

VARIOUS FORMS OF REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY

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Some replacement theologians prefer the title “fulfillment theology” in describing their view of Israel’s current and future role in relation to the church. Since “supersessionism” is a term that describes both “replacement theology” and “fulfillment theology,” that term can be used interchangeably with “replacement” and “fulfillment” terminology in describing various forms which the two theologies may take. Supersessionism is the view that the NT church is the new and/or true Israel that has forever superseded the nation Israel as the people of God. It may take the form of “punitive supersessionism,” i.e., God is punishing Israel for her rejection of Christ. Or it may be in the form of “economic supersessionism,” i.e., it was God’s plan for Israel’s role as the people of God to expire with the coming of Christ and be replaced by the church. The final form of supersessionism is “structural supersessionism,” i.e., the OT Scriptures are largely indecisive in formulation of Christian conviction about God’s work as consummator and redeemer. Strong supersessionists hold that Israel has no future in the plan of God, but moderate supersessionists see a divine plan for the future salvation of the Jews as a group, but not their national restoration to the promised land. This last view holds that Israel is the object of God’s irrevocable gift of grace and calling, but that such a role guarantees them no national blessing as the OT promised. It assures them only of becoming part of the church as the people of God.

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Few theological issues are as hotly debated as the Israel/church issue. It is a constant topic of debate between covenant theologians and dispensationalists. More recently new covenant theologians have thrown their theological hat into the ring with their views on the Israel/church relationship. At issue is whether the New Testament church replaces, fulfills, and/or displaces national Israel as the people of God. And if so, to what extent does this affect national Israel?

Giving a title to the view that the church replaces or supersedes Israel as the people of God has not been without controversy or debate. As Marten Woudstra observes, “The question whether it is more proper to speak of a replacement of the

Jews by the Christian church or of an extension (continuation) of the OT people of God into that of the NT church is variously answered.”¹

A common designation used in recent scholarly literature to identify this position is “supersessionism.” The term “supersessionism” comes from two Latin words: *super* (“on” or “upon”) and *sedere* (“to sit”). Thus it carries the idea of one person sitting on another’s chair, displacing the latter.² The title “replacement theology” is often viewed as a synonym for “supersessionism.”³ This title appears to be the most common designation in popular literature, at least for now.

The label, “replacement theology,” does not appear to be well received by some. Several have noted that they would rather be known as “fulfillment theologians” or some other title that is more positive. Steve Lehrer, for example, shies away from the term “replacement theology” since he does not see the church replacing the nation Israel. He says, “Instead I would rather use the term ‘fulfillment theology.’ Israel was simply a picture of the true people of God, which the church fulfills.”⁴ This sentiment has been expressed by others as well.

Unfortunately for those who desire a different label, apparently the horse is already out of the barn.⁵ The title “replacement theology” is well established and does not appear to be going away any time soon. Plus, many theologians who espouse a supersessionist view have used the terms “replace” and “replacement” in regard to Israel and the church to warrant the title “replacement theology.” It is not simply the case that nonsupersessionists have imposed the title “replacement theology” against the will of supersessionists. Those who espouse the supersessionist view are partly to credit or blame for this title since they often have used replacement terminology themselves. Thus, an argument against the designation “replacement theology” is not

¹Marten H. Woudstra, “Israel and the Church: A Case for Continuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1988) 237. Woudstra believes that the terms “replacement” and “continuation” are both acceptable and consistent with biblical teaching. See also G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) 55.

²Clark M. Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel: Post-Holocaust Church Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993) 268 n. 9.

³Diprose views the titles “replacement theology” and “supersessionism” as synonymous. He also notes that the title “replacement theology” is a “relatively new term in Christian theology” (Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel in the Development of Christian Thought* (Rome: Istituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, 2000) 31 n. 2. This present article treats the titles “supersessionism” and “replacement theology” as synonyms. This writer acknowledges, though, that these designations may not be entirely satisfactory to those who view the church more as the *continuation* or *fulfillment* of national Israel. See Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 333-34; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999) 1058-59.

⁴Steve Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* (n.p.: Steve Lehrer, 2006) 203. Lehrer is a leading representative of New Covenant Theology.

⁵The title “amillennialism” is another theological term that makes some unhappy. Jay Adams has pointed out that this is a negative term since the term literally means “no millennium” and is mostly a term in reaction to the premillennial view of the millennium. Adam’s suggestion that amillennialism be replaced with “realized millennialism” has been unsuccessful.

in order. For purposes of this article, though, the designation “supersessionism” will often be used because this term can encompass the concepts of “replace” or “fulfill.” Thus, this is the word that will be used most frequently in this article.

Defining Supersessionism

Several theologians have offered definitions of “supersessionism” or “replacement theology.” According to Walter C. Kaiser, “Replacement theology . . . declared that the Church, Abraham’s spiritual seed, had replaced national Israel in that it had transcended and fulfilled the terms of the covenant given to Israel, which covenant Israel had lost because of disobedience.”⁶ Diprose defines replacement theology as the view that “the Church completely and permanently replaced ethnic Israel in the working out of God’s plan and as recipient of Old Testament promises to Israel.”⁷

Richard Kendall Soulen argues that supersessionism is linked with how some view the coming of Jesus Christ: “According to this teaching [supersessionism], God chose the Jewish people after the fall of Adam in order to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus Christ, the Savior. After Christ came, however, the special role of the Jewish people came to an end and its place was taken by the church, the new Israel.”⁸ Herman Ridderbos asserts that there is a positive and negative element to the supersessionist view: “On the one hand, in a positive sense it presupposes that the church springs from, is born out of Israel; on the other hand, the church takes the place of Israel as the historical people of God.”⁹

These definitions from Kaiser, Diprose, Soulen, and Ridderbos appear consistent with the statements of those who explicitly declare that the church is the replacement of Israel. Bruce K. Waltke, for instance, declares that the New Testament teaches the “hard fact that national Israel and its law have been permanently replaced by the church and the New Covenant.”¹⁰ According to Hans K. LaRondelle, the New Testament affirms that “Israel would no longer be the people of God and would be *replaced* by a people that would accept the Messiah and His message of the kingdom of God.”¹¹ LaRondelle believes this “people” is the church

⁶Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “An Assessment of ‘Replacement Theology’: The Relationship Between the Israel of the Abrahamic–Davidic Covenant and the Christian Church,” *Mishkan* 21 (1994):9.

⁷Diprose, *Israel in the Development of Christian Thought* 2.

⁸Richard Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 1–2.

⁹Ridderbos, *Paul* 333–34.

¹⁰Bruce K. Waltke, “Kingdom Promises as Spiritual,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity* 274. He also states, “The Jewish *nation* no longer has a place as the special people of God; that place has been taken by the Christian community which fulfills God’s purpose for Israel” (275, emphasis in the original).

¹¹Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1983) 101 (emphasis in the original).

who replaces “the Christ-rejecting nation.”¹² Loraine Boettner, too, writes, “It may seem harsh to say that ‘God is done with the Jews.’ But the fact of the matter is that He is through with them as a unified national group having anything more to do with the evangelization of the world. That mission has been taken from them and given to the Christian Church (Matt. 21:43).”¹³

When comparing the definitions of Kaiser, Diprose, Soulen, and Ridderbos with the statements of those who openly promote a replacement view, it appears that supersessionism is based on two core beliefs: (1) the nation Israel has somehow completed or forfeited its status as the people of God and will never again possess a unique role or function apart from the church; and (2) the church is now the true Israel that has permanently replaced or superseded national Israel as the people of God.

Supersessionism, then, in the context of Israel and the church, is the view that *the New Testament church is the new and/or true Israel that has forever superseded the nation Israel as the people of God*. The result is that the church has become the sole inheritor of God’s covenant blessings originally promised to national Israel in the OT. This rules out a future restoration of the nation Israel with a unique identity, role, and purpose that is distinct in any way from the Christian church.¹⁴

Variations within Supersessionism

Though all supersessionists affirm that the church has superseded national Israel as the people of God, variations exist within supersessionism. Three major forms of supersessionism that have been recognized are punitive supersessionism, economic supersessionism, and structural supersessionism.

Punitive Supersessionism

“Punitive” or “retributive” supersessionism emphasizes Israel’s *disobedience* and *punishment* by God as the reason for its displacement as the people of God. Or in other words, Israel is replaced by the church because the nation acted wickedly and has forfeited the right to be the people of God. As Gabriel J. Fackre explains, this form of supersessionism “holds that the rejection of Christ both eliminates Israel from God’s covenant love and provokes divine retribution.”¹⁵ With punitive supersession-

¹²Ibid.

¹³Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1957) 89-90. According to Bright, “The New Testament triumphantly hails the Church as Israel . . . the true heir of Israel’s hope” (John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1953] 226).

¹⁴This writer uses this term “restoration” strategically and by it he means more than just a salvation of Israel. By “restoration” he means a return of Israel to her land and a role to the nations in an earthly millennium that is not the same as that of the church as a whole.

¹⁵Gabriel J. Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 148.

ism, according to Soulen, “God abrogates God’s covenant with Israel . . . on account of Israel’s rejection of Christ and the gospel.”¹⁶ Because the Jews reject Christ, “God in turn angrily rejects and punishes the Jews.”¹⁷ In sum, with punitive supersessionism, God has rejected the Jews because of their disobedience and their rejection of Christ.

Belief in punitive supersessionism was common in the Patristic Era. Origen (c. 185–254) espoused a form of punitive supersessionism: “And we say with confidence that they [the Jews] will never be restored to their former condition. For they committed a crime of the most unhallowed kind. . . .”¹⁸ Lactantius (c. 304–313) also asserted that the Jews were abandoned by God because of their disobedience:

For unless they [the Jews] did this [repent], and laying aside their vanities, return to their God, it would come to pass that He would change His covenant, that is, bestow the inheritance of eternal life upon foreign nations, and collect to Himself a more faithful people out of those who were aliens by birth. . . . On account of these impieties of theirs He cast them off forever.¹⁹

Punitive supersessionism was also held by Martin Luther. For him, the destruction of Jerusalem was proof of God’s permanent rejection of Israel:

“Listen, Jew, are you aware that Jerusalem and your sovereignty, together with your temple and priesthood, have been destroyed for over 1,460 years?” . . . For such ruthless wrath of God is sufficient evidence that they assuredly have erred and gone astray. . . . Therefore this work of wrath is proof that the Jews, surely rejected by God, are no longer his people, and neither is he any longer their God.²⁰

Economic Supersessionism

A second form of supersessionism is “economic” supersessionism. This view is not as harsh as punitive supersessionism since it does not emphasize Israel’s disobedience and punishment as the primary reason for its displacement as the people of God. Instead, it focuses on God’s plan for the people of God to transfer from an ethnic group (Israel) to a universal group not based on ethnicity (church). In other words, it was God’s plan from the beginning that Israel’s role as the people of God would expire with the coming of Christ and the establishment of the church.

According to Soulen, economic supersessionism is the view that “carnal Israel’s history is providentially ordered from the outset to be taken up into the spiritual

¹⁶Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* 30.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.22, ANF 4.506.

¹⁹Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 4.11, ANF 7.109.

²⁰Martin Luther, “On the Jews and Their Lies,” in *LW* 47:138–39. See also *WA* 53:418.

church.”²¹ With this form of supersessionism, national Israel corresponds to Christ’s church in a merely prefigurative and carnal way. Thus, Christ, with His advent, “brings about the obsolescence of carnal Israel and inaugurates the age of the spiritual church.”²²

With economic supersessionism, Israel is not replaced primarily because of her disobedience but rather because her role in the history of redemption expired with the coming of Jesus. It is now superseded by the arrival of a new spiritual Israel—the Christian church.

For those who adopt an economic supersessionist view, the key figure in bringing about this expiration of national Israel’s role in redemptive history is Jesus Christ. According to Rudolf Bultmann, “The new *aeon* has dawned in the Christ-event.”²³ As a result, “The people of God, the true Israel, is present in the Christian community.”²⁴ Because of this “Christ-event,” the people of God is no longer an “empirical historical entity.”²⁵

Economic supersessionism, according to Soulen, “logically entails the ontological, historical, and moral obsolescence of Israel’s existence after Christ.”²⁶ With His coming, Jesus, the ultimate Israelite, fulfills all God’s plans and promises regarding Israel. All those who are in Jesus, then, are the true Israel. This appears to be the approach of Vern S. Poythress:

Because Christ is an Israelite and Christians are in union with Christ, Christians partake of the benefits promised to Israel and Judah in Jeremiah. With whom is the new covenant made? It is made with Israel and Judah. Hence it is made with Christians by virtue of Christ the Israelite. Thus one might say that Israel and Judah themselves undergo a transformation at the first coming of Christ, because Christ is the final, supremely faithful Israelite. Around him all true Israel gathers.²⁷

Though punitive supersessionism was popular in the early church, several

²¹Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* 181 n. 6.

²²Ibid., 29.

²³Rudolf Bultmann, “Prophecy and Fulfillment,” in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. Claus Westermann, trans. James C. G. Greig (Richmond, Va.: John Knox, 1969) 71.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* 30. Dubois writes, “Now that the messiah has come, the church—*versus Israel*—has taken the place of the ‘old’ Israel and the Jewish people no longer has any reason to occupy the historic land of Israel” (Marcel J. Dubois, “Israel and Christian Self-Understanding,” in *Voices From Jerusalem: Jews and Christians Reflect on the Holy Land*, eds. David Burrell and Yehezkel Landau [New York: Paulist, 1992] 65 [emphasis in the original]).

²⁷Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 2d. ed. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1994) 106. See also John W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1972) 106-7.

early church fathers also espoused economic supersessionism.²⁸ Melito of Sardis, for example, declared,

The people [Israel] was precious before the church arose, and the law was marvelous before the gospel was elucidated. But when the church arose and the gospel took precedence the model was made void, conceding its power to the reality. . . . The people was made void when the church arose.²⁹

A more recent advocate of economic supersessionism was Karl Barth.³⁰ He stated,

The first Israel, constituted on the basis of physical descent from Abraham, has fulfilled its mission now that the Saviour of the world has sprung from it and its Messiah has appeared. Its members can only accept this fact with gratitude, and in confirmation of their own deepest election and calling attach themselves to the people of this Saviour, their own King, whose members the Gentiles are now called to be as well. Its mission as a natural community has now run its course and cannot be continued or repeated.³¹

In line with an economic supersessionist viewpoint, N. T. Wright asserts that “Israel’s purpose had come to its head in Jesus’ work.”³² As a result “Those who now belonged to Jesus’ people . . . claimed to be the *continuation of Israel in a new situation.*”³³ Wright also argues that, “Jesus intended those who responded to him to see themselves as the true, restored Israel.”³⁴

Structural Supersessionism

According to Soulen there is a third form of supersessionism—*structural supersessionism*. This is a deeper form of supersessionism than both the punitive and economic positions, he claims, because it involves how the unity of the Christian

²⁸Pelikan points out that Gen 49:10 was sometimes used by the early fathers as evidence that the “historic mission of Israel” came to an “end with the coming of Jesus” (Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* [100-600], vol. 1, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971] 560). Cf. Justin, *First Apology* 32, ANF 1:173.

²⁹Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha*, trans. S. G. Hall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979) 21.

³⁰According to Soulen, “Barth’s theology of consummation embodies the logic of economic supersessionism as clearly as any in the history of the church. The incarnation brings Israel’s history to a conclusion in principle, after which Israel’s sole legitimate destiny is to be absorbed into the spiritual church” (*The God of Israel and Christian Theology* 92-93).

³¹Karl Barth, *CD* III/2 584.

³²N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 457.

³³Ibid. (emphasis in the original). According to Wright, these who make up the redefined Israel were able to draw upon Israel’s images, read Israel’s Scriptures and “fulfil Israel’s vocation on behalf of the world” (457-58).

³⁴N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 316 (emphasis in the original).

canon has been understood:

The problem of supersessionism in Christian theology goes beyond the explicit teaching that the church has displaced Israel as God's people in the economy of salvation. At a deeper level, the problem of supersessionism coincides with the way in which Christians have traditionally understood the theological and narrative unity of the Christian canon as a whole.³⁵

Whereas punitive and economic supersessionism are "explicit doctrinal perspectives," structural supersessionism concerns how the standard canonical narrative as a whole has been perceived.³⁶ According to Soulen, "Structural supersessionism refers to the narrative logic of the standard model whereby it renders the Hebrew Scriptures largely indecisive for shaping Christian convictions about how God's works as Consummator and as Redeemer engage humankind in universal and enduring ways."³⁷

Soulen argues that the standard canonical narrative model, which the church has accepted since Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, turns on four key episodes: (1) God's intention to create the first parents; (2) the fall; (3) Christ's incarnation and the inauguration of the church; and (4) the final consummation.³⁸ He says two facts stand out from the narrative content of this standard model.

First, the foreground of this standard model emphasizes God's engagement with human creation in "cosmic and universal terms."³⁹ Second, the foreground of this model "completely neglects the Hebrew Scriptures with the exception of Genesis 1–3!"⁴⁰ The standard model tells how God engaged Adam and Eve as Consummator and how God's consummating plan for them was disrupted at the fall. The story, however, then "leaps to the Apostolic Witness" and the "deliverance of humankind from the fall through Jesus Christ."⁴¹

Thus, according to Soulen, God's purposes as Consummator and Redeemer "engage human creation in a manner that simply outflanks the greater part of the Hebrew Scriptures and, above all, their witness to God's history with the people of Israel."⁴² What is the result of this leap over the Hebrew Scriptures? God's identity as the God of Israel and His history with the Jewish people "become largely

³⁵Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* 33.

³⁶Ibid., 181 n. 6.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid., 31.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., 32.

⁴²Ibid.

indecisive for the Christian conception of God.”⁴³ Craig Blaising states that the “structural nature of supersessionism” has established “the deep set tradition of excluding ethnic, national Israel from the theological reading of Scripture.”⁴⁴

It appears that Soulen is claiming that supersessionists have adopted a hermeneutical approach that ignores or removes the Hebrew scriptures of the OT from having a voice. Clearly, those who hold a supersessionist view will deny the claim of Soulen or call it something different from “structural supersessionism.”

Supersessionism and the Future of Israel

In light of the discussion so far, it might seem natural to assume that supersessionism always leads to the view that Israel has absolutely no future whatsoever in the plan of God. God is done with Israel and that’s that. Though this certainly is the case for some supersessionists, others hold to or are open to some future significance for Israel as a nation or the Jews as a group.

Two terms are important for understanding what some supersessionists believe about Israel. These terms are *salvation* and *restoration*. In short, some supersessionists believe there will be a future *salvation* of Israel, but this salvation does not mean a *restoration* of Israel.

So what is the difference between a salvation of Israel and a restoration of Israel? Belief in a salvation of the nation Israel means that in the last days the Jews as a group will believe in Christ and be saved. In short, salvation means simply that—many Jews will believe in Christ and be saved. The concept of restoration on the other hand includes the ideas of Israel being replanted in her land and given a unique role and mission to the nations. A restoration of Israel means that Israel will have a role and a place of prominence that is not shared with any other group, including the church.

Those who are nonsupersessionists believe in both concepts. They believe Israel as a nation will be saved and they also believe Israel will be restored to a place of prominence among the nations.

Some supersessionists do not believe in either a salvation or restoration of Israel. Other supersessionists believe in a salvation of Israel, but do not believe in a restoration of Israel. No supersessionists believe in a restoration of Israel. In fact, belief in a restoration of Israel is the main factor that distinguishes all supersessionists from all nonsupersessionists.

In regard to Israel’s future then, there are two major variations on the future of Israel among supersessionism. “Strong” supersessionism asserts that Israel will not experience salvation as a nation. Moderate supersessionism, though, holds that the nation Israel will experience a salvation. Thus, the major distinguishing factor among supersessionists is whether they believe in a future salvation of Israel or not. Strong

⁴³Ibid., 33.

⁴⁴Craig A. Blaising, “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question,” *JETS* 44/3 (2001):442.

supersessionists say “No” to a future salvation of Israel. Moderate supersessionists say “Yes” to a future salvation of Israel.

Moderate Supersessionism

Below are statements from various moderate supersessionists who hold that the church is the new Israel but still hold to a future for national Israel. Ridderbos, for instance, believes there is “tension-filled unity” concerning Israel’s rejection and its election.⁴⁵ He asserts that, “the church takes the place of Israel as the historical people of God.”⁴⁶ For him, “This means a new definition of the people of God, and likewise a new concept of Israel.”⁴⁷ This belief, though, does not lead him to conclude that the historical people of Israel have permanently lost their role in the history of redemption.⁴⁸ For Ridderbos, the historical bond between God and Israel continues to be maintained with real significance:

Thus, on one hand Paul is able to see the church of the gentiles as endowed with all the privileges and blessings of Israel, and to see it occupy the place of unbelieving Israel, and yet on the other hand to uphold to the full the continuation of God’s original redemptive intentions with Israel as the historical people of God.⁴⁹

According to Ridderbos, this tension regarding Israel’s rejection and election is not inconsistent: “There is therefore no contradiction between the definition of the essence of the New Testament church as the people of God and holding to Israel as the object of God’s irrevocable gift of grace and calling.”⁵⁰

This dialectical approach concerning Israel’s acceptance and rejection is found often in church history. Tertullian, for example, declared that the church had overcome Israel as the people of God and that Israel had been “divorced” by God.⁵¹ Yet he also encouraged Christians to “rejoice” at the coming “restoration of Israel.”⁵²

John Y. B. Hood asserts that there was a “dualistic view” concerning the fate of the Jews among theologians of the Middle Ages.⁵³ According to Hood, “Medieval Christians believed Jews would eventually accept Christ and be saved, but they also

⁴⁵Ridderbos, *Paul* 356.

⁴⁶Ibid., 333-34.

⁴⁷Ibid., 334.

⁴⁸Ibid., 355.

⁴⁹Ibid., 360–61.

⁵⁰Ibid., 360.

⁵¹Tertullian, *PL* 2:598.

⁵²Ibid., 2:996.

⁵³John Y. B. Hood, *Aquinas and the Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1995) xii.

saw them as dangerous infidels who had been rejected and punished by God.”⁵⁴ Hood notes that Thomas Aquinas, like other medieval theologians of his day, accepted the supersessionism theory as a “given,” yet Aquinas also held to a future salvation of the Jews.⁵⁵ Aquinas attempted to deal with the “dualities” of this view. As Hood states, “He [Aquinas] made an effort to explain how it was possible for Jews to be at the same time chosen *and* rejected, ignorant *and* malicious Christ-killers, damned *and* destined for salvation.”⁵⁶

John Calvin’s views on Israel also appear to evidence a rejection/acceptance tension. According to Willem VanGemeren, “Some have seen the utter rejection of Israel in Calvin’s writing, whereas others have also viewed the hope for national Israel.”⁵⁷ Williamson, for example, believes there is a tension in Calvin’s writings on this issue when he states, “On the one hand, Calvin strongly insisted that God’s promise to and covenant with the people Israel was unconditional, unbreakable, and gracious. . . . On the other hand, Calvin often makes statements exactly opposing the above.”⁵⁸

At times, Calvin made statements consistent with supersessionism. For him, the “all Israel” who will be saved in Rom 11:26 is a reference to the church composed of Jews and Gentiles.⁵⁹ He also took the interpretation that the “Israel of God” in Gal 6:16 refers to “all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, who were united into one church.”⁶⁰ At other times, though, Calvin made statements that seem to indicate he believed in some form of a future for the Jewish people. For example, in his commentary on Isa 59:20, he stated,

Paul quotes this passage, (Rom. xi. 26,) in order to shew that there is still some remaining hope among the Jews; although from their unconquerable obstinacy it might be inferred that they were altogether cast off and doomed to eternal death. But because God is continually mindful of his covenant, and “his gifts and calling are without repentance” (Rom. xi. 29), Paul justly concludes that it is impossible that there shall not at length be some remnant that come to Christ, and obtain that salvation which he has procured. Thus

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Aquinas believed in a future conversion of the Jews based on his view of Romans 11. See Thomas Aquinas, *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Super Epistolam B. Pauli ad Romanos lectura*, 11.4 (<http://www.unav.es/filosofia/alarcon/cro05.html> [accessed January 26, 2004]). Especially significant is the statement in which Aquinas asserted that Paul believed all Jews will be saved in a general sense.

⁵⁶Hood, *Aquinas and the Jews*, xii (emphases in the original).

⁵⁷Willem VanGemeren, “Israel as the Hermeneutical Crux in the Interpretation of Prophecy,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45/1 (1983):142.

⁵⁸Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel* 131.

⁵⁹John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. Ross Mackenzie, eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) 255.

⁶⁰John Calvin, “Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians,” *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 21, trans. William Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844–56; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999) 186.

the Jews must at length be collected along with the Gentiles that out of both “there may be one fold” under Christ. (John x. 16). . . . Hence we have said that Paul infers that he [Christ] could not be the redeemer of the world, without belonging to some Jews, whose fathers he had chosen, and to whom this promise was directly addressed.⁶¹

More recently, a dualistic view of Israel can be found in the writings of George Ladd. Ladd asserted that the church is now the new “spiritual Israel.”⁶² Yet he also believed, “The New Testament clearly affirms the salvation of literal Israel.”⁶³ He bases this conclusion on his study of Romans 11. Commenting on Rom 11:26 and its statement that “all Israel will be saved,” Ladd declared, “It is difficult to escape the conclusion that this means literal Israel.”⁶⁴

Millard Erickson too holds that the church is the new Israel, yet he also believes in a salvation of national Israel: “To sum up then: the church is the new Israel. It occupies the place in the new covenant that Israel occupied in the old. . . . There is a special future coming for national Israel, however, through large-scale conversion to Christ and entry into the church.”⁶⁵ He also says, “There is, however, a future for national Israel. They are still the special people of God.”⁶⁶

Wayne Grudem, in his discussion of Israel and the church, espouses a supersessionist view when he states that “many New Testament verses . . . understand the church as the ‘new Israel’ or new ‘people of God.’”⁶⁷ Yet he also declares that the Jews have a future in the plan of God: “I affirm the conviction that Rom. 9–11 teaches a future large-scale conversion of the Jewish people.”⁶⁸ Karl Rahner said Israel still possesses some role in salvation history: “The church is made up of Jews and pagans. . . . But the unfinished role of Israel in salvation history is also recognized (cf. Rom. 9–11).”⁶⁹

As these quotations show, it is possible to believe that the church is the new Israel while still holding to a large-scale conversion of the Jews. This salvation, though, is usually viewed as being in conjunction with an incorporation into the Christian church. Though affirming a future salvation of the Jews, supersessionists do not see this salvation as inferring any special role for Israel apart from the church.

⁶¹John Calvin, “Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah,” in *Calvin’s Commentaries* 8:269.

⁶²George Eldon Ladd, “Historic Premillennialism,” in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1977) 25.

⁶³Ibid., 28.

⁶⁴Ibid., 27.

⁶⁵Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999) 1053.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 861.

⁶⁸Ibid., 861 n. 17.

⁶⁹Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury, 1978) 338.

As Erickson explains,

In Romans 9 and Galatians 3, for example, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Paul regarded the church, Jew and Gentile alike, as the true heir to the promises originally made to national Israel. It does appear that there will be a period of special favor toward the Jews and that they will in large numbers turn to God. It seems likely, however, that this will be brought about through their being converted and integrated into the church rather than through God resuming the relationship He had with them, as the chosen or covenant nation, in the Old Testament.⁷⁰

So in addition to affirming the existence of three variations of supersessionism—punitive, economic, and structural—it is also valid to affirm that there are variations within supersessionism on the future of Israel. A stronger form of supersessionism holds that there is no special future whatsoever for national Israel or ethnic Jews as a group. A milder or more moderate form of supersessionism holds that the church supersedes national Israel as the people of God, but it also asserts that the future will bring an *en masse* salvation of Jews into the Christian church.

Conclusion

As the previous discussion has shown, replacement theology or supersessionism is not a ‘one size fits all’ perspective. There are variations within this view. Punitive supersessionism emphasizes Israel’s disobedience as the reason for its displacement as the people of God. Economic supersessionism emphasizes that national Israel’s role as the people of God expired with the coming of the New Testament church. Structural supersessionism is an approach to the canon that minimizes the role of the Hebrew scriptures. Within supersessionism strong and mild forms are discernible. Strong supersessionism does not believe in a future salvation or restoration of Israel. Mild supersessionism believes in a salvation of the nation Israel but no restoration to a place of prominence. Thus, any discussion of supersessionism or replacement theology should take into account the various nuances that exist within the supersessionist view.

⁷⁰Millard J. Erickson, *A Basic Guide to Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 123–24.