the legitimacy and future of the Jewish people, the nation of Israel and the land. The former eschatological matters allow for some latitude of opinion and do not explicitly involve ethical consequences. However the latter matter

has decided ethical consequences and this fact is made clear down the centuries of church history. It is for this reason that I believe that a Christian's attitude toward the Jew is not a soft option, so to speak. Furthermore I believe that the biblical Christian should evidence spontaneous love for the Jewish people even though they continue in unbelief. The model here is Paul who, although the apostle to the Gentiles, nevertheless was unwavering in giving priority to the Jew (Rom. 1:16), especially via the synagogue, when first visiting a town or city. Though frequently beaten because of his testimony, Paul's loyalty to his "kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:3) was indefatigable. Yes, he could be moved to sternly denounce the Jewish establishment in Judea and declare it to be under the focus of God's wrath (I Thess. 2:14-16). Even so, in no way did Paul suggest God's covenantal disenfranchisement of the Jews as a whole, witness his continuance in ministering to them after departing from Thessalonica for Berea, Athens, Corinth, and eventually onward to Rome (Acts 28:17-29).

The Christian needs to be reminded that the Word of God is substantially Jewish, his Savior was and remains Jewish, the early church was Jewish as with the apostles including Paul. Indeed, the Scriptures teach that eventually the fortunes of the Jews will be reversed so that they will be given prominence in the Messianic kingdom (Zeph. 3:14-20; Zech. 14:1; Matt. 19:28). Does this trouble you? I challenge you to read Horatius Bonar, in *Future Israel*, and note the loving, compassionate tone that is often so void in the lives of many Christians. Also read about C. H. Spurgeon, and especially his sermon titled *The Restoration and Conversion of the Jews*, based on Ezekiel 37. Then you will be able to sing Bonar's wonderful hymn, *Forgotten, no that cannot be*.

Forgotten; no that cannot be;  
 All other names may pass away,  
 But thine, MY ISRAEL, shall remain  
 In everlasting memory.

Forgotten! No, that cannot be;  
 Inscribed upon My palms thou art,  
 The name I gave in days of old  
 Is graven still upon My heart.

Forgotten! No, that cannot be;  
 Beloved of thy God art thou  
 His crown forever on thy head,  
 His name forever on thy brow.

Forgotten! No, that cannot be:  
 Sun, moon, and stars may cease to shine,  
 But thou shalt be remembered still,  
 For thou art His and He is thine.

*Horatius Bonar*

(Tunes: Abends, Warrington)