

This Rapidly Spreading Theology Is Only Hurting the Church's True Mission

Supersessionism is on the rise today, capturing a new generation of adherents and hurting the church's mission to share the gospel to the ends of the earth.

As Gerald McDermott has opined, one does not need to be either a Christian Zionist or dispensationalist to believe that God's promises about the land of Israel will be literally given to the physical sons and daughters of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Yet, today's anti-Christian Zionists generally paint all who believe in a future for Israel with the brush of extremism, prophetic sensationalism and an attachment to an archaic and irrelevant form of dispensationalism. In fact, they would argue that all dispensationalism is passÃ© without acknowledging the various nuances of the position.

Through their theological views and pro-Palestinian political perspective, anti-Christian Zionists have devalued the theological significance of Israel and the Jewish people, causing Christians to be less concerned with missions to the Jewish people.

As a Jewish believer who affirms the right of Israel to possess the land given to it by God, I find many Christians cannot distinguish between an Israeli political policy and the Jewish people as a whole.

News media, books and lectures often paint the policies of modern Israel so negatively that one could not help but develop a negative view of Israelis. Every time Israel is portrayed as a land-grabbing monster, the Jewish people are lumped into this characterization.

The problem is this: When you paint a picture of one group of people (the Palestinians) as victims in need of help and the others (the Israelis) as aggressors in need of restraint, it is only normal for sensitive, kindhearted individuals to sympathize with the group of people in need of help.

This negative characterization of Israelis has helped lead to a decreased interest in bringing the gospel to the Jewish people.

As believers in Jesus, we are called to extend His love and grace to all peoples. It is our mandate to proclaim the Gospel to every person: Jew, Gentile, Arab and Israeli and to demonstrate His love in the most practical terms. Inflammatory rhetoric used by Christians to vilify any race, nation or social group is always wrong.

Reconciliation not only needs to take place between Israeli and Palestinian believers but also between Western Christians on both sides of the conflict. Christian Zionists and premillennialists (especially those who are in one way or another dispensational) feel unfairly demeaned and attacked by the anti-Christian Zionists for their view of Israel's divine right to the land by covenant.

In effect, supersessionism nails shut the coffin of Jewish covenantal existence for all eternity. This viewpoint is a major impediment to reconciliation and peace between Arab and Israeli believers in Israel.

The views of those who believe in Israel's present and future cannot simply be dismissed or ignored as archaic and insensitive. This is disrespectful and harmful to the process of reconciliation.

True reconciliation is only possible when there is mutual respect between Palestinian evangelicals and anti-Christian Zionists on one side and those on the other side who believe the Jewish people are God's chosen people and that the land

was given to the Jewish people by covenant.

The time has come to temper our rhetoric, calming the waters of antagonism so that the gospel may be preached to both Israelis and Palestinians as all sides agree that Jesus is the only hope for peace in the Middle East.

However, it is important to lay our theological cards out on the table and to identify the underlying supersessionism that promotes the theological perspective that the Jewish people rejected Jesus and therefore have been put aside from God's plan and purposes, including the loss of the promised land of Israel. An honest discussion, without dismissing the premillennial view as eccentric or even dangerous, must be part of any potentially fruitful discussion about unity and reconciliation.

The unity Jesus prayed for might very well be within our grasp by the power of his Holy Spirit. I write in hope of a better future for relationships within the body of the Messiah between Arabs and Israelis, and for those who advocate for both. As the apostle Paul writes, it is important to reflect our shared position in the Messiah: "how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, and fellow members, and fellow of the promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph. 3:6). {eoa}

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