

Is Christ at the Center of your Cosmology and Eschatology?

By Jay Wegter

Reformed or covenant theologians in their sincere effort to make Christ the source of continuity between the Testaments have replaced Israel with the Church. In so doing they have employed a hermeneutic that abandons the tension between Israel and the Church. This oversimplification proves to be highly reductionistic. For most Reformed theologians argue that since the Mosaic Covenant has ended, God has no relationship with Israel that would affect her future.

Dispensational thought insists upon a distinction between the Church and Israel. And this distinction involves a truth which is held in tension. And what is this tension between God's dealing with Israel and with the Church? It is the fact that there is a 2000-year time gap between the formation of the Church and God's future work with national Israel. God has temporarily set aside apostate Israel before He begins working with her again. The tension exists between a primarily Gentile church founded 2000 years ago and the divine future promise of God to graft Israel again into the tree of faith.

We emphasize that Christ Himself holds or manages the tension between the two phases of God's redemptive program. For, Christ is both the Savior of the world, and is Israel's Messiah yet to be recognized. Yes, those two phases are separated by 2 millennia of history. Covenant theologians cry foul! They protest, "That would be two different gospels, two different plans of redemption, two different approaches to knowing God." Consequently, replacement theologians define their hermeneutic as gospel-centered and faithful to the unity of Scripture and define the dispensational hermeneutic as a relatively new and novel approach. But is that a fair critique? What do the Scriptures say?

Christ, in Himself unites what no covenant theologian can hold together by his spiritualizing hermeneutic. In Himself, Christ unites the formation of the Church and the restoration of national Israel's calling and future fulfillment. At His glorious return, Christ returns to Zion, not to New York City. Christ installs His throne in Jerusalem, not in the United Nations. Consider that the last view the unbelieving world had of the Son of God was of a man more marred than any other

man, having died in shame, horror, agony, and ignominy. The next view the unbelieving world will have of Christ will be at His glorious return (2 Thess 1:7-10; Rev 1:7). At our Lord's second advent the revelation of His blinding glory will fill the hearts of the impenitent with terror. The paradox of the *wrath of the Lamb* will be a global event—as lightning from one horizon to the other (Rev 6:12-17).

The vindication of the Son by the Father will be before men and angels.

In this vindication of Christ Jesus by the Father, our Savior will be given the nations as His inheritance (Ps 2:7-9; Rev 2:26-27). Our Lord's visible global reign will take place in time-space history. He will be installed as rightful uncontested King (Phil 2:9-11). But covenant theologians have no problem justifying their replacement theology by postulating that apostate Israel has not been temporarily set aside but has been eliminated altogether, swept into the dustbin of history as a failure without hope. Consequently, all of the promises to Israel of future bounty, national protection, occupation of her full land borders, renown among the nations, and world missional influence have now been spiritualized and been transferred to the church.

We cannot peer into the hearts of covenant theologians but suspect that they hate the tension brought about by a 2000-year gap between the phases of redemption. Romans chapter 11 verses 17-22, 25 does firmly warn Gentile believers not to be *arrogant against the branches* that were broken off, nor to be ignorant of the fact that a partial hardening has happened to Israel. Replacement theologians have sought to remove the tension by eliminating Israel from God's plan. By doing this, they have made their hermeneutic and theology evaporate the tension rather than crediting Christ with that ability to hold the tension. For Christ will do what men believe is impossible. He will as Israel's promised Messiah grant a restored kingdom which fulfills the promises that remain.

We reiterate Christ holds the tension together and consummates it in Himself. In so doing, His glory, majesty and honor will be vindicated in time-space history. He is going to do the miraculous, for Scripture states that all Israel will be saved (Rom 11:26). She will be grafted in again to the tree of faith, to the praise of God's wisdom, mercy, and power (Rom 11:23-24). At this point, the reader may find himself asking, "Why does Christ require vindication?" The answer is that the depth of His public humiliation, the magnitude of the reproach He bore, and the efficacy of His curse-bearing require a public display of His glory and majesty to both saints and sinners.

In holding together this tension between the two phases of God's redemptive program, Christ in His own public vindication will also vindicate God's promises to Israel. The Jews have been despised throughout history. They have been the target of holocausts, persecutions, and ridicule. But, in the vindication of Christ, there will be a vindication of God's ancient nation. For the promises of her future which are made to her can only be fulfilled when her promised Messiah is on His throne in Jerusalem as her King and Savior. It is in this way—namely Israel's reception of her glorified Messiah that God's mercy toward her will be fully demonstrated. By the miraculous effectual call and pouring out of a spirit of grace and supplication on Israel she will be saved (Zech 12:10-13:1). God the Father will accomplish together the vindication of His Son in glory, power, and majesty and the vindication of His unbreakable promises to Israel.

Though this present evil age and much of the religious world decries the possibility of a future for Israel, God is going to act. Yes, the history of her unbelief and disobedience is well-documented. She has 3000 years of spiritual and moral failure, and she has never fulfilled her missional calling to the nations. But she will do so one day when her Messiah as mediatorial King is on His throne in her land (note the apostles' question in Acts 1:6).

Now covenant theologians are attracted to an Augustinian view of eschatology which historically has resisted the literalness of the promises to Israel—the promises associated with the Messianic Age. Many of these promises will be fulfilled in miraculous ways: *the lamb will dwell with the lion, the land will be productive producing bountiful crops, there will be no more war, mortal humans will experience great longevity, Israel will be a blessing to all the nations of the earth.* Replacement theologians consider these blessed promises to be too fantastic to be literal, even fanciful, perhaps even impossible. Therefore, they spiritualize these promises and replace Israel, the recipient of these promises with the Church.

When it comes to eschatology, covenant theology tends to display neo-platonic tendencies. It is as if for them that the tension between the Church age and an Israel in waiting for her Messiah represents a chasm too wide to bridge. Well, our Lord is the bridge. He manages the tension in Himself. He spans the gap. It's interesting that replacement theology appoints itself as the protectorate of Christ's throne rights. But, by their replacement theology, they have abandoned a

massive part of Christ's glory and vindication. For, in writing off any future for ethnic Israel, they have at the same time discarded the biblical promise of a visible historic reign of Christ.

Consequently, in denying a visible historic reign of Christ, replacement theologians are willfully missing the *Mount Everest of theology* and redemptive history, namely God's point in the force and impact of Romans 11:30-36. For, God in Christ in bringing these two phases of redemption into one final glorious coalescence is, by God's own testimony, the height of His wisdom. Thus, to summarize, God intends to display His infinite brilliance in forming the Church and in restoring Israel. And these two phases are held together in a tension with two millennia between them that will become one consummation in Christ.

But covenant theologians in dismissing Christ's ability to hold that tension together have made their replacement theology and hermeneutic the trusted assertion that eliminates the tension. But by eliminating a future for ethnic Israel, they have painted themselves into a corner as to what to do with the plethora of Kingdom promises to Israel yet to be fulfilled. Scripture in places such as Colossians 1:15-21 exalts Christ in His preeminent role of holding together the tension between creation and redemption. And in Romans 11 in holding together the tension between the Church and Israel's future. As Israel's promised Messiah, her coming King will restore the Kingdom. As John Piper says its inescapable that the Messianic Age will have a Jewish feel to it.

And what is the zenith of God's wisdom described in Romans 11:32-33? It is this, that through Israel's disobedience the Gentiles were shown unmerited mercy, and because of the unmerited mercy shown to the Gentiles made manifest in the gospel to the nations and the resultant Church age, Israel will again be shown mercy. And so, we ask the following question, how can replacement theologians without compunction use a shell game of redefinition to change the Scriptural meaning of the words *Church* and *Israel*? How can the replacement of Israel with the Church be done in good conscience when God is stating that the pinnacle of His wisdom is displayed in these three phases of his historical redemption—namely in response to Israel's disobedience, abounding mercy to the Gentiles (the Church age), and because of the unmerited mercy shown to the Gentiles, mercy again will be poured out on disobedient Israel.

It is a travesty to take the 'Mount Everest of theological statements' and then twist it like a wax nose to fit a replacement theology. The argument Paul

makes in Romans 11:25-36 is iron-clad. God sets conditions for the complete freeness of His display of grace both to the Gentiles and to a disobedient Israel.

- 25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;
- 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,
“THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION,
HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.”
- 27 “THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM,
WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.”
- 28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of *God’s* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;
- 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.
- 30 For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience,
- 31 so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy.
- 32 For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.
- 33** Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!
- 34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?
- 35 Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN?
- 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.