

Commentary — From the Margins

Replacement Theology

1.

Scholars will agree that the early Church and the early Church apologists taught some form of “replacement theology,” the teaching that the Christian Church has replaced natural Israel as the Holy nation of God, with the Christian Church evolving from a mid 1st-Century CE sect of Judaism to a separate and distinct theological paradigm that was “a logical outgrowth of late classical thought and, at the same time, an astonishingly brilliant fulfillment of the best traditions of ancient philosophy” (D. W. Robertson, Jr. “Translator’s Introduction.” *Augustine’s On Christian Doctrine*). Yes, the evolution of the Christian Church was away from Judaism and into previously uncharted paganism: before the Apostle John died, the Christian Church had ceased being *Christian* and had become an extension of philosophical paganism. Yet from Justin Martyr, who throughout his life wore his philosopher’s robes and who in 160 CE, in speaking to a Jew said, “The Scriptures are not yours but ours,” to Irenaeus who said, “Jews are disinherited from the grace of God,” to Tertullian who in his treatise, *Against the Jews*, said that God had rejected the Jews in favor of Christians, to Eusebius who argued that the Christian Church was the continuation of the Old Testament and had superseded Judaism, the early Christian Church in its youthful rebellion against God declared itself to be the true Israel, heir to the covenants of promise. This early Christian Church, which had not walked as Jesus walked since Rome sacked Jerusalem in 70 CE, argued that *Israel according to the flesh* had been cast away and that God had transferred His love for Israel to Christians.

There is certainly adequate scriptural support to argue that the Church is the successor to the covenants of promise:

1. Paul writes, “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29).
2. Elsewhere Paul writes, “For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith” (Rom 4:13).
3. After Jesus enters Jerusalem as the Passover Lamb of God, He tells the chief priests and elders of Israel, “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits” (Matt 21:43).
4. Paul writes, “For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter” (Rom 2:28-29).
5. Paul also writes, “If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches” (Rom 11:16). Paul goes on to say that *some* of the natural branches were broken off so that wild olive branches could be grafted onto this root of

righteousness, with these wild olive branches being Gentile converts. This root of righteousness is neither the Church nor Israel, but Christ Jesus. And if the natural branches are of Christ, then what the writer of Hebrews says applies: “For good news [the gospel of Christ] came to us just as to them [Israel in the wilderness], but the message they heard did not benefit them” (Heb 4:2). Therefore a partial hardening came over Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come to God (Rom 11:25); so until the fullness of the Gentiles has come to God, natural Israel will mostly remain as broken off branches.

In all of these points, the assumption is that the Church will walk as Jesus, an Observant Jew, walked (cf. 1 John 2:3-6; 1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17) ... Paul writes, “For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision” (Rom 2:25-16). Elsewhere he says,

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under the law but under grace. / What then? Are we to sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? (Rom 6:12-16)

The Christian who presents him or herself to sin as its willing servant has voluntarily given sin dominion over the person. This person is no longer under grace, but is under the law even if this person is a Gentile convert who was not before under the law.

Christ will not be mocked—and the person who voluntarily returns to sin after being set free through being born of spirit mocks Christ by not valuing His sacrifice enough to strive to keep the commandments, the reasonable expectation of everyone of the house of God. Therefore, the Church as the continuation of Israel bears no relationship to the visible entity in this world called *Christian* by the prince of this world ... Justin Martyr wore philosopher robes throughout his later life because he never ceased being a philosopher. He expressed love for Jesus, but he was never willing to do as Jesus said, a subject to which we will return.

Although the early Church, a practicing sect of Judaism as the Pharisees and Sadducees were, taught that through Jesus Old Testament prophecies pertaining to Israel were being and would be fulfilled, 19th-Century theological revisionists mostly abandoned replacement theology, the teaching that the Church superseded Israel as the holy nation of God, and taught instead that God would save Israel through the law but saves the Church through grace, making two paths to God. This heretical teaching expanded to make salvation a many spoke wheel by which persons of good character of all religions are saved, but has

recently contracted back to where only through Christ Jesus is a person saved. However, this teaching allows for Christianity to be a many spoke wheel by which good persons of every denomination are saved.

Replacement theology became entangled in civil governance early in the 4th-Century CE, and remained entangled even after Luther and Calvin separated themselves from the old Roman Church. As ancient Israel was a theocracy, Western European governance was theocratic until the Age of Enlightenment threatened to expose all theocracies to scientific criticism of the sort that trumps the Ptolemaic universe. And what becomes apparent is that the history of natural Israel [i.e., physically circumcised Israel] here on earth serves as an informing metaphor for the history of the Church [spiritually circumcised Israel] in the heavenly realm, where mortal men cannot enter to see the Church as God sees the Church.

In a salvation tango, the dance of love, the dance of dispensationalists with Judaism, replacement theology became an ugly concept; for if replacement theology is true—if the Christian Church is endtime Israel, the holy nation for which endtime prophecies about being recovered from captivity in the north country pertain—then the Christian Church must go into captivity and be scattered and then return to God and be recovered from the far corners of the world. Christianity will cease being “important” theologically until God sets His hand to recover the Church from where He scattered it. To dispensationalists, this cannot be! Therefore, in the minds of dispensationalists who were certain that they were theologically pure, replacement theology must be a false teaching that infected the early Church as the flu bug infects the nation every winter. And these Evangelical dispensationalists (and a few others who utterly lack spiritual understanding) have made replacement theology one of those dirty labels they can verbally hurl to shout down disciples advocating what the Apostle Paul taught about endtime Israel being the new creatures, born of spirit, that dwell in the tents of flesh of the old man.

2.

The arguments against replacement theology distill down to one point: God never says that natural Israel has been replaced by the Christian Church as His holy nation (Ex 19:5-6) or as His firstborn Son (Ex 4:22). This is true. Israel continues as the holy nation of God just as the covenants of promise mediated by Moses continue on even after the offense of circumcision has ended so that Gentiles will not balk when drawn and called by God. But not all who have descended from Israel belong to Israel (Rom 9:6). Natural branches have been broken off and wild olive branches have been grafted to the root of righteous (Rom 11:17-18), which isn't Israel but Christ Jesus, the last Adam. And in a really inadequate translation, Paul writes: “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring [seed]. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings [seeds],’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ” (Gal 3:16) ... the promises are to Christ, and to those who belong to Christ.

All of humankind has, in Christian theology, biologically descended from the first Adam and as such are of the house of Adam. Their paternal ancestry can be traced back to Adam—with one exception, Jesus of Nazareth, whose Father was

the *Logos*, *Theos*, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matt 22:32). Thus, Jesus was not born as a man into the house of Adam, for He was of the house of God.

Sin entered the world through one man, Adam (Rom 5:12), who covered Eve's transgression by being her head, her husband. Because of Adam's transgression, all of humankind has been consigned to disobedience so that God could have mercy on all (Rom 11:32), mercy coming in the form of being liberated from disobedience and given "life" residing in the tent of flesh of the old self. For the firstfruits of God, this giving of *life* (or being raised from the dead — John 5:21) began when Jesus breathed on ten of His disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit [πνεῦμα ἅγιον]" (John 20:22), and this giving of *life* will continue until He comes again to also give life to whom He will through the mortal flesh putting on immortality. So both the Father and the Son must give life to a person born physically of the house of Adam before this *person* will enter into the heavenly realm ... this person must mentally leave the house of Adam and begin to identify him or herself with the house of God, for the new creature dwelling within the tent of flesh—the new creature that is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek—is of God and of His house.

The *life* that the Father gives or will give to a person through receipt of His divine breath [πνεῦμα θεοῦ] was foreshadowed when this divine breath descended as a dove, lit and remained on the man Jesus of Nazareth (Matt 3:16), the only Son of the *Logos*. The man Jesus now became the beloved Son of the Father (v. 17) through receipt of a second life within the tent of flesh that was the man Jesus. Literally, Jesus was born of Mary as the only Son of the *Theos* of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and He became the firstborn Son of the Father, *Theon*, the Host of heaven, when the divine breath of the Most High descended upon Him as a dove to cause Him to be born again, or born a second time to fulfill all righteousness (v. 15).

Jesus was never of the house of Adam; He was not born consigned to disobedience. Thus, He was free from birth to keep the commandments of God—and by keeping the commandments, He did not sin, so death had no claim to His life. He was a mortal man, but not a man under sentence of death. He could walk on water because death had no claim on his life. He had to choose to be made sin—He had to choose to take on the sins of Israel—before He could die at Calvary. Thus, He chose to lay down His life for Israel, the second son of promise descended from the patriarch Abraham, to whom God had promised to make of him a great nation if he left his father's house (Gen 12:1-2) ... to be of a house is to be of a lineage, so every son of Adam is of the house of Adam, and every son of Terah was of the house of Terah. But Abraham, of the house of Terah, was told to leave his father's house, and by faith, Abraham [then still Abram] left his natural father's house where he was certain to receive an inheritance to journey into a Promise Land where he awaited the coming of the city [a house grown large] of God. Abraham left the house of Terah for the house of God.

The city for which Abraham waited was New Jerusalem, the house of God grown very large and glorified, the great nation promised to him. His descendants would be numbered through Christ Jesus, a life-giving spirit (1 Cor

15:45), the spiritual Abraham whose son of promise was a spiritual Isaac, according to Paul (Gal 4:21-31).

Every descendant of Abraham is of the house of Abraham, who was to become the father of many nations as well as the father of a single nation, two promises that are conjoined through Israel: every son of Israel is, now, of the house of Israel and is known simply by the name of the house, Israel. Therefore, *Israel* continues generation after generation regardless of righteousness and regardless of circumcision and regardless of biological ancestry, for Caleb was of Abraham through Esau but was not of Israel by biology. Yet Caleb represented the tribe of Judah as a spy into the Promised Land so it isn't and has not been biology that makes an Israelite, but adoption through choosing to live by faith as an Israelite; hence, not all of Israel belongs to Israel, for those who are Israel by biology but who do not choose to live by the commandments and statutes of God are not of Israel regardless of their ancestry.

Extending this argument Paul makes that was not well understood in the 1st-Century nor well understood today, every son of God is of the house of God; thus, Jesus as the beloved Son is of the house of God and is known simply by the name of that house, God. Likewise, disciples who have been born of spirit are sons of God and as such are of the house of God. Jesus uses this logic when He cites Psalm 82:6 to Jews determined to stone Him: Jesus said, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'?" If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming," because I said, "I am the Son of God"?" (John 10:34-36).

Those Jews who sought to kill Jesus knew they were not of the house of God. They claimed to be of the house of Abraham (John 8:39), not the house of God. And Jesus confirms that they were not of the house of God when He said they were of the house of the devil (v. 44).

Gentiles have been grafted into the household of God through faith that will have these *Gentiles living as Judeans* who believe that Jesus is Lord and that the Father raised Jesus from the dead. And there is the error in both so-called replacement theology and in all arguments against replacement theology: the visible (in this world) Christian Church is not of God. Just as the Pharisees of the 1st-Century were not of God (a claim that rabbinical Judaism will vigorously dispute), the Christian Church is neither of Israel nor of God, and hasn't been since mid 1st-Century CE.

How can the Christian Church not be of God? How, by what John writes: "Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ... Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil" (1 John 3:4, 8). ... Jesus said Pharisees were of the devil because they sought to kill Him, and John said lawless Christians are of the devil because they practice sinning. The defining characteristic of the visible Christian Church is its open transgression of the law, visible for all to see every Sunday morning.

It is, for Sabbatarian disciples, sometimes too easy to dismissed well-intended Sunday-observing Christians as being of the devil through their continued sinning, apparent by when they attempt to come into the presence of God. But John would have identified—going back farther than Justin Martyr—those who

practicing sinning by transgressing the Sabbath commandment as being of the devil, and again, this would place all the visible Christian Church in a similar relationship to Sabbatarian disciples as Pharisees had to Jesus and His disciples. Judaism, now, might be compared to the Sadducees.

Biological Israel is not replaced by another *Israel*, but is pruned by God. Its dead wood is stripped away to be burned. New branches, like Caleb who had about him a different spirit, have been grafted to the root of righteous so as to make the natural branches jealous (Rom 11:11, 14)—and no wild olive branch will make a natural branch jealous by continuing to live as a wild olive. Thus, the Gentile convert who will not live as a Judean (who will not live as a natural Israelite should have been living) is not of God but is of the devil, who has deceived the entire world (Rev 12:9).

The visible Christian Church has not and will not ever replace Israel as the holy nation of God, but—and this is a very large “but”—natural Israel is no longer the holy nation of God. The Church is; for long ago the prophet Jeremiah recorded, “Behold the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh—Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert who cut the corners of their hair, for all these are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart” (Jer 9:25-26). Those days are both still coming and are upon Judah and all of the house of Israel, in that circumcision of heart was offered to Israel as a condition of the second covenant, the Moab covenant, but Israel never turned to God by faith when in a far land and began to love God with heart and mind, keeping the commandments and all of God’s laws and statutes. Rather, a remnant of Israel returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the house of God by decree of Cyrus, king of Persia and king of Babylon. But this house lacked having the presence of God in it because the Ark of the Covenant was not returned, nor were the *Urim & Thummim*—this second temple did not know the presence of God until the man Jesus, twice born, entered it to cleanse it from the mercantile buying and selling that typifies the kingdom of this world (John 2:13-22). And then He entered at Passover rather than on *Yom Kipporim* [as *Yom Kipporim* is the compression of the Passover season when Israel eats *bread of affliction*—Jesus’ cleansing of the house of God began the spiritual fulfillment represented by Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread].

Understand! Jeremiah records, “Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the Lord, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land [Israel] and its inhabitants ... [t]his whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity” (25:8-9, 11-12). Although the physical king of Babylon was punished long ago, but not immediately after the seventy years, the spiritual king will not be punished until he is cast into the pit (Isa 14:4-21).

Cyrus isn’t king of the Media-Persian Empire when the seventy years transpire: Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, is (Dan 9:1-2). So the remnant of Israel that returned to Jerusalem to build for Cyrus a house for God (Ezra 1:1-2) by the

hand of Zerubbabel did not return after seventy years, but returned earlier. The first temple was razed and its debris burned in 586 BCE, and Zerubbabel's temple was dedicated in 516 BCE, exactly seventy years later, but a remnant of Israel had returned to Jerusalem more than two decades earlier—so a remnant of Israel was not absent from Jerusalem for seventy years. Rather the house of God in any form was absent for seventy years ... the remnant of Israel that returned to Judea as servants of the king of Babylon—Cyrus is identified as “king of Babylon” by Tattenai the governor of the province (Ezra 5:13)—were not the *house of God*; they were not of God; and they still were not of God when Jesus, centuries later, said they were of the devil, the prince of this world and the spiritual king of Babylon (again, Isa 14:4).

The tango of love that dispensationalists and Judaism perform nightly for the world to see and admire is the dance of the dead ... the prophet Haggai asks the priests about the law:

“If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?” The priest answered and said, “No.” Then Haggai said, “If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?” The priests answered and said, “It does become unclean.” Then Haggai answered and said, “So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, declares the Lord, and so with every work of their hands. And what they offer there is unclean [Israel was a *dead* nation]. Now then, consider from this day onward. Before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the Lord, how did you fare? ... I struck you and all your products of your toil with blight and with mildew and with hail, yet you did not turn to me, declares the Lord. Consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid ... from this day on I will bless you.” (2:11-19)

The remnant of Israel that returned to Jerusalem were an unclean people, unclean through touching a dead body, that of the nation of Israel in Babylon. Zerubbabel was the holy meat hid in the fold of the garment, but this Zerubbabel wasn't the man by that name but Christ Jesus, for Jesus is the reality or substance of all of the Old Testament. Therefore, when foundational stones for the temple were laid, blessing would return to Israel but only on the condition of obedience.

The house of God is the lineage of God, and this “house” goes from being a physical structure built of timber and stone to being the tents of flesh in which the divine breath of God [πνεῦμα θεοῦ] dwells, what Paul understood but others apparently did not (1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16). Likewise, Israel goes from being a physically circumcised nation to being the spiritually circumcised nation, with the former forming the lively representation (Jonathon Edwards' words) of the Church. And the physical Ark of the Covenant that lay under the Mercy Seat goes to being disciples in whom are the commandments of God written on two tablets of flesh, the heart and the mind, the jar of manna in the form of the Spirit of Christ, and Aaron's budded staff in the form of the promise of resurrection.

Beside the Ark of the Covenant was the book of Deuteronomy as a witness against Israel; beside or in the hand of every disciple is the book of Deuteronomy as a witness against every Christian (John 5:45). Jesus said, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?” (vv. 46-47).

Only one tribe of Israel served in the physical house of God: the sons of Levi. Today, the inner new creature born of spirit as a son of God is the spiritual equivalent to a son of Levi, not any of the other tribes of Israel.

As the Promised Land shrank through Israel’s lawlessness until it was no larger than the polis Jerusalem before Nebuchadnezzar razed the city (Ezek 12:9, 21-28), Israel as the firstborn son of God (again, Ex 4:22) shrank until it was no larger than the man Jesus of Nazareth when He entered the temple as both the only Son of *Theos* (John 3:16) and the firstborn Son of *Theon*—to repeat, the circumcised nation of Israel left Egypt as the first son of “I Am,” but this firstborn son broke covenant with the Lord over and over again, so Israel was sent away from God and out of His presence; God’s glory left the temple not to return until Jesus as the Wave Sheaf Offering entered in the presence of the Most High. Here on earth, not until Jesus as the firstborn (and only) Son of the *Logos* who was *Theos* and was with *Theon* from the beginning (John 1:1-2) entered the second temple did *Israel* return to the house of God. Glory did not return to the house of God until the glorified Jesus breathed on ten of His disciples and said, *Receive the Holy Spirit*. Then, at that moment, the glory that the prophet Ezekiel had seen leave returned.

And Israel was no larger than the ten upon whom the glorified Jesus had breathed, thereby directly transferring the Holy Spirit to them.

All ten upon whom Jesus breathed were Galileans, Israelites by birth and by faith. Paul was an Israelite by birth and by faith. The Circumcision Faction with whom Paul battled were Israelites by birth but here problems enter, for they professed to be of Christ but they lacked spiritual understanding. They would have made dispensationalists wonderful tango partners. There were like the alleged scholar, a Sabbatarian who, when a disciple mentions that Israel is today a nation circumcised of heart, a nation that is the Christian Church, immediately responds with some variation of, “*That’s replacement theology, you have to be careful of that.*”

Yes, a person has to handle replacement theology carefully, for the physicality of the creation concealed the *Logos*, the beginning and end (Rev 22:13), from Israel throughout its recorded history (Eccl 3:11), leaving natural Jews out of covenant with the Creator-of-all-that-has-been-made. Inevitably, those alleged scholars who are too fearful of replacement theology to pick it up and handle it as mature disciples will end up claiming that the Father is the Creator, not the Son—or these alleged scholars will take the Passover sacraments on some night other than the night on which Jesus was betrayed, thereby leaving themselves with no covering for their sins other than their own obedience. They will feel good about themselves, but they are spiritual bastards, claiming the Most High as their Father but in reality they are of the Adversary.

When Israel as the firstborn son of God left Egypt, it was a nation of about 600,000 adult males of which only two entered into the Promised Land, and one

of these two was of Esau by birth and Israel only by adoption. So by biological descent, the firstborn natural son of God that left Egypt entered into the Promised Land as one man, Joshua. And Israel, the firstborn son of God, spiritually entered into the Father's presence as only one man, Jesus of Nazareth. The second "man" to enter into the Father's presence will be adopted into Israel by faith, and this second man—a spiritual Caleb—will have a different spirit about him than have all of those others who today say they are of God.

Disciples, regardless of their biological heritage, will only enter into God's presence through adoption by faith, this adoption displayed through the presence of a *different spirit* that has them believing God.

The natural descendants of Israel are as the nation that left Egypt. They are of Israel but they do not belong to Israel, for Israel is no larger than the Christian Church, which is not today visible in this world. What is visible is the Trojan horse built by Greek philosophers to win by deceit a empire from Rome that Greeks could not win by swords or triremes, a spiritual horse like the wood horse Odysseus built so long ago ... beware of Greeks bearing gifts, especially the promise of salvation.

At another time, more will be said about physically circumcised Israel being the spiritually lifeless shadow of the nation that is today circumcised of heart, with the first Elijah's lament that he alone was all that remained of the faithful nation serving as the shadow and type of the Church prior to life being returned to the Body of Christ. Until then, let those who fear to handle *replacement theology*—the serpent isn't in the theology, but in the weeds surrounding the Promised Land—ask to have their diapers changed, for they are spiritual newborns regardless of how many years they have been hiding in the bushes.

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