Israel and Anti-Semitism

Part 2 of 2: Has the Church Replaced Israel?
with Darrell Bock, David Brickner, Mitch Glaser
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There are a series of text in Luke-Acts that most people, when they write on this, don't talk about. And I'm gonna take the microphone here for a second and do my thing. And those are passages that relate to Luke 13:34 and 35 in which Israel's house is said to be desolate because she's rejecting her messiah, but then it goes on to say until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," which tells you this is not a permanent exile that we're talking about. It's a temporary exile.

We get the same kind of thing in the Olivet Discourse when Jerusalem is trampled down until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. Well, you don't talk about until the times of the Gentiles being fulfilled unless you think there's another time on the other side of it. Or you think about the passage in Acts 3, where Peter gets up and he says, "Heaven must hold the Messiah until the times of refreshing come that have been written about in the holy prophets of old." So you've got these three “until” passages, all of which are saying yes, there's a time in which Israel is suffering judgment for her rejection of Messiah for her form of covenantal unfaithfulness, but it's not permanent.

It's temporary, and it looks forward to a time when there's going to be a reintroduction. And then the beauty of this particular example is not only do we have Jesus teach it, not only do we have Peter teach it; we also have Paul teach it. Because, of course, in Romans 9 to 11, we've got the anticipation of Israel being grafted back in when she was grafted out when Gentiles were grafted in, as Paul's discussion of this period, looking forward to a time when God will be faithful to his promises and will keep his commitments. So all of this is important in thinking through the question of has Israel been set aside by anything that's been done for the church. And the biblical answer to that is – it's one of those questions you can answer in a short reply. The answer is no.
Dr. Mitch Glaser

One of the issues that I know really concerns me, and I'm sure David 'cause we lead Jewish missions, and the goal – I mean overall the goal that we have is to see Jewish people come to faith, be discipled, and become fruitful servants of the Lord. I mean that's what it's all about. And historically, the greatest motivation for Jewish evangelism has been an understanding of the role of Jewish people in the second coming of Christ. And so because of passages, as you just mentioned Matthew 23 versus 37 through 39, particularly 39, and in Luke; where one day we understand that a final remnant of this will cry out baruch haba beshem adonai or blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And the prophecy of Zechariah 12:10, "Where they will look upon me whom they have pierced, mourn for him as mourn for an only begotten son," precipitates the coming of the Lord.

And so Christians have always been motivated by having the thrill of having at least a part in bringing about the second coming of Jesus, even though we don't know when it would ever happen, but at least we have a role in participating in God's end time activities through bringing the gospel to the Jewish people. And when this whole doctrine that Jewish people are not the Jewish people, it's really a reference to the church, and so there really is no end time sort of inclusion of the Jewish people. That diminishes the motivation for Jewish evangelism, and I will say that this interpretation of scripture even predates Darby and goes all the way back to the latter Middle Ages. It was the Scottish divines.

David Brickner

Justin Martyr.

Dr. Mitch Glaser

McShane, Fairbairn, even our old Cotton Mather in the United States. It was almost a Puritan doctrine for a long time that understood that the end time remnant coming to Christ precipitates second coming of the Messiah and that causes us to be highly engaged in reaching Jewish people. When you lose that motivation, it diminishes people's enthusiasm for Jewish evangelism.

David Brickner

One of the things I like to tell people when we talk about that particular passage is I'm so grateful to God that here I am, 2000 years later, a Jew who has said baruch haba beshem adonai. And so it's not like John Ryle said, "The Jews have been reserved and preserved for some time in the future." God did not set aside the Jewish people in that he is no longer working with them. He is. Paul was so insistent. There is to this very day –
And that remnant theology needs to be rediscovered by the church today because it's a jewel in the crown of the blessing of God for all people, and it's an evidence of his ongoing work. It helps us to understand how is it possible that Israel can be back in the land and yet in unbelief. Well, guess what? The greatest openness to the Gospel now among any Jewish group is in the land of Israel, and so that's indication for believers who are keeping their finger on the pulse of what God is doing in the world. Yeah, we have been reserved and preserved, but not like pickles in a jar. We are in the midst of seeing an historical move of God, and we need to see the signs of the times and get excited and reinvest our faith and confidence in the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Okay. Well, we've kind of made the case here that the scripture has a place for Israel, has a permanent place for Israel, that there are commitments and promises that God has made to Israel through the Hebrew scriptures that he keeps forever. It's a reflection of his faithfulness. I've tried to put all the themes together here in one paragraph. But let's deal with one objection. This is, I think, all we have time left to discuss.

And that's this, well, it really isn't Israel through whom blessing comes, it's through the Christ, the Messiah. And the means of blessing, the bridge to blessing is through Jesus, not Israel. So why should we expect Israel to have a place when she has rejected that Messiah and the basis of inclusion is not coming through Israel, it's coming through her Messiah? So if anyone's in Christ, they clearly are in the place of blessing. Israel is not in the place of blessing, so why not say the church has replaced Israel? There it is. I've asked it. Now, how do we deal with that position, David?

Well, I think that there's no argument from scripture for that, first of all. That's kind of a syllogism that is unrelated to any particular text that I'm aware of.

You mean the replacement idea?
David Brickner  
Exactly. And the language of the scriptures concerning this has to do with the wild and natural branches of Romans chapter 11, and the wild branches are everyone who's not Jewish who's become grafted into the rich root of the olive tree. And yes, branches were broken off. So I think all that Paul does in that beautiful picture and what that means has to be the basis on which we understand that and answer that objection.

Dr. Darrell Bock  
And Israel's not being defined and redefined in Romans 9 to 11. I think it's very important to make this point. Israel's not being redefined in Romans 9 to 11 because that chapter opens with Paul saying, "I'm weeping over the people that I'm talking about. These are people that I wish myself would be accursed that they would be responsive." So we're not talking about an Israel reconstituted as the church when we talk about Israel in Romans 9 to 11.

We're talking particularly about that portion of Israel, that large portion of Israel, if I can say it that way, that up to this point has not been responsive to the Gospel and that Paul longs for a time when they will be responsive. So when we talk about the natural branches and those are broken away, that's the context. That can't be the church. In fact, Cranfield, who has written one of the more important commentaries on Romans and comes out of a reformed tradition in doing so, basically introduced his section on Romans 9 to 11 by saying that his tradition had badly, consistently misread this text when they make that transfer in this passage. It just can't work there. Mitch, once again, I can tell that you're chomping at the bit to chime in, so go ahead.

Dr. Mitch Glaser  
Well, I'm pretty good with everything you've said. Just some obvious points, and that is I don't really want to be the person that starts debating whether or not our greatest blessings are all in Christ because they are. And so it's just that if all the blessings are in, so to speak, the ultimate Israel, that still doesn't mean that the people that God chose have been dismissed from duty. And so one is not at the exclusion of other, but Jesus is everything to all of us, and he is the ultimate fulfillment, and he is the bridegroom of Israel.
So I'm not gonna be the kind of person that says, "Oh, no, no, no, no. There are a lot of other blessings outside of Jesus," because he is the ultimate and greatest blessing. But he is the one who also said that, "You will see me when you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' " So Jesus, who might be the promise and fulfillment and the ultimate fulfillment in blessings for all that God wants us to have, is the very one who said that a remnant will turn at the end of days. And so that would pit Jesus in disagreement with himself.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Probably not a good position to be.

*Dr. Mitch Glaser* Follow me?

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Yeah, I got that. Yeah.

*Dr. Mitch Glaser* Yeah.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Go ahead.

*Dr. Mitch Glaser* No, I'm just saying – and so we're dealing with a promise and fulfillment in theology which is common today and advocated by N.T. Wright and a lot of other people. And we understand that these are smart and godly people, and we have to also deal with text by text by text. But I think we, again, have to address the basic hermeneutics and the way that a lot of these dear brothers and sisters approach scripture. And we're allowed to, with love, contend with each other. And so when I look at promise and fulfillment, I can't get away from the fact that God made a promise to Abraham and that God has fulfilled that promise to the Jewish people, first of all, in bringing Jesus the Messiah and then, secondly, in bringing the Jewish people back to the land and then, finally, in bringing Jewish people in the land back to the Messiah and then Messiah returning and reign as king. I think it's a great story, Darrell. And if it's taken literally, it's much better.
So the point here is is that we need to be careful not to shortchange all it is that God has done. God has definitely centered salvation in Israel's Messiah, in Jesus who is the Christ. That's for sure. We affirm that. Everybody is affirming that. The question then is what has that Christ committed himself to do in the midst of that salvation. And part of what that Christ has committed himself to do in the midst of that salvation is to show God's faithfulness to the original commitments that God made back in the Abrahamic covenant to redeem the people to whom he made the original promise, and the inclusion of others is not to their exclusion.

Not only that –

Absolutely.

Not only that, I think it's important to state very positively, and I know you all agree with this, that the Abrahamic covenant is not, for the Jewish people, the basis of their salvation, but the new covenant in Jesus. And that those who would, for example, take that verse in Romans 11, "And thus all Israel will be saved," and conclude that by being born Jewish, I just have an automatic pass; they've missed the whole context of that, which is a future context yet to be revealed. And in the meantime –

And a responsiveness to Jesus in the midst of it.

It is exactly that moment of responsiveness that seals the deal, so to speak. And in the meantime, Jewish people who are apart from faith and trust in Jesus, whether in the land of Israel or outside the land of Israel, are just as lost as any other people and, therefore, our putting Jewish evangelism back on the front burner of the church as it was in the 1st century when Paul said the Gospel is to the Jew first. And where he practiced that in his own Gentile-focused evangelism is something that I believe will be a sign of the hermeneutics that Mitch is talking about so well, of being corrected and our recognizing that the church has a primary responsibility to the first born. You mentioned Cranfield.
John Calvin even when he comments on Romans 11, and who also obviously believes in this kind of replacement theology, nevertheless preserves a place of prominence. He says in that Israel is – the Jewish people are the firstborn of Israel, all the promises that God made to them will certainly be fulfilled. Now, I don't accept his view of Jewish people just being the firstborn. I make that distinction. But even among those who have this replacement theology, their forefathers, so to speak, in the Reformation recognized God wasn't done with the Jewish people. And what the implications of that for the church today has been lost on many who have this mixed up hermeneutic that Mitch was talking about.

Dr. Darrell Bock
So we've got – I just want to be clear for people 'cause we've kind of dealt with two things at once here, and I just want to make sure that they're clearly distinguished. On the one hand we've got people who are arguing for a replacement theology, which says the church has replaced the role of Israel so Israel doesn't have a future, doesn't need a future. That's one side of the spectrum, but you alluded to briefly another group that says, "Well, you don't need to evangelize the Jews because they're already in covenant and God's taking care of them. They don't need to embrace the Messiah because they already have their relationship through covenant." And so you're basically saying, "We don't think either of those positions is actually a reflection of what the scripture is teaching."

David Brickner
Yeah. I would so far as to say that's a lie from the pit of hell. I really feel strongly about it because they think that they're showing love and tolerance towards Jewish people when they take up that position, but they're ultimately refusing to give the greatest gift, the most demonstrable act of God's love toward the Jewish people by withholding Jesus from them.

Dr. Darrell Bock
Because this is the – God has taken on the price for our failures on himself, and we are robbing people of that substitutionary work when we make that declaration that they automatically qualify.

David Brickner
That's right.

Dr. Darrell Bock
Mitch, anything to add?
Dr. Mitch Glaser  

Not particularly. I mean I think it's obvious that there are a lot of Christians actually who love the Jewish people and who have Jewish friends and want to be sensitive to the Jewish people. Some have lulled themselves into an evangelistic sleep into thinking that somehow Jewish people have another chance in the end times or that Jewish people would be judged on a different basis than non-Jews. And most of the people who do that, I find, are not well taught, but they have a lot of love for Jewish people.

And then you have a whole other group that sees the Jewish people basically being included in the church and losing all theological and ethnic distinctiveness and even forgetting that in heaven every tongue and every tribe will have a voice in worship, and some people make it out as if Hebrew won't even exist in that day. And so I think we need a good balance of it. But again, I think that the importance or one very practical step that I know that we all should take is to encourage a good solid biblical teaching, not to overreact, not to say that people do not love the Jewish people or there's something wrong. I really believe that we need to do more biblical teaching on the subject of God's role and plan for Israel and God's role and purpose for the church. One is not exclusive of the other. God is glorified through both.

Dr. Darrell Bock  

Well, I appreciate you all taking the time to interact with this topic. We started with anti-Semitism and then took a good look at some of the key texts that show that Israel has a future in scripture and that she hasn't been set aside or replaced. I know we've only scratched the surface of this topic. We did a conference in New York a few months ago in which we had multiple hour-long presentations on various aspects of this topic, working through, systematically, the scriptures. So there's a lot more here, and I'm sure we'll come back to this topic in the future. But I really do appreciate you taking the time to be with us today, and we hope that it's been helpful to those of you who've joined us here on The Table Podcast, where we discuss issues of God and culture.