

**THE ONE OLIVE TREE**

The Relationship between the Christian Church and the Jewish People

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**Abstract**

The Lord Jesus Christ was born as Jew, lived as Jew and resurrected from the dead he was crowned as the son of David. For this reason every Christian ought to reflect on the place and significance of the Jewish people and on the relationship between the Jewish people and the Christian church. Guidance for such reflection is given in this article that because of its length is divided into four chapters.

The New Testament data, and especially Romans 9-11, are the basis for this reflection. The New Testament teaches us that the coming of Jesus as the Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit are the fulfilment of the Old Testament promise of the restoration of Israel. Under the New Testament dispensation we see the fulfilment of the Old Testament promise of salvation for the gentiles. The fulfilment surpasses the promise. On equal level with the Jewish believers, gentiles have to become members of the household of God and fellow citizens with the saints through faith in Jesus as the Christ without obedience to the Mosaic law. The believers from among the Gentiles are wild branches grafted onto the olive tree, whereas those Jews who do not acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, although they were natural branches, have been hewn off.

Nevertheless, we are bound to say that the Jewish people retains its special status even under the new dispensation. To no other people besides the Jews has the guarantee been given that she will always have a remnant according to the gracious election of God. Nor has any people in history apart from the Jewish people ever received the promise of a future mass conversion. In the future the natural branches that have been hewn off, will be grafted in again.

Christians must oppose all forms of anti-Semitism, albeit with the understanding that merely witnessing to Jews that Jesus is the Messiah and that faith in Him is necessary for all people can never rightly be construed as 'anti-Semitic', as is sometimes levelled at us from Jewish circles. Much

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the rather, it is *denying* Jews this witness that is a manifestation of not caring for them. The Christian church cannot and must not ever give up preaching that there is salvation for no-one outside faith in Jesus as the Christ, neither for Jew nor for Gentile.

**Keywords:** relationship between the Christian Church and the Jewish people; restoration of Israel; promise and fulfilment; enlargement theology; replacement theology; dispensationalism; Vaticanum II

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## Preface

This little book briefly article sets out the essentials of the relationship between the Christian church and the Jewish people. Because of its length it is divided in four chapters. The term ‘the Jewish people’ has been chosen advisedly; the Jewish people is called ‘Israel’ only in Biblical quotations or allusions. The issue with using the term ‘Israel’ is that the question can arise—although it need not necessarily—of whether the intended meaning is restricted to the nation of Israel under the old dispensation. The present work, on the contrary, is very much about the Jewish people still in existence today. Besides Biblical quotations and allusions, references to the Land in this book also use the term ‘Israel’. This book calls the canonical books received under the old dispensation the ‘Old Testament’; it does so in alignment with the terminology used by the Christian church as early as the second century AD. The New Testament itself, of course, refers to that section of scripture as ‘the Scripture’ or ‘the Law and the prophets’ or ‘Moses and the prophets’.

The intent of this book is to encourage reflection on the place and significance of the Jewish people and on the relationship between the Jewish people and the Christian church, as well as to offer guidance for such reflection. It is also meant to urge Christians to pray for the welfare, but above all the eternal salvation, of the Jewish people. Two fundamental convictions shape this book: first, that God will remember forever His covenant faithfulness to Israel, being the Jewish people (Ps. 105:8ff.), and second that the only way of access to God and to salvation for anyone, including for Jews, is by faith in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and as the fulfilment of Moses and the prophets. Hence the title *The One Olive Tree*, an image used by Paul in Romans 11.

Gentiles have become, and continue today to become, members of the household of God and fellow citizens with the saints through faith in Jesus as the Christ. Together with the saints (which in this context means those Jews who had confessed Jesus as the Christ and who had proclaimed Jesus Christ as Saviour to those Gentiles in the first place), they have obtained a part in the blessings of God’s covenant with Abraham. The Christians

from among the Gentiles are wild branches grafted onto the olive tree, whereas those Jews who do not acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, although they were natural branches, have been hewn off. Never let it be forgotten by Christians that the ground that bears their faith is God's covenant with Abraham. If natural branches have already been hewn away, how much the more can this be done to wild branches! It is by virtue of God's covenant with Abraham that we may confidently expect that natural branches will in future be grafted back in again in great numbers. This image of the single olive tree bearing both wild and natural branches which can be both grafted in and hewn off throws two truths into sharp relief: the necessity of a lively faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the abiding interconnectedness of the Jewish people and the Christian church.

For long centuries, and down to the present day, the view has held sway in great swathes of the Christian church that since the coming of Christ, there has been nothing whatsoever to set the Jewish people apart from the other nations. Indeed, to the extent that any distinction has been admitted of, it has been exclusively a distinction unfavourable to the Jews: not only has Jews' unbelief in Jesus as the Christ been seen as guilt, but the blame has been pinned on the entire Jewish people for the death by crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no Biblical basis whatsoever for that latter notion. One of the finest poets in the Dutch language, Revius (who was also the Old Testament editor of the Statenvertaling, the Dutch equivalent of the King James Version), versified in a sonnet the proper Christian attitude of rejecting that blaming of the Jews:

*No, it was not the Jews who crucified,  
Nor who betrayed You in the judgment place,  
Nor who, Lord Jesus, spat into Your face,  
Nor who with buffets struck You as You died.*

*No, it was not the soldiers fisted bold  
Who lifted up the hammer and the nail,  
Or raised the cursed cross on Calvary's hill,  
Or, gambling, tossed the dice to win Your robe.*

*I am the one, O Lord, who brought You there,  
I am the heavy cross You had to bear,  
I am the rope that bound You to the tree,*

*The whip, the nail, the hammer, and the spear,  
The blood-stained crown of thorns You had to wear:  
It was my sin, alas, it was for me.<sup>1</sup>*

On the other hand, the Christian church cannot and must not ever give up preaching that there is salvation for no-one outside faith in Jesus as the Christ, neither for Jew nor for Gentile. It is partly out of a sense of shame at the atrocities perpetrated on the Jewish people in the Second World War that the view has gained ground that one had better be quiet about salvation to Jews. Those who take, and even teach, this attitude are thereby criticising not merely the history of the Christian church, which certainly does have many a dark page in its history of relating to the Jewish people, but also the New Testament itself.

If there is any salvation outside Jesus as the Christ, then it must actually have been a mistake for the Christian church as such to have arisen at all. All the first Christians were Jews. As a Messianic Jew has remarked, 'If even Jews could be saved without believing that the Messiah of Israel has come, then how much more could Gentiles!' Yet the Gospel is to be preached to Jew and Gentile alike, and in fact Jews enjoy primacy in this regard. The apostle Paul wrote to the Christian church at Rome: 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.' (Rom. 1:16)

For no other people other than the Jewish people is there any remaining special promise under the new dispensation. Of the Jewish people, Paul testifies that all Israel will ultimately be saved (Rom. 11:26). Precisely because of our connectedness with the Jewish people, it must be an abiding grief to us that the greater part of the Jewish people still does not recognise or confess Jesus as Christ and Saviour. I emphatically bring out in this

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<sup>1</sup> Jacobus Revius, pentameter translation by Henrietta Ten Harmsel

book that connectedness with the Jewish people in no way precludes our sense of spiritual union with Christians, whether they be of Jewish or Gentile origin. This very much applies to our unity with Christians in the Middle East, too. The Christian church's connectedness with the Jewish people means that she should and must make known especially to the Jewish people its own Messiah, who has already come and who will come again. It is the Christian church's calling in encounters with Jews to testify to them that Jesus is the only way to the Father. Christians ought also to provoke Jews to jealousy through their conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ, who through His death on the cross reconciled enemies to God. Let it not only be Christians from among the Jews who pray for the conversion of the Jewish people, but also Gentile Christians, rightly pleading the merits of the covenant that God once made with Abraham.

Let it not only be Christians from among the Jews who pray for the conversion of the Jewish people, but also Gentile Christians, rightly pleading the merits of the covenant that God once made with Abraham, Izaak and Jacob. Under the Old Testament dispensations the godly of Israel prayed for the ingathering and conversions of the Gentiles pleading upon the prophetic promises. Let under the New Testament dispensation the saints of Gentile stock plead vehemently upon the promise of the conversion and restoration of Israel, a restoration that is in the first place a spiritual restoration. In this way we may expect great blessing both for Jews and Gentiles, blessings in the name of Jesus the Messiah of Israel and the Saviour of the world.

**Chapter 1****The election of Israel and the Christian Church***The election of Israel*

The election of Israel begins with the calling of Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees. The LORD commands him to forsake his country and family and strike out on a journey to the country that He will show him. The LORD promises to make a great nation of him and promises that in his seed, all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). Abraham's calling is a calling of pure grace. Joshua 24:2 states expressly that Abraham served other gods before the LORD called him. Deuteronomy as a book underscores the gracious nature of the election of Israel. Israel was not chosen on the basis of any inherent qualities as a people. The LORD testifies by the mouth of Moses: 'For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people; but because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keeps covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations' (Deut. 7:6-9).<sup>2</sup>

It was not because of Israel's righteousness that Israel was given to possess Canaan, but merely because the LORD remained faithful to His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is enunciated as follows by Moses: 'Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations doth the LORD thy God drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. also Deut. 4:37, 38; 10:14,15; 14:2.

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the word which the LORD swore unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ (Deut. 9:5,6)

The words ‘land’, ‘seed’ and ‘blessing’ used in the calling of Abraham—and, more broadly, the promises given to that patriarch—connect his calling back to the opening chapters of Genesis. God’s original purpose in Creation is going to be achieved through the progeny of Abraham. In Abraham’s seed, all the families of the earth will be blessed.

The seed which—or rather, the Seed who—is mentioned right back in the ‘first gospel’ of Genesis 3:16 will spring from Abraham’s seed. Even before the Book of Genesis is out, that promise of the seed of Abraham blessing all the families of the earth receives a preliminary fulfilment in the person of Joseph. However, it is another of Jacob’s sons whom he identifies in his deathbed blessings as destined for the great fulfilment: ‘Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father’s children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion’s whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.’ (Gen. 49:8-10)

Nathan announces to David that the LORD has made an eternal covenant with his house (II Sam. 7). Within the tribe of Judah, then, the Davidic line is definitively accorded an unique position. David had previously conquered Jerusalem and made it the capital of his kingdom. It was he who had transferred the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (II Sam. 6). Thus, the expectation of the ideal King, the Messiah of the House of David, is bound up with Jerusalem as the City of God. Solomon’s building of the Temple serves to confirm the special significance of Jerusalem. This was the place which the LORD had chosen for Himself to dwell in, although knowing this did not detract in the least from the understanding that not even the heaven of heavens can contain the LORD (I Kgs. 8:27).

The Old Testament reveals to us that notwithstanding Israel’s transgressions of her covenant with the LORD, the LORD remained

faithful to His covenant. His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is an everlasting covenant. The LORD changes not; therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed (Mal. 3:6). In the Prophets, we find the message that God's promises will be fulfilled in a remnant of Israel. Surviving all the judgements, this remnant remains preserved still. The LORD Himself is the Guarantor that there always shall be a remnant. Hence, the Old Testament indicates that there is personal election besides national election. We find that doctrine not only in the Written Prophets, but also in Elijah, whose ministry pre-dated the earliest prophetic books. When Elijah expresses the fear that he is the only believer left alive, the LORD makes known to him: 'Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him' (1 Kgs. 19:18). These words are cited by Paul in Romans 11:4 to make clear that the position of Israel under the new dispensation is no different from that under the old: it is no better, but no worse in principle either. There is still a remnant.

Whereas in the first half of Isaiah we encounter a number of prophecies which, recapitulating the promise made through Nathan to David, foretell the coming of the ideal Prince, the Messiah of the House of David (e.g. Is. 7:14ff, 9:1ff, 11:1ff.), what we find in the second half of Isaiah is a series of prophecies about the Servant of the LORD. More than merely representing Israel, this Servant has a duty to fulfil regarding her. He shall raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the preserved of Israel—and that is not even the be-all and end-all of His role: He is also to be a light to the Gentiles and be the LORD's salvation unto the end of the earth (Is. 49:5ff). The fourth of the Servant Songs (Is. 52:11-53:12) tells us that this Servant of the LORD will have the bearing not only of a king but also of a priest. With the sin-offering of His own life, He will bear away the iniquities of many.

As well as Isaiah's prophecies, we should particularly refer to Daniel 7, where we read of one like the Son of man (v. 13). This figure represents the faithful remnant of Israel in its afflictions. Whereas all the kingdoms of this world will perish, the kingdom that remains eternally will be given to this One.

In the canonical order of the Old Testament books that the Western church uses, Malachi is the final book of the testament.<sup>3</sup> The Book of Malachi substantiates the expectation that the Angel of the Covenant will come quickly. A precursor to his coming will be that Elijah, as His messenger, prepares the way for him (Mal. 3:1; 4:5). When the new dispensation commences, there will be seen to be yet a remnant among whom this expectation has been preserved in its pure form. Zacharias and Elisabeth, Anna and Simeon are representatives of this remnant. Within the Old Testament itself, we see that there is mention not only of the election of Israel as a people but also of a remnant that will be preserved through the judgements and in whom God shall fulfil the promises He has made to Israel. From among that remnant, ultimately it is the Servant of the LORD spoken of in the latter half of the Book of Isaiah Who will meet the requirements which the LORD makes of Israel. On behalf of and in place of Israel, He will do what the LORD requires of Israel, vicariously bearing the transgressions of the people. The Servant of the LORD also has, in keeping with God's promise to Abraham, a duty for the Gentiles.

The link between the election and calling of Israel and the duty which Israel has towards the Gentiles is an inseparable one. Israel's task was to be a light to the Gentiles and to bring the world's nations to a true knowledge of the God of Israel. It is in and by the faithful remnant of Israel that this duty will be discharged. While the Old Testament describes the nations going up to Zion, we see in the New Testament that that movement will spread out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. The apostles—every last man of whom was a Jew—had the assurance of viewing their mission in the light of fulfilling God's promises of the restoration of Israel and of salvation for the nations. Their work was an extension of the work of Jesus, the Servant of the LORD. None but Jesus Himself had said: 'He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.' (Luke 10:16)

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<sup>3</sup> The Eastern canon places the Minor Prophets before, rather than after, the Major Prophets, and counts Daniel as the last Major Prophet. Thus, the Book of Daniel is the final book of the Old Testament in the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches.

*The beginnings of the Christian church*

It is largely in post-Exilic books such as Esther and Nehemiah that we encounter the expression ‘Jew’ to describe any descendant of Abraham. The overwhelming majority of the members of the ten tribes had by then been absorbed into heathendom. Even as early as Rehoboam’s reign, Levites and priests had come out of the northern kingdom to continue their ministry in the two-tribe kingdom of Judah (II Chron. 11:14). After the fall of the northern kingdom, Hezekiah issued an appeal to all Israel to hold Passover in Jerusalem (II Chron. 30:1ff). God’s covenant faithfulness to all twelve tribes was displayed in that part of the seed of Abraham that remained distinct from the Gentiles after the Exile. It is clear from the New Testament that Paul knew his ancestry: he was of the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:5). This was a tribe closely associated with that of Judah. On the other hand, Anna knew that she was of a northern tribe: Asher (Luke 2:36). It was to the twelve tribes scattered abroad that James wrote his epistle (Jas. 1:1). This expression must be taken to mean the Hebrew Christian congregations outwith the Land of Israel. And Paul was able to speak of a promise to which ‘our twelve tribes’ hoped to attain (Acts 26:7).

In its New Testament form, the Christian church arises with the coming to earth of Jesus Christ and with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit after His resurrection from the dead and His ascension. As is explicitly stated at the head of His genealogy in Matthew, Jesus was both Son of David and Son of Abraham (Mat. 1:1). God’s covenant with Abraham, of which His covenant with David was a further specification, finds its fulfilment in the person and work of this Christ. So it is that the new covenant is substantiated with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Who had been promised in advance under the old dispensation, no less than Christ, as the coming Saviour.

The Christian church knows herself to be the continuation of the Old Testament Israel of God. The Christian church is the New Testament Israel of God. Initially, the only members of this Israel of God were Jews and proselytes to Judaism, but it was certainly not long before Gentiles began pressing into the Church. The apostles met in council at Jerusalem unanimously and definitively resolved (Acts 15) that Gentiles could,

without subjecting themselves to the whole Mosaic law, become fully-fledged members of the Christian church together with Jews who confessed Jesus to be the Christ.

Jews were a substantial proportion of the Christian church in the first decades of her existence, and very much so indeed for the congregations in Israel. When Paul speaks in I Thessalonians 2:14 of the ‘churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus’, he was most probably making a geographical reference to the Roman province of that name, within whose boundaries practically the whole land of Israel had lain since 44 BC. Jews continued to be a substantial part of Christian congregations for long ages after the New Testament era, especially in Syria. Even in the congregations founded by Paul’s missionary efforts, where most members were of Gentile origin, there was a non-negligible Jewish minority in membership.

Until the fall of the Second Temple in AD 70, the Christian church was in fact one of the persuasions within Judaism.<sup>4</sup> Jewish Christians were known by the name of Nazarenes. Another designation used by the first Christians to describe themselves was that belonged to the ‘Way’. The word ‘Way’ was used for the content of the gospel. (Acts 9:2; 18:25-26; 19:9; 22:4, 14, 22). Christians were people who belonged to the Way or followed the Way.

It was in the forties AD in Syrian Antioch that the name ‘Christians’ first came to be used for the followers of Jesus (Acts 11:26). It was quite possibly (at least in part) due to the not insubstantial presence of Gentile Christians in that congregation that outsiders first really grasped in that time and place the fact that the Christian church was more than merely a sect of Judaism. It was probably as a nickname, or worse, that outsiders first deployed the name ‘Christian’, but fairly rapidly, the term was adopted by those themselves who confessed Jesus to be the Christ. It was

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<sup>4</sup> The Greek word αἵρεσις is often translated as sect. However, we must realize that the Greek word does not have a bad connotation as such in distinction of the English word.

by that name that followers of Jesus came to be known, and by that name that they introduced themselves.

Until the fall of the Second Temple, Judaism had been a pluriform construct; after AD 70, it did not take long for several of its expressions, such as the Essenes and the Sadducees, to disappear from the face of the earth. Only two forms of Judaism survived the cataclysm: rabbinic Judaism and the Christian church. In terms of its heritage of thought, rabbinic Judaism cannot be unthinkingly asserted to be the mere continuation of Old Testament Judaism, nor even of Second Temple Judaism. The rabbis developed their thinking not least as a *reaction* to the Christian church. For instance, the rabbinical decision not to have the Ten Commandments read out in synagogue as liturgy is a response to the Christian church's having accorded those ten words an unique status within the corpus of Mosaic law. Rabbinic Judaism can be regarded as a continuation of the Scribes and Pharisees tendency that we encounter in the pages of the New Testament.

In the second century AD, the synagogue and the Christian church continued apace to grow apart. In the end, there was no place any more for Jewish Christians in any synagogue, and likewise, due to the mass influx of Gentiles into the Christian church, the special sense of connectedness with the Jewish people was felt less and less as time went on, although as an understanding it has never entirely disappeared from the Church. Christians in the first few centuries AD saw themselves as a third kindred of mankind, alongside Jew and Gentile. In the New Testament itself we find a point of departure for this view in 1 Kor. 10:32 where Paul admonishes the member of the congregation of Corinth: 'Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God.' The difference with the later usage is that for Paul a Christian is either a Jew or Gentile and both Jews and Gentiles form the Christian church.

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*On which points did the Christian church and the synagogue part company?*

From the very outset, the contention between the Jews who have followed Jesus and the Jews who have not is the person of Jesus Himself. To the question which Jesus posed His disciples, ‘Whom say ye that I am?’, Peter answered on behalf of the rest: ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ (Matt. 16:16) That confession that Jesus is Lord and the Son of God is what distinguishes a follower of Jesus (cf. Acts 8:37, 9:20; Rom. 10:9; Phil. 2:10,11). Calling Jesus Lord has several significances, not least of which is asserting that it is right to use of Him the Name of the Covenant God (YHWH), the personal Name of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

There are Old Testament texts mentioning the name of the LORD (YHWH) which are in the New Testament used in reference to Jesus Christ (cf. Is. 45:23 and Joel 2:32 with Acts 2:21, Rom. 10:13 and Phil. 2:10,11). That Jesus is equal with God (the Father) and yet to be distinguished from Him is something which the Lord Jesus Christ Himself stated in His teaching. Witness, for example, how He, drawing upon Psalm 110, knows Himself to be David’s son and yet David’s Lord. He speaks with a power and an authority which is not only vastly different from what the Pharisees and scribes used but which exceeds even the authority of the prophets; even that of Moses. He could say, ‘I say unto you’ (Mat. 5:22ff). He could say, ‘Come unto Me’ (Mat. 11:28). Nor was His divinity seen in His teaching alone; it was evident from His deeds. He forgave sins (Mat. 9:6), walked on water (14:26; cf. that it is only the LORD Whose way is said to be in the sea, Ps. 77:19), and multiplied loaves (Mt. 14:13-21, 15:32-36; cf. the miracle of the manna, Ex. 16:13ff).

There is no separating the person of Jesus Christ from His work. As God Who became man, he vicariously drained the last drop of the cup of God’s wrath, suffering for and in the place of others. Not only did He die for their sins: what is more, He arose from the dead, and has since His ascension into heaven been seated at the right hand of the Father. He has ascended the throne of his father David. He will one day come again to judge the living and the dead. It is apparent from the Father’s having committed all

judgement to the Son that the Son shares in the Father's identity. That Jesus is the Mediator Who was and remains God and Who became man to die vicariously for sin has everything to do with the fact that since the fall, man is unable to keep the law perfectly. The law is not a way of salvation, but is meant to impart the knowledge of sin.

Rabbinic Judaism and the Christian church differ not just in their view of the person of Jesus, but also on the question of whether the law can be kept. Rabbinic Judaism, which knows of no doctrine of original sin, has no expectation of a Messiah who will be more than an ideal man. This Messiah will be the king who brings outward peace, but not a priest who absolves sin through the offering up of himself. Through the ages, rabbinic Judaism has either refused to talk about the person of Jesus or, where it has done so, has been negative about Him. He has been called 'the hanged man' and it has often been customary to spit on the ground when uttering that expression. This still is the attitude to Jesus found among ultra-Orthodox Jews.

Since the Enlightenment (known within Judaism as the *Haskalah*), a more positive view of the person of Jesus has arisen in large swathes of Judaism. The expression *die Heimholung Jesu ins Judentum* ('bringing Jesus home into Judaism') has been used for this trend. Its proponents have availed themselves of liberal Christian New Testament scholarship to cast Jesus as a mere man. He is thus sketched as a teacher of the Law who was faithful to the law and who had some compelling attractiveness; some of this persuasion have called Jesus 'the greatest Jew who ever lived'. Pinchas Lapide sees it as the historical significance of Jesus that His appearance was the catalyst for the spreading of a belief in One God to the heathen nations of the world. Lapide is even convinced of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. A few Jews even count it a possibility that Jesus seems to fit the bill of the Messiah who should one day come, but these latter positions are a bridge or two too far for most Jews.

All this positive appreciation of Jesus does do away with the fact that He is not being seen as Son of God sharing in the very identity of God. The need to come through Him as Mediator to draw near to God is not acknowledged. Just as in New Testament times, this remains the point of

the parting of the ways between the Christian church and the synagogue. None can be called a Christian but those who confess Jesus as Lord and Son of God, Who died in our place for our sins. Such faith is necessary to enter into the kingdom of heaven (e.g. John 3:16, 20:28,31; Rom. 10:9).

If Jesus is nowadays appreciated within Judaism but only as a man, the tendency is to ascribe to Paul the conviction that Jesus is equal with God. It is Paul who is said to have made that an article of faith in the Christian church. Yet the facts indicate otherwise. From the very first days after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, His disciples were confessing their Master as Lord and were praying to Him, even though prayers may be addressed to God alone. Their prayer *Maranatha* meant 'Lord,' (or 'Our Lord,') 'do come.' It is quite telling that this is one of the few Aramaic phrases to have made its way into the Greek New Testament without being translated. We have already seen that Jesus Himself showed, not only in His teaching but also in His deeds, that He was equal with God (the Father). If one seeks to draw a distinction here between what the Synoptic Gospels state and what Paul (and John after him) state, one can only do so by striking out countless details about Jesus found in the Synoptic Gospels.

Where the ways of the Christian church and of the synagogue part company is around the issue of the nature of the Messiah and thereby around the person of Jesus. For the synagogue, the Godhood of Jesus is unacceptable and so is His vicarious passion. In that regard, there is no substantial difference between the situation in the early Christian centuries and now. However, what has changed is that due to the many atrocities affecting the mutual relationship between the Jewish people and the Christian church since then, it has become extremely difficult for a Christian to speak candidly about these matters to a Jew who does not confess Jesus to be Saviour and Messiah.

*The Old Testament promises of the restoration of Israel and the bringing-in of the heathen are in principle fulfilled in the Christian church, consisting of Jew and Gentile*

The Christian church in her New Testament form is bound up not only with the fulfilment in the person of Jesus of the Old Testament promises

regarding the coming of the Christ and His kingdom, but also with the fulfilment of the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the concomitant restoration of Israel. Not only is Jesus the Servant of the LORD sung of by Isaiah; He is also the Son of Man of whom we read in Daniel 7. His arrival in this world inaugurated in principle the time of salvation and the coming kingdom of God foretold by the prophets (cf. Is. 61:1ff. with Luke 4:16ff). With His ascension into heaven, Christ mounted the throne of his father David. His heavenly Father then entrusted to Him all power in heaven and earth. Since that time, He has reigned in a manner prophesied of Him in Psalm 72:8: from sea to sea, yea, to the ends of the earth. As Psalm 110 tells us, all His enemies are subjected under His feet.

The New Testament associates the formation of the Christian church in her New Testament form not only with the promise of Israel's restoration but also with the Old Testament prophecies of Salvation for the Nations. Paul had the assurance of seeing his mission work among the Gentiles as an extension of the task given to the Servant of the LORD as prophesied by Isaiah. This Servant would do more than bring the preserved of Israel back to God: he would also be a Light to the Nations and be God's salvation to the ends of the earth (cf. Is. 49:1ff.; Acts 13:47).

The first of the fundamental questions which the young Christian church found itself faced with was *how* the Gentiles could join the church. Initially, the members of the Christian church were all Jews or proselytes, even though they came from all parts of the Roman Empire and even further afield (see Acts 2). At the Jerusalem Council, as described in Acts 15, it was resolved that Gentile Christians did not have to hold to the whole Mosaic law: the only parts of it which would bind them would be those relating to idolatry and sexual immorality. The church was delighted with the influx of heathen into the body of Jesus Christ. James, the brother of the Lord, quotes Amos 9:11,12 in this regard: 'After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.' (Acts 15:16,17) The discrepancies between Acts 15:16-17 and the Hebrew of Amos 9:11,12 as found in the Old Testament are explained by the fact that James is quoting

from the Septuagint. Instead of ‘the remnant of Edom’, James speaks of ‘the residue of men’ (Adam), and rather than ‘possess’ (or ‘inherit’) (Hebrew: *y-r-sh*), James speaks of ‘seeking’ (Hebrew: *d-r-sh*). What is key here is that James regards the promise of Israel’s restoration, coupled with the conversion of the Gentiles, as finding its fulfilment in the apostolic church.

Within Second Temple Judaism, the bone of contention was which of the several tendencies was the faithful remnant of Israel spoken of by the prophets. The Christian church knows that Jesus is the principal fulfilment of the Law and the prophets. Around Him, even before His crucifixion and resurrection, there formed a circle of disciples who constituted the faithful remnant of Israel. Not least among the evidences of this is that Jesus Himself gave twelve of these disciples a special vocation. These twelve disciples represent the twelve tribes of Israel. The church of Jesus Christ, which by His own witness is invincible to the gates of hell, *is* that faithful remnant of Israel, or the Israel of God.

The temple service of the Old Testament meets its fulfilment in Jesus. He it was Who could say, ‘In this place is one greater than the temple’ (Mat. 12:6). Jesus was also able to call Himself, or His body, the Temple (John 2:19). Very intimate is the bond between Jesus and His church. This explains how Paul can call the church—and, indeed, individual members of the church—the temple of God and the dwelling of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 3:16, 6:19; Eph. 2:21,22; I Pet. 2:5). Just as the coming of Jesus is the true fulfilment of the Old Testament expectation of the Messiah, and just as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit fulfils the core prophecy of the restoration of Israel, the same applies to the formation of the church of Jesus Christ. With this in mind, he who sees a distinction between the fulfilment of God’s promises to Israel and those to the Christian church is failing to give account to the very heart of what the New Testament means by fulfilment, and is introducing an opposition between the Church and Israel which the New Testament does not accept in that sense (and which only began to rear its head after the close of the apostolic age). The Church is the Israel of God, consisting of the faithful remnant within Israel to which are added the Christians from among the Gentiles. As a furtherance of what the LORD of Israel had testified, Christians are also a chosen

generation and a royal priesthood (Ex. 19:5; Deut. 7:6, 14:2, 26:18; I Pet. 2:9).

Although God's promises regarding the restoration of Israel and the dawn of the Messianic time of salvation have not yet been perfectly fulfilled, they have been fulfilled in principle with the coming of Jesus, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the forming of the New Testament church. The promises of the coming Messiah and of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit are the two core promises from the old dispensation which are fulfilled under the new dispensation. That which was not unambiguously foreseen under the old dispensation was that this fulfilment would be found to unfold in phases. The first coming of Jesus as the Christ was a coming that was accompanied by shame and repression. Jesus died vicariously on the cross, but He then arose from the dead and has since His ascension reigned at His Father's right hand as the promised Son of David. The peace which He brings to His own is in this present dispensation not yet an outward peace, but a peace with God.

In this present dispensation, the Lord Jesus Christ's way of suffering is also the way of His church, although the suffering and shame which His disciples meet with have no vicarious significance (Rom. 8:17; Col. 1:24). We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). The ultimate fulfilment of all God's promises will be given at the return of Jesus Christ. Then will occur the definitive separation, but every tear will be wiped away from the eyes of all those who are privileged to belong to Christ (Rev. 7:17). After the creation of the new heaven and the new earth, the mountains shall bring peace and the hills righteousness for all eternity (Ps. 72:3).

As regards the fulfilment of God's promises, we can and may speak of a Now and a Not Yet fulfilment. This 'now and not yet' is in fact found in every book of the New Testament, with the Now emphasised more in one passage and the Not Yet in another.

Pieter de Vries

*The Christian church is the format within which God's covenant with Abraham is expressed, and expressed not only with regard to Israel but also extended to the Gentiles*

It is thanks to God's covenant with Abraham that the Christian church exists at all. As the Christ (or Messiah), Jesus is the promised Seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16). In Him, the promises of God to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are yea and amen (II Cor. 1:20). The new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah received its substance in the church of Jesus Christ as the Israel of God. Jesus Himself expressly made this clear in His institution of the Lord's Supper, and we find this extensively set out in the Epistle to the Hebrews, too.

What sets the New Testament dispensation apart is more than the fact that the Good News goes out to the nations, for that had been spoken of by the Old Testament prophets before, especially Isaiah. That which had not been foreseen by the Old Testament prophets was that these Gentiles, when brought in, would not be bound by the Mosaic dispensation and yet that converts from the heathen would still have a full and equal place in the New Testament church alongside the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Under the old dispensation, whoever wished to serve the God of Israel had in principle to identify wholly with the Jewish people. The most eloquent example of this is Ruth's choice (Ruth 1:16). Around the start of the Christian era, there were very many proselytes, or companions of the Jews, who had come to identify themselves entirely with the Jewish people despite being of Gentile origin. Around them was a penumbra known as the 'God-fearers'; that is, Gentiles who had only confessed the God of Israel to be God and who had broken with polytheism, without observing the Mosaic law in full. Examples of this outer circle include Cornelius the centurion (Acts 10) and Lydia the seller of purple (Acts 16).

The mystery revealed under the new dispensation is that converts from the Gentiles who confessed the Messiah (or Christ) of Israel as their Saviour would not have to be bound by the Mosaic law in order to become fully-fledged members of the church of Jesus Christ; and more than this, that

they were not even supposed to undertake such observance. The first time that this found expression was when Cornelius, who together with some of his subordinate soldiers was a God-fearer, received the Holy Spirit while Peter proclaimed to him that Moses and the prophets had been fulfilled in Jesus. Peter then baptised Cornelius without his being circumcised (Acts 10:44-48), an act which Peter justified by testifying that before ever he had baptised Cornelius with water, God Himself had already baptised Cornelius with His Holy Spirit (Acts 11:5ff).

Paul very explicitly holds forth to the Gentile Christians in Galatia that they are not to let themselves be bound by the Mosaic law. Should they do so, they would merely be demonstrating that they had failed to grasp what it meant to be justified before God by faith and not by works. Whether one is a Jew or a Gentile, one only becomes a child of Abraham, and only shares in the fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham, by faith. This very much comes to the fore in Galatians, and also in Romans (see Rom. 3-4, 9; Gal. 2-4).

It is important to remark in this regard that the word 'Israel' in the New Testament tends to refer to the Jewish people. However, when Paul in Galatians 6:16 speaks of the Israel of God, the context is that of answering the question of who shall share in the blessing given to Abraham. Paul has already testified theretofore (Gal. 3:26) that there is only one way to be a child of God, for Jew and Gentile alike: by faith in Christ Jesus. Those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God—Jews and Gentiles—together make up the Israel of God.

In his epistle to the church at Ephesus, Paul expressly uses the word 'mystery' (also translated 'secret'). As the word implies, there is something which was not clear under the old dispensation but which is now made manifest. The content of the secret is that it is given to Christians from among the Gentiles to be fellow heirs and partakers of the promise, fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, without being bound by the Mosaic dispensation (Eph. 2:19; 3:6). Christians from among the Gentiles are no longer aliens from the commonwealth (citizenship) of Israel or strangers from the covenants of promise (Eph. 2:12). In one body, Christ has reconciled Jew and Gentile

with God; through Him, Jews and Gentiles both have access by one Spirit unto the Father (Eph. 2:18). With the coming of Christ, the middle wall of partition between Israel and the Gentiles has been broken down (Eph. 2:14,15).

If Gentile Christians are called *fellow* heirs and *fellow* citizens with the saints, then the saints and the first heirs are those Jews who have confessed Jesus as Lord and as Son of God, and whose incorporation into the church of Jesus Christ is sealed with the sign of baptism. It is muddled thinking to suppose that Paul is in Ephesians 2 calling Jews the first heirs regardless of whether or not they confess Jesus as the Christ. The New Testament makes plain that a Jew cannot share in the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham outside the faith of Abraham any more than a Gentile can. Romans 9:1-5 does, however, clarify that as concerns to whom God's promises were made, the Jewish people has an unique status among the world of nations: a status maintained under the new dispensation, too.

The new covenant, the form of which is the Christian church consisting of Jew and Gentile confessing Jesus as Lord and Son of God, is not a replacement but a renewal and extension of the old covenant.<sup>5</sup> In the initial years of the Christian church, it was taken for granted that Jews were in the church. *All* her members were Jews or proselytes to begin with. The remarkable thing was that increasing numbers of Gentiles also began pressing in to confess Jesus as Lord and Son of God. After this led to conflicts, the entire body of the apostles, met at Jerusalem, unanimously resolved that Christians from among the Gentiles should not be required to keep the Mosaic law.

Besides, not a single New Testament book was written by a representative of that group. Luke aside, all New Testament authors were Jews by birth, and even Luke was a proselyte. The New Testament is therefore a collection of entirely Jewish writings. The New Testament is not a whit less Jewish than the rabbinic writings, which, moreover, all post-date it (although they do contain old material). Nor is the New Testament any

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<sup>5</sup> Alex Jacob, *The Case for Enlargement Theology* (Saffron Walden: Glory to Glory Publications, 2010).

less Jewish than the Dead Sea Scrolls. The New Testament does, however, represent a different *form* of Judaism than rabbinic Judaism or the Judaism of the Qumran sect.<sup>6</sup> The New Testament was written by Jews plus one proselyte to Judaism, all united in their conviction that Jesus is the promised Christ, that Moses and the prophets have found their fulfilment in Him, and that with His coming, the Messianic era has in principle begun.

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<sup>6</sup> That Christianity began, in historical terms, as a branch of Judaism is also acknowledged by Jewish scholars. Alan F. Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts/London: Harvard University Press, 1986); Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

## Chapter 2

### **No replacement theology, but what is the biblical view?**

*What is dispensationalism?*

In the nineteenth century, a highly idiosyncratic view arose not just of the future of Israel and that of the Christian church, but more particularly encompassing the interrelation of these two futures. This was dispensationalism, or the doctrine of separate dispensations. The name most readily associated with the emergence of this view is that of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), the spiritual father of the Brethren movement. Dispensationalism found particularly wide acceptance in the United States with the dissemination in the early twentieth century of a new Bible edition whose dispensationalist marginal notes were by the Congregationalist minister Cyrus I. Scofield (1843-1921). This has become known as the Scofield Reference Bible.

The notion of dispensations as such is not the distinguishing characteristic of dispensationalism; as far back as the church father Augustine, we see a formal scheme of seven dispensations in world history. Rather, what sets dispensationalism apart is the sharpness of the dividing lines it places doctrinally between Israel and the church. In the dispensationalist view, the dispensation of Israel expired with the crucifixion of Christ, since His death ended the sixty-ninth week spoken of in Daniel 9. That, the movement claims, is when the church dispensation began, and dispensationalism insists that that dispensation was not foreseen in any way, shape or form by the Old Testament prophets. This present church dispensation, it is taught, will end with the church being caught up into the air, inaugurating the seven-year period that precedes the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The maintenance of this distinction between the rapture of the church and the parousia of Christ is based on a reading of I Thessalonians 4:17.

After the Rapture, we are told, the prophetic stopwatch that was put on hold during the church age will start ticking again, heralding the seventieth week of years prophesied in Daniel 9. While the truly regenerate (if we are

to believe what the view itself teaches) have all been borne away to glory, nevertheless the earthly Temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. Three and a half years into this seven-year period, the Antichrist will be disclosed, ushering in the great tribulation spoken of not only in Daniel 9 but also in Revelation. The saints who come out of the great tribulation (therefore known as the tribulation saints) must then be legalist Jews. It is rather unclear in dispensationalist dogma how these tribulation saints regard the Lord Jesus Christ.

When the seven years are over, thus finishing the seventieth and last week of Daniel 9, Jesus Christ will return and will commence His thousand-year reign over the earth in Jerusalem. The tribulation saints will be resurrected and the nations judged on the basis of how they treated these tribulation saints from within the Jewish people. That criterion will determine whether they are allowed to enter the millennial reign or not. The Third Temple, which by this time will already be standing ready, will be purified, and the sacrificial service that will then be resumed there will be memorial in nature. There are no shortage of variations and adaptations in dispensationalism. For instance, some would have the Rapture take place during the great tribulation, or even after its end. Nor are dispensationalists all agreed on who, other than the tribulation saints, will be resurrected from the dead to reign with Christ at Jerusalem.

Dispensationalist doctrine has become a touchstone of orthodoxy in many circles in the United States, and to reject it is seen by many American churchgoers as tantamount to higher criticism of the Bible. The self-defined fundamentalists particularly tend to insist that this is so.<sup>7</sup> One of the reasons for this conviction is the scant knowledge that many American Christians have of church history. Many a dispensationalist is not so much as even aware of how much his or her view diverges from the classic Reformational understanding; yet, seen in the light of the Reformers' theology, dispensationalism is anything but unobjectionable as a heresy.

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<sup>7</sup> Given the deliberate self-use for nearly a century now of the term 'fundamentalist' by this persuasion, it is not very useful to describe classic orthodox Protestants as 'fundamentalist Christians', as often happens.

Grave objections must be raised against dispensationalism. Incidentally, dispensationalism should not be equated with premillennialism, since that was a view found even in the Early Church and common particularly from the nineteenth century onwards among such orthodox Protestants as the leading Dutch Jewish Christian Izaak da Costa (1798-1860), Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), J.C. Ryle (1816-1900) and Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-1843), and it absolutely should not be equated with the Puritans' postmillennialism.<sup>8</sup> We must, however, recognise that even classic premillennialism was explicitly rejected by the Reformers.

The key difference between classic premillennialism and dispensationalism is that classic premillennialism does not insist on two separate tracks for how God deals with Israel and how He deals with the church.<sup>9</sup> For premillennialists, unlike for dispensationalists, the church is inseparable from the Old Testament prophecies, and Israel (again differently from what dispensationalists believe) will spiritually be part of the church when Christ reigns bodily at Jerusalem for a thousand years. Moreover, classic premillennialism knows of no rapture of the church seven years before the Second Coming. However, classic premillennialism does in effect hold to there being a third dispensation yet to come in time before the eternal glory, and this is a shared feature between classic premillennialism and dispensationalism. Therefore, all objections that there are to dispensationalism which relate to its insistence

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<sup>8</sup> The very terms 'premillennialist' and 'postmillennialist' date from the nineteenth century and refer to one's view of where in chronology the Second Coming is to be placed: before (pre) or after (post) Christ's thousand-year reign. So describing the mainstream of Puritanism as 'postmillennialist' is actually a terminological anachronism. The Puritans themselves mostly disliked being called 'chiliasts' (the then-current Greek equivalent term to 'millennialists') because in the popular seventeenth-century understanding, a 'chiliast' was one who believed in a future bodily reign of Christ on earth. That latter view was in fact one taken by a small number of Puritans, and those who embraced this fully-fledged form of the doctrine had no problem with being called chiliasts.

<sup>9</sup> In recent decades, a variation on classic dispensationalism has arisen, known as progressive dispensationalism. 'Progressive' here means not 'revisionist' but relates to its adherents' assumption that God's Old Testament promises will be fulfilled in stages. One of the repercussions of this view is that its adherents can, while clinging to the other aspects of dispensationalism, at least esteem the Christian church as a preliminary fulfilment of the Old Testament promises.

on such a future dispensation after the church age apply equally to classic premillennialism.

The postmillennialism encountered in Puritanism and its Dutch sister movement, the Further Reformation, is based on the assumption that the dispensation in which we presently live will culminate in two great events: the conversion of the Jews and a thousand-year blossoming of the church.<sup>10</sup> Not that it is believed that Christ will leave heaven to rule the world from Jerusalem during that millennium: like the adherents of the classic eschatology of the Christian church, postmillennialists collocate the Second Coming with the Last Judgement, whereas premillennialism separates those two events with the thousand-year reign in between. Although not all Early Modern postmillennialists linked the conversion of the Jews with a return of Israel to the land of the forefathers, some emphatically did, including such prominent champions of the later Dutch Further Reformation as Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711) and Theodorus van der Groe (1705-1784). Postmillennialism has no concept at all of God's having a special programme for Israel other than that of the church: it holds that Jews who come to confess Jesus as the Christ will by that very token become part of His fellowship, namely the church, and that they should accordingly be baptised. The Scripture thus applies to both Jew and Gentile that 'he that believes and is baptized shall be saved' (Mark 16:16).

*In a sense, dispensationalism is the mirror image of Marcionism*

Hermeneutically and exegetically, the key objection to it is that dispensationalism reads the Old Testament as if there were no New, and the New as if there were no Old. In dispensationalism, Old and New Testaments are decoupled from each other, since it is a theory that eschews the notion of progressive revelation. Accordingly, dispensationalism regards the people of Israel and the Christian church as two entirely distinct peoples of God. As if that were not bad enough, dispensationalism propounds that God has provided a separate means of salvation to each

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<sup>10</sup> Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1971).

dispensation. Key to that latter doctrine is the concept that works do contribute to salvation for Israel but not for the Christian church.

It is not by chance that it was in the nineteenth century that dispensationalism arose. In liberal Protestant circles of that era, belief in the supposedly differing characters of the Old and New Testaments had led to the idea that the Old Testament was the expression of a backwards and wretched religion. The Christian church, it was asserted, had a sufficiency for her faith in the New Testament alone, the kernel of which was held to be the life of Jesus as an ideal man and our Example. Leading figures who must be named in this regard are Friedrich D.E. Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930). This liberal Protestant view is inextricably bound up with the historical-critical reading of both the Old and the New Testament. Von Harnack wrote what was effectively a justification of the Early Church's condemnation of Marcion's having rejected the Old Testament. He argued that the Reformers' maintenance of the Old Testament had been an artefact of the circumstances of their age, and that with the ostensible progress made in the intervening centuries, it was now high time that the Christian church ceased accepting the Old Testament as authoritative. The holding of this view was—not always, but in many cases—accompanied by an undeniable anti-Semitic attitude.

Dispensationalism distances itself altogether from Higher Criticism and, according to its own proponents, seeks to read all Scripture literally, particularly the Old Testament prophecies. The fact is, however, that dispensationalism is a kind of mirror image of Marcionism: in this inversion, while the Old Testament is accepted as divine and authoritative, it is not held to have any immediate relevance to the Christian church. Dispensationalism will own that the Old Testament prophecies find their fulfilment in Jesus, whom the Christian church confesses to be Messiah, but will not accept that they are fulfilled also in the church as His body.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The tendency known as 'progressive dispensationalism' finesses this line—not least in response to the many exegetical and hermeneutical objections mounted against dispensationalism—by speaking of 'partial' and 'analogous' fulfilments of the Old Testament prophecies in the Christian church. This allows progressive

What this amounts to is that the Old Testament is being held to teach a different way of salvation than the New. Nor are even the teachings dispensed by Jesus on earth before His crucifixion held to be of immediate relevance to the Christian church in dispensationalist thinking. For instance, the Sermon on the Mount is asserted to be a rule of life for the millennial reign. We are actually left with a New Testament for the church that is cut down in scope to just the Epistles, with a question mark hanging over which dispensation the Epistle of James is for. Thus, the Bible books which dispensationalism holds to be immediately relevant to the Christian church are only a couple more than those which Marcion placed in his canon.

In that it maintains a strict opposition between the people of Israel and the Christian church, dispensationalism fails to do justice to the historical fact that the Christian church came into being as a denomination of Judaism. Nor does dispensationalism reckon with the principle that the New Testament draws a line from an initial stage of fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies of Christ's kingship through to Jesus' ascension and His sitting at the Father's right hand.

Holding Jesus' pre-crucifixion teachings to be directly relevant to a future millennial reign only is a position that runs clean contrary to His own words in the Great Commission: 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe *all things whatsoever* I have commanded you' (Mat. 28:19,20). The italicisation is deliberate emphasis here.

What dispensationalism is doing by defining Israel and the Christian church so strongly as distinct entities is in effect projecting a later view back into the time of the Christian church's origins, and more than back-casting it, actually legitimising it as well. At least dispensationalism does not (as has far too often been done elsewhere in Christendom) regard the church as the replacement of the Jewish people, but by the same token, we cannot say that dispensationalism provides for any positive form of

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dispensationalists to continue holding that the complete and literal fulfilment of these prophecies is reserved for the millennial reign.

relationship between the church and the Jewish people either. By viewing the church through its peculiar Old Testament goggles, dispensationalism reduces the church to a mere interlude in salvation history, one that has nothing of substance to do with the Jews. It must be commended that dispensationalists have a very high view of the Jewish people, but by their own conviction, the repercussions of their view are not to be felt until the future, not now.

*A simplistic view of literal fulfilment*

Dispensationalists tend to insist that they read prophecies literally, and to accuse those not convinced of their view of failing to do so. They read, as they say, ‘Israel’ where it says ‘Israel’. Yet this rather prompts the rebuttal: ‘Do you believe that the wall of partition between Israel and the Gentiles has in principle been broken down with the coming of Christ, and that the Christians from among the Gentiles are fellow heirs of the promises together with the Christians from among the Jews?’ Moreover, one will run aground in the end even if one takes a highly literal reading of prophecy.

For instance, dispensationalism expects the construction of a third temple, yet, in express contradiction of what we read in Ezekiel’s final vision about the sacrifices that will be brought into it, teaches that it will be purely memorial in purpose and will have no atoning significance. Dispensationalism tends to disregard altogether the fact that in Ezekiel’s final vision, the city and temple are very explicitly kept separate from each other and that the temple is far more significant than the city. Another problem for dispensationalism in that passage is the view of the prince. Dispensationalists are forced to take this prince to be not the awaited ideal Davidic prince mentioned in other prophecies, whose portrait is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, but instead a resurrected David who will beget children once again in the millennial reign. Yet to teach that David will have a special place in Israel’s future beside the Messiah is an express contradiction of the Old Testament, where the name ‘David’ signifies that very coming Messiah (Ezek. 34:24, 37:25; Hos. 3:5).

That orthodox Jews should look forward to a restoration of the Temple service is understandable. That orthodox Christians should do so, however, is incomprehensible. To take just the clearest example, the Epistle to the Hebrews makes clear to us that, in accordance with Jeremiah 31, the new covenant has been fulfilled by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. No temple is needed now, and sacrifices need no longer be offered. According to the final vision in Revelation, the Christian looks forward to the coming down—in connection with the return of Jesus Christ—of New Jerusalem out of heaven. That city will be a city without a temple. No temple is needed there, ‘for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it’ (Rev. 21:22).

He who expects the restoration of the Temple service is obliged also to accept a re-erection of the wall of partition between Israel and the Gentiles which was demolished upon the cross of Christ, and to accept that Gentiles, in order to belong fully to the Israel of God, must—in contradiction to the message of Galatians and the apostolic resolution of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)—be fully bound to observe the Mosaic law. Now, we do believe that the prophecies are really fulfilled; but one must give due account to the genre of a prophecy in looking for its fulfilment. They are not mere historiography written prior to the events they describe; in their fulfilment, we must always bear in mind the progression of salvation history.

#### *Further objections to dispensationalism*

Among the ramifications of dispensationalism—and, for that matter, of classic premillennialism—is that in the millennial reign, the preaching of the Gospel in the form in which we now know it will be impossible. This is because, while it will still be possible to preach then that Christ died and rose again for us, it will no longer be possible to say that He is ascended into heaven for us and intercedes for us there. As compared with the present-day new dispensation, any future millennial reign would (notwithstanding all the material and spiritual blessings which would accompany it) be a major retrograde step in spiritual terms: Christ would no longer be accessible day and night to all His people worldwide. And

the very notion that there should be a single step backwards in salvation history is quite contrary to the whole tenor of the New Testament.

The New Testament gives the impression on every hand—and we could couch it even more strongly than that—that the return of Christ will be to usher in not as it were the Last-But-One Things (namely a millennial reign) but the very Last Things, namely the final judgement and the coming-down of New Jerusalem out of heaven. In its brief outline of the millennial reign in chapter 20, the Book of Revelation does not give any indication that we have to do here with fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. Matters are very different when we turn the page to John's final vision (Rev. 21:9-22:5), which is bursting with allusions to the Old Testament prophecies of the restoration of Israel and of Jerusalem.

Another very major objection to dispensationalism is that it is a view in which the Christian church is not the only entity that can directly be linked to the Old Testament prophecies. No, under dispensationalism we should also have to accept that the Old Testament prophets foresaw and foresaid only the Last-but-One Things (the millennial reign), not the Last Things (the eternal glory). Coupled with this is the view held in several versions of dispensationalism that Israel has an earthly but the church a heavenly destiny, which would mean that the two peoples would forever be in two separate realms. Yet the Epistle to the Hebrews sets out the Old Testament faithful as examples to New Testament believers! The New Testament believers read in Hebrews that they ought, together with those believers of old, to seek a city whose builder and maker is God (11:10). At the end of Chapter 11, we even read in terms that those Old Testament believers would not be made perfect without the New Testament believers. This is because when the former walked this earth, they never witnessed the coming of the new dispensation, and only that new dispensation will usher in the eternal glory.

Also quite wrong-headed is the dispensationalist notion that there is an earthly calling for the people of Israel and a heavenly calling for the New Testament church. In the progression of revelation, and particularly if we look at the transition from the old to the new dispensation, the emphasis is increasingly laid upon the eternal glory. Bound up with this, the Bible

stresses increasingly as it goes on that the old dispensation, and hence also the fate of this world, is but temporary and relative. Now, this is a developing trend, but it is not one that is reversible in future. On the contrary, the Bible culminates in the dissolution of any distinction between the earthly and the heavenly, for a new heaven and a new earth with New Jerusalem upon it are coming. The Old Testament believers were already looking forward to that, and ultimately they owned themselves for that reason to be strangers and pilgrims on the earth (Heb. 11:13ff). The believers under the new dispensation, although they stand at a later time in revelation history, may share in that expectation. The word to them is: 'Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.' (Heb. 12:1,2)

Finally, it can be remarked before we proceed that while classic dispensationalism does regard the work of Jesus Christ up until His resurrection as a fulfilment of the Old Testament promises, it does not so view His ascension into heaven, let alone view the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the New Testament form which the church thereby obtained as the fulfilment of those prophecies. However, if the Christian church—which came into being as the fulfilment of what the Old Testament prophets had heralded, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit—is not allowed to be seen as the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises, then it is in fact inconsistent to carry on insisting nevertheless that Jesus is the fulfilment of the promised coming Messiah. For the outpouring of God's Spirit was foretold by the Old Testament prophets no less than the coming of the Messiah was.

*Dual-covenant theology: a contradiction of the New Testament*

It is particularly since the Second World War that we have seen Christian theologians suggesting that God has taken the church and Judaism down two separate routes—that He has had one covenant with Israel and the

synagogue, and another covenant with the church.<sup>12</sup> This view leaves the position of Jews who confess Jesus as the Christ rather muddled. Sometimes, adherents of this doctrine of two ways reject the applicability to them of the received term for it, ‘dual-covenant theology’, yet what their doctrine boils down to theologically is dual-covenant theology nevertheless, namely: Israel and the church are covered by the same covenant and are both on the way to the same future; there is a ‘single’ congregation or family of God which consists of church plus synagogue; and Israel enjoys coverage by the blessings of Jesus without having to confess Him as the Messiah.

The Dutch theologian Arnold A. van Ruler (1906-1970) expounded that he was able to regard both the church and the synagogue as expressions of the Kingdom of God.<sup>13</sup> This view can hardly be called anything other than a species of dual-covenant theology, even if van Ruler did accord the church primacy over the synagogue in light of the progression in revelation that had culminated in the person and work of Christ.

Dual-covenant theology has erroneously been defended by invoking the Parable of the Prodigal Son, which of course one can more properly call the parable of the two lost sons and their patient father. Those who pray this parable in aid identify ‘the’ prodigal with the Gentile church and the elder son with the synagogue. The father’s statement to his eldest at the end of the parable—‘Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine’ (Luke 15:31)—is taken in this reading to mean that Israel is already with the Father and thus needs no conversion in the way that the Gentiles need.

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<sup>12</sup>Even before the Second World War, the Anglican theologian James Parkes (1896-1981) was defending the notion that post-Biblical Israel had its own covenant with God and did not need Jesus Christ for salvation. James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Anti-Semitism* (London: Soncino Press, 1934), 15, 64ff.

<sup>13</sup>Arnold A. van Ruler, *Droom en gestalte: een discussie over de theologische principes van het vraagstuk van christendom en politiek* (Amsterdam: Holland, 1947), 115, 119; *Die christliche Kirche und das Alte Testament [The Christian Church and the Old Testament]*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971)] (München: Kaiser Verlag, 1955), 27.

Several objections must be raised against this view and this explanation of the passage. At the exegetical level, the objections start from the basic consideration that a parable is not an allegory: not necessarily every detail in a parable has a spiritual significance. Rather, we must begin by considering the primary purpose that the parable serves, and only such details as fit that purpose can be concluded to have a directive significance. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the whole point is God's mercy having become readily visible in Jesus Christ, and that mercy seeking man's repentance. Repentance, then, is necessary for all. Stronger yet, this parable is in the first instance about the necessity to all within Israel of repenting!

In His earthly walk, Jesus' message found acceptance not least among notorious sinners, prostitutes and tax-collectors. This brought criticism down upon Jesus' head from Pharisees and scribes: 'This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.' (Luke 15:2) The Prodigal Son serves as a type of these repentant flagrant sinners; the elder son represents the scribes and Pharisees. While the latter do take the trouble to set themselves apart from notorious sinners in their conduct, they are nevertheless (and unawares) alienated from God. They are not concerned to be close to God. No less shocking or unprecedented in the parable than that the father should go out and wait for his younger son and run to meet him is the father's preparedness, when the elder son refused to share in the festive joy, to come out and plead with him to come inside. This urging shows us explicitly that repentance is equally needful for the elder son, i.e., the Pharisees and scribes.

In literary terms, the power of the Parable of the Prodigal Son lies in its unresolved ending. The question left hanging is: how shall the scribes and Pharisees respond to this appeal? The parable itself leaves this issue unanswered. We read of the rich young ruler that he went away sorrowful (Luke 18:23) when Jesus had told him (v. 22), 'Yet lackest thou one thing'. Nevertheless, one of the most striking of Biblical conversions, if not the most striking, is that of Saul the Pharisee. From an enraged persecutor of Jesus Christ, he becomes a confessor and defender of His Name, and the Paul who can attest that he has laboured more abundantly than all the apostles (I Cor. 15:10). If such a furious Pharisee as Paul could come to

repentance, then how are we to abandon hope for the most staunch of ultra-Orthodox Jews? With men it is impossible, but not with God.

There is another remark to be made about this parable of the two sons. Understanding the younger son to stand for the church from among the Gentiles and the elder to stand for the Jewish people as a whole is not an interpretation that does justice to the original context in which this parable was given. That is not all: the interpretation just mentioned gives rise to a common impression among Gentile Christians that they must by default identify with the Prodigal Son. This is simply not the case. When applying a parable in a new context, we are always bound to give due weight to the parable's original power. The original force of this parable is that everyone needs to repent. Thus, so does anyone who grew up in the Christian church or who has joined it. Accordingly, anyone who cannot readily identify with the Prodigal Son, including people within the Christian church, can see themselves in the elder brother. It is a deleterious practice for the Christian church to tidy away any Old Testament or Gospel warnings with the label 'reserved for Israel'. If the Church is fellow heir of the promises, then so is she of the warnings too.

The elder son, without being conscious of it, gives away by his words that his thinking about the father nothing differs from his younger brother's attitude before repentance. He feels his father's presence to loom over him and would rather have thrown his party without him (cf. Luke 15:29-30). Let us posit the resolution to the parable that the elder son also came to himself. What should then be his confession? He would assuredly confess, in his younger brother's words, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.' (Luke 15:21)

Paul regarded his own conversion as miraculous: a dramatic intervention in his life by God in Christ. In this, he counted himself an example for others. To the church in Ephesus, evidently a majority-Gentile congregation, Paul writes not only that he and his Jewish co-religionists first trusted in Christ (Eph. 1:12), but also that they, no less than these Christians of the Gentiles, were by nature children of wrath and dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-3). The great wonder, not just for Gentile Christians but also for Christians from among the Jews, is: 'But God, who

is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.’ (Eph 2:4-7)

It is certain from the New Testament that there is no salvation for Jew nor Gentile outside repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If Jews were able to obtain salvation without believing in Him in Whom Moses and the prophets are fulfilled, then how much the more would Gentiles be able to! If the Christian church starts allowing for exceptions to the universality of the message that no man comes to the Father but by Jesus Christ, then she has already undone her own *raison d’être*. The only sense in which one could become or remain a Christian would then be in a historical-cultural sense; there would be no overarching principle necessitating Christian faith.

The view of Vaticanum II: *Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate*

For long centuries, the Roman Catholic church regarded herself without the slightest reservation as the replacement of the Jewish people. The Tridentine Mass every Good Friday included a prayer for the conversion of the ‘perfidious [or ‘faithless’] Jews’ (*perfidis Judaeis*). In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Roman Catholic church felt the general need of the times, along with other groups, to rethink the significance of the Jewish people. The Second Vatican Council, held from 1962 to 1965, reaped the harvest of that thinking, among its other fruits. The offending word *perfidis* was dropped from the liturgy. Since 1962, Rome’s Good Friday prayer has been: ‘Let us pray for the Jews: that Almighty God may remove the veil from their hearts ... and deliver them from darkness and blindness, that they might acknowledge Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all men.’ A further rewording was directed by Pope Benedict XVI in 2008, softening this clause to: ‘Let us pray for the Jews: that our God and Lord may illuminate their hearts, that they acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of all men.’

In a section addressing the relationship between the Roman Catholic church and other religions, *Lumen Gentium* (*Light of the Nations*), the constitution of the Second Vatican Council which sets out Rome's doctrine of the church, goes into detail on the Jewish people and also on rabbinic Judaism. Another Vatican II constitution, *Nostra Aetate* (*In Our Age*), lays down further outworkings of this relationship.

*Lumen Gentium* states that God's plan of salvation encompasses all who acknowledge the Creator. It names at the head of this category the Muslims, because they are one with Christians in acknowledging God as Creator, worshipping the one merciful God and confessing Him as the Judge of mankind at the last day. The document then turns to the Jews, calling rabbinic Judaism an estimable response to the Divine revelation in the old covenant. *Lumen Gentium* also speaks of a shared future for God's people of the old covenant and the new people of God.<sup>14</sup> The basic premise of *Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate* in Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations is a premise known as the Abrahamic oecumene (or Abrahamite oikoumene).

As regards Christian churches outwith communion with Rome, these constitutions make clear that churches lacking what it calls an 'historic(al) episcopate' are the most distanced from Rome. These are refused the label 'church' and are instead called faith 'communities'. Among the world's Episcopal churches, it is with the Eastern Orthodox denominations that these documents see Rome as having the greatest commonalities. What the Eastern Orthodox are still lacking, we read, is an acknowledgement of what Rome calls the Petrine ministry. In terms of the overall grasp of the truth that religions have, the documents set out a progression, via the monotheistic religions, that culminates in the Christian faith. Within Christianity, Rome asserts, the full expression of that faith is to be found with her alone.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Lumen Gentium* 16; *Nostra Aetate* 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Lumen Gentium* 14, 15; *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Vatican II's constitution on ecumenism) 13-18.

Rome's thinking is shaped by her Thomist understanding of nature and grace: nature is built on grace and finds its fulfilment through grace. The Roman Catholic church thus presents her message, in whatever context in the world she is, as a supplement to what is already to be found in the local context. Revisionist interpretations of this scheme finesse classic Thomism with a couple of assertions: that Rome alone is in possession of the fulness of salvation, but that there are good things to be said nevertheless about the religion(s) of those not in fellowship with Rome. The reason why this has become the latter-day argument of choice is that the assumption is still there in Rome that the whole world is, in some inchoate sense, desirous of being accepted into fellowship with her. That is how Rome's doctrine of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* has been maintained into our day. We also read in *Lumen Gentium*, 'Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.' (Chapter II, para. 16) Thus, the goalposts have been shifted: baptism as the criterion for one's pertaining to the people of God (as it had been through Rome's whole history theretofore) is dispensed with, to be replaced by the touchstone of 'sincerely seeking God', which of course can just as well be done beyond the Christian church as within her. By extension of the aforementioned argument, Roman Catholic theologians now permit themselves the notion that even those who have not been baptised as such are subconsciously desirous of baptism.

It is striking that Pope John XXIII greeted Jewish leaders with the words, 'I am Joseph.' We must note that this was not merely a friendly way of showing his sense of oneness of purpose with Jewish spiritual leaders; rather, he was also implicitly pressing his claim to be the vicar of Christ on earth, for Joseph is an Old Testament type of the Lord Jesus Christ. This being the case, he was in fact also insisting that the Jews must change their attitude not only towards the Lord Jesus Christ but also towards him at this announcement, just as Joseph's brothers did towards Joseph.

We who go by the Scriptures cannot muster more than mixed feelings for the changes that Rome has made in her attitude towards the Jewish people.

That a word so liable to be misunderstood as ‘perfidious’ is no longer used of the Jews year by year in the Good Friday liturgy is a positive development, as too is Rome’s recent tendency to emphasise her connectedness with the Jewish people. However, these expressions of connectedness with the Jewish people are tied to a view that regards rabbinic Judaism as a legitimate way of salvation; as a way of salvation that needs no error stripping from it, but merely to be supplemented with the message of the Christian church (and very much a Roman moulding of the message at that). Quite apart from Rome’s wrongful insistence that the full expression of Christian faith is to be found with her alone, we must also reject the notion at play here that there is salvation outside a conscious placing of one’s faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup> No: contra Rome, which in her official doctrine bases all upon a scheme of nature and grace, we must preach to Jew and Gentile the gospel of sin and grace. For all our connectedness to the Jewish people, we cannot accept rabbinic Judaism as a legitimate way of salvation, for to do so would set at naught the words of Jesus Himself: ‘No man comes unto the Father but by Me.’ (John 14: 6).

*What does replacement theology entail?*

Replacement theology can be described as the notion that the church has completely taken the place of the Israel of the Old Testament and that the Jewish people no longer has any significance, as a people, under the new dispensation. In this teaching, when Jews join the Christian church, there is no reason whatsoever for them to hold fast to Jewish customs or usages. Now, it must be pointed out at once that the term ‘replacement theology’

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<sup>16</sup> The question of the salvation of infants and the severely mentally handicapped is a separate matter. We have the comfort of believing that by virtue of God’s covenant of grace, people who die in these categories will be found among the saved along with others. The blessings of the covenant can never be shared in where there is no faith. However, faith in seed-form can be present in people’s hearts and lives even at an extremely young age: in John the Baptist’s case at least, we may be sure that he had faith even before his birth (Luke 1:44), and nowhere does the Bible give rise to the impression that faith in even seed-form can occur outside the bounds of the covenant. The same as with infants applies to those who have not been able to develop an intellect: faith can be present in seed-form in them without an actual faith in Christ being exercised.

is sometimes used far more broadly than to mean a strict doctrine of the church supplanting Israel. To the adherents of dual-covenant theology, any form of Christian theology that does not hold rabbinic Judaism to be a valid path to God is ‘replacement theology’.

Dual-covenant theology is a view which regards rabbinic Judaism as inseparable from the Jewish people. Because the two are asserted to be indistinguishable, the Christian church is admonished to go beyond merely being sensible of her connection to the Jewish people: she is told she must embrace rabbinic Judaism as a way of salvation. The problem is that those who think thus are obliged to criticise the New Testament itself, with its witness that there is no salvation for Jew nor Gentile outside faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ.

In the eyes of dispensationalists, classic Christian theology is itself an expression of replacement theology, because it does not operate on the assumption of there being two sequential programmes, one for the Jewish people and one for the Christian church. Be that as it may, dispensationalism does not in practice decouple the Christian church from the Jewish people to any greater degree than does any conceivable form of replacement theology. After all, if the Christian church is but an entracte in the master plan of God’s dispensations, then she has no direct relationship at all with the Old Testament, and thus none with the Jewish people either.

In the history of the Christian church, we can find a whole gamut of opinions on how the church relates to the Jewish people. As early as the second century AD, the view had taken root that the Jewish people had lost its special status as a people. The Christian church was held to be a third race besides Jew and Gentile, and to have taken over the status which Israel had had under the old dispensation. The apologist Justin Martyr expounds this view in his *Dialogue with Trypho*. Incidentally, this by no means signifies that the church was not concerned about the Jews or that she did not fervently pray for their conversion: the *Dialogue with Trypho* indicates quite the opposite.

It is not long in Christian church history before we see the Mosaic law being spoken of almost universally negatively. The *Epistle of Barnabas* explains the law as having been a necessary reaction on God's part to the Golden Calf idolatry. The opinion became widespread immediately after Christ's resurrection that all His disciples had been released from each and every Mosaic usage: that to observe them in light of the Resurrection was by definition wrong. Jerome, following Origen in this matter, defends in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* the view that the conduct of Peter which earned him Paul's reprimand did not reflect Peter's true convictions: that Peter was merely going along with the custom of not sharing a table with heathen (even if they confessed Jesus) so that he could give Paul a fortuitous opportunity to bolster the Christian church with the teaching that it was not right to live in accordance with the Mosaic law.

Augustine was entirely at odds with that view, rounding on it in two of his letters, *Epistula* 28 and 40. For him, eschewing Mosaic observance would undermine the authority of the Biblical text and thus of the Bible itself. Augustine argued that Jewish followers of Jesus could continue following the Mosaic usages in good conscience even after Jesus' resurrection. He understood the interval between the Resurrection and the fall of the Temple to have been a transition phase, after whose expiry it was (in that church father's opinion) no longer legitimate for any followers of Jesus, even the Jews among them, to hold to these customs. Augustine is thought of as *the* theologian responsible for replacement theology, but this is highly unjust, the more so since Augustine—like Athanasius—cherished the expectation that the Jewish people would turn to Christ en masse with His return to earth.

From at least the fourth century AD onwards, every Jew joining the Christian church has been expected to forsake his keeping of the Mosaic law. In fact, it was not unusual for Christians to demand of a Jewish convert that he eat pork in the presence of others to demonstrate the break with his past. No defence of this practice whatsoever can be mounted from the New Testament. Believers from among the Gentiles are not bound to observe the Mosaic customs. In his *Epistle to the Galatians*, Paul had taught that for Christians from among the Gentiles to bind themselves with such observance was actually harmful: it would call into question whether

faith in Jesus Christ alone justified a man. That said, Paul was a Jew to the Jews. We must at a minimum state that believers from among the Jews are at *liberty* to keep the Mosaic customs.

A Biblical justification sometimes adduced for replacement theology is the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (Mat. 21:33-45; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19). The words of Christ which the advocates of this doctrine particularly draw upon are those of Matthew 21:43: 'Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.' However, reading the parable within the context of the Gospel, we are bound to conclude that its meaning is that those from whom the kingdom of God is being taken away are the then spiritual *leaders* of the Jewish people. It is *their* position which is taken over by the twelve apostles sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel in future judgement (Mat. 19:28). What is not meant is that there is no future for the Jewish people in the kingdom of God, or that the mission work of Christ's church should exclusively be geared towards the Gentiles.

The Church is the Israel of God, consisting of Jews and Gentiles who confess Jesus as the Christ, with the Jewish believers remaining the first heirs of the promise. Christ's church does not supplant Israel. What is true, however, is that under the new dispensation there is an inseparable bond between Christ and His church. The words 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned' (Mark 16:16) apply just as much to Jew as to Gentile. Baptism is the emblem of being joined to both Christ and His church. Under the new dispensation, a Jew is attaining to his proper destination when he comes to confess Jesus as Christ and when he receives in baptism the token of his incorporation into His church. At the time when the Christian church came into being, baptism was not the distinguishing mark between Gentile Christian and Jewish Christian; rather, it was an intra-Jewish distinction between those

who did acknowledge Jesus as Messiah and Son of God and those who did not.<sup>17</sup>

*Extension or enlargement theology*

The Christian church must see herself not as the replacement of Israel but rather as the extension of the faithful remnant within Israel. The covenant of God with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has been enlarged to the Gentiles under the New Testament dispensation. If the Christian church does see herself as a substitute Israel, she fails to do justice to the continuity that there is between the old and new dispensations. And because the Christian church knows herself to be an outgrowth of that faithful remnant within the Jewish people, she is also bound to be grief-stricken that the huge majority of the Jewish people down the ages has refused to accept that outgrowth and has through unbelief not had a share in the fulfilment of God's promises. Even so, the Jewish people remains a special people. Romans 9:4 tells us not that the adoption, the glory and the covenants, the giving of the law, and the service of God pertained to them, but that (as there is no verb in the Greek) they *pertain* to them. The Christian church, consisting of Jews and Gentiles, must abidingly give priority to the Jewish people in her proclamation to all nations of the Gospel. She is invigorated in doing so by the expectation that, by operation of God's covenant to Abraham, not only will there always remain a faithful remnant among the Jewish people but also ultimately all Israel shall be saved (Rom. 11:24-26).

Yet the notion is false that it is some despicable species of replacement theology for the Christian church to confess herself to be the initial fulfilment of the promises of the new covenant and of the restoration of Israel as such. The reason why it is false is that what we have to do with here is the very reason for the Christian church's existence. At such time

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<sup>17</sup> Due to its highly fraught history, the sign of baptism is a sensitive issue between the Jewish people and the Christian church. However, we are to take a New Testament mentality and to emphasise that in its pages, baptism was, for every person who confessed Jesus as Christ, the visible sign of communion with Him and thereby with His church.

as the Christian church ever gives up this conviction, she will have lost her right to exist.

For the same reason, we are not free to speak in this regard of the Christian church having annexed the Old Testament or its promises. Had the Christian church not had this conviction, she would never have arisen; had she not clung to it, she would have been overwhelmed by Gnosticism, Marcionism or Manichaeism. Those tendencies all put it about that there was absolutely no message left for Christians in the Old Testament; they completely severed the link between the Christian church and that Testament. Nevertheless, the Church needs to be cognisant that if she is heir to the Old Testament's promises, then so is she also of its threats. Christians from among the Gentiles very much do need to take Paul's salutary warning seriously: 'For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.' (Rom. 11:21)

We have the benefit of knowing that by God's faithfulness, the Church will always remain in existence. However, *parts* of the Church and members of her *can* be smitten by definitive judgement. Essential to the Biblical message is the understanding that entry into New Jerusalem at the end of time is an undeserved privilege and due entirely to God's faithfulness and grace. The blessed of the old and new dispensations, from Israel and from the nations, will sing there eternally of that faithfulness and grace.

## Chapter 3

### The land promise and its fulfillment

#### *The significance of the land promise under the new dispensation*

If we believe that the Jewish people thus retains a special place under the new dispensation, what significance does that have for the Old Testament land promise? To answer that question, we must first ascertain whether, and if so how, the land promise is in operation in the New Testament. What is beyond doubt is that where the New Testament alludes to the land promise, that promise always has universal traits. In Jesus' own teaching, it is the meek who will inherit the earth (Mat. 5:5).<sup>18</sup> In Romans 4:13, Abraham is said to have been given the promise that he would be heir of the world. It is clear that the land spoken of in Genesis is being used in the New Testament to mean the whole world. The whole world that is meant here is that world which will in the fulness of time be liberated from the consequences of the Fall and which will become the habitation of all who have with Abraham come to believe in the God Who justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5; 8:18ff).

The teaching of Jesus accords a great place to the kingdom of God, alias the kingdom of heaven. We also encounter this term, albeit much less frequently, in the apostles' teaching. In the teaching of both Jesus and His apostles, what is meant by the kingdom of God is the fulfilment of God's promises given by the hand of the Old Testament prophets. In principle, the kingdom of God has already come. It will be unfolded in all its fullness at the return of Christ. Then, people will come from the ends of the earth to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and conversely there will be

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<sup>18</sup>The third of the Beatitudes is an allusion to Psalm 37:11. The Hebrew word used there, *èrèts*, can mean either 'land' (hence the land of Israel) or 'earth'. The same ambiguity exists in the Greek noun *gè* that is used in Matthew 5:5. Given the context, we must interpret the word as meaning the earth in that New Testament verse, and specifically in the sense of the new earth. What is being spoken of here is a kingdom of earth, and it is a synonym for the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mat. 5:10).

children of the kingdom who will be cast out. Then—staggering reality—there are first which shall be last (Mat. 8:11, 12; Luke 13:28-30).

During His earthly walk, the Lord Jesus Christ directed these words to His Jewish contemporaries. Nevertheless, we are not to limit the scope of this warning to them alone or to the Jewish people down the ages. If Christians are privileged to become fellow heirs of the promises belonging properly to the Jewish people, then by the same token they are to heed the threats made for disobedience. In the present connection, what this amounts to is that the land promise finds its ultimate fulfilment in a reality that is of an entirely different character than our present reality: a future reality in which all the spiritual shall have become material, and all the material spiritual.

Even during the Old Testament, Jerusalem rises to a significance plainly transcending that of a mere settlement. As the City of God, she is the dwellingplace of God upon earth, and even more than that: she is very closely bound up with heaven, the actual abode of God. Until Titus' destruction of city and temple, Jerusalem was also the mother congregation and spiritual hub of the Christian church. The Jerusalem church lost this significance in AD 70.

Does the above mean that there are no grounds for stating that the Jewish people in the present dispensation is entitled to the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem? The lack of such grounds cannot be asserted blithely. After all, while the New Testament has next to nothing to tell us explicitly about this issue at all, we nowhere read of a revocation of the land promise. Even though the evidentiary material is scant, there are a few New Testament data in support of the enduring significance of the earthly Jerusalem under the new dispensation, and thus of the land promise too. We can particularly turn to Luke 21:24b in this regard, where we read, 'and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.' The conjunction 'until' indicates to us that there will come an end to the treading-down of Jerusalem by heathen nations. Therefore, there is a future for Jerusalem, and, by extension, for the land of Israel.

This much is certain: even after the destruction of Jerusalem, a Jewish presence remained in the land of Israel, albeit that after the quashing of the second Jewish rebellion led by Bar Kokhba, Jerusalem remained off-limits to Jews for long ages, and the centre of Jewish life in the Jewish land gravitated north to Galilee. In the ensuing centuries, most Jews living in the Jewish land resided in what came to be known as the Four Holy Cities: Safed (Zefat), Tiberias, Hebron and Jerusalem.

Down the ages, there have been Jews who returned ('made aliyah', literally 'went up') to the land of their fathers, although the numbers of such *olim* remained very small. This changed in the nineteenth century, with the trickle becoming something of a flood of Jews returning to their ancestral land even before the rise of Zionism. Just as with those inspired by Herzl's incipient movement of Zionism, these *olim* were largely secular Jews. The vast majority of adherents of Orthodox Judaism, and indeed of nascent liberal Judaism, were dismissive of Zionist ideas. Liberal Judaism insisted that the future of Judaism lay in the diaspora; Orthodoxy wrote off secular Zionism as man striving to be ahead of God, a human effort to bring about something that could only be effected at the coming of Messiah. One tendency within Orthodox Judaism began to see eye to eye with Zionism even before the rise of Nazism, although these Orthodox Jews could not regard returning to the ancestral land as more than an initial sprouting of redemption as long as Messiah had not yet come.

The British government released the Balfour Declaration on 2 November 1917, declaring that Her Majesty's Government was favourable to the establishment of a Jewish national state in what was then Palestine (which at that time also encompassed what is now Jordan). Both Arthur James Balfour himself, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and Prime Minister Lloyd George had been brought up as observant Protestants and from that perspective were amenable to the Jewish yearning for a homeland in the country of their forefathers. When the Ottoman Empire was dissolved after losing the Great War, it was the United Kingdom which was entrusted by the League of Nations with the mandate of geographical greater Palestine in 1922. It was not long before an Arab kingdom was founded in the Transjordanian sector of the mandate, precluding the establishment of any Jewish nation-state in that territory.

The State of Israel was founded in the aftermath of the Second World War, in 1948, with United Nations approval. President Harry S. Truman, brought up a Missouri Presbyterian, was inspired by Biblical themes to support the establishment of a Jewish state for the same reasons as the British statesmen Balfour and Lloyd George had, to such an extent that he disregarded contrary advice from senior advisors and even the Secretary of State. The United Nations came up with a plan for the division of the Palestine Mandate, which was accepted by the Jews but rejected by Arab dignitaries. A war broke out directly upon the declaration of independence, in which the Jews held their own.

The boundaries which the Jewish state eventually assumed were a little more generous than the territory assigned to it by the United Nations. This notwithstanding, the Jewish community which had clung on in one of the quarters of the Old City of Jerusalem from century to century was now unceremoniously expelled by its new Jordanian overlords, who had managed to obtain for themselves the rule over that part of Cisjordania which had been given the new label of ‘the West Bank’. At this point, a couple of hundred thousand Arab inhabitants of the new Jewish state sought refuge elsewhere, in many cases (but not all) egged on by their own leaders; the thinking was that the Jewish state would soon be destroyed and that they could return home. This decision sowed the seeds of what the world has come to know as the Palestinian issue. A further catalyst for the issue was the 1967 war, in which Israel wrested control of the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Both liberal Judaism and the great majority of Orthodox Jews have had a basically positive attitude towards the existence of the State of Israel since its establishment. In fact, there is not a Jew in the world who is indifferent to the existence of the Jewish land and hence (be it indirectly) with the present incarnation of the Jewish state. But what of us Christians; how are *we* to digest the establishment of the State of Israel? Let us take a leaf out of Orthodox Judaism’s book. There is an official prayer for the State of Israel, jointly written by the Sephardic and Ashkenazi chief rabbinate, and this prayer speaks of the ‘beginning of the sprouting of our redemption’ (רֵאשִׁית צְמִיחַת גְּאֻלָּתֵנוּ) (*rēsjit ts<sup>e</sup>mīchath g<sup>e</sup>ulāthēnu*). Not once but twice, the tone of the prayer is reserved. The State of Israel is not even

the beginning of ultimate redemption; it is a beginning that is still in the bud.

The reason for the chief rabbis' reserved language is that the current State of Israel is a secular state. This being so, it is hard for Orthodox Jews to speak straightforwardly of it being the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. For this very reason, there are several ultra-Orthodox tendencies which entirely reject the present Jewish state. It can be stated in terms that for Orthodox Judaism, God's promises regarding the land cannot be said to have been really fulfilled until the whole Jewish people live there, observe the Torah, and Messiah has come back to them. In quite a few places in Orthodox writing, it is stipulated as a precondition of Messiah's return that the whole Jewish people first become keepers of Torah. At the very least, we must recognise that Orthodox Judaism is far more hesitant to join the dots from the State of Israel to the promises of God than many a Christian who is quite insistent that the relationship is one-to-one.

The mass return of Jews to the ancestral land is certainly a highly remarkable phenomenon, one which necessitates us to be vigilant against two mistaken attitudes: that of seeing no relationship at all between it and the fulfilment of God's promises, and that of unreservedly embracing it as the fulfilment. The return to the Land is not an end in itself. As Christians, what we look forward to is all Israel acknowledging and accepting Jesus as the Messiah. *That* is the juncture at which we can say that His coming cannot be long now and that the times of refreshing (or 'cooling', ἀναψύξεως) from the Lord have come, as Peter puts it (Acts 3:19,20). In this regard, we could say that our earnest expectation is a mirror image of that of the Orthodox Jews. We have in common with them the conviction that the land of Israel has been put there to serve God. For Orthodox Judaism, that service means to keep halakha; for Christians, it is to be reconciled with God through Christ Jesus as the promised Messiah and to be a bearer of His image.

Our support for the Jewish people prompts in us the conviction that they are entitled to inhabit the land of their fathers. In stating this, we ought also to point out that justice must also be done for the Arab dwellers in

that ancestral land. It is prudent for Christian churches to be loath to go beyond the aforementioned stances when it comes to particular political issues, and very much prudent that churches decline to express preferences for one or other of the range of options which Jews in the State of Israel itself find preferable.

Even though we have seen that we do have grounds for speaking of Jerusalem retaining a lasting significance and the land promise retaining a vigour under the new dispensation, that does not do away with the fact that the dominant paradigm in the New Testament is that of the land promise taking on universal and above all eschatological meaning. The full and final fulfilment of the land promise and of the restoration of Jerusalem will be seen in the eternal glory, when New Jerusalem has come down out of heaven to be the eternal abode of the people of God redeemed from Israel and from the nations. It is evident that the New Testament places all the emphasis upon New Jerusalem: it is the city which, as the Epistle to the Hebrews testifies, even the patriarchs were seeking, and which Christians under the new dispensation, whether Jews or Gentiles, ought to be seeking (Heb. 11:10, 16).

The Book of Revelation culminates in a description of this New Jerusalem from heaven as the fulfilment of all prophecies not yet fulfilled (Rev. 21:9-22:5). We ought to be praying daily for this city to descend from heaven, for it is when that happens that the promises of the rebuilding and restoration of Jerusalem will definitively be fulfilled. If that is not the ultimate perspective that shapes our hopes for the future, our hopes are at variance with the absolute kernel of the Christian faith. The ultimate hope of the church of God from the old and the new dispensation will be fulfilled in that city which needs no temple because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are themselves its temple (Rev. 21:22).

### *Expecting the full performance of God's promises*

We considered the Book of Revelation earlier, when addressing dispensationalism. Having rejected dispensationalist interpretations of the

Book of Revelation, what significance are we to accord the book instead? Revelation was written as a book of consolation for the New Testament believers. The Seven Churches of Asia Minor represent the whole New Testament church. Revelation is more than an epistle; it is also prophecy. It makes plain that Jesus Christ rules the world: He is the Prince the of kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5). He is perfectly willing and able to protect His church and to smash every power that resists Him and His Father. The foremost of these powers is the dragon (the devil), but there is also the beast from the sea (the Antichrist power in its political aspect), the beast from the abyss (the Antichrist power in its religious aspect) and Babylon (the Antichrist world order). Once Babylon has been vanquished, New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven.

The Book of Revelation is packed with references to, and imagery taken from, the Old Testament. These allusions stress the unity between the New Testament church of Jesus Christ and the Old Testament people of God, and concomitantly the unity between Jew and Gentile washed in the blood of Christ. The 144,000 of Revelation 7 might stand for all the blessed of the old and new covenants (Rev. 7:4-9). If so, then we must see the Gentile believers as having been numbered among them due to being incorporated into Israel (Ps. 87:4-7). More probable than that interpretation, however, is that the 144,000 are to be understood as all the saved *Jews* of both the old and the new dispensation. In addition to this fulness of the twelve tribes of Jewry, there shall also enter into New Jerusalem a multitude from the nations which no man can number (Rev. 7:9-10).

The gates of New Jerusalem bear the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev. 21:12). In this detail, John is congruent with what Ezekiel's final vision tells us about the New City (Ezek. 48:31-34). The foundations of New Jerusalem's ramparts bear the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Rev. 21:14). With the coming-down of New Jerusalem out of heaven, then, both the old and the new dispensation are given their perfect fulfilment. We remarked when treating of dispensationalism that John's final vision (Rev. 21-9:22:5) is full of allusions to Old Testament prophecies. Especially drawn from are Isaiah 60, 62 and 66; Ezekiel 40-48; and Zechariah 14.

Just as in Ezekiel the return of the glory of the LORD to the new temple is preceded by the victory over Gog, so in Revelation the coming-down of New Jerusalem out of heaven is preceded by the fall of Babylon, the defeat of the beast from the sea and the beast from the abyss (the false prophet), the dragon, and the powers of Gog and Magog.<sup>19</sup> It is not to be ruled out that John was familiar with a manuscript of the Book of Ezekiel in which chapter 37 actually *follows* chapters 38-39.<sup>20</sup> If we maintain that sequence, then the parallelism is even more pronounced.

This datum, together with the fact that John's final vision corresponds with that of Ezekiel, is of major import to our understanding of what John is saying about the millennial reign in Revelation 20:1-10. It means that we are not free to place the defeat of Gog and Magog and of the dragon one thousand years after the fall of Babylon and the defeat of the beast of the sea and of the false prophet. Rather, we have to do with simultaneous events. This is because the Book of Revelation has an architectural structure, with each storey, as it were, illumining the whole New Testament dispensation from Christ's ascension to His parousia and the concomitant last judgement.

The millennial reign must, therefore, be placed prior in time to the return of Jesus Christ and the last judgement. The millennium serves to answer the question among the saints of what the fate will be of those put to death for Christ's sake. This plaint had already arisen in Revelation 6, where the martyrs ask, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?' (Rev. 6:10) The answer given is: 'And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.' (Rev. 6:11) So, the martyrs are privileged to enter into their rest directly upon their deaths; a rest which otherwise *remains* for the

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<sup>19</sup> In Ezekiel 38-39, Gog is the prince of the land of Magog; in Revelation 20, Gog and Magog are both peoples.

<sup>20</sup> Papyrus 967, the best witness to the Old Greek translation, has Ezekiel 37 following Ezekiel 38-39. So does Codex Wirceburgensis, one of the oldest and best Latin manuscripts.

people of God (cf. also Rev. 14:13). In this regard, the martyrs have the role of representing all believers. Only a fraction of believers die a martyr's death, but every believer is a potential martyr, for he holds Christ dearer than his own life.

In Revelation 20:1-10, more extensively than in 6:10 or 14:13, we are given to know the fate of the saints fallen asleep in Jesus. They are given thrones (Rev. 20:4). Just as elsewhere within Revelation, so here, these thrones must be situated in heaven. Accordingly, the best exegesis of what the millennium in Scripture is, is that it portrays the blessedness in heaven of the believers who are fallen asleep before the Lord Jesus Christ returns. Early Church millennialists believed otherwise: they placed the abode of the believers after death as not (yet) in heaven, but rather in the Bosom of the Fathers, a place which they expressly distinguished from heaven. On that view, what privileged the martyrs was that they would be awoken a thousand years before the last judgement to reign with Christ over a renewed earth. Now, if John is teaching that the saints who are fallen asleep are given to rest from their labours immediately upon their deaths, then indirectly this is an argument against the notion that he should be thinking of a future thousand-year kingdom.

An objection not infrequently levelled against the view that the millennial reign is a reality in the here and now is that we can hardly imagine that the devil is currently bound (Rev. 20:1, 2). Yet if we consider the transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament dispensation, we see that the message concerning the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob which under the old dispensation was spoken by the mouths of the prophets is now, under the new dispensation, being disseminated by (or in) His Son (Heb. 1:1) among all the peoples of the earth. Hence it is that Satan really is unable in our day to deceive the nations (Rev. 20:3). Yet Satan will be loosed for a little time not long before the return of Christ, and then the great tribulation will reach its climax.

The Puritans and Further Reformation men took the expectation of the conversion of Israel and of a worldwide thriving of the church, which they understood to be prophesied in Romans 11, and linked it furthermore with

the prophecy of the millennial reign in Revelation 20.<sup>21</sup> In reading of the resurrection of the dead martyrs, they thought that since these martyrs' cause is also the Cause of Christ, the church would blossom on earth as never before. There need be no mutual exclusion between that view and the conviction that the millennial kingdom refers to the reign in heaven of the saints who are fallen asleep.

In Revelation 11, we read of two witnesses, standing for the New Testament church, being killed and then coming back to life after three and a half days and being taken up into heaven, and that one of the consequences which this causes is that glory is given upon earth to the God of heaven. We might well see in this a reference to a period of blossoming for the church following after persecution. It is certain that church history indicates that times of persecution and of decline (incidentally, these two phenomena are not always linked; far from it) are followed by times of flourishing. The Biblical pointers to a global resurgence of the church are less than those to the conversion of the Jewish people. Yet even those Christians who fail to see any such pointers at all can hardly be disappointed if it does happen.

It must be noted, however, that the connection between the conversion of the Jewish people and the promise of the millennial reign is not made in Revelation 20 itself. Rather, it is the fruit of combining Biblical data. In this regard, let us recall that not all Early Church figures of premillennial persuasion had a positive future expectation of Israel. For example, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus connected the thousand-year reign with only one thing: the resurrection of deceased Christian martyrs. Even in that early period of the church, however, it became apparent that some did very emphatically believe in a future conversion of the Jewish people: Athanasius, for one, but also the amillennialist Augustine.

For anyone who reads the New Testament and believes its message, the unavoidable conclusion must be, whatever else, that the Old Testament promises of the coming of the kingdom of God were in principle fulfilled with Jesus' appearance on earth. The Old Testament promises in Psalms

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1971).

2, 72 and 110 were in principle fulfilled at His ascension in to heaven. Upon His ascension, Christ received all power in heaven and earth, and began to reign as King over the whole world and all nations. Christ's kingly rule extends from His ascension to His parousia, at which point I Corinthians 15:25 takes effect: 'For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.' That Christ does indeed already reign, for all that His church on earth is despised and oppressed, is one of the key themes of the Book of Revelation. However high and mighty the great and good of this world might be, Christ is the Prince of the kings of the earth. He gathers and protects His church. He is the Rider on the white horse spoken of in Revelation 6:2, a Rider going forth, conquering and to conquer.

The ultimate fulfilment of God's promises will be substantiated when, in connection with the return of Jesus Christ, New Jerusalem comes down from heaven to earth. Then, death will be destroyed and all tears will be wiped from the eyes of those who are privileged to enter the new city. Anyone who compares the Old Testament prophecies with this New Testament fulfilment will see that there are just commonalities but also distinctions. The most striking of the differences is that the New Testament fulfilment makes clear to us that in the final and definitive form of the kingdom of God, there will be no temple. This has to do with the fact that the fulfilment of God's promises in Jesus Christ is not lesser than, but rather even more than the Old Testament foretelling could ever have led us to expect.

Lines which run parallel or intersect only partially in the Old Testament ultimately all run together in the person and work of Jesus Christ. In their expectation of Him and of His first coming, the believers of the old covenant were saved. From the time of Abraham's call onwards, the believers of the old covenant were very largely descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and wherever that was not the case, they were Gentiles grafted into Israel. The believers under the new dispensation are privileged, living from His finished work and looking forward to His return, to share in that salvation. These new-covenant believers are a remnant of the Jewish people plus a great multitude from the heathen world. Nevertheless, before Christ returns, the promise will take effect that all Israel shall be saved.

When we pray for Jesus Christ to return, we are thereby also praying for the promises of God to be given their ultimate fulfilment, namely that New Jerusalem should come down from heaven. God shall then be all in all (I Cor. 15:28). Through long eternity, all the saved of both the old and the new dispensation will then hymn God's praise, and will do so on the basis of God's unshakeable promises once given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

## Chapter 4

### **The Christian Church and its abiding relationship to the Jewish people**

*Is Jewishness an ethnicity or a religion?*

The Christian church ought to be continually sentient of her bond with the Jewish people. It was not just under the old dispensation that that people had a special place. Amidst all the changes that the onset of the new dispensation brought about, not the least of which must be said to be the bringing of Jews and Gentiles to the same position within the Christian church (being the Israel of God), Israel remains a people that cannot be equated with other peoples.

Now, the question is who actually constitutes the Jewish people. This is a question raised not just in the Bible but also in post-Biblical rabbinic Judaism. Any answer must begin with the consideration that the Jews derive from the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Not all of Abraham's nor Isaac's descendants are Jews, but all Jacob's are. Of Abraham's sons, Isaac is the son of promise, and from among the sons of Isaac, the son of promise is Jacob, who was additionally named Israel. Accordingly, the name 'Israel'—and, albeit much less frequently, the name 'House of Jacob'—is the Old Testament term for the people of God's choice.

The name 'Jew' is derived from the name Judah: the tribe which after the fall of the ten-tribe Northern Kingdom came more than ever before to define the nation. However, as we have already seen, we may regard all the tribes as being represented in the present-day Jewish people. The Old Testament makes clear that it was possible for people who were not descendants of Jacob to become part of the people of Israel. Examples are Moses' father-in-law Hobab; Ruth; and the whole people of the Gibeonites. Over the course of the ages in the old dispensation, persons not descended from Jacob were added to the people of Israel. This joining of Israel was certainly not lessened, but rather increased, when Israel went into exile: an exile or scattering (diaspora) which did not end when after

seventy years *some* of the dispersed Jews returned from Babylon to the land of their fathers.

The question of belonging to Israel therefore has primarily, but not exclusively, to do with whether one is a descendant of Jacob. It is also a matter of serving the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jewishness, we could say, is a question both of ethnic origin and of religion, with no easy way of determining the precise relationship between these two. Under the old dispensation, the great majority of the people frequently abandoned the service of the LORD, yet this did not do away with their belonging to the people of Israel. On the contrary, it only served to aggravate their apostasy from the LORD, since Israel was a people for the LORD's own possession. Departing from the LORD did not annul that fact. In the diaspora (the Jews scattered among the nations), however, there were in fact members of the people of Israel who miscegenated with the Gentiles. In these cases, any trace of descent from Jacob had been eradicated within a few generations.

In the Old Testament, descent from Jacob was determined patrilineally. By marrying an Israelite man, a heathen woman would be grafted into Israel (cf. Deut. 21:11-14; Ruth 1:16). Some time in the post-Biblical era, and at any rate after the razing of the Second Temple, Jewishness came to be reckoned by matrilineal descent instead. This change of axiom in Jewish genealogy has never satisfactorily been explained, but it is at least certain that in rabbinic Judaism, the question of whether one is a Jew is entirely dependent on whether one's mother is or was a Jewess. Incidentally, the Nazis were entirely unconcerned with this nicety: they placed people on liquidation lists whether their father or their mother was Jewish, and in principle a Jewish grandfather or grandmother was also sufficient as a death sentence. After the State of Israel was founded in 1948, the 1950 Law of Return stipulated that not only those with a Jewish mother but also those with a Jewish father fell within the scope of the Act.

Around the start of the Christian era, Judaism bore the unmistakable hallmarks of a missionary creed. Several internal and external developments bearing upon the religion had almost completely put paid to that missionary attitude, already even in late antiquity, but it has remained

possible until the present day to enter the Jewish people from the Gentiles. That said, the conversion procedure is now much more exacting than it was in Classical times, and is very strongly geared towards dissuading people from taking the step. This is much more the case with Orthodox rabbis than with liberal rabbis. Orthodox rabbis, even if not all other rabbis, require that any Gentile wishing to accede to the Jewish people undertake the strict observance of halakha (the Jewish rules for living, based on rabbinic law). The ethos is, 'Better a good goy [heathen] than a bad Jew.' Liberal rabbis take a different view; liberal Judaism is much less strongly attached to halakhic living anyway. The consequence of this is that Orthodox rabbis tend not to accept the validity of conversions that took place under the supervision of a liberal rabbi.

Until the Jewish Enlightenment (the Haskalah), practically every Jew on earth was religious and lived within the rabbinically-set rules. That is not to say that there was uniformity in the Jewish world. First and foremost, we must bear in mind the cultural distinction between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews. There were also small pockets of Jews adhering to neither of these major strands, such as the Jewish communities of Arabia and the Ethiopian Jews commonly known as Falashas. Special mention should be made of the Karaite ('Bible Reading') Jews, a movement arising in ninth-century Eastern Europe that eschewed the authority of the Talmud. Also in Eastern Europe, in the seventeenth century, the rise of Hasidic ('Pietist') Judaism prompted the non-Hasidic tendencies to become known as the Mitnagdim ('Opponents').

With the onset of the Haskalah, the diversity within Judaism greatly increased. A not insignificant number of the Jewish people became completely or substantially secularised. Besides the tendencies of Orthodoxy and ultra-Orthodoxy (a modern umbrella term for the Hasidic denomination plus its traditionalist opponents, the Mitnagdim; these are also known collectively as Haredim), there arose a liberal Judaism in nineteenth-century Germany and Austro-Hungary. This persuasion has become strongly represented in the USA, where it is also known as Reform Judaism. The two poles of Judaism in the early twentieth century were thus Orthodoxy, with its strict halakhic observance, and Liberalism, which had all but dropped halakha. A middle way was then sought by some

(largely American) Jews, leading to the construction of a third pillar. This Conservative Judaism is more receptive to modernisation than is Orthodoxy, while still according a much greater significance to tradition than liberal Judaism does.

As far as rabbinic Judaism is concerned, one who is born a Jew remains a Jew, even if he is completely secularised or is consciously inspired by New Age-type thinking. Things are different if a Jew converts to Islam: by acknowledging the prophethood of Muhammad, he is held to have deliberately rejected Moses and the Prophets. What, then, of Jews who recognise Jesus as the Messiah? As early as the late first century AD, there were voices within rabbinic Judaism advocating that such should no longer be regarded as Jews. This had come to be the generally-held position in rabbinic Judaism by the central Middle Ages: he who joins the Christian church ceases to be a Jew. One has to point out here that the church, for her part, was of the conviction at that time that a Jew who became a member of the church must radically break with his Jewish way of life. The Nazis were unconcerned with whether a Jew had professed Christianity or not: many Jews who had confessed Jesus as the Christ were murdered in the Shoah. We do not have accurate data, but the numbers will have been somewhere between 150,000 and a quarter of a million.

Although the Christian church began as a denomination within Judaism, it began increasingly to work its way loose from the Jewish people from the end of the first century onwards. This did not detract from the fact that many church members, particularly in the Levant, still had Jewish roots, and there were still congregations and groupings which were completely Jewish-Christian in character. Some of these were heretical in their views of the person of Jesus. A group known as the Ebionites, for example, did not confess that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary; they believed that He had been adopted to the sonship of God and was thus not the eternal Son of God. There was also a persuasion which was completely orthodox in its view of Jesus but which insisted on following the Mosaic law to the letter. Justin Martyr, a second-century AD apologist, expressly accepted this latter group as fellow Christians.

Things changed in the fourth century AD. Until that time, the Christian church did not recognise those Jewish Christians who although orthodox in their Christology persisted in keeping the whole Mosaic law, any more than rabbinic Judaism was prepared to accept the Jewishness of Jews who confessed Jesus as the Christ. In the fourth century, however, Jewish Christians disappeared as a visibly separate entity within Christendom. Through the centuries thereafter, there were Jews in the church, but with no distinctive elements. Only from the nineteenth century onwards do we again see a discernible presence of Jews confessing Christ. That was the century in which there began once again to be openings in the Christian church for Jews to confess Jesus as the Christ while holding on to their Jewish cultural identity.

Can a person be both a Jew and a Christian? As we have already seen, rabbinic Judaism has answered that question in the negative down the ages. In the Christian church, we see the understanding arise in seventeenth-century Protestantism that a Jew who confesses Jesus as the Christ can continue to be purposely connected with the Jewish people. The Puritan view of the people of Israel must be highlighted in this regard, and in its wake the similar view taken in the Netherlands by the men of the Dutch Further Reformation.

With precious few exceptions, rabbinic Judaism regards it as an impossibility to be a Jewish Christian. This is particularly true of Orthodox Judaism, but is also the view taken by the vast majority within liberal Judaism. However, the eminent Jewish jurist and historian David Daube was prepared to pen a foreword to the book *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ* by the Jewish Christian Jacob Jocz, and went so far as to say expressly that he continued to regard as Jews those who profess Jesus as the Son of God who died on the cross in their stead.<sup>22</sup>

Daube was well aware that the divinity of Christ and the vicarious significance of His suffering and death on the cross were the crux of Christianity and that these were the very doctrines which drew the visible

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<sup>22</sup> Jacob Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ*, revised edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Bookhouse, 1979).

red line between rabbinic Judaism and Christianity, yet this did not stop him continuing to embrace as Jews those who confessed Jesus in these terms. Among the current generation of Jewish spiritual leaders, the liberal British rabbi Dan Cohn-Sherbok is the only figure known to me who has indicated a preparedness to continue to view Jews who confess Jesus to be the Messiah as Jews.<sup>23</sup>

*How does Judaism view the Christian church and Islam?*

Around the start of the Christian era, Judaism was a missionary religion. Opinions vary among scholars as to whether Jews of that period actually practised active mission, but it is irrefutable that (as we saw earlier) Judaism had a real power of attraction for pagans. One of the most attractive aspects of the religion was the monotheism confessed in the synagogues. In order to become a part of Judaism, proselytes were required not only to confess the God of Israel as the only God and Creator but also to observe the Mosaic law. Confessing Judaism as a religion was inextricably linked to joining the Jewish people. It is certain that from the time of the destruction of the Second Temple onwards at the latest, proselytes were asked to honour the rabbinic modernisations and extensions of the Mosaic code.

Both the pagan Roman government and the later Christian governments of Rome and Byzantium (the Eastern Roman Empire) legislated to make it increasingly difficult, in some cases nigh impossible, to become a Jew. For its part, rabbinic Judaism also started to take a highly sceptical attitude towards would-be converts. First and foremost, this policy of caution was intended to dissuade a person from converting to Judaism after all: the rabbis wished to be certain that those who entered the faith would also be serious about keeping halakha. This is still the case for Orthodox Judaism. The attitude is different in liberal Judaism, since its cradle adherents are much more relaxed themselves about halakha than the Orthodox are. This is why Orthodox rabbis are reticent about accepting conversions made under a liberal rabbi.

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<sup>23</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000).

Rabbinic Judaism's reticence to welcome potential converts cannot be understood apart from the fact that Jews have come to regard it as an acceptable state for the Gentiles to serve God by adherence to any monotheistic religion. We see this view gaining ground in Judaism even quite early in the Middle Ages, with particular reference to the acceptability of Christianity and Islam. The renowned mediaeval Jewish thinker Maimonides added that Islam was preferable to Christianity for Gentiles to follow, as the latter held the doctrine of the Trinity, which he saw as undermining monotheism. Whereas Judaism and Christianity have the Old Testament (known in Judaism as the Tanakh) in common as Scripture, that is not a shared feature with Islam. Nevertheless, in its doctrine of God, Judaism is closer to Islam than to Christianity.

While we are on the topic of Jewish-Muslim relations, it should be remarked that the treatment of Jews in the Middle Ages was often more favourable in countries dominated by Islam than it was in European Christendom. However, both Jews and Christians were both unmistakably second-class citizens in the Islamic world. Islam respects both Jews and Christians for their monotheism, calling both religions 'people of the Book'. Because Islam holds the Qur'ān to be the last word in divine revelation, it encourages people to move on from either Judaism or Christianity to Islam, but teaches that leaving Islam is an act worthy of death.

The founding of the State of Israel in 1948 introduced tensions into the relationship between Judaism and Islam, since Islam holds that the territory on which the State of Israel exists is part of the 'house of submission' (*dar al-islām*), i.e. land which having once come under the sway of Islam should remain Islamic forever. From the perspective of classic Islamic thought, it is intolerable that the dominance of Islam no longer obtains in some part of that territory. The unconditional and permanent recognition of a Jewish state within the *dar al-islām* zone of the world is ultimately unacceptable to Islam, since it is insisted that that zone should only expand, never shrink.

Although it is a mark of orthodoxy in Christianity that one should seek to win the whole world for Christ, rabbinic Judaism knows no such drive to

win the world for the God of Abraham; not even in Orthodox Judaism. For the Jew in our day, salvation is bound up with the keeping of the law, and what God expects of him is that he observe the Mosaic statutes plus halakha. The yoke of the commandments is held to be bearable and indeed should be taken upon oneself. The Gentile is held to owe God only the observance of what are known as the Noahide ('given to Noah') commandments, seven basic laws for the nations, at whose core is the shunning of idolatry. There is thus no internal drive for rabbinic Judaism to set about world mission. As mentioned above, rabbinic Judaism is more concerned to see Gentiles be good Gentiles than to have them become bad Jews.

*How should the Christian church regard the Jewish people?*

In multiple places, the New Testament gives witness to a sharp polemic that existed between the nascent Christian church and the then mainstream of Judaism. This is no grounds for accusing the New Testament of anti-Semitism; still less does it justify invoking the New Testament as a pretext to legitimise anti-Semitism. The polemic on record in the New Testament is in fact an intra-Jewish argument. In most of the instances where the Gospel according to John speaks of 'the Jews', it means the Jewish spiritual leaders who then held sway over the people. Only in a few instances does it cover the Jewish people as a people; one thinks here of texts such as 'Salvation is of the Jews' (John 4:22), where of course the meaning is actually positive towards the Jews.

How are we to understand Paul's words in I Thessalonians 2:14-16? We read there: 'For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men, [even] forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.'

The first thing that we must note about this sentence is that Paul logically cannot have had in mind the category of 'every Jew without exception'.

After all, the churches of God in Judaea consisted of Jews. What Paul was concerned about was those Jews who rejected Jesus as the Christ. We see Paul using the word ‘Jew’ in more neutral ways in other places in his writings. That is the case, for instance, when he teaches that the preaching of Jesus Christ, the Crucified, is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, but to them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, the power of God and the wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:23-24). What also comes to mind in this regard is Paul’s introduction to his Epistle to the Romans, when he calls the Gospel the power of God to salvation, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16). Incidentally, the inescapable meaning of those words is that the Jews are always and everywhere the first people to whom the Gospel should be proclaimed.

Paul himself seems to reserve the word ‘Jew’ when he speaks from the perspective of an outsider about a member of the Jewish people. Speaking from an inside perspective he prefers the word ‘Israelite’ (Rom. 9:4; 2 Cor. 11:22). When Paul wanted to emphasize that he – although he was born outside the land of Israel – could speak Hebrew and Aramaic he said he was a Hebrew (2 Cor. 11:22; Phil. 3:5).<sup>24</sup>

When Paul speaks of the Jewish people as a whole in positive terms, he prefers to use the term ‘Israel’. We see this, for instance, in the chapters Romans 9-11; nowhere else in the New Testament is the position of the Jewish people treated at such length as it is there. While in Ephesians 3 Paul speaks of the now-revealed secret that the Gentiles are now—without being subject to the Mosaic law—to become full members of the church of Christ together with the Jews who confess Jesus as Christ, the secret treated in Romans 9-11 is that of Israel. It bears repeating that ‘secret’ or ‘mystery’ in the New Testament refers to something which was not clear under the old dispensation but which is now revealed.

Who under the Old Testament dispensation could have imagined that the overwhelming majority of the Jewish people would reject its own Messiah, in whom Moses and the prophets found their fulfilment, much

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<sup>24</sup> Jews raised in the Diaspora who could only speak Greek, were called Hellenists (Acts 6:1; 9:29).

less that the Gentiles would accept Him en masse? In Romans 9-11, Paul brings out how there are two kinds of children within the covenant of God; not all those who are of Israel actually are Israel (9:6). As he had already done in Galatians 4:28ff, Paul points out that Abraham had more sons than just Isaac: there was Ishmael besides (9:8-9). Now, while Ishmael was Abraham's son, he was not Sarah's son. For his second example, Paul cites Jacob and Esau; an even more telling case. These two sons shared not only a father but also a mother, and what is more, they were twins; yet, against all human expectation, God declared even before they were born that the elder would serve the younger (9:10-13).

The fact that the great majority of the Jewish people failed (then as now) to recognise in Jesus the Messiah is not, then, essentially a departure after all from the situation that obtained under the old dispensation. Paul demonstrates that under the old dispensation, too, it was but a minority of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who were truly faithful to the covenant of God. However, there still is, as there was in that day too, a remnant according to the election of [God's] grace (11:1ff, esp. v. 5). Paul himself is one of that remnant.

The rejection of Israel has led to the reconciliation of the world; the receiving of Israel, something which Paul knows for a certainty will come, will be nothing less than life from the dead (Rom. 11:15). There are two ways to understand the 'life from the dead' of which Paul speaks. The first is that, just as the rejection of Israel was followed by reconciliation with the heathen world, so the receiving of Israel will be followed by the resurrection of the dead, together with the return of Christ. The second way is to understand 'life from the dead' to mean a blessing that falls to the heathen world after the receiving of Israel. That is the view that we find among the Puritans and the Further Reformation men: they looked forward to the mass conversion of the Jews, and had the firm expectation that that conversion would bring about an unequalled blossoming of the Christian church among the Gentiles.

It is in this context that Paul uses the image of the firstfruits and the olive tree. 'If the firstfruit be holy, the lump [of dough] is also holy; and if the root be holy, so are the branches' (Rom. 11:16). We could take the

firstfruits and the root to be references either to Christ, the Bearer of the olive tree, or to the fathers with whom the covenant was made. The one reading need not exclude the other, for Christ is the very essence of the covenant made with the fathers. Paul describes the unbelieving Jews as natural branches broken off the olive tree, and the Christians from among the Gentiles as wild branches grafted into the olive tree (Rom. 11:17). They ought not to be high-minded (v. 20) against the broken-off branches. After all, if God saw fit to break off the natural branches, how much the more could He do so to wild branches (v. 21)! Christians from among the Gentiles should not gloat in any way with regard to Jews who do not acknowledge Jesus as Christ. Their task is rather to provoke the Jewish people to jealousy. Much has taken place in the history of the Christian church that is a complete negation of that jealousy-provoking vocation. Let Christians worldwide now take this apostolic urging seriously.

The secret regarding Israel of which Paul speaks is not simply that there still remains a remnant among the Jewish people according to God's election, but also encompasses the fact that in the future, the Jewish people will confess Jesus as Christ en masse. The rejection of Israel has not been full or final: there will come a time when, in accordance with God's promises made to the prophets, all Israel shall be saved (Is. 59:20, 21; Jer. 31:34; Rom. 11:26, 27). Paul avers that 'blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved.' (Rom. 11:25, 26).

In that clause in Romans 11:26, 'And so all Israel shall be saved', at issue is whether the adverb 'so' is to be understood purely logically ('in this manner') or whether there is also a temporal aspect to it. If we take the first reading, then Paul is stating one thing: that God will use the coming-in of the fullness of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God to convert Israel. In the second reading (which is ancillary to, rather than to the exclusion of, the first), there is the supplementary understanding that the coming-in of the fulness of the Gentiles of which v. 25b speaks is our indication of the juncture at which we are to see the conversion of Israel. Given the context, it must be conceded that there is indeed a temporal aspect to Paul's statement. The apostle is drawing a contrast between the present-

day situation of partial blindness and the future situation of mass conversion.

The Book of Acts too, taken together with Luke's Gospel, is important in determining our attitude towards the Jewish people. Luke portrays to us how the Good News spreads out from Jerusalem across the whole of the Jewish land and onwards to the ends of the earth. As a codicil to Acts, we read of how Paul, as witness and apostle of Jesus Christ, preaches the kingdom of God and teaches those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence and no hindrance, although a prisoner (Acts 28:31). Now, there have been misplaced assertions, extrapolated from what Acts tells us about the progress of the Gospel, traced outwards from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, that the Jewish people somehow lost its special status.

First and foremost, it must be pointed out that the Book of Acts relates that Gospel progress to the Old Testament prophecies, and in particular to the Servant of the LORD sung of in the second half of the Book of Isaiah. In addition, we read at the conclusion of Acts that Paul invites the leaders of the Jewish community at Rome to visit him, in order that he can persuade them from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets (i.e. from the Old Testament) to believe in Jesus (Acts 28:23). What Paul did here is a permanent example to the Christian church. Luke, in his Gospel, mentions in his account of Jesus' Olivet discourse that Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled (Luke 21:24). No further explanation or illustration of this teaching is given, but it incontrovertibly means that the LORD will yet visit Jerusalem with His salvation.

In conclusion, we are bound to say that the Jewish people retains its special status even under the new dispensation. To no other people besides the Jews has the guarantee been given that she will always have a remnant according to the gracious election of God. Nor has any people in history apart from the Jewish people ever received the promise of a future mass conversion. Love for Jesus as the promised Christ and only Saviour ought to be accompanied by a love for the people from whom He came forth.

*The duties of the Christian church towards the Jewish people*

It is a non-negotiable for the Christian church that there is salvation for neither non-Jew nor Jew outside of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Saviour. The Christian church ought to pray for the salvation of the Jewish people. Intercession for the Jewish people should have a fixed place in the intercessory prayers at public gatherings of the Christian congregation. When interceding for the Jews, we may plead the special promises of God: promises which have lost none of their currency under the new dispensation. Just as believers under the old dispensation looked forward to and prayed for the conversion of the nations, it behoves Christians under the new dispensation to look forward to and pray for the conversion of the Jewish people. Christians—and very particularly Christians from among the Gentiles—have the vocation of provoking Jews to jealousy by their life and attitude. This is, of course, a calling that we are best able to fulfil when we come into personal contact with Jews. Besides this, the Jewish people should be able to notice that the Christian church as a whole loves them. There is, then, a special bond in more than one regard between us and those Jews who have come to regard Jesus as the fulfilment of the Law and the prophets. These dear souls ought to be the particular subjects of our support and prayers.

Should the Gospel be proclaimed to Jews? If we go by the New Testament, there is no question that the answer is yes. The first generation of Gospel-proclaimers was made up almost exclusively of Jews or proselytes to Judaism, and a substantial proportion of their first hearers was likewise Jewish. Paul's pronouncement that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16) still applies: among the peoples of the earth, the Jewish people remains the first addressee of the Gospel. A less than felicitous word to use in this regard, however, is the word 'mission'. To call the work of reaching the Jews for Christ 'mission' does not do justice that it was to them that God entrusted Moses and the prophets, who point to Jesus Christ. Be that as it may, it is certain that believers are always to seek openings to speak of the one Name given under heaven by which we must be saved.

In the twentieth century, the word ‘dialogue’ acquired questionable connotations. What ‘dialogue’ has latterly been taken to mean is an exchange between the adherents of various world religions, in which the quest for truth is left off the agenda. One is supposed to dialogue with the adherents of other faiths without bringing out the exclusivity and uniqueness of Jesus Christ and of faith in Him. In the New Testament, the Greek verb from which our noun ‘dialogue’ is derived occurs in the meaning of ‘converse/reason with’. Paul entered into dialogue with his Jewish compatriots and with Greek philosophers, but we see him expounding in these dialogues that Jesus is the Saviour, outside of whom there is no salvation. To announce the Gospel to people, one has first to come into contact with them—to enter into conversation with them. Such conversation cannot, however, remain limited in purpose to a non-committal chat. Our love for Israel must never be invoked to justify our remaining silent in encounters with Jews about the Messiah of Israel or about the needfulness of faith in Him. That brand of philo-Semitism is one clean contrary to both Old and New Testament.

In our witnessing to Jews that Jesus is the Christ, we must be quite clear in our minds about the fact that a great many Jews are entirely secular people who rarely if ever attend synagogue and whose grasp of the Old Testament is extremely sketchy. There are also many liberal Jews, who hold that the authority of rabbinic tradition (halakha) and of the Old Testament itself is at best relative. Quite a few liberal Jews do not even believe in a personal God. Matters are different with orthodox Jews: for them, both the authority of the Old Testament and the binding obligations of halakha are beyond question. The Jewish people in all its strands must be the subject of our persistent prayer, and testimony should be given to those of each and every Jewish persuasion that Jesus is the Christ. Experience teaches that the more orthodox a Jewish person is, the trickier it tends to be to draw them into conversation about the significance of the New Testament and the person of Jesus. There are no grounds at all for the romanticised notion that orthodox rabbinic Judaism is to be feted as somehow the closest thing there is to the Christian church and its adherents our ideal conversation partners. We are, however, bound to concede that in the wise counsels of God, Jewish orthodoxy has been the means of preventing this people from dissolving into the Gentile world. Christians

as early as the church father Augustine have expressly pointed out that aspect of providence.

The aim must be that Jews should be urged no less than Gentiles to believe that Jesus is the Christ who has reconciled Jew and Gentile with God in and into one body. The emblem of adoption into this body is baptism. Hence, it is not only for the Gentile, but also for the Jew, that the Lord commands: 'He that believes and is baptized shall be saved' (Mark 16:16). Salvation is bound up not only with believing in Jesus Christ but also with admittance to the church, His bride. They who are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, in both the old and the new dispensation, will eventually enter New Jerusalem.

The burden of history rests heavy upon the Christian church's witness to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. Even in the Early Church period, we find outbursts about the Jewish people that must be condemned as extremely unbecoming: to take one example, church father John Chrysostom's sermons on the Jews. It must certainly be borne in mind here that the context of these expressions was partly shaped by his concern that the boundary between Judaism and the Christian church was at times blurry for many people in that era, but even so, his utterances remain highly censurable. He unreservedly holds the Jewish people as a whole culpable for the crucifixion of Christ. There is precious little conviction here that the Christians' task is to stir the Jews to jealousy!

What is grievous is that we must accept that it was under Christian emperors of Rome that the Jews gradually lost liberties which they had maintained under pagan emperors after the failure of the First Jewish Revolt in AD 70 and even after the crushing of the Second Jewish Revolt in AD 136. We should, however, add that even in the nominally Christian period of the Late Roman Empire, the Jews still had more freedoms than heretics or pagans. In Europe, from the Middle Ages onwards, the Jews were not merely disadvantaged but were on multiple occasions even severely persecuted. One thinks here of the pogroms, which, far from remaining confined to the mediaeval period, continued in Eastern Europe into the twentieth century. One thinks also of the fact that it was far from rare for Jews to face the dilemma of baptism or death. The era of the

Crusades, among others, must be identified in this regard. This is especially the reason why baptism is such a fraught issue for many Jews.

The darkest of all pages in history was the Nazi effort to eradicate the Jewish people completely. In fact, it would be far, far too weak of us to dismiss it as a 'page' of church history. The horrifying truth is that countless Christians collaborated with the Nazis, or at the least distanced themselves insufficiently from the Nazis' hatred of the Jewish people. When the Holocaust or Shoah is spoken of in the presence of Jews, we ought, in all cautiousness and humility, to point out that Nazi ideology was anti-Christian as well as being anti-Semitic. There was no shortage of resolute Nazis who would have gone after the Christian church outright if they had had their way. There is no doubt that if they had been given the time, they would have done so eventually. The key reason for the Nazi loathing of the church was the Christian message of self-denial, but it was not unconnected either with the fact that Jesus was a Jew.

Sadly, anti-Semitism took on Christian garb in Europe: not only were the Jews of all generations since the crucifixion of Christ held responsible for His death, but the assumption took hold that this guilt gave Christians carte blanche to visit all manner of violence on contemporary Jews. When carrying out the Holocaust, the Nazis invoked the spirit of those centuries-long anti-Semitic feelings that had been given a place in European Christendom. However, this does not negate the fact that the Europe in which the Holocaust took place was a Europe that had already set vigorously about casting off all aspects of Christianity.

When the Christian church witnesses to Jews that Jesus is the Christ, it is Jews who have come to confess Jesus as the Christ from whose lips that testimony can best come. The Christian church ought to give these Jews a particular esteem in her midst, the more so since they typically face loneliness and rejection among their own people and in Israel are persecuted outright, largely by their ultra-Orthodox compatriots.

Since the nineteenth century, as already stated, Jewish Christians have resumed their ancient visibility within the Christian church. Hebrew Christian Alliances were formed at national level, and the British and U.S.

alliances forged an International Hebrew Christian Alliance in 1925. There were also national Hebrew Christian Alliances on the Continent, but several of them were destroyed in the Second World War, when so many Jewish Christians shared the fate of their fellow Jews who did not confess Jesus as the Messiah and were annihilated in the Shoah.

Even before the Second World War, the question of whether or not to change the then-usual name of ‘Hebrew Christians’ to ‘Messianic Jews’ was a lively one. The switch was not made in practice until after the War, however. Rev. Johannes Rottenberg (1890-1943), the Jewish Christian murdered in Auschwitz who is known in the Netherlands chiefly for having sought to reach his fellow Jews with the Gospel through his Elim Society of Rotterdam, greatly preferred the already-established term ‘Hebrew Christians’, as he found that it made clearer than did the term ‘Messianic Jew’ that the co-religionist bond with a Gentile is ultimately stronger than a blood bond with an unbeliever of one’s own people, whether that people be Jewish or other. He was against the forming of congregations consisting exclusively of Jewish Christians.<sup>25</sup> Not only before the Second World War, but after it too, most of the Jews in Europe who have confessed Jesus as the Christ have continued to belong to regular church denominations. Matters have turned out differently in Israel: there, practically all Jews who confess Jesus as the Messiah belong to Messianic congregations. I am of the conviction that the formation of Messianic Jewish congregations outside the land of Israel should not be encouraged. What is important when founding congregations is that the principle should not be infringed that Jew and Gentile enjoy the same position within the church, the body of Jesus Christ. More objectionably still, there are ‘Messianic Jewish’ congregations outside the land of Israel that count not a single Jew among their membership. This situation is a pertinent example of the Judaising error rearing its head again, against which Paul warned in his Epistle to the Galatians and also to the Colossians.

It is partly thanks to contact with Jews that our knowledge of Hebrew in the Christian church was preserved. Jews’ linguistic expertise in Hebrew

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<sup>25</sup> S.P. Tabaksblatt, *Ds. Johannes Rottenberg, Verkenning en bezinning*, 16/1 (1982), 28.

tends to exceed—by far—anything Christians can boast. In expounding the Old Testament, and indeed the New, we will find much useful material in rabbinic literature. However, it is vital that we bear in mind that the longer the time period between a Jewish writing and the Biblical era, the less directly relevant it will tend to be for Biblical exposition, even if familiarity with it is still necessary if we are to understand rabbinic Judaism itself. Is it proper to accord a special place to Messianic Jews in our exegesis of Scripture? To answer this too enthusiastically in the affirmative is to lose a degree of healthy awareness that many Messianic Jews had a secular upbringing and only began exploring their Jewish spiritual heritage once they had become Christians. Let us not be unrealistic in our impressions of the level of theological understanding of Messianic Jews taken as a whole. Not rare are the instances in which they would be well served by accepting theological guidance from Gentile Christians.

If Christians have a duty to do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10), then we can legitimately rephrase that New Testament injunction as enjoining us to do good to all nations but most of all to the Jewish people, since our Lord and Saviour arose from them after the flesh. Christians must oppose all forms of anti-Semitism, albeit with the understanding that merely witnessing to Jews that Jesus is the Messiah and that faith in Him is necessary for all people can never rightly be construed as ‘anti-Semitic’, as is sometimes levelled at us from Jewish circles. Much the rather, it is *denying* Jews this witness that is a manifestation of not caring for them. Besides our witnessing, though, let us not fail to provide real social support and solidarity to those Jews who need it. Let this, too, be a way in which we express the fact that we love the Jewish people.

Finally, when we seek to make plain to Jews that Jesus is the fulfilment of Moses and the prophets, then we may, indeed we must, draw on more parts of the Old Testament than just the passages of Messianic expectation. The Old Testament witness to the gravity of sin—not just deeds (sins), but more essentially our wicked nature (sin)—needs to be given. This reality has come to be known in the Christian church as ‘original sin’. Intimately bound up with this is the Old Testament witness that the restoration of

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Israel—as that of mankind in general—to the favour of God is an act of sheer grace. We may particularly point to Jeremiah's testimony (ch. 31) of a new covenant and that of Ezekiel (ch. 36) of a new heart of flesh. It is in Jesus that all the Old Testament lines on the coming of the Messiah, the seriousness of sin and the all-sufficiency of God's grace converge. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him (Col. 2:3). O that Christians would live from this conviction and would give that testimony to others; to the Jew first and also to the Greek.