

The Subtle Attempt to Take Israel Out of the Bible

New Christians struggling to study their Bible are often taught to read the Scriptures as though they were written personally to them, even reciting the scriptures using one's own name in place of the verse's subject. While it is important to apply Scripture to one's own life, it is equally important to not ignore the original context of the scripture and the original recipient of that particular promise.

For example, a special verse that brings comfort to a person who may be experiencing difficulty is Isaiah 49:16 "See, I have inscribed you [insert name] on the palms of My hands." This verse lets the believer know that they are known by the Lord, and He holds them before Him, as it were, in the palms of His hands. It is a beautiful verse.

It may be a great surprise to many to learn that the verse is originally intended for Jerusalem, the city that personifies the people of Israel, for verse 17 goes on to say "Your walls are continually before Me." An over-personalization of the scriptures can actually result in a Christian who can recite verses from their Bible but has failed to understand what the book is about.

Another tendency in Bible study is to study by topic or book, which is understandable for such an immense volume as the Bible. The danger, however, is walking away from a Bible study understanding everything there is to know about a particular topic but not knowing the overall story of the Bible itself.

The Bible is the story of God's love for the world, His plan to redeem that world, and the battle against that plan. The object of God's love was always the world, and He chose Abraham to birth a nation through which He would carry out His

plan to redeem that world. This is the overarching story that the Bible tells, and central to the story is the calling on the nation of Israel.

The Bible is, in fact, a Jewish book: written by, about, and largely for, Jews. Jesus even said that salvation is of the Jews. Christians are partakers of that salvation and are able to apply the scriptures to their own lives, because they are the heirs of Abraham by faith. Through Jesus they are adopted into the family and are part of Abraham's family tree. But, they do not replace the original family they are grafted into, nor do they annul God's promises to the Jews.

Some Christians have tried to claim that the Old Testament should no longer be read literally about the people of Israel; it now only applies spiritually to the church. This is known as Replacement Theology: the idea that the church has replaced Israel in the plans and purposes of God. This spiritualization of scripture is actually a rejection of scripture by rewriting it to mean something other than its original meaning.

While some Replacement Theologians would deny rejecting or rewriting scripture, others are quite blatant about it. One such group is Sabeel. Founded by Palestinian Anglican Canon, Naim Ateek, Sabeel propagates Palestinian Liberation Theology and disregards any portion of Scripture that disagrees with Ateek's anti-Semitic views. He calls for Scripture to be "de-Zionized" by removing all "Zionist" portions that afford any significance to the nation of Israel and any connection of the Jewish people to the Holy Land.

While that may sound ludicrous to most, Sabeel has the ear of some mainline denominations, one being the Presbyterian Church (USA). The group's influence over the years has fanned the flames of Replacement Theology in the PCUSA and finally resulted in this summer's vote to divest from companies doing business with Israel.

That denomination also published an anti-Semitic study guide earlier this year entitled "Zionism Unsettled" in which Sabeel authored a chapter as did Replacement Theologian Gary Burge.

The study guide was unbalanced and malicious, and it intentionally over-simplified the extremely complicated Arab-Israeli conflict in order to vilify Israel and Zionism. It was so biased that some Jewish groups called it "hate speech."

The study guide ended with a group exercise suggesting that liturgy and hymns be edited so as to avoid words like Israel, Zion, exile, covenant and return, as they might cause worshipers to confuse these biblical terms with modern events and people in the Holy Land.

Interestingly, all of this manipulation and conniving is with one intent in mind: rid Scripture of the role of the nation of Israel. This is in complete contradiction to the words of the Apostle Paul that Israel's calling cannot be revoked. Speaking specifically of the Jewish people, He said in Romans 11:29, "For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."

The problem is, of course, that if you want to remove Israel from the Bible, you will have little Bible left. Christianity then loses its spiritual roots, churches lose their moral authority, and their membership numbers dwindle. The PCUSA membership has dropped 26.8 percent over the last 10 years. Let's hope they see the error of their ways before it is too late.

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