

## **“A Voice for Biblical Zionism”**

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*“The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendents after you; and I will be their God.” (Genesis 17:8)*

*“I am zealous for Zion with great zeal;  
With great fervor I am zealous for her.” (Zechariah 8:2)*

The discussion of “*Zionism*” and the role it plays in *any* dialogue concerning modern Israel today is inevitably a discussion from which surfaces debate. In fact, it is indeed true that considerable debate has taken place over what terminology should be employed in reference to the historic homeland of the Jewish people.<sup>1</sup> A discussion of “*Zionism*” will be the focus of this paper.

To preface this topic, let it be noticed that historically the blending of both *biblical theology* and *politics* seems apparent and unavoidable when the topic of *Zionism* is discussed. Hence, the difficulty that presents itself is that though such biblical terms such as *promised land* (Gen. 12:1), *holy land* (Zech. 2:12), and *the land of Israel* (I Sam 13:19, in Hebrew, *Ha-Aretz*, or “*the land*”) have a Scriptural basis, it is virtually impossible to find a politically-neutral term.<sup>2</sup> I contend that even though the term holds political implications today, and is often only *interpreted* primarily by some with a political nuance, it is a term that is rooted in the Scripture. Hence, I aim to *give voice* to a concept that I will refer to as “*Biblical Zionism*.” Without a doubt, it is a concept that deserves our attention. Indeed, it is a concept rooted in Scripture which deserves a voice in our growing *Anti-Israel world*!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, p. 256.

<sup>3</sup> A more general term would be *Anti-Semitism*. However here, I use this term, *Anti-Israel* as a way to portray a growing sediment against the nation of Israel’s right to exist.

Let it be clear from the start of this “*dialogue*” on the topic of *Jewish people* and the *land* that the term *Biblical Zionism*<sup>4</sup> is to be distinguished from *Secular Zionism*. Speaking of the later, according to the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, 1897, Zionism was defined as a movement of “*seeking to establish a home for the Jewish people in Eretz Israel, secured under public law.*”<sup>5</sup> Zionism has also been defined with a secular/political orientation as “*The right of the Jewish state of Israel to exist within defined and defended borders ...*”<sup>6</sup> Conversely, *Biblical Zionism* (a term I personally prefer over the commonly-used term *Christian Zionism*, a term that still holds *political* ramifications, especially in Evangelical circles), implies an absolute and sure recognition of the right of *ethnic Israel*, solely based upon Biblical reasons, to possess and own the land given to them by God. Indeed, “*the cornerstone of their (the Jewish people) support is the belief that the title to the land which God granted to the Jews in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1-7 & 12:14-18) is everlasting and irrevocable.*”<sup>7</sup> Thus, although the issue of “*the land*” and its ownership (e.g. Jewish vs. Arab) is certainly a very complex issue that warrants finding workable remedies, at least in part, in *political* solutions, the biblical motif of the everlasting promises made to the Jewish people must serve foundationally as the ultimate *starting point* to the answer.

In essence and as an introductory remark to the discussions that will follow, what many well-intended Christians do not understand (and in particular, those who believe that *the Church* has “*replaced*” Israel as the people of God<sup>8</sup>) is how entirely *inseparable* the “*land*” is to the Jewish concept of *berit* (e.g. “*Covenant*”). While fairly, it is appropriate to mention that not all who prescribe to *Replacement Theology* can be deemed as *anti-Semitic*, the painful story over the last 2,000 years of the *anti-Semitism* displayed by the *Church* cannot be overlooked. I attribute this, in part, to the lack of appreciating this

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<sup>4</sup> Sometimes also referred to as “religious Zionism.”

<sup>5</sup> “The First Zionist Congress and the Basel Program,” unsigned article in The Jewish Virtual Library, [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/First\\_Cong\\_&\\_Basel\\_Program.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/First_Cong_&_Basel_Program.html), p. 1. The Congress gathered under the leadership of Austrian journalist *Theodor Herzl*, know today as the father of modern *Zionism*.

<sup>6</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Dr. David Reagan, *The Lamplighter* (May, June, 2008, Vol. XXIX, No. 3), p.3. (author’s bold emphasis)

<sup>8</sup> A term that is used to describe this certain theology is “*Replacement Theology*.” The primary tenet of this theology rests upon the belief that The Church has *replaced* ethnic Israel as the *people of God* and thus arrogating to itself the title *new* or *true* Israel. Unfortunately, it represents one of the greatest *dangers* to the existence of Israel today, resulting in a growing lack of support for the Jewish nation called *Israel* and a *delegitimizing* of Israel’s right to the land. A more thorough discussion of the *flaws* of this theology will be addressed later in this paper.

everlasting link between the *land* and God's eternal covenant made with *ethnic Israel*. Speaking of the election and preservation of the Jewish people and the land, Abraham Heschel has said, "*In the mystery of the divine plan God chose the Hebrew patriarch Abraham, His election and the election of the land came together.*"<sup>9</sup>

Because of God's grace (*hesed* in Hebrew) and despite the sin and rebellion of God's people, God never abandoned them, nor did He revoke His eternal promises to them. Quite clearly, the "*preservation of the people of Israel from generation to generation has reflected God's faithfulness, grace, and ultimate purposes in history, rather than Israel's own righteousness.* (Deut. 9:5-6)."<sup>10</sup> Despite Israel's unbelief and failure, and although God became angry time and time again with Israel as a nation, He kept His promise to them. Over the centuries of history, the sins of the nation of Israel has brought severe punishment and exile, but not *covenantal abandonment*.<sup>11</sup>

While some who prescribe to a growing movement within Christian circles (even within the evangelical community called "*Replacement Theology*"<sup>12</sup>) would incorrectly argue that due to their disobedience Israel literally *forfeited* their right to the land, Scripture is clear that even when they forfeited the *enjoyment* of the land, and even when they were evicted for a time from the land (e.g. Babylonian Exile, Roman Exile), they still retained the *title* to their land (Psalm 105:8-11). Clearly, God's covenant faithfulness with Israel is what guarantees their right for security, validity, and permanent existence. (2 Sam. 7:24; Jer. 31:35-36). Wilson writes, "*So, too, Israel understood God's 'everlasting covenant' (Gen. 17:19) as a pledge that the land was to be an 'everlasting possession' (Gen. 13:15; 15:18; 17:7-8).*"<sup>13</sup> Thus, the Hebrew Scriptures describe throughout its three major portions - from the *Torah* ("Law"), the *Ketuvim* ("Writings") to the *Neviim* ("Prophets") - that this "promise land" is an actual piece of *earthly real estate* with specific geographical boundaries (Gen. 15:18-21; Num. 34:2-12; Josh. 15:1-12; Ez. 47:13-20).

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<sup>9</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, *Israel: An Echo of Eternity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), p. 100.

<sup>10</sup> Wilson, p. 258.

<sup>11</sup> Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged*. (Nashville, TN: B & H Academy, 2007), p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> Also referred to as "*Displacement Theology*" or "*Supersessionist Theology*."

<sup>13</sup> Wilson, p. 259.

So when it comes to some of the crucial questions that arise on this subject, the issues to be explored and discussed on this topic of *Biblical Zionism* will include a response to the follow two questions:

- *What historical claims do the Jewish people have to the land called 'Israel' today?*
- *Why and how is "Replacement Theology" a flawed theology?*

A few personal remarks will be shared to conclude this paper.

### **1. *What historical claims do the Jewish people have to the land called 'Israel' today?***

The national anthem of the modern State of Israel, the *Ha-Tiqvah* ("The Hope") affirms the continuation of the hope that the land provides, "*Our hope is not yet lost, the hope of two thousand years...*" Speaking about the times of dispersion and persecution, the *Biblical Zionist* would contend that the land covenant was "*not canceled or annulled; rather it was interrupted by the Diaspora but not set aside forever by it.*"<sup>14</sup> Such a perspective is grounded in an accurate historical reference to the role of the land as given to the nation of Israel. It was the prophet Jeremiah who penned, "*I will plant them and not uproot them*" (Jer. 24:6). It was the prophet Amos who wrote a similar theme, "*I will plant Israel in their own land, even again to be uprooted from the land I have given them, says the Lord your God*" (Amos 9:15). There was something inheritantly *spiritual* about the land. These promises were rooted in God's redemptive history for His people.

Sadly however, what those who hold to "*Replacement Theology*" (e.g. "*super-sessionists*") fail to recognize (or *casually* dismiss entirely) is ethnic Israel's historical affinity with the land itself, rooted in the history of the Hebrew Scriptures. Says scholar Barry Horner,

*"How discouraging this is for the inquiring Jew! The Christian Church takes the name of Israel and leaves everything else behind as worthless*

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<sup>14</sup> G. Douglas Young, *Israel: "The Unbroken Line"* (Christianity Today, October 6, 1978), p. 22

*Jewish fables and shadows. This is not reconstitution; it is the prodigal son attempting to disinherit the older brother and claim his title. To suggest that old Israel, having Jewish individuality, nationality, and **territory** is 'reconstituted' so that the original distinctive Jewishness is reformed but not replaced, is to play with words while at the same time retaining an eliminationist agenda."*<sup>15</sup>

Rabbi David Rosen said it equally well,

*"Simply in pragmatic terms, it is only Israel that can guarantee the continuity of the Jewish people. And thus the historic events fulfill the divine promise that were manifested through the Zionistic movement and through the ingathering of the exiles, and the establishment of the State of Israel are the only way of really guaranteeing the divine covenant of promise of the eternity of Israel. The State of Israel is crucial in terms of the divine plan."*<sup>16</sup>

What makes any discussion difficult at best, especially as it relates to the *land* of Israel, are the voices of the *replacement theologians*.<sup>17</sup> Speaking of Chapman, it has been said that *"though in constantly beating a drum in his cry for justice for the Palestinians, any similarly impassioned demand for justice with regard to centuries of inhumanity suffered by the Jews is merely referenced at a token level."*<sup>18</sup> The bias of these authors is clearly noted, particularly related to the *land*. For instance,

*"I **do** have a problem with the original vision of many Zionists to establish a Jewish homeland or a state in Palestine which would be exclusively or near exclusively Jewish ... I feel bound to conclude that the promise of the land to Abraham and his descendents 'as an everlasting possession' does **not** give the Jews a divine right to possess the land for all time ... I **don't** believe that the State of Israel is 'of God' in the sense that it is the fulfillment (or even a preliminary stage in the fulfillment) of all that God promised and predicted in the Old Testament about the future of the land and its people. I would go further and suggest that for Christians to interpret these events simply as the fulfillment of prophecy represents a kind of regression."*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Horner, p. 57. (author added bold print).

<sup>16</sup> David Rosen, Shabbat Shalom, "60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Israel" (Vol 55, No. 3, 2008), p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> The contemporary voices include that of two Anglican clergyman, Colin Chapman, (author of Whose Promised Land?) and Stephen Sizer, S. Moyter, Hank Hanegraff (The "Answer Man"), and Gary Burge (Wheaton College professor), to name a few.

<sup>18</sup> Horner, p. 83.

<sup>19</sup> From Horner, p. 83, quoting C. Chapman, Whose Promised Land? (Tring, Herts, England: Lion, 1983), p. 224, 226-28.

Additionally, Sizer “has marketed a nightmare version of Christian Zionism that paints all Christian supporters of Israel as reactionary and dangerous fundamental fanatics intent on bringing on Armageddon.”<sup>20</sup> Hanegraaff bluntly asserts that “Israel is the Harlot of Revelation.”<sup>21</sup>

The *straightforwardness* of the Hebrew Scriptures and the promises that God gave to *ethnic Israel* concerning the land are plain to see. It is a promise given with unconditional terms. Whereas the *Mosaic Covenant* was indeed *superseded* by the atoning sacrifice of Christ,<sup>22</sup> the *Abrahamic Covenant* was not. It was given as an *everlasting* and *irrevocable* promise. Speaking of O.P. Robertson and his assertion that the “*possession of the land under the old covenant was not an end in itself, but fit instead among the shadows, types, and prophecies that were characteristic of the old covenant in its presentation of redemptive truth*”<sup>23</sup>, Horner states,

“Another fundamental error of this author is evidences here: his incorporation of the land promise into the conditional, temporal Mosaic covenant. Certainly the whole tabernacle order was merely a temporal shadow of the substance yet to be embodied in Christ. However, the promise of the land was according to the **unconditional, everlasting** terms of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 15:1-21) that were revealed 430 years before the giving of the law and thus cannot be annulled (Gal. 3:17).”<sup>24</sup>

Thus arguing from an *Abrahamic covenant* perspective, the land or territory given to Abraham was not a mere shadow! Given this, one can properly conclude that the land of Israel (or Palestine, whatever term or label one wants to give it today) is still a valid part of God’s promise to the national seed of the first three Patriarchs of Israel, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” *irrespective of present unbelief or whether a number of Jews, large and small, inhabits it!*<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> From Reagan, p. 6 (see Ami Isseroff, “*Christian Zionism and Christians Who Are Zionists: Asset or Threat?*” [www.zionism-israel.com/log/archives/00000098.html](http://www.zionism-israel.com/log/archives/00000098.html), p. 1

<sup>21</sup> From Reagan, p. 6 (see Dwayna Litz, “*Hank Hanegraaff’s Conference on Preterism and Replacement Theology,*” [www.lightingtheway.blogspot.com/2007/06/essay-on-afternoon-with-hank-hanegraaf.html](http://www.lightingtheway.blogspot.com/2007/06/essay-on-afternoon-with-hank-hanegraaf.html), p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> See Hebrews 9:11-28.

<sup>23</sup> O.P. Robertson, *The Land of Israel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000), p. 27-28.

<sup>24</sup> Horner, p. 59. (bold emphasis by author)

<sup>25</sup> Horner, p. 60. Dr. Horner correctly observes that the *present tense* declaration of Romans 9:4 implies that the Apostle Paul himself viewed these promises of the land as still belonging to the Israelites. He states, “*To suggest*

As *Replacement Theology* unapologetically asserts that because of Christ's redemptive work encompassing the *whole earth* as the so-called "*new promised land*," thus making the Old Testament boundaries of the land of Israel inconsequential, a fundamental error of "*identifying the promised land with the bilateral Mosaic covenant rather than the unilateral Abrahamic covenant is once again most prominent.*"<sup>26</sup> Rather, Scripture speaks clearly of the land being an *everlasting promise*.

Furthermore in relating this discussion to *the land*, it has been observed that the four foundational pillars on which the concept of "*covenant*" rests are the following: God , Torah (or *Law*), people, and land.<sup>27</sup> Each is dependent upon the other. Without one, the other cannot exist. To be sure, "*Far from the popular notion that Israel's covenant embraced only a spiritual dimension, it was in actuality 'tied to earth, life, land.'*"<sup>28</sup> The clear and undeniable realm of God's faithfulness with his ethnic people called *Israel* is what serves to guarantee their security, validity, and permanent existence. Jeremiah writes, "*This is what the Lord says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar – the Lord Almighty is his name. Only if these decrees vanish from my sight, declares the Lord, will the descendant of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me.* (Jer. 31:35-36). This is why it should be of no surprise that the land was given as a pledge, and everlasting possession (Gen. 13:15, 17:7-8).

To illustrate this biblical promise of the land, to ponder a clarifying observation related to the historic *Balfour Declaration*<sup>29</sup> would bring a helpful perspective,

*"The Balfour Declaration did not 'give Palestine to the Jews.' It recognized that here existed already a historic Jewish right, not to but in the country; and it promised to assist the Jewish people in its development in such a way that the other rights in the country were no endangered. It equally did not 'give away what belonged not to it but to the Arab people': for it had*

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*that this expression excludes the land would be quite unthinkable according to the apostle's use of accepted Hebrew parlance."*

<sup>26</sup> Horner, p. 97.

<sup>27</sup> Wilson, p. 259.

<sup>28</sup> From Wilson, p. 259. See Seymous Siegal, "*The Meaning of Israel in Jewish Thought.*" in "*Evangelicals and Jews in Conversation*, ed. Marc H. Tanenbaum, Marvin R. Wilson, and A. James Rudin (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 105.

<sup>29</sup> This was an action of the British Government in 1917. It was composed a month before General Allenby's formal entry into Jerusalem by means the British government gave formal recognition to the Zionist Movement of Europe.

*already refused to recognize, also on historical grounds, that the Arab claim to be exclusive owners of the country was justified.*<sup>30</sup>

In light of this perspective, David Rosen adds,

*“There are many Christians who still find the idea of peoplehood and return to the land an indigestible idea. They find Jewish nationalism in contrast with universalist grace instead of being able to recognize, I think, what I would describe as their complementary nature. The result is that one of the few places where supersessionist theology (displacement theology) is still very much alive is precisely in the land of Israel amongst certain Palestinian theologians in order to be able to find political justification for their own particular political position. And very often within certain international church bodies in order to be considered, as it were, politically correct. There’s very often been an almost unconscious as well as conscious prejudice towards Israel that often continues to express itself in anti-Zionism. And if anti-Zionism means the denial of Israel to be able to have what you consider to be acceptable for everybody else, then, of course, it’s classic anti-Semitism. So very often Israel has served as a lightning conductor for traditional Christian anti-Judaism or anti-Semitism, and very often, it is simply a more convenient and genteel guise for what are the same of prejudices.”*<sup>31</sup>

In regard to the many Biblical passages that speak in reference to the promise of land, Wilson insightfully comments about the Church’s tendency to *spiritualize*<sup>32</sup> the land, *“This point about the geophysical nature of the land is particularly important for Christians to understand. Unfortunately, the Church has often spiritualized the concept of the land so that the earthly Canaan has evaporated into an ethereal heavenly Canaan.”*<sup>33</sup> Ronald Diprose further illustrates this in stating, *“In spite of the fact that Israel’s status as an elect people is confirmed by Paul in Romans 9 - 11, the view that the Church had completely replaced Israel in God’s plan became the dominant opinion in post-Apostolic Christendom.”*<sup>34</sup> He further adds how some church fathers went even

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<sup>30</sup> J. Parkes, Whose Land? A History of the Peoples of Palestine (London: Penguin, 1970), pp. 256-57.

<sup>31</sup> Rosen, p. 31.

<sup>32</sup> While most if not all who view the land as a literal and unconditional promise made to ethnic Israel are, for the most part, “*Dispensational*” in their eschatological view, generally those who *spiritualize* the land are not. The necessity to *spiritualize* is required in order to match their particular eschatological view.

<sup>33</sup> Wilson, p. 260.

<sup>34</sup> Ronald Diprose, Israel and the Church: The Origin and Effects of Replacement Theology. (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Publishing, 2004). P. 167.

further when they “affirmed that the Church had always been the true Israel of which the physical Israelites were but the visible sign.”<sup>35</sup>

While it is true that Israel’s *possession* of the land was indeed conditioned by obedience (Deut. 28:63-68; Is. 7:17; Jer. 13:19, 16:13, and 25:11), God offered the *remembrance* of the land (Lev. 26:42) and a certain *hope* for Israel’s future (Jer. 31:17). Thus, any notion that the “*possession of the land is tied to obedience to the covenant*,”<sup>36</sup> or that “*Israel lost its inheritance because of disobedience*,”<sup>37</sup> does not have biblical support. Simply, “*the land covenant was not cancelled, annulled, or replaced by a wider-ranging covenant, but rather interrupted by the diaspora but not set aside forever by it*.”<sup>38</sup> Though there was never a time when *all* Jews left the land, most Jews were scattered to areas of the world apart from the land.<sup>39</sup> However, within God’s timing, a *spiritual gathering* (not just a secular Zionistic gathering) has begun intrinsically in association with the *spiritual blessings* that the land offers.

If there is any doubt about the promise of literal land (and the implied *spiritual blessings* associated with the land) to the people of Israel, the following passages serve to illustrate this:

*“For all the land which you see, I will give to you, and to your offspring forever.”* (Gen. 13:15)

*“On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, ‘To your descendents I give this land...’* (Gen. 15:18)

*“I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the land where you are traveling, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession. I will be their God.”* (Gen. 17:8)

*“Behold, I will make you fruitful, and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your seed after you for an everlasting possession.”* (Gen. 48:4)

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<sup>35</sup> Diprose, p. 169.

<sup>36</sup> Gary Burge, Whose Land? Whose Promise? (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim, 2003), p. 153.

<sup>37</sup> This reasoning of the Jewish people losing their inheritance of the land due to disobedience is seen in contrast to “Christians gaining this inheritance, spiritually speaking, strictly by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ.”

<sup>38</sup> Douglass G. Young, “*Israel: The Unbroken Line*,” *Christianity Today* (October 6, 1978): 22.

<sup>39</sup> Alan Davies, The Territorial Dimension of Judaism. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 50.

*"I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it to you for a heritage: I am the Lord." (Ex. 6:8)*

*"But I said to you, 'You will possess their land; I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey.' I am the Lord your God who has set you apart from the nations." (Lev. 20:24)*

*"You shall keep his statutes, and his commandments, which I command you this day, that it may go well with you, and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land, which Yahweh your God gives you, forever." (Deut. 4:40)*

*"It is a land the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end." (Deut. 11:12)*

*"Be strong and of good courage; for you shall cause this people to inherit the land which I swore to their fathers to give them." (Josh. 1:6)*

*"Remember his covenant forever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations, the covenant which he made with Abraham, his oath to Isaac. He confirmed the same to Jacob for a statute, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant, saying, I will give you the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance." (1 Chr. 16:15-18)*

*"God is King forever and ever! The nations will perish out of his land." (Ps. 10:16)*

*"But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace." (Psalm 37:11)*

*"He has remembered His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations, the covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac, and confirmed it to Jacob as a decree to Israel for an everlasting covenant, Saying, 'To you I will give the land of Canaan, as the allotment of your inheritance.'" (Psalm 105:8-11)*

*"For God will have compassion on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land. The foreigner will join himself with them, and they will unite with the house of Jacob." (Is. 14:1)*

*"In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I gave for an inheritance to your fathers." (Jer. 3:18)*

*"I will grant you mercy, that he may have mercy on you, and cause you to return to your own land." (Jer. 42:12)*

*“I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel, and one king will rule over them. Then they will be my people, and I will be their God.” (Ezekiel 37:22-23).*

*“Then the Lord was jealous for his land, and had pity on his people.” (Joel 2:18)*

*“I will plant them on their land, and they will no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them, says the Lord your God.” (Amos 9:15)*

*“The Lord their God will save them in that day as the flock of his people, for they are like the jewels of a crown, lifted on high over his land.” (Zech. 9:6)*

Now to the second question.

## **2. Why and how is “Replacement Theology” a flawed theology?**

As it has already been mentioned, *Replacement Theology* essentially teaches that the church has replaced Israel in God's plan. This implies a belief that Jews (e.g. *ethnic Israel*) are no longer God's *Chosen People*. This theology also contends that, apart from repentance, the new birth, and incorporation into the Church, any specific future that God once had planned for Israel is now been replaced by the promises fulfilled by the Church. Thus, the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures regarding the blessing and restoration of Israel as a *people* and as well as to the *land* (e.g. the country of Israel today) are "spiritualized" or "allegorized" into promises of God's blessing for the Church. Gary Burge, a leading advocate for *Replacement Theology* who resorts to *spiritualizing* most of the Hebrew Scriptures, argues that the promises made to Abraham are now spiritualized in and through Jesus, who is a new Moses. Burge states, *“Jesus himself becomes the locus of the holy space... Just as Moses was leading the people of Israel to their promised land, so too, Jesus leads God's people. But now we learn that Jesus himself is in reality that which the land had offered only in form. To grasp after land is like grasping after bread – when all along we should discover that Jesus is ‘the bread of life’.”*<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Gary Burge. Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told About Israel and the Palestinians. (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003), p. 175.

Thus, since the *Day of Pentecost* (see Acts 2), the term "Israel," as found in the Bible, now refers to the Church. Simply, *Replacement Theology* is a doctrinal teaching that originated in the early Church and it became the fertile soil from which Christian anti-Semitism grew and has infected the Church for nearly 1,900 years.<sup>41</sup>

How does *Replacement Theologians* present their case? Clarence Wagner shares a helpful summary of the primary points of theology. Allow me to share 7 of his observations.

1. To be a son of Abraham is to have faith in Jesus Christ. For them, Galatians 3:29 shows that *sonship* to Abraham is seen only in spiritual, not national terms: "*And if you be Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*"
2. The promise of the land of Canaan to Abraham was only a "starter." The real Promised Land is the whole world. They use Romans 4:13 to claim it will be the Church that inherits the world, not Israel. "*For the promise that he should be the heir of the world was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.*"
3. The nation of Israel was only the seed of the future Church, which would arise and incorporate people of all nations (Mal. 1:11): "*For from the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same, My Name shall be great among the nations, and in every place, incense shall be offered to My Name, and a pure offering for My Name shall be great among the nations, says the Lord of Hosts.*"
4. Jesus taught that the Jews would lose their spiritual privileges, and be replaced by another people (Matt. 21:43): "*Therefore I am saying to you, 'The kingdom of God will be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits of it.'*"
5. A true Jew is anyone born of the Spirit, whether he is racially Gentile or Jewish (Rom. 2:28-29): "*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*"
6. Paul shows that the Church is really the same "olive tree" as was Israel, and the Church is now the tree. Therefore, to distinguish between Israel and the Church is, strictly speaking, false. Indeed, people of Jewish origin need to be grafted back into the Church (Rom 11:17-23).
7. All the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament, unless they were historically fulfilled before the coming of Jesus Christ, are now the property of the Christian Church. These promises should not be interpreted literally or carnally, but spiritually and symbolically, so that references to Israel, Jerusalem, Zion and the Temple, when they are prophetic, really refer to the Church (II Cor. 1:20). "*For all the promises of God in Him (Jesus) are Yea, and in Him, Amen, unto the glory of*

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<sup>41</sup> Clarence Wagner, Jr., appearing in a "Bridges for Peace" article, May 9, 2002.

*God by us.*" Therefore, they teach that the New Testament needs to be taught figuratively, not literally.<sup>42</sup>

Given these particular theological positions, the *Christological logic*<sup>43</sup> of the *Replacement Theologian*, by essence of a *spiritualizing hermeneutic*, makes the *land*, like the *Law*, irrelevant. Such a *deterritorialization* of the land in light of the Christological ramifications of the new *covenant* made complete in Christ, again, is fundamentally wrong. Once again, it is the *new covenant* that abrogates the old *Mosaic covenant*, **not** the Abrahamic covenant (Jer. 31:31-24, Heb. 8:7-13). Paul precisely states this principle, "*What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise*" (Gal. 3:17-18). Most importantly, this is to conclude that "*the newer covenant* (e.g. the Mosaic covenant) *does not do away or negate the promises of the older covenant* (e.g. the Abrahamic covenant). Otherwise, as Paul wrote to the Galatians, God's promise made to Abraham would thus be based upon *works* instead of faith.<sup>44</sup> Hence, while Galatians 3 and other similar soteriological passages verify this wonderful inclusionary promise for the Gentile community, such verses do not exclude the Jewish people from their original covenant, promise and blessing as the natural seed of Abraham.

Horner states, "*Until the actual establishment of the Mosaic covenant, including its renewal because of Israel's disobedience, possession of the promised land remained as a certain hope. With this in mind, Paul affirmed ... that the law, which came 430 years later, does not revoke a covenant that was previously ratified by God and cancel the promise* (Gal. 3:17)."<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, incorporating Christ as the *root of promised blessing*<sup>46</sup> can be accomplished without denying the covenant promise of the *land*. Or to

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<sup>42</sup> Wagner, as shared in detail on the web site: [www.therefinersfire.org/replacement\\_theology.htm](http://www.therefinersfire.org/replacement_theology.htm).

<sup>43</sup> Speaking about the Apostle Paul, a term used by W.D. Davis, in *The Gospel and the Land* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994), p. 179.

<sup>44</sup> These insights were shared with the author by Dr. Tom Tribelhorn. God's promise offered to Abraham was based on grace, and therefore cannot be taken away. (See Galatians 2:15-16 and Hebrews 9:22).

<sup>45</sup> Horner, p. 49.

<sup>46</sup> Horner, p. 72.

state it in another way, “*Christ is the ground of covenant blessing, but this does not nullify national blessing.*”<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps this is a good place to insert a brief conversation about the *people of God*. Clearly, no matter of one’s eschatological position, two (2) entities of people can and should be both identified as well as distinguished from the other, namely, *Israel* and the *Church*. The view that Israel and the Church are different is clearly taught in the New Testament. In this view, the Church is completely different and distinct from Israel, and the two are never to be confused or used interchangeably. Since the *Day of Pentecost* (Acts 2), the Church became an entirely new creation. Given what we read in Romans 11 (and contrary to *Replacement Theology*), it is *Israel*, and **not** the Church who serves as the *olive tree*. It is the Church who is *grafted into the olive tree* (Rm. 11:17-21), not the other way around.<sup>48</sup> The New Testament speaks of the Church’s relationship to Israel and her covenants as being “*grafted in*” (Rom. 11:17), “*brought near*” (Eph. 2:13), “*Abraham’s offspring*” (Rom. 4:16), and “*partakers*” (Rom. 15:27), not as “*usurpers of the covenant and a replacer of physical Israel.*”<sup>49</sup> We Gentile Christians joined into what God had been doing in Israel, and God did not break His covenant promises with Israel (Rom. 11:29). Additionally, whereas both Israel and the Church are charged to be a “*light to the nations/world,*” (Is. 51:4; Mt. 5:14), this does not imply that the Church in any way *replaced ethnic Israel*.

Also, a redemptive-historical hermeneutic would suggest that in regard to *prophecy*, the New Testament references to Israel clearly pertain to Israel, not the Church. This is to observe that even though God established the Church as a distinct *people of God* to proclaim the kingdom message of Christ and salvation to a lost world, God still has *simultaneously* has a redemptive role for Israel in the *end times*.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, no

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<sup>47</sup> Horner, p. 73.

<sup>48</sup> A scriptural truth that should spawn within the Gentile believer in Christ a sense of deep *humility* and not *arrogance* that so unfortunately can so easily characterize believers who forget that the root of our faith is historically Jewish! It is the tree that holds us up as Gentile believers in Christ!

<sup>49</sup> Use of Wagner’s own phrase here.

<sup>50</sup> The term “*end times*” is used as a general eschatological phrase describing the final *epoch* whereas God culminates His soteriological/salvation plan by redeeming Israel unto Himself. I personally believe that the first stage of this redemptive process has begun with the creation of the State of Israel, even though this “against all odds” *modern-day* miracle of the re-gathering of the physical seed of the sons and daughters of Abraham has been politically oriented.

promise to Israel and the Jewish people in the Bible is figurative, nor can they be relegated to the Church alone. The promises and covenants are literal, many of them are everlasting. Despite Israel having been temporarily set aside in God's program during these past 2,000 years of dispersion and exile, the covenants, promises, and warnings are valid only for Israel. Those who hold to such a position generally fall into what has been called "*Dispensationalism*" (or "*Premillennialism*").

In contrast to "*Covenant*" theology,<sup>51</sup> the *premillennial* method of biblical interpretation takes this usual literal approach to the fulfillment of the prophetic word of the Old Testament. Thus, Israel plays a key piece to the unfolding of the *end-times puzzle* to which so many in the evangelical world hold. Correctly, Martin Marty concludes that "*premillennialism demands support of Israel.*"<sup>52</sup> Speaking once again about the distinction between Israel and the Church, within this position the *Church* essentially becomes only a mere "*parenthetical*" reality waiting for these "*last days*" events to unfold. This is to say, the *Church* simply exists in a "*holding pattern*" and has so for 2,000 years now until the next *dispensation* is initiated by Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. To the contrary, however, *Covenant* theology (which for the most part holds to the eschatological position of *amillennialism*), views the *Church* as primary. However, *ethnic Israel* does not exist in a "*holding pattern*," but rather is both *replaced* by the Church as "*God's covenant people*" as well as *discarded* into the *dump pile* of irrelevance. As stated, "*The best the world Jewry can now hope for is to be part of the new people of God, the Church – but without nationality, land, or statehood.*"<sup>53</sup>

While *eisegetical* interpretive approaches must be avoided within both theological camps,<sup>54</sup> the New Testament clearly affirms a future for *ethnic Israel*.<sup>55</sup> This *future* for

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<sup>51</sup> The theological camp into which fall the theologian who delegitimizes the Jewish peoples' right to the land, contending that their geopolitical rights promised in the old covenant have been cancelled and permanently discarded.

<sup>52</sup> Martin Marty, "*Which Christians Can Israel Count On? A Ladder of Sympathies*," Christian Century (March 8, 1978): 235.

<sup>53</sup> See Uriel Tal, "*Jewish Self Understanding and the Land and State of Israel*," Union Seminary Quarterly Review 26 (1970): 353-54.

<sup>54</sup> These "*eisegetical*" approaches are often marked by sensationalism, speculation, or merely by what I refer to as "*newspaper headline*" hermeneutics, that is, interpreting Scripture by the daily news of the day, instead of the other way around.

*ethnic Israel* is outlined by Paul in the classic passage of Romans 9-11 where Paul addresses the issue with heart-felt passion. “*The main thrust of Paul’s argument is that the destiny of the Jew and Gentile is so intimately connected that the latter does not find God except through the former.*”<sup>56</sup> While appreciating the *interdependent* relationship between the Jew and Gentile through the illustration given of the *olive tree* in Romans 11, Paul is categorically insistent that despite Israel’s past (and present) *unbelief* God has not rejected His people. Wilson states, “*Israel still belongs to God and is called a ‘holy people’ (v. 16), and ‘loved on account of the patriarchs’ (v. 28). Israel’s historically unique preservation lends added support that it still has a vital role to play in the history of redemption.*”<sup>57</sup>

Given Paul’s clear appreciation to God for His continuing desire to see, like himself, *ethnic Israel* to come to a saving faith in Christ (see Romans 11:1), an absolutely significant concept in this whole *debate* on whether or not the Jewish nation has been replaced by the Church is the concept of the **coexistence of God’s ancient covenant people and the Church!**<sup>58</sup> This concept is key to understanding the fallacies (and outright anti-Jewish bias) of *Replacement Theology!* To Paul, this divinely willed *coexistence* can only be described as a great “*mystery*” (Rm. 11:25), for God’s immutability is what guarantees that He “*does not change his mind about whom he chooses and blesses*” (Rm. 11:29). Again, Wilson says it with articulation,

“*Paul’s argument reaches its denouement when he refers to the future salvation of Israel, a time when ‘the deliverer will come from Zion’ (Rm. 11:26-27). The Old Testament context for Paul’s composite quotation here is the salvation of Israel through the appearing of its divine Redeemer (cf. Is. 59:20-21; 27:9). Thus, ‘all Israel’ (i.e. Israel as a whole) will be saved (Rm. 11:26). In Romans 11, Paul does not elaborate on how this deliverance from Zion will take place, but it would seem from the other letters of Paul that he may have in mind the second coming of Jesus.*”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Even though *Replacement Theology* downplays the role of eschatological theology, in part, to counter-balance what they perceive as the “extreme Christian Zionists view” that seem to only focus exclusively upon “Israel and last days fulfillments.”

<sup>56</sup> Wilson, p. 267.

<sup>57</sup> Wilson, p. 267.

<sup>58</sup> This concept of *coexistence* is argued by most Reform theologians as not accepted. This concept falls outside the boundaries of “permissible theology.” It is argued that God can only have “one chosen people” at a time. *Replacement Theology* contends that while the term “people of God” belonged once to “Israel,” because of their disobedience and unfaithfulness to God, the term is now owned by “the Church.”

<sup>59</sup> Wilson, pp. 267-68.

To be sure, it cannot be denied that the emergence of the State of Israel is a remarkable sign of God's *preservation and purpose* of His ancient people, the Jews.<sup>60</sup> Those who cannot appreciate the reality that Israel will have an ongoing role in the continuation of God's ultimate redemptive plan and purpose, perhaps are those who are aimed to "*remove the national and political aspects of the prophetic hope.*"<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, whereas it can and should be admitted by those who support Biblical Zionism that the modern State of Israel is still not yet the *perfected Israel* that the prophets of old spoke about and envisioned, it must be granted that God works out His redemptive plan through both the *sacred* and the *secular*. The average Israeli citizen of modern Israel today can be characterized as a person who is *spiritually blind*, particularly in regard of recognizing that the *Messiah* has indeed already come as One given the name Jesus (or *Yeshua*). Yet as James Parkes observes, "*Whenever the Church seeks to distinguish between the secular and the spiritual, in reality it negates its insistence on fulfilling the Old Testament.*"<sup>62</sup> A "*future consummate renovation and manifestation of the Jewish people by means of heaven coming down to earth*"<sup>63</sup> is on the horizon. It is a future and a hope that is difficult for even Israel to imagine and grasp. The reason is that Zion will be the dwelling place of the *Messiah*, Jesus Himself, upon His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. It will be Jesus who will be honored at the gates of the holy city (see. Psalm 9:11-14; 102:12-13, 16, 21; Is. 46:12-13). At that time Israel will weep over her tragic past (Zech. 12:10-12), yet the children of Zion will also rejoice in their coming King (Ps. 149:2). Jerusalem will be the joy of the whole earth, with her inhabitants being told by God, "*You are My people*" (Is. 51:3,11,16). In a glorious way, "*Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City, the mountain of the Lord of hosts, and the Holy Mountain*" (Zech. 8:3).

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<sup>60</sup> Although in arrogance, certain *replacement theologians*

<sup>61</sup> Joseph, Klausner, The Messianic Idea of Israel. New York: Macmillan Books, 1955), p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> As quoted in Wilson, p. 128. See James Parkes, pp. 325-26.

<sup>63</sup> Horner, p. 142.

## Concluding Personal Thoughts:

My desire throughout this paper has been to offer an articulate and inspiring voice for *Biblical Zionism* and for *ethnic Israel* today. In light of the heightening of anti-Israel thought and theology, especially among select evangelical *academia*, this voice needs to be heard. And to share in the voice for *Biblical Zionism* does not mean one has to accept each and every dogma and teaching of those who support Israel either from a *political* orientation (e.g. *secular Zionism*) or *purely* from an ultra-Dispensational perspective. As it relates to the Church's relationship with Israel today, what is essential is a "*Christian theology must be based on sound hermeneutical principles which presuppose the Church's essential relationship with Israel.*"<sup>64</sup> My heart is with the Jewish people and their continual struggle to live safely in the land given to them by God. Their right to exist and their right to the land given to them by God is being countered in dangerous proportions. If Israel has been condemned by God, and there is no future for the Jewish nation, how does one explain the supernatural survival of the Jewish people over the past 2000 years despite the many attempts to destroy them? How does one explain why and how Israel reappeared as a nation in the 20th century after not existing for 1900 years? Once again, one leading explanation based on the whole of Scripture is evident: Israel has **not** been replaced by the Church, but **co-exists** with the Church. Israel exists today as the ancient covenant people, and with an eternal prophetic and redemptive purpose.

As salvation has come, even our own salvation as Gentiles, through the Jewish root of *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, and finally through the Jewish Messiah called *Jesus*, it is the Church who has been *grafted in* to *ethnic Israel*. For this reason, the fundamental mistake, as already mentioned, of identifying the promised land with the Mosaic covenant (which was fulfilled by Christ) rather than the unilateral Abrahamic covenant is

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<sup>64</sup> Diprose, p. 172. One of those hermeneutical guidelines is what he calls the "canonical principle" (191). He states, "*Inasmuch as the Jewish-Christian dialogue involves parties that recognize two partially different canons of Scripture, Christian partners in dialogue are obliged to bring to bear their understanding of the inter-relatedness of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament writings. Where the constraints of dialogue lead to the development of views involving the suppression of apostolic teaching, the best interests of both Israel and the Church are lost because no real progress can be made at the expense of truth*" (pp. 191-92).

what flaws *Replacement Theology*. Indeed, the *eternity* of Israel, its very *existence* despite all odds, gives testimony to God's presence in the world.<sup>65</sup>

As I work through my own eschatology, it certainly has *evolved* from embracing a *Dispensational Theology* (with all the “end time” charts, with the *kingdom of God* still a future 1,000 year entity, with a focus on the *rapture* of the Church, and a sure identification of Israel as the **only people of God**)<sup>66</sup>, to a *Covenant/ Reformed Theology* position being taught at Westminster Seminary (a theology that defines the *kingdom of God* as already existing within us as a spiritual reality, and a sure identification of the *people of God* as solely being the Church).<sup>67</sup> I would say that my current theology is somewhere in between these two camps, taking what is biblically grounded, while leaving all that is not!<sup>68</sup> Of the biblically grounded positions to which I hold, a dualistic view of the identity of *God's people* (e.g. Israel and the Church both deserve this title in the course of God's redemptive role and purpose for each respectively) as well as Israel's rightful possession of the land as an eternal inheritance from God are primary.

To conclude, let it also be mentioned that those who support this notion of *Biblical Zionism* and Israel's right to their historic homeland must do so not only on the basis of the Abrahamic covenant, but also upon the pursuing the “*prophetic concern for justice, righteousness, compassion, and peace*,”<sup>69</sup> especially to those whom the prophets call “*strangers*.”<sup>70</sup> Any solidarity and support of Israel by the believer in Christ “*does not*

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<sup>65</sup> Rosen, p. 29.

<sup>66</sup> *Premillennialism* essentially demands or requires the support for Israel and the land. I surmise that many who hold to *Replacement Theology* do so in part as a reaction to what they perceive as a “theology of the fundamental right” (e.g. Hal Lindsey, John Hagee).

<sup>67</sup> See I Peter 2:9-10. Using language from the Old Testament, Peter defines the Church as a “*chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*” This does not in any way forfeit Israel's identification as God's people.

<sup>68</sup> Perhaps this topic would be an interesting a beneficial topic for a follow-up paper.

<sup>69</sup> Wilson, p. 269. I just wish that this call for Israel to practice “*justice...and peace*” towards her neighbors would be reciprocated to equal proportion by those who continually oppose and condemn Israel. Instead, Israel faces the *injustices* of the world on a daily basis, something the Jewish people have had to suffer for nearly 2,000 years.

<sup>70</sup> The U.S. and world media have done a consistent job in portraying the Israelis as those who have not put into practice this prophetic admonishment of old. The Israelis have been portrayed as people who treat the “Palestinians” with injustice. While not perfect in their actions, the endless stories of the display of justice and compassion by the Israelis towards the peace-seeking Palestinians regrettably (and intentionally) never make the news.

*imply the negation of Palestinian Arabs.*"<sup>71</sup> Personally, as I have a heart to see Israeli Jews *complete* their faith in Christ, I also understand the struggles of the Israeli Arabs and this merging peoples' group called the "*Palestinians*." In particular, my heart goes out to the Palestinian Christian community. They, too, are people who have been *grafted into* the household of faith. God's role and purpose for them as a minority of people<sup>72</sup> among their own and amidst the struggles and even persecutions brought on by certain factions of their own Palestinian Muslim brothers. This growing intolerance for Palestinians to practice Christianity, and the degree to which Palestinian believers are literally terrorized and forced to leave makes this whole issue even more complex.<sup>73</sup>

God Himself is *zealous* to see his historic people whom He has called *Israel* to come to a saving faith in His son, Jesus. God, I believe, is in the very process of unfolding the final chapter in His redemptive plan in bringing Israel back to Him. The zeal of God will bring about the rejuvenation of the land of Israel (Zech. 8:1-8), something we are witnessing in Israel today. The zeal of God will also bring about the eternal reign of Messiah in Zion, for God says through His prophet Isaiah, "*The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this.*" (Isa. 9:7).

In the end, ultimately, our own *zeal* for God's historic Jewish people and for the land is about God. It's about *God's glory*. The prophet Ezekiel declared the return and re-establishment of the nation of Israel, and God clarifies His motives for doing this, "*I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake,*" (Ez. 36:22), that is, His reputation and glory. God is working in Israel for His own purpose and glory, demonstrating before the nations that He is faithful to His promises (Ps. 105:8-11).

It's also about *God's salvation*. God chose Israel to reveal Himself to the world, and if it wasn't for Him choosing and using them, we ourselves would still be in this same fallen

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<sup>71</sup> Wilson, pp. 270-71.

<sup>72</sup> There are now more "Palestinian Christians" in various parts of the world than in Israel today, largely because of being pressured out by Palestinian Muslims.

<sup>73</sup> Replacement Theologians seemingly focus on the *injustices* the Palestinian Christians have to endure by the hands of the Israeli government or Israeli Defense Force (as if to provide the world a theological reason to cast blame upon the Israelis for racial segregation, apartheid, and war), but seldom mention the injustices they (e.g. Palestinian believers) incur by the hands of their own people. See Horner, p. 97.

situation, without hope (Eph. 2:12). The same is true for every nation and people group on earth. God used Israel to bring salvation to the world. We see in this the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that, "*in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.*" (Gen. 12:3).

**May this voice for *Biblical Zionism* for Israel resonate clearly among God's Church today!**

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Gal 3:17-18 What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

There's an important principle here that I believe is too often overlooked. First, each newer covenant builds upon the previous older covenant. In class I refer to the Newer Testament and Older Testament to remind my students of this principle. Second, and most important for the argument you are making in your paper - a newer covenant never does away with or negates the promises of the older covenant otherwise as Paul says promise would then be based upon works instead of faith! What many do not realize is that Jews do not believe in "works" salvation as I am sure Moshe will tell you in his gift shop. Paul says in Galatians 2:15-16 and Hebrews 9:22 that the blood of the sacrifice - not works of the law - is what forgives sins.

So the promise made to Abraham was by grace not by works and therefore cannot be taken away. Just a thought. Love the paper.