

How Revelation 1 Obliterates Replacement Theology

Replacement theology, or “supersessionism,” teaches that the New Covenant, through Jesus, supersedes the Old Covenant, which was made exclusively with the Jewish people. The church is the new Israel. God’s covenant to Israel, despite being reaffirmed over and over again in the Old and New Covenant, is now null and void, according to the beliefs of those who follow replacement theology. The Jews broke that covenant, and God is finished with them forever.

Individual Jews can find salvation in Jesus, but God’s plans for Israel (as a nation) have been replaced by His plan for the church. All the promises of blessing to Israel in the Old Covenant now belong to the church.

Monkey Wrench

However, there is a little passage in the first chapter of Revelation that throws a monkey wrench into replacement theology:

“Look! He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen” (Rev. 1:7).

These are John’s opening words to the seven churches of Asia. This was written at a time when there was much deeper unity than today. You could simply write to the church at Ephesus and know that all believers in Ephesus would be included.

In speaking of the coming of Yeshua, John draws upon the words of the Hebrew prophets, Daniel and Zechariah. First, he quotes Daniel:

I saw in the night visions, and there was one like a Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. He came to the Ancient

of Days and was presented before Him. There was given to Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed (Dan. 7:13-14).

For those who embrace replacement theology, this first reference to the Hebrew prophets is not so problematic. Even if God has rejected Israel in favor of the church, Yeshua is still coming back in the clouds. But the second reference, in Zechariah, clearly points to Jewish people in Jerusalem recognizing Yeshua:

And I will pour out on the house of David and over those dwelling in Jerusalem a spirit of favor and supplication so that they look to Me, whom they have pierced through. And they will mourn over him as one mourns for an only child and weep bitterly over him as a firstborn (Zech. 12:10).

This is extremely close to John's words.

- "Every eye will see him." / "so that they look to Me."
- "Even those who pierced Him." / "whom they have pierced" (John uses the same Greek word for "pierced" as he uses when quoting Zech. 12:10 in John 19:37).
- "And all peoples on earth will mourn because of him." / "They will mourn over him as one mourns for an only child and weep bitterly over him as a firstborn."

All Earth or All Israel?

You might say, "But it says all the peoples on earth, not just Israel." Maybe, but some scholars interpret the Greek differently. In Greek, it literally says not "peoples on earth," but "tribes of the land." Dr. David Stern, editor of the *Complete Jewish Bible* translates it this way: "all the tribes of the Land will mourn him."

He concludes, as do other scholars, that the word “land” used here is specific to the “land of Israel”. In Hebrew, we often refer to Israel as simply “*Ha’aretz*—the land.” In fact, this phrase is used even more commonly than the name *Israel*. If I want to ask a friend if he is in the country, it would be just as natural, if not more so, for me to say, “*Ata b’aretz? Are you in the land?*” That would be more natural than asking if someone was in Israel.

Of course this lines up with Romans 11:26, which prophesies a national revival in Israel, “and this, all Israel will be saved,” after “the fullness of Gentiles.” (v. 25) Without going too deep in end-times prophecy, some think the fullness of Gentiles is the end of the world domination by the nations under the Antichrist, while others, like me, see it as the gospel touching every nation—something, according to Matthew 24:14, that must happen before Yeshua returns. Both theories put this massive Jewish revival just before, or even at, Yeshua’s return.

John is quoting Zechariah, saying that at the coming of Yeshua, those who pierced him in the land of Israel will mourn over this fact, and it will lead to national revival (see Zech. 13:1). Also, while it is possible that every eye around the world would supernaturally see Yeshua coming, it is a fact that the “inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Zech. 12:10a) will see Him as He returns specifically to the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:3-4) just east of the city.

At the very least, it has a double meaning, as prophecy often does, of the Jewish people seeing and receiving Him, as well as people all over the world.

John and the Hebrew Prophets

From this verse, we can conclude that John affirms the prophecies of the Hebrew prophets:

1. He comes in the clouds.

2. The people of Jerusalem will see Him.
3. They will mourn over their past rejection of Him.
4. He returns to physical, national Israel.
5. They receive him (as Yeshua says in Matt. 23:39b as they say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord").

This refutes replacement theology, which has no place for the end-time revival in Israel that the prophets predicted over and over (because replacement theology has no place for Israel at all). You would think that both the fact that Israel has been restored as a nation (as the prophets said) and that Jewish people are turning to Yeshua more and more (as the prophets said) would cause those who believe that God is finished with Israel to rethink their position.

We pray that they do.

Enjoy this podcast with Rabbi Jonathan Bernis, speaking about his book, A Lasting Peace, which looks at the Middle East crisis through a prophetic lens.