

Does the New Testament Teach “Replacement Theology?”

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Preterists believe that all Bible prophecy has been fulfilled. This position implies no special purpose for Jews in the future. The preterist believes that Old Covenant promises are ultimately fulfilled in Christ and his church, and *all* are now eligible to be God’s chosen people. Those who think God still considers Jews his chosen people cannot stand this view and routinely accuse preterists of teaching “replacement theology.” They also find it convenient to charge us with anti-Semitism, which is an inaccurate interpretation of our position. Some preterists quickly retort, “No, we don’t teach replacement theology!” The explanation following such a response might point out that God always had only one “olive tree” which continued right on into the New Covenant era. However, we shall demonstrate that those wishing to refute the basic premise of replacement theology — whether futurist or preterist — must explain away some rather clear passages suggesting replacement.

The Kingdom taken away

Matt. 21:33-43 records the parable of the vine-growers, or *tenants* (ESV, NET, NLT). Jesus describes the unrighteous behavior of the tenants and asks his listeners for an opinion on how the landowner would likely respond:

They said to Him, “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons.” (v. 41, NASB throughout.)

They thought the tenants should have been *replaced*. Jesus agreed and clearly indicated the tenants in the parable were intended to represent *them*:

Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be *taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.* (v. 43)

If the theme here is not *replacement* of the very Jews to whom Jesus was speaking, it would be difficult to find another word for it.

Jews broken off, Gentiles grafted in

In Rom. 11:1-25, Paul clearly teaches that Gentiles have *replaced* Jews. Notice especially verse 17:

...some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them...

Again, there is no other word for this but *replacement*. Notice also, verses 19-20: “You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.’” Paul answers, “*Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear.*” Paul is telling them not to be arrogant about their good fortune. However, he clearly agrees they *have* replaced Jews; at least, those Jews who did not believe on Jesus as their Savior. Branches that are broken off die and are burned. However, God is merciful, and Jews may be grafted back in on one condition: “*if they do not continue in their unbelief*” (v. 23). Their lineage back to Abraham means absolutely nothing (Acts 4:12; Luke 3:8; John 8:39-43), but they *can* get back into the plan *if* they believe on Jesus for salvation. Otherwise, they have nothing, and have been replaced by Gentiles. In the first century, only a “remnant” of the Jews was saved (Rom. 11:5).

Does Christ have two wives?

The book of Revelation presents another enormous problem. Here we see an adulterous harlot being condemned and Jesus taking a new bride. The adulterous woman is symbolized by a city: “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS” (Rev. 17:5). This woman/city can be none other than Old Covenant Judah: God’s wife. He had previously divorced her sister Israel:

⁸“And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and *given her a writ of divorce*, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also. ⁹Because of the lightness of her harlotry, she polluted the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. ¹⁰Yet in spite of all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to Me with all her heart, but rather in deception,” declares the Lord.

¹¹And the Lord said to me, “*Faithless Israel has proved herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.*” (Jer. 3:8-11)

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God had already divorced Israel because of her adultery. Now, he declares “treacherous Judah” worse than Israel!

In Revelation, Judah is put to death for her sins:

⁷“To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, ‘I SIT AS A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning.’

⁸“For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.” (Rev. 18:7-8)

At this point, Jesus is free to take a new wife, and the bride of Christ enters the picture: “for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready” (Rev. 19:7). It is abundantly clear that Judah was *replaced*. There is simply no other word to better describe what takes place in Revelation chapters 18 and 19.

Jesus does not have two wives and will *never* take Judah back. As far as he is concerned, his former wife is *dead!* Most futurists would not agree that the harlot of Revelation is symbolic of Old Covenant Judah. However, they most certainly agree that the church was to be the bride of Christ. So they are stuck with trying to explain how Jesus could have two wives. Judah has been replaced by the church. Those who insist she will be taken back someday make Jesus a bigamist.

Two Jerusalems?

Finally, since New Jerusalem is representative of Christ’s bride (Rev. 21:2), it *replaces* Old Jerusalem (Babylon the Great). “How the faithful city has become a harlot” (Isa. 1:21). Just as Jesus cannot have two wives, the two cities do not coexist in God’s plan. Earthly Jerusalem’s temple was obliterated, and the city became spiritually irrelevant.

Replacement not anti-Semitic

The teaching we have presented is basic New Testament theology. Today, however, it has been all but lost, and those attempting to revive it are accused of anti-Semitism. For the record, we declare that the gospel is *not* anti-Semitic; it is *pro-everybody*.

Anyone currently not in on the plan of salvation may be *grafted* in, that is, “if they do not continue in their unbelief.” The gospel does not exclude Jews. On the contrary, it allows them to ascend to an immeasurably higher level: eternal life!

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