

God didn't replace Israel with the Church! by Rev Murray Dixon

Did God reject Israel? By no means!

Did Israel stumble to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! [Romans 11:1,11]

In the Apostle Paul's mind, as reflected in his writings, the promises and covenants of God to Abraham and his descendants stand, regardless of Israel's behaviour. God, the Sovereign Lord, simply states His plan of action. *"Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises."* [Romans 9:4-5]

God's sovereignty is repeatedly demonstrated in these covenants where God declares *"I will..."* over and over again [Genesis 12:2-3; 2 Samuel 7:11-16; Jeremiah 31:31-34]. To question, or worse, to deny whether God will be faithful to the fulfilling of His covenants and promises is to besmirch God's character: *"God's gifts and his call are irrevocable."* [Romans 11:29]

One New Man – Not Two!

God in His grace revealed mysteries to Paul. A mystery has been defined as "an unexplained or inexplicable event". Paul was given insight into several mysteries.

One of those revealed mysteries is that *"through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus"*. [Ephesians 3:6]

Paul further explains that God's purpose is with the Jew and the Gentile *"to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."* [Ephesians 2:15-16]

Who are we Christians?

Paul calls us firstly to consider our past and to recognize our identity:

"Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ." [Ephesians 2:12-13 RSV] Paul is clearly stating that we Gentile Christians, before we knew Christ, were *"alienated from the commonwealth of Israel."*

As a New Zealander I am a member of the British Commonwealth. The word "commonwealth" can be broken up into its parts: "common" – shared ownership; and "wealth" – that which is owned. It speaks, then, of possessions commonly owned. We have enjoyed trade privileges with Britain, freedom of movement and the opportunity to work in Britain, while still retaining our New Zealand independence.

What is the Commonwealth of Israel ?

Before going further we have to identify the *"Israel"* of the commonwealth of which we have become members. Paul makes the statement: *"Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children."* [Romans 9:6-7]

Being able to trace back natural lineage to Abraham does not, in itself, qualify a person to be regarded as of *"Israel."* The qualification is restricted to those who are *"the children of promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring"* [Romans 9:8]. Those qualifying for this group are obviously fewer in number than the group who simply are natural descendants of Abraham: the *remnant*.

Paul puts it simply: *"...at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace"* [Romans 11:5] – the true Israel.

Paul, addressing Gentiles, defines the significance of this relationship:

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." [Ephesians 2:19-22]

We need to grasp the extent of the Gentiles' separation. *Gentile* is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *goyim*, meaning "the people of the nations," that is, anybody who is not Jewish. Jeremiah rebuked Israel for changing their God: *"Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols. Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror," declares the Lord.*" [Jeremiah 2:11-12]

The point is absolutely clear – only those belonging to Israel knew God while everybody else [the Gentiles] were idol-worshipping pagans. “*The nations*” and “*the heathen*” were interchangeable terms.

A glorious change takes place in our lives when we accept the redeeming work of Jesus at Calvary, when we are united with Christ – we have changed our status in God’s eyes. Our status changes from being an “*alien from the commonwealth of Israel*” to being included in that commonwealth! When we were aliens we were “*foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope.*” But through our acceptance of Christ we share in the inheritance of the covenants of promise which were given to Israel!

“Fundamental to the mystery, too, is the truth that a Jew has to choose to be a pagan, while the Gentile has to choose not to be.” [F H Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews*, p.63]

What do the Covenants Promise? And to Whom?

The Abrahamic Covenant – a blessing people

It is essential that we now understand the content of the covenants to know what is promised to the Jewish people, and what is promised to Gentiles who are members of the commonwealth of Israel. In order to do this we need to go back to God’s covenant with Abraham – it is pivotal:

“The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse’ and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you... The Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’” [Genesis 12:1-3,7]

God promised blessings to Abraham, to his offspring and to the Gentiles.

Abraham would be the father of a great nation who would possess the land God allocated them. This land allocation is obviously very important for God repeats “*to you and your offspring I will give this land.*” Abraham’s “*offspring*” is the nation of Israel who are promised an enormous population that will fill the full extent of the territory Abraham looked upon but which Israel has never yet totally possessed even under Solomon’s reign. God is giving Israel the title deeds to the land. To the Gentiles, spiritual blessing is promised.

This covenant with Abraham is signed and sealed [Genesis 15 & 17]. Then he is renamed Abraham, “father of nations.” The importance of the covenant is further emphasized when later, God confirms these promises to Isaac, Abraham’s promised son [Genesis 26:2-5, 24], and years later to Jacob, Isaac’s son [Genesis 28:13-15].

These are the patriarchs: “*from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ*” and “*as far as election is concerned, they [Israel] are loved on account of the patriarchs.*” [Romans 9:5; 11:28]

The Mosaic Covenant – a relationship with God

The Mosaic covenant or the Law of Moses, recorded in Exodus 20:1 through Deuteronomy 27:26, is the only conditional covenant. Blessings follow obedience to the Law and cursings follow disobedience. Unlike the other covenants this is not an eternal covenant. The key element of this covenant is the blood sacrifice [Leviticus 17:11] preparing the way for an eternal covenant. Its purpose was to make sin obvious.

The Land Covenant – the Promised Land

God reaffirmed the territorial promise of his Abrahamic covenant in the land covenant, found in Deuteronomy chapters 28 to 30. Attention was focused upon the consequences of disobedience – calamities and dispersion from the land. Repentance would result in restoration of the land.

Whereas in the covenant with Abraham God gave Israel the “title deeds” to the land, here God is declaring that Israel’s “right of residency” in the land is dependent upon their obedience to his Law.

The Davidic Covenant – the Messianic Covenant

The seed aspect of the Abrahamic covenant is developed in the covenant which God made with David, who represents the house of David. This covenant singled out one family from whose seed the Messiah would come. In 2 Samuel 7:11-17 God promised

David that his son would establish David’s kingdom, build a house or dynasty for God’s name, and that throne of this son’s kingdom would be established forever.

God also promised to be a father to David’s son whom God will discipline when he strays. At first reading it appears that 1 Chronicles 17:10-15 is just a repetition of this passage. But, while God makes the same promises of an eternal kingdom, house or dynasty and throne, there is a sharp contrast on two points: the son spoken of by

Samuel who has to be disciplined is not referred to by the Chronicler; to the son described by the Chronicler are promises, *"I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever."* [1 Chronicles 17:14]

The promises recorded by Samuel refer to a descendant of David establishing an earthly kingdom, throne and house which will be established forever. However, the Chronicler records God's promise of his son who will rule from the throne over God's house and kingdom *forever*. There is a clear distinction between two of God's sons who will be involved in establishing a throne, building a house, and ruling over a kingdom.

History has shown us that Solomon, who had to be disciplined, fulfilled the first function and the second will be fulfilled by Israel's Messiah. That is why Matthew begins his gospel *"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham."*

The New Covenant – All Israel shall be Saved

In the fifth covenant – the New Covenant – God and Israel are involved [Jeremiah 31:31-34]. This is amplification of the spiritual blessing of the Abrahamic covenant which is made with the houses of Israel and Judah. It is distinct from the Mosaic covenant in which God demanded righteousness from the Jewish people but never gave them the power to keep it.

This unconditional covenant, promised exclusively to the house of Israel and the house of Judah, replaces the temporary conditional covenant [the Mosaic covenant], promising the nation spiritual regeneration, the forgiveness of sin, and a relationship where all in Israel will know God: *"They will all know me from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord.*" Paul simply declared: *"All Israel will be saved."* [Romans 11:26]

Through this covenant the Gentiles receive the spiritual blessings promised in the Abrahamic covenant and it is to this covenant that Jesus refers: *"This is my blood of the new covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."* [Matthew 26:28]

While the Mosaic covenant served to keep the Jewish people distinct by controlling their food, clothing and working habits, it also functioned as a barrier or *"dividing wall of hostility"* separating the Gentiles from the privileges of the Jewish spiritual blessings.

Israel's Promised Glorious Future

The promised *"one new man"* is prophetic. Never in history has there been a significant body of Jewish believers in Jesus and Gentile believers in Jesus working together as one – this is still to come.

The whole of the house of Israel and the whole of the house of Judah have never for one moment in history entirely known the Lord: *All Israel will be saved*. This is prophetic – still to be fulfilled.

Nowhere in all of Scripture has God declared that the promises and covenants He has made with Israel are transferred to the Church. Nowhere does Scripture explicitly state, or even allude to, the Church replacing Israel in the purposes of God.

Rather, *"Salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious...if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?"* [Romans 11:11, 15]

God has promised the day when He will call Israel:

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." [Isaiah 60:1-3]

Today's Urgent Hour

As Israel's isolation among the nations increases daily we need to know God's agenda. President-elect Obama clearly listed his priorities for action after his inauguration as the 44th President of the USA on January 20, 2009: Iran, the nation pledging itself to Israel's destruction, is not on that priority list. In June 1981 Israel destroyed Iraq's nuclear reactor. Will Israel attempt to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities? Hamas' war drums in the Gaza Strip pound louder as each rocket hits Israel: their smuggled weaponry more effective than previously. Hizb'allah, in south Lebanon, boasts rearmament with weapons far superior to those used in 2006. Currently the nation is weak under a 'lame duck' prime minister until the general election of February 10, 2009. Do pray for God's wisdom among Israel's leadership. Pray for God's man to be raised up as Israel leader in this crucial hour.

=====