

The Value in being Jewish as Related to End Time Events

Christianity is split over the value of being Jewish in modern times. Some theologians say that there is no end time relevance to being Jewish and no purpose for a Jewish nation. Others look at the reappearance of the Nation of Israel to be a dramatic display of God's plan and a key to understanding current events. In this article, we will review the various teachings and try to dispel misunderstandings that have arisen in an attempt to deal with biblical prophecy.

Dispensational Theology

The first concept that must be examined is dispensationalism. Truly, this is not a doctrine. There are no Scriptures that explicitly state dispensationalism. It has been developed by theologians who believe the Scriptures imply it. Dispensationalism, instead, is a paradigm through which Scripture is viewed. It is a way to organize and categorize Scripture for the purpose of deriving truth. Dispensationalists divide history into various ages which they call dispensations. There are several divisions depending on the doctrines that each teacher takes into account when discussing the changes implemented by God over time. Simply stated, this paradigm speaks of a dispensation of law and a dispensation of grace. This is often associated with two divisions in which many Christians believe that the Bible is divided. The first being referred to as the Old Testament, while the second is referred to as the New Testament.

It would be an oversimplification to state that dispensationalism proclaims that the law was given to Israel, but grace was given to the church. Even so, this is a statement that has often been heard from many preachers proclaiming it. Other theologians in the dispensational camp realize that drawing such a distinct line between the two Testaments does not resolve all conflict they perceive between them. Some teachers draw the line at Jesus' resurrection, leaving us with law before and grace afterwards. A second division is made at Pentecost. They teach the church began at Pentecost so this leaves us with an Israel / church distinction.

Dispensational premillennialists¹ draw another line where they see law restored during the Great Tribulation. They claim that grace is ended with the rapture of the church, and then the law again applies to those who are left behind. To gain the best understanding of the various divisions and doctrines taught because of those divisions, one would need to review several explanations found under the dispensational heading. One group claims there were seven distinct dispensations, while another claims only four. To the non-dispensationalist, this seems to suggest that God changed his mind when one method didn't work and decided to do it differently. In order to properly understand this paradigm, it must be viewed as a progression of completing a task. It is presenting a change of situation caused by a completion of a previously planned work. The dispensationalist would say this is a systematic phasing in of God's plan.

The dispensational premillennial paradigm began in the mid 19th century with John Nelson Darby. Over the years it has been supported by several Bible study reference materials such as the Companion Bible by Dr. E. W. Bullinger, the Scofield Reference Bible by Cyrus

¹ A group within dispensational teaching that holds to a literal millennial reign of Messiah on the earth.

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Scofield and Ryrie Study Bible by Dr. Charles Ryrie. In premillennial dispensationalism, Israel is considered a distinct entity separate from the church. This paradigm claims that Israel retains a special identity in the eyes of God, still being his chosen, and still retaining promises and prophecies that apply to them. Charles Ryrie, suggested that there are two New Covenants, one for the church and one for Israel. If one is of a premillennial belief, the church and Israel simultaneously are the elect of God and are destined to rule and reign with Christ in the Millennial kingdom. If one is of amillennial or postmillennial belief **the church** will rule the nations prior to the return of Christ.

Some teachers holding an amillennial/postmillennial eschatology teach the New Covenant applies only to Israel. Select groups from all eschatological persuasions suggest, the New Covenant is only for the Church or like Ryrie, that there is a dual covenant affording both Christianity and Judaism with a covenant. These variations afford different treatment for Israel and the church. Some will claim that the law is applicable to Israel, so a Jew who is a Christian must keep the law, while a Christian from the nations is not required to keep the law. Others may believe that the Jew who is not a believer must keep the law but those who believe in Jesus are not required to do so. None would teach that the law is binding to the non-Jewish Christian. These variations are debated due to the different ways one determines how he and others relate to the law.

The name “dispensationalism” contains the idea of setting aside law for a particular purpose. If a criminal was to be found guilty of theft, but the judge set aside his sentence because he determined it would better serve all involved, he would be making a dispensation. He would dispense with the punishment. Dispensationalists believe that Jesus died so that law could be set aside. Jesus is said to have been perfect and since He did every requirement of the law He fulfilled the requirements enabling those who receive His work to not need to be perfect in order to gain eternal life. Most in Messianic Judaism² believe that there is a different treatment for the Jew and for the church. Hence, they might say the Jew should keep the law while the church should not. Others within this view might say that the Jew who is in the church should not be required to keep the law, but the Jew who rejected Jesus as Messiah is still required to do so.

Replacement Theology

To believe in dispensationalism does not necessarily mean that a person believes in Replacement Theology. It is only a way of viewing Scripture that could *allow* for Replacement

² Messianic Judaism is the part of the Messianic movement whose leadership is made up of Jewish believers in Messiah and many in the congregations are also of Jewish descent.

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Theology. Dispensational premillennialists reject the doctrine of Replacement Theology, but still adhere to the law/grace division in Scripture. They usually teach that Israel has a place in the millennial kingdom and that the modern Jews are a special people in the eyes of God whether or not they believe in Jesus. They are still His chosen, but the church also could be called the elect of God. Since two different terms are used in English, “chosen” for the Old Testament, and “elect” for the New Testament, some believe that these are two different concepts speaking of different ways God deals with two different people groups. Hence, their dispensational paradigm does not require that the church replace Israel, but the two can be simultaneously the people of God. Ironically, this paradigm produces a saved people of God and an unsaved people of God.

Replacement theology springs from dispensationalism, although as pointed out above, it is not required to do so. Replacement Theology can be explained as follows. The covenant of the Old Testament was given to Israel. It included the moral law and certain national laws, but because of their disobedience to those laws, God rejected them as a people. When Messiah came and died, being perfect, He was able to put an end to the law and give eternal life to all who received and believed on Him. Then, those who received Jesus became the people of God. This is referred to as the New Covenant. Hence the church received all the promises once given to Israel, only it no longer is required to keep the law. Dispensationalism is the structure through which to view the Scriptures so that this doctrine emerges without major conflict. Without a division between Israel and the church and between an era of law and an era of grace it would be impossible to accept such a dramatic change of requirements, but with neatly drawn lines and distinct definitions, this dramatic shift in emphasis seems clear to its proponents.

The majority view in Christianity at large does not hold to either the Replacement Theology view, or the dispensational premillennial view. In America, these doctrines have become popular due to our predominantly Protestant heritage. Orthodox churches, such as Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox and Syrian Orthodox, are not dispensational. We in the US fail to recognize this and often even lump all orthodox into one category we call Catholic. This comes from being unfamiliar with the distinctions between the various Orthodox churches and assuming they are all alike. This same lack of distinction has been done with Replacement Theology. Some will hear one phrase that sounds similar to Replacement Theology and infer that the two groups are the same due to a similar phrase. For example, many believe that the Presbyterian's teach Replacement Theology. They adamantly deny this label. They might say, “the church is spiritual Israel,” which leads one to believe that they are saying the church replaces Israel, but with a better understanding of their teachings we will find this is not the case.

Covenant Theology

John Calvin, a teacher greatly admired in the Reformed movement, taught the doctrine of election. Reformed theologians actually arrived at a similar conclusion to Replacement Theology, although through a different process. They begin with covenants, not dispensations. They have developed a Covenant theology, which is dramatically different from

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dispensationalism. This effectively enables the church to become the modern Israel of God, and the Jews to possibly cease being so, without God having to change in order to do so. To them, dispensationalism would be God changing His mind while covenant theology is God dealing with mankind consistently over the generations.

These two groups both use the term “covenant,” but in distinctly different ways. When dispensationalists speak of covenants, there is the Old and the New covenants. The Old being the way God dealt with Israel, meaning law, and the New in the way that God deals with the church, namely grace. These covenants are mentioned in Scripture, but it is possible that the dispensational description of them is an oversimplification of how the terms are used in the Bible. Covenant theology also uses the term “covenant” but these covenants are not explicitly expressed by their name in Scripture. These covenants were named and defined to express various ways in which God has dealt with His people. Covenant Theology teaches three covenants. These covenants were not time related such as the Old Covenant dealing with people pre-Jesus and the New Covenant post-Jesus. Instead, the Reformed Theologians’ covenants were simultaneously in affect from creation. They consist of the Covenant of Redemption, the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace.

The first thing one should notice is that none of these covenants are literally spelled out in Scripture. Reformed Theologians have derived these from verses they believe indicate them, combined with observing God’s character and consistent actions with His people. They are called “theological covenants” because they are not explicitly enunciated in Scripture. Instead, theologians have determined that they are implicit from the Bible.

We will begin our explanation of the three theological covenants with the “Covenant of Redemption.” It is a covenant made between the three persons of the Trinity who determined to elect, atone for, and save a chosen group of individuals giving them eternal life. This covenant preceded the creation and the fall, hence God had a plan of redemption before the fall. God planned to reveal to man certain works which would bring eternal bliss but He foreknew man would fail, so God planned to offer grace through Jesus Christ to bring those chosen elect, to salvation.

The first of the three covenants to appear in the Scriptural Narrative is the “Covenant of Works.” God gave Adam a perfect place in which to live and he would continue in this place until he broke the rules. He stayed in Eden until he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then he was banished from the garden and was given a destiny with death. Later, Moses brought rules down for the nation of Israel and they were offered a land flowing with milk and honey (a metaphoric Eden) until they were banished for breaking the covenant with God.

The third theological covenant, known as the “Covenant of Grace,” becomes active when the covenanters have broken the tenets of their Covenants of Works. This in some respect could be seen as time related since it only follows the Covenant of Works after it has been exhausted and the participants have failed. Adam set this covenant into effect when he sinned. God offers

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the sinner eternal life and salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus as a benefit to the Covenant of Grace.

The first example of the Covenant of Grace is seen when God promises a redeemer who will crush the head of the serpent. Yet another Covenant of Grace appears in the covenant with Abraham. Abraham and his descendants were given eternal promises. These are an extension of the Covenant of Grace. In like manner, the Davidic Covenant had an eternal nature to it which also was an extension of the Covenant of Grace. The New Covenant was the progressive fulfillment of these two unconditional Covenants of Grace with Jesus being the fulfillment of the promised Davidic Kingdom.

While this does not make time periods in which God deals differently with his chosen, it does make the modern kingdom of Israel invalid. Since Israel failed to keep the Covenant of Law, they were banished from the land flowing with milk and honey and no amount of law keeping can now return them, just as Adam could not have decided that God was right all along and returned to the garden, never eating of the tree again.

Comparing Dispensational and Covenant Theology

The following chart shows the two paradigms combined with the three Eschatological views and shows what these views claim to teach concerning Replacement Theology.

	Dispensational	Covenantal
Premillennial	No Replacement Theology. A distinction is made between the Church and Israel. The Jew has a major role in end time events	Would not teach Replacement Theology and would teach a distinction between Israel and the church. The nation of Israel may or may not play a role in end time events
Amillennial	Replacement Theology, the church replaces Israel and the church as Israel play a major role in the end of the age. There is no role for National Israel or the Jews.	No Replacement Theology, and there is a distinction between the church and Israel even though the church may be called spiritual Israel. National Israel has no end time role.
Post-millennial	Very rare belief but would tend to teach Replacement Theology and call the church Spiritual Israel. The church would play the major role in end time events, but the Jews or National Israel do not.	No Replacement Theology, and there is a distinction between the church and Israel even though the church may be called spiritual Israel. National Israel has no end time role.

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These distinctly different teachings, considered to be the same by those who see a plan for Israel in the end times, show how easy it is to misinterpret someone's beliefs by hearing only part of their view. Often a person hears one phrase or cliché, makes a quick judgment as to the belief of that person and then begins thinking how to refute him. Some may just dismiss them as deceived and write them off as heretical without ever trying to understand the distinctions they may be presenting. The result of Replacement theology and the Reformed suggestion that the church is spiritual Israel, bring about distinctively different visions. To lump them together as the same doctrine is a gross misrepresentation of either. However, when one doesn't understand their differences and recognizes that both dismiss the value of National Israel, elevating the church above it, it is easy to call them both Replacement Theology. This causes one to stop considering the ramifications of what those who hold these views are teaching.

Replacement theology considers all Jews to be damned unless they convert to Christianity and repent of law keeping. I knew of one man who had invited a messianic Jew to speak in his assembly. He purposely served him pork at a meal to see if he truly had converted. So, not only is the special place for the Jew removed in Replacement theology, but the demand for denying one's heritage and any national law for the Jew may also be required. It is no wonder that the believing Messianic Jew would abhor such a teaching, at least if he is faithful to any portion of his heritage. The one served pork in my story did eat and was accepted. He evidently had left his cultural background and had embraced all the Protestant replacement teachings concerning the law.

The Calvinist position would not necessarily demand that a Jew who didn't believe in Jesus received damnation. From their perspective, the elect is whomever God has chosen. He does not necessarily exclude the Jew, allowing God to choose whomever He pleases. Yet, this view does eliminate the necessity for the state of Israel, in which the dispensational premillennialists invest much interest. To the premillennialist, the state of Israel is a trophy to their teaching. They believed Israel would be resurrected as a player in the end times and in 1948 the nation of Israel afforded them with a score to their theological interpretation. This did not affect the Calvinist position since anyone could proclaim themselves a historic nation and act as though they were heirs to a land. Does my claim to being German and a descendant from Bavaria give me any right to land in Hassloch Germany? So the materialization of a Jewish state is not relevant to Calvinist theology and is in no way persuasive that the dispensational premillennialists are correct.

Most Messianic Jews came from a premillennial dispensational background. Either they were converted to Christianity through these denominations or they discovered themselves to be Jews while in such a denomination. The premillennial dispensationalist's love for Israel may have afforded the rise of the Messianic Movement. Jews became almost idolized due to being seen as the "chosen people." Baptist, Nazarene, Christian, and Assemblies of God have all sponsored Messianic congregations as an evangelical outreach to the Jews. Many Messianic Rabbis are ordained ministers in these denominations. This being the case, it is no wonder that Messianics love the premillennial dispensationalists. It also should be no surprise that they

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regard those as heretics, who suggest that Jews have been replaced or are of no significance to the end time events. Messianic Jews do not distinguish between Replacement Theology and Covenant Theology. Both teachings infer that modern Jews as a group, have nothing to do with end time prophecy, thus devaluing the Messianic Jewish ministry. The nation of Israel becomes insignificant, the modern Messianic Jewish movement has little value and the people are devalued in their doctrine and existence. This is a dramatic difference from the premillennial dispensationalists who elevate their value.

Messianic Israelite Theology

This leads us to a newer explanation concerning the Christian relationship with the Jew and the misunderstanding that develops from certain phrases used to express their belief. Some in the Hebrew Roots Movement (aka. the Messianic Israelite Movement or as called by those who don't understand the teaching, the Two House Movement,) claim that the church is Israel. Immediately, a red flag is raised in the mind of a listening Messianic Jew. This means to them that the Jewish presence is of no importance and that they are being replaced. Once such a statement is made, the ears are shut off. There is no more need to listen because the Jews have been devalued. However, to call the Hebrew Roots Movement a Replacement Theology teaching is a total misrepresentation of the facts. It is like a platypus being called a bird because it has a bill like a duck and lays eggs. Instead, the Hebrew Roots Movement has offered another idea that is benevolent to Israel, just as the dispensational premillennialists. Furthermore, they have done so without using the dispensational paradigm to filter their Scripture. I will attempt to briefly distinguish between this teaching and the beliefs mentioned this far, so as to dispel false notions.

The dispensationalists distinguish between Israel and the church indicating that the two have distinct differences. Replacement Theologians use this distinction to say Israel has sinned and been rejected as the people of God. Premillennial dispensationalists suggest that Israel has an end time role to play and that God still esteems them. Covenant theologians tend to suggest that the church is spiritual Israel and that it now has all the covenants once given to the nation that disobeyed and were divorced of God.³ The first differentiates between Israel and the Church. The second replaces Israel as the people of God. The third treats Israel differently from the church and claims the church has become spiritual Israel and is now the heir to all her promises. In contrast to these the Messianic Israelite doctrine suggests that the Church is Israel, some being literal descendants from the Northern Kingdom. They do not consider themselves to be "spiritual Israel," so Israel retains all the covenants given to them from the beginning because that is who they are. This sounds like the covenant theologians who make the same statement and use it to do away with the necessity of Israel, but in reality the Messianic Israelite is doing the exact opposite. One reason this has a different effect is that the definition of Israel is different.

The dispensationalists would readily define Israel in Scripture as the Jews. The premillennial dispensationalist will consider the Jew to be special in that they are the chosen of

³ Jeremiah 3:8

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God. They do not assign such chosen nature to the church, but they do consider the church to be saved, while the Jew without Christ they consider to be damned. It then becomes important to bring the Jew to Christ in order for him to receive salvation. They expect the nation of Israel to fulfill much prophecy and consider it to be of great significance. They expect most Jews to convert to Christianity prior to the millennial kingdom as a part of that fulfillment. People with this perspective who are not of Jewish decent may have a slight jealousy of the Jew since they believe God considers him chosen and them not chosen. Jews who become Messianic often have a great burden for their family and Jewish friends and will be very evangelical due to their perception of them being damned.

Other millennial views in the dispensational camp who hold to Replacement Theology, will oppose the nation of Israel and expect nothing from the Jew to fulfill prophecy. They either think there is no prophecy still needing to be fulfilled⁴ or any prophecy concerning Israel not fulfilled, is now transferred to the church.⁵ They have no special desire to convert the Jew over any other person. They might even be calloused toward him or her since they teach that the Jew rejected Yehoshua in the first century and has continued to do so since that time.

The covenant theologians would also readily define Israel in Scripture as the Jews. Yet, they believe that the church is now spiritual Israel and if there is any future fulfillment of prophecy, it should apply to the church, not the Jew or modern nation of Israel. Again, covenant theologians have no desire to convert Jews over any other people. Some might even believe that since they have a covenant, they do not need to be converted. Salvation is for those whom God has chosen from the beginning of the world, so there is nothing that could be done to change their status. Either they are chosen or they are not. Presbyterians, one denomination who hold to this doctrine, have already taken sides against the modern nation of Israel in favor of the Palestinians. They have divested themselves of Israeli goods and investments and have encouraged their congregations and people to do so also. Any promises of blessing or future fulfillment of prophecy would apply to the church so there is no particular reason to give them favor.

The Messianic Israelites define Israel in Scripture as the Northern Kingdom which is a distinct entity separate from the Jews who are from the Southern Kingdom. They will also use the term to be inclusive of both kingdoms when united. The unified kingdom is explicit when “all Israel” is used in the text, but may be implied in other passages. To the Messianic Israelite community, the Jew and the land of Israel are of great significance. They use the term “Israel” to indicate a unification of the two kingdoms, and use it to distinguish between the divided kingdoms. But claiming the church to be literally Israel in no way replaces the Jews. The Jews are still the literal Jews and there are prophecies concerning them which gives them great significance in future end time events. This belief only allows some prophecies which were made

⁴ Amillennial teaching

⁵ Post-millennial teaching

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to the Northern Kingdom to have their fulfillment in the church. Most of these revolve around repentance from idolatry, reuniting with the Southern Kingdom and joining them in defense of greater Israel. This is only a slight differentiation from the premillennial dispensationalist who believe the church will be joining together with the Jews to rule and reign with Christ in the millennial kingdom. This view allows for some cooperation and unity between Jews and Christians/Messianic Israelites prior to the return of Christ.

Since most of those professing the Messianic Israelite belief came from various denominations, there is a great diversity of belief concerning salvation for the Jew. Some people hold an evangelical stance like the premillennial dispensationalists, while others hold a view closer to a covenantal stance. Some may believe that the Jew has a covenant which gives eternal life. Others in the Messianic Israelite movement may feel a higher calling to build bridges, foregoing the temptation to try to convert. This is a new and building movement and will take time to stabilize. At this time it seems to be taking a less evangelical stance than their Messianic Jewish counterpart. Yet, they have a strong love for the Jewish people whom they consider to be their brothers and sisters, and they consider the state of Israel to be an important part of the future work of God.

From the Messianic Israelite position, the Jew still has his position as the holder of the scepter in the combined kingdom of Israel. Yehoshua will still be the ruling king. All specialness assigned to Judah as the people of God still applies. The Messianic Israelite also attributes specialness to the church as being the repenting Northern kingdom who had been lost into the nations. They believe them to be fulfilling prophecy as they return to the God of Israel from idolatry. They expect the church to ultimately reunite with Judah into one kingdom incorporating all 12 tribes. This unification will result in the return of Messiah. There is little difference in this last tenet from the way premillennial dispensationalists view the Millennial Kingdom. They also believe that the Jewish nation and the church will join to form the Millennial Kingdom. Yet, in the Messianic Israelite view, no one loses their special place in the eye of God and no one is suggesting a replacement for or devaluation of the other.

While the Hebrew Roots/Messianic Israelite Movement is in a process of development, both the dispensational and covenantal paradigms seem to be rejected by them. In following articles, we will deal with the results of this rejection and attempt to formulate a paradigm that seems to represent their view.

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