

A Deadly, Anti-Israel Theological Error

The idea that God is finished with the Jewish people as a nation and that the church has replaced Israel in God's plan is not only a serious theological error. It is a deadly one as well.

It was this false theology that helped fuel the fires of Jew hatred in one of the early church's most respected leaders, John Chrysostom (347-407), who once said, "God hates the Jews, and on Judgment Day will say to those who sympathize with them: 'Depart from Me, for you have had intercourse with My murderers!' Flee, then, from their assemblies, fly from their houses, and hold their synagogue in hatred and aversion."

Without this erroneous theology, the Crusades would never have taken place 700 years later.

It was this false theology that helped fuel the fires of Jew hatred in the great reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546), who gave this counsel to the German princes of his day: "First, to set fire to their synagogues or schools. ... Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed. ... Instead they might be lodged under a roof or in a barn, like the gypsies. ... Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them. Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb." (For many more examples, see my book *Our Hands Are Stained With Blood*.)

Luther's murderous words were put into action by none other than Adolph Hitler, beginning the night of Nov. 9, 1938, which is called *Krystallnacht*, the Night of Broken Glass, when, according to Nazi officer Reinhard Heydrich, "815 [Jewish]

shops [were] destroyed, 171 dwelling houses set on fire or destroyed ... 119 synagogues were set on fire, and another 76 completely destroyed ... 20,000 Jews were arrested, 36 deaths were reported and those seriously injured were also numbered at 36."

This is a direct result of a theology that was dead wrong helping to justify deadly actions. (The Nazis were obviously not true Christians, but it was centuries of "Christian" anti-Semitism in Europe that helped make the Holocaust possible.)

To be sure, there are fine Christians today who embrace this same theological error (called replacement theology or supersessionism, meaning that the church has replaced or superseded Israel), and they are absolutely not anti-Semites and they would never sanction the persecution of the Jewish people in Jesus' name. And they totally repudiate hateful quotes like these just cited.

But the sad fact of history is that it is this very theology that opened up the door to centuries of "Christian" anti-Semitism in the past, and it is threatening to open up that ugly door once again in the present.

In light of the third "Christ at the Checkpoint" conference that just took place in the ancient city of Bethlehem, where issues like these were anything but theological abstractions, it's important to remember how wrong theology leads to wrong actions.

According to Acts 1, after the disciples had spent 40 days with Jesus after His resurrection, speaking to them "about the kingdom of God" (v. 3), His devoted followers wanted to ask Him one question before He ascended to heaven.

They inquired, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He replied, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that

the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (vv. 6-8).

In other words, that's a good question, and it certainly makes sense in light of everything we've been talking about, but the timing of when that will happen—when God will "restore the kingdom to Israel"—is not of your concern right now. You must concentrate on fulfilling the Great Commission with the help of the Spirit's power.

But that's not how John Calvin interpreted Jesus' reply. As noted by Dr. Paul R. Wilkinson in his book *Understanding Christian Zionism*, Calvin stated that there "'were "as many errors ... as words' in the disciples' question concerning Israel's restoration. This, he believed, showed 'how bad scholars they were under so good a Master,' and therefore 'when he [Jesus] saith, you shall receive power, he admonisheth them of their imbecility.'"

Wilkinson also notes, "At the 5th International Sabeel Conference in 2004 [this is an anti-Zionist conference], Mitri Raheb denounced the disciples as 'very narrow-minded,' 'nationalistic,' and 'blinded' for asking such a question."

To be candid, interpretations like these are nothing more than exegetical nonsense, standing the biblical text on its head.

For example, if the disciples had said to Jesus, "Lord, is this the time for us to take up swords and behead our enemies?" He would not have replied, "It's not for you to know the time for beheading that the Father has determined. You just concentrate on preaching the gospel."

Hardly! Instead, He would have rebuked them in no uncertain terms.

But that's not what He did here, despite the fact that His

words are constantly interpreted as if He had said, “You idiots! Don’t you know that I’m through with Israel? Don’t you know that the church has replaced Israel? Have I been with you so long and you still don’t get it?”

Instead, He simply told them it was not for them to know exactly when the Father would restore the kingdom to Israel (something that Jesus and Peter and Paul affirmed; see Matthew 19:28; Acts 3:19-21; Romans 11:28-29; 15:8); their mission was to be His witnesses.

Unfortunately, in our day, as we are seeing an increasing number of Christians turning against the modern state of Israel—and I don’t simply mean that they are criticizing Israel when Israel deserves criticism but that they are rejecting it as a prophetic fulfillment in any sense of the word, also embracing the Palestinian narrative of Israel as an evil occupier and claiming that no prophetic promises remain to the Jewish people as a nation—we are seeing the seeds of Jew hatred being planted again in the hearts of many of these believers. Their hostility to Israel is hardly a secret.

Be careful, people of God!

History could well repeat itself—to the reproach of the name of Jesus, to the disgrace of the church, and to the spiritual and physical harm of the Jewish people—unless we get our theology right.

You have been forewarned.

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