

Entrust Eschatology The Divine Restoration of Israel – Part 3
Fulfillment of the Covenants 2/21/24

III. The Fulfillment of the Biblical Covenants

➤ Preliminary remarks:

○ The hermeneutical approach that we take:

- Later revelation builds upon the contextual, literal, grammatical understanding of earlier revelation
- Later revelation does not impose an understanding of the text that original readers could not have understood (i.e. our understanding of Scripture keeps with authorial intent)

- We saw that the covenants were not fulfilled in the book of Joshua, nor Ezra and Nehemiah.
- Now, we will turn to a consideration of the NT. Does the NT teach that the promises made to Israel were fulfilled such that the church has replaced Israel, or is Israel?

C. Fulfillment in the New Testament Church

Covenant Theologians and other Supersessionists assert that the promises made to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament are fulfilled in the New Testament Church of Jesus Christ. Some hold that the Church fulfills these promises either in the present age (as believers are saved through Christ) or in the eternal state (as believers inherit the new heaven and earth), or in a combination of both. Several arguments have been presented for this view:

1. Jesus as the True Israel

Covenant Theologians and Supersessionists hold that Scripture teaches that Jesus is the “true Israel” who typologically fulfills all that the nation of Israel was to accomplish and all that she was promised. Consequently, the Old Testament promises made to the nation of Israel “vanish in Jesus Christ, who has fulfilled them” (Riddlebarger), and the Church, which is the true people of God, receives the blessings of these promises because of its union with Christ.

HOWEVER:

- As Michael Vlach argues, the identity of Jesus as the ultimate representative of Israel does not erase or transcend national Israel's significance or alter the nature of the promises to God's covenant nation. This is clear from Isaiah 49:3-6, which teaches that
 - (a) Jesus, the Servant of Yahweh, is indeed the true Israel (v. 3), and yet
 - (b) He will restore the nation of Israel and bring blessing to the nations of the world (v. 6).

- "Thus, Isaiah 49:3-6 explicitly contradicts the argument...that Christ as true Israel means the end of national Israel's significance. Not only does Christ as true Israel not mean the end of the nation Israel in the plan of God, but the presence of Christ means the restoration of the nation Israel" (Vlach).

2. The Redefinition of "a Jew" in Romans 2:28-29

In Romans 2:28-29, the apostle Paul writes:

"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God."

- According to many Supersessionists, this passage redefines what it means to be "a Jew" by denying that it simply involves ethnic Jewishness and expanding it to refer anyone – whether Jew or Gentile – whose heart has been circumcised through faith in Christ.

HOWEVER:

- As Bruce Compton argues, Romans 2:28-29 is better understood "as simply contrasting a saved Jew as a subset of the larger category of ethnic Jews, without any intent of including Gentiles within the designation." This is evident from the broader context in which Paul specifically addresses Gentiles in 2:12-16 and ethnic Jews in 2:17-3:20 (note the transition in 2:17: "But if you bear the name 'Jew' ...). "

- According to Romans 2:28-29, then, the “true Jew” is not simply the ethnic Jew who has been circumcised physically, but rather the ethnic Jew who has also experienced the circumcision of the heart through faith in Jesus Christ.

3. The Israelite Terminology in 1 Peter 2:9

First Peter 2:9 takes several terms used exclusively of Israel in the Old Testament (Exod 19:5-6; Isa 43:20-21; Hos 1-2) and applies them to the Church.

According to many supersessionists, this means that Peter (a) redefined the concept of Israel by identifying the Church as the new Israel and (b) indicated that OT promises made to the physical nation of Israel will be fulfilled in the “holy nation” called the Church.

HOWEVER:

- In using this terminology, Peter does not present the Church as the new/true Israel or as the fulfillment of prophecy about Israel; instead, he simply highlights specific points of correspondence between the people of God in the OT (Israel) and the people of God in the NT (the Church).
- According to Edward Glenny, this correspondence consists of a typological relationship in which OT Israel was a *pattern* of the Church’s relationship with God as His chosen people: “Peter uses various aspects of the salvation, spiritual life, and service of Israel in its relationship with Yahweh to teach his recipients the greater salvation, spiritual life, and service they enjoy in Christ.”
- In light of (a) the OT promises to Israel that have yet to be fulfilled (e.g., Deut 30:1-10; Ezek 36:16-38) and (b) the NT reaffirmation of a future restoration of Israel (Rom 11:25-32), even if this correspondence in 1 Peter 2:9 does rise to the level of a typological relationship (as Glenny claims but which most Classic and Revised Dispensationalists deny), it does not negate the final fulfillment of the covenants made to God’s chosen nation (Rom 11:29).

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

- W. Edward Glenny, “The Israelite Imagery of 1 Peter 2,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, eds. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, 156-87. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992.

4. Christ as the Fulfillment of All Promises in 2 Corinthians 1:20

Here is how this argument goes:

2 Corinthians 1:20 For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.

According to many supersessionists, because Jesus Himself is the fulfillment of all the promises of God (2 Cor 1:20), promises made to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament have already been fulfilled in Christ. Therefore, the argument says, since believers are “in Christ,” they too experience the OT promises to Israel, and therefore those promises will not be fulfilled in a future restoration of the nation of Israel.

HOWEVER:

Second Corinthians 1:20 does not indicate that prophecies concerning Israel are absorbed into the person of Christ or climaxed in Him in such a way which subsequently *removes literal fulfillment* of what God has promised to Israel.

- It is essential to distinguish between Jesus *as a referent of many OT prophecies* (Gen 3:15; Isa 53) and Jesus *as the personal agent* through whom other OT promises will be fulfilled (Vlach).
- Romans 11:26-27 is an example:

Romans 11:26–27 And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”; ²⁷ “and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

- Here, Paul teaches that the salvation of Israel (v. 26a) will be accomplished *through the agency* of the Deliverer who will come to remove her ungodliness and take away her sins (vv. 26b-27). In this way this promise to Israel will be fulfilled “in Him” (cf. 2 Cor 1:20).
- Thus, Jesus is the referent of many Old Testament prophecies. And in other prophecies, He is the personal agent through whom others will experience blessings, including the promises of Israel’s future restoration.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

- Cory M. Marsh, “A Dynamic Relationship: Christ, the Covenants, and Israel” MSJ 30/2 (Fall 2019): 257-75.
- Michael J. Vlach, “Response to Merkle” in Three Views on Israel and the Church: Perspectives on Romans 9-11, eds. Jared Compton and Andrew David Naselli, 209-22 (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018).

5. The “Seed/Sons of Abraham” in Romans 4 and Galatians 3

Paul identifies Gentile believers as the “seed of Abraham” (τοῦ Ἀβραάμ σπέρμα) (Gal 3:29; cf. Rom 4:13, 16) and “sons of Abraham” (υἱοὶ εἰσὶν Ἀβραάμ) (Gal 3:7; cf. Rom 4:11-12, 16). Also, he refers to Gentiles as “heirs of the promise” to their father, Abraham (Gal 3:28-29; cf. Rom 4:16). Therefore, supersessionists argue that the Church is the true/spiritual Israel, and that all the promises made to Israel, including the geographical-national blessings, are fulfilled today by the Church.

HOWEVER:

- At its foundation, this argument fails to distinguish between the **four different senses of the “seed of Abraham”** found in Scripture:
 - 1) Biological Seed, including all the physical descendants of Abraham, even Ishmael (Gen 21:13; 25:12-18), the sons of Keturah (Gen 25:1-4), and Esau (Gen 36:9-19)
 - 2) Biological/Special Seed, consisting of the physical descendants of Abraham (17:7-10) through Isaac (Gen 26:4) and Jacob (Gen 28:14), the covenant people of God – whether true believers or not – who were chosen to mediate the blessings of Yahweh to the nations of the world (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18)
 - 3) Typological Seed, as a reference to Christ who is the true/unique and ultimate Seed of Abraham through whom this universal blessing has come (Gal 3:16)
 - 4) Spiritual Seed, as a reference to all believers in Christ – both Jew and Gentile – who are sons of Abraham because they imitate his faith (Gal 3:6-9, 26-29; Rom 4:11-12; cf. Matt 3:9; Luke 19:9).

- Giving due consideration to these various senses of the “seed of Abraham” means refusing to let any one sense cancel out the meaning or implications of the other senses (John Feinberg).
- Thus, Paul’s identification of believing Gentiles as “the seed of Abraham” does not mean that the church is now “spiritual Israel,” and it does not revoke the physical, political, and territorial promises given to national Israel.
- Furthermore, when Paul relates the Abrahamic Covenant to the present-day salvation of Gentiles in Galatians 3:8, he does not say that they, as the seed of Abraham, are now part of that nation of Israel. Instead, he maintains a distinction between (a) the Gentiles who believe in Christ and are blessed through the nation of Israel (“the nations”) and (b) the nation of Israel through whom this blessing has come (“you”).
- Michael Riccardi: “Rather than identifying the present Gentile church as spiritual Israel who receives a spiritualized version of the Abrahamic Covenant promises made to the nation, Paul is simply announcing that Yahweh’s promise to Abraham of universal blessing to the nations has come in the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

- Michael Riccardi, “The Seed of Abraham: A Theological Analysis of Galatians 3 and Its Implications for Israel,” MSJ 25/1 (Spring 2014): 51–64.
- John S. Feinberg, “Systems of Discontinuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 71–73.
- Matt Waymeyer, “Romans 4:11 and the Case for Infant Baptism,” MSJ 29/2 (Fall 2018): 247–48.

6. The Fulfillment of the New Covenant in Hebrews 8

Hebrews 8:7–13 “For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. ⁸ For he finds fault with them when he says: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ⁹ not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand

to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. ¹⁰ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ¹¹ And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." ¹³ In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."

- According to supersessionists, Hebrews 8:1-13 indicates that the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 is already "a present and glorious reality for all who are in Christ" (Riddlebarger) – having been fulfilled in the Church in the present age – and therefore it will not be fulfilled in a future restoration of the nation of Israel.

HOWEVER:

- As an initial observation, the quotation of Jeremiah 31:31-34 is not introduced in Hebrews 8 with a "fulfillment" formula that would suggest that this prophecy has been (or is being) completely fulfilled in the present age.
 - Rather than quoting Jeremiah 31 to indicate that the promises made to Israel are fulfilled in the Church, the writer of Hebrews appeals to this prophecy to argue that the Old Covenant was faulty (8:7-8a) and that it was made obsolete by the New Covenant (8:13a).
 - In other words, the purpose of quoting Jeremiah 31:31-34 was not to say that the Church will experience the fulfillment in the place of Israel (a radical redefinition of the recipients of these promises). Nor was it to say that this prophecy is fulfilled in the present age. Instead, it was to show that the older covenant was inferior and therefore abrogated and replaced by a new and better covenant with new and better promises (cf. Heb 8:6). Hebrews 8 is simply arguing for the superiority of the New Covenant to the Mosaic/Old, not that the church will replace Israel.
 - Thus, the conclusion that the Supersessionist draws from this citation of Jeremiah 31:31-34 (that this prophecy is fulfilled in the Church during the present age) is not the same as the conclusion that the author of Hebrews himself draws (that the Mosaic Covenant was inferior and has been made obsolete by the New Covenant).

- As a second observation, the author of Hebrews appeals to this Jeremiah prophecy twice (8:8–12 and 10:16), but neither time does he identify his readers as the designees of the New Covenant:
 - First, when quoting Jeremiah 31:31–34 in Hebrews 8:8–12, he retains “the house of Israel” (vv. 8 and 10) and “the house of Judah” (v. 8) as the recipients of the New Covenant. At the same time, he also describes his readers as receiving the forgiveness of sin that is promised in the New Covenant (8:6; 10:15–18, 29; 13:20), thereby indicating that the Church participates in the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant in the present age even though the Church is not the direct recipient of the promises.
 - Second, when quoting Jeremiah 31:33 in Hebrews 10:16, he consciously changes the identification of the recipients from “the house of Israel” to “them” (the Israelites) rather than to “you” or “us” (the readers of Hebrews). The pronoun “them” refers to the house of Israel, and contextually it stands in contrast to his readers, who are designated “us” in the previous verse (10:15). As Compton suggests, distinguishing between “us” (in 10:15) and “them” (in 10:16) is the author’s way to “highlight the point that his readers, although benefiting from the forgiveness promised in Jeremiah’s new covenant, are not the designees of Jeremiah’s covenant.” Those designees were – and remain – the nation of Israel, even though believers in the present age receive the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant.
- As a third observation, the promises quoted in Hebrews 8:8–12 are limited to those New Covenant provisions that are spiritual in nature (e.g., the forgiveness of sin) and do not include the physical/material blessings (e.g., restoration to the land) that will be experienced by Israel at the Second Coming of Christ.
- In summary, then, the teaching of Hebrews – including the quotation of Jeremiah 31:31–34 in Hebrews 8:8–12 – is perfectly consistent with the fact that the New Covenant is:
 - Promised to the Nation of Israel in the Old Testament (Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 36:22–36)
 - Ratified by the Lord Jesus through His Death on the Cross (Luke 22:20; Heb 9:15–18; 10:9)

- Inaugurated by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41; cf. Ezek 36:27)
- Participated in by the Church in the Present Age (1 Cor 11:23-26; 2 Cor 3:1-18)
- Fulfilled in the Nation of Israel at the Second Coming (Rom 11:25-27; cf. Isa 27:9; 59:21; Jer 31:31-34)
- The critical issue is this final point: Israel will be restored at the end of the age in fulfillment of the New Covenant.
 - After asserting this eschatological salvation in Romans 11:25-26a, Paul supports this declaration in verses 26b-27 with New Covenant promises from Isaiah 59:20-21a and 27:9 (and possibly Jer 31:31-34). In doing so, “Paul intentionally associates the concepts of (1) the coming of a deliverer for the nation, (2) the forgiveness of sins, and (3) God’s establishing a covenant with His people” (Compton).
 - As Compton asks, “if the church has supplanted national Israel in God’s plan of redemption and now fulfills God’s promises originally given to Israel, then why does Paul [in Rom 11:25-27] speak of a future deliverance of the nation, a deliverance, it should be noted, that fulfills God’s promise of a new covenant with national, ethnic Israel?”
 - Therefore, the quotation of Jeremiah 31:31-34 in Hebrews 8 does not exclude an eschatological restoration of the nation of Israel in fulfillment of the New Covenant.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

- R. Bruce Compton, “Dispensationalism, the Church, and the New Covenant,” DBSJ 8 (Fall 2003): 3-48.
- Bruce A. Ware, “The New Covenant and the People(s) of God,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, 68-97. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.
- Robert L. Saucy, “The New Covenant and the Salvation of the Gentiles,” in *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, by Robert L. Saucy, 111-39. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993.

- Ralph H. Alexander, “A New Covenant – An Eternal People (Jeremiah 31),” in *Israel, the Land and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God’s Promises*, ed. H. Wayne House, 169–206. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998.
- Homer A. Kent, Jr., “The New Covenant and the Church,” *GTJ* 6/2 (Fall 1985): 289–98.
- Larry D. Pettegrew, “The New Covenant,” *MSJ* 10/2 (Fall 1999): 251–70.
- Mike Stallard, ed., *Dispensational Understanding of the New Covenant*. Schaumburg, Ill: Regular Baptist Books, 2012.

7. The “True Circumcision” in Philippians 3:3

Philippians 3:3 “for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh”

- According to some supersessionists, when Paul refers to Christians as “the true circumcision” in Philippians 3:3, he identifies both Jewish and Gentile believers as true/spiritual Israel (i.e. the church has replaced Israel or is the new Israel). Therefore, the argument says, the church inherits the Old Testament promises made to the nation of Israel.

HOWEVER:

- Though Paul identifies followers of Christ as “the true circumcision” in Phil 3:3, nowhere in the passage does he refer to the Church as “Israel” or to believers as “Jews.”
- In fact, he uses the term “Israel” just two verses later in the standard biblical sense; of the ethnic nation (Philippians 3:5 “circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews..”).
- In warning the Philippians of false teachers who emphasized the need for the physical rite of circumcision, Paul describes true believers as those who “worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (3:3). In the process, the apostle calls them “the true circumcision” (literally, “the circumcision”) to describe them as those who have undergone not merely physical circumcision of the flesh but *a spiritual circumcision of the heart*.

- Paul uses this designation to establish a polemical contrast between his regenerate readers and the unbelieving false teachers who emphasized the physical rite of circumcision to the exclusion of the spiritual circumcision of the heart that the Old Testament sign anticipated.
- Since the Church experiences the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant (see discussion above), it makes perfect sense for Paul to describe believers as those whose hearts have been spiritually circumcised (Deut 30:6; cf. Jer 9:25-26) without intending to signal an unprecedented redefinition of “Israel” or the term “Jew.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

- Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 202–05.

8. The Salvation of “Israel” in Romans 9:25-26

Romans 9:25–26 “As indeed he says in Hosea, ‘Those who were not my people I will call “my people,” and her who was not beloved I will call “beloved.”’²⁶ And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’ ”

- According to many supersessionists, when Paul applies the promises of Israel’s restoration in Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 to the salvation of Gentiles in Romans 9:25-26, this indicates that the OT promises of restoration are fulfilled in the salvation of the Church in the present age.

HOWEVER:

- As indicated by a contextual study of (a) the promises in Hosea and (b) Paul’s use of Hosea in Romans 9:25-26, the apostle is drawing a parallel between the future restoration of the Jews and the present salvation of the Gentiles to highlight the graciousness of God toward those who have no claim on His mercy.
- In this way, the apostle is underscoring a point of continuity between these two distinct situations without equating them or suggesting that one fulfills the prediction of the other. For this reason Paul’s use of Hosea in Romans 9

fails to support the view that the covenant promises to Israel are fulfilled in the salvation of the Church.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

- Appendix 11: "Paul's Use of Hosea in Romans 9:25-26"

CONCLUSION:

The position from covenant theology/supersessionism and amillennialism holds that the previous eight passages teach that the promises made to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament are fulfilled in the New Testament Church of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Church has replaced Israel. However, upon further analysis of these passages, interpreters understand them to teach that Israel is not replaced by the New Testament Church. Therefore, the Church cannot be said to be the new Israel who experiences the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. We can expect national Israel to experience the promises in a way consistent with a grammatical-historical-contextual understanding of those Old Testament passages.