

ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH: TRAGEDY AND BLESSING

Part 1

The Origins of Replacement Theology

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“The New Testament Church has taken the place of Old Testament Israel and God has transferred His covenant promises to the Church.” That statement sums up the belief system known as replacement theology or its more formal term supersessionism (one has taken the place of the other).

Variations include those from covenant and reformed traditions who simply state that Israel and the Jewish people have no special place in God’s economy and that the modern nation of Israel has no God-given right to the land. Others take a more extreme position, claiming that God is punishing the Jews for their unbelief, and that their persecution is justified. An increasingly popular version today is known as fulfillment theology in which all things are said to be fulfilled in Christ, including issues related to land and the covenants. Regardless of the variation, you end up with Israel in the same place—cast aside in the purposes of God.

It is an issue that stretches over many boundaries from theology and politics to international conflicts and religious disputes between Christians and Jews. In a bizarre union, it links together outright haters of Jews and some well-meaning Christians. And it has produced a ripple effect down through the generations, affecting the way things are taught and believed today. Yet most of the people have no clue what brought these beliefs about. Most Christians just assume that the teachings they hear today are identical to the beliefs of the church when the Bible was still being written. Yet history shows that is not the case.

Without question, it is imperative that we have a solid understanding of the underlying history of replacement theology and what the Bible has to say to us about the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, and between Israel and the church.

The historical development of a flawed way of interpreting Scripture

How did supersessionist reasoning come about? It’s not enough to go back to the time of the Reformation. We have to go all the way back to the earliest days of the Church. We know from history that the first century church leaders who were directly taught by the New Testament Apostles believed in a literal future restoration of the Kingdom of God as promised to Israel in the *Tanakh* (Old Testament). These individuals include Apollinarius of Laodicea, Irenaeus of Lyon, Polycarp of Smyrna who was a direct disciple of the Apostle John, and Papias who was discipled by both John and Philip.

In other words, the first Christians immediately after the writing of the New Testament believed in:

- A literal Messianic kingdom at the end of the age, although it would not be limited to Jews since God was now expanding His household of faith by bringing salvation to the

Gentiles, and that the substance of the kingdom was already present among believers.

- Literal interpretation of Scripture. They believed that the words of Scripture had direct meaning for the reader that could be plainly understood.

We know from the ancient writings that these beliefs continued into the second century. But over time, as an increasing number of Gentiles became believers in Yeshua (Jesus), they became increasingly influential in the leadership of the believing community that became known as the Church.

Justin

The turning point came in 135 A.D. with the brutal end of the Bar Kochba revolt. This was when Jewish zealots sought to overcome Rome a second time. And like the first revolt that ended in 70 A.D. with the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, the second one resulted in the complete annihilation of Jewish communities throughout Judea, killing nearly 600,000 Jews in the process, and the land being renamed Palestine by Rome.

About the same time, a new Gentile convert to Christianity named Justin began traveling from his home in the former land of Judea to Ephesus where he met a Jewish refugee named Trypho who had fled from the same conflict in the south. The two of them began an extensive dialogue that was recorded in writing. With the familiar zeal of a new convert, Justin sought to convince Trypho to believe in Christ. But he also taunted the Jewish man with references to the recent destruction of Jewish life in Judea by expressing his belief that it was God's judgment:

“ . . . you [Jews] alone may suffer that which you now justly suffer; and that your land may be desolate, and your cities burned with fire; and that strangers may eat your fruit in your presence, and not one of you may go up to Jerusalem. . . Accordingly, these things have happened to you in fairness and justice, for you have slain the Just One, and His prophets before Him; and now you reject those who hope in Him. . .”¹

These words are grievous to hear even today because it reveals a lack of understanding of the true nature of the death of Messiah. For it was the sins of the world, meaning all people, who are responsible for “slaying the Just One” (cf Rom 5:12). Nevertheless, this lie has embedded itself within the church. And while a great number of Christians would not agree that the Jewish people are responsible as a nation for the death of Messiah, it is a principle that is at the very foundation of replacement theology and has led to other misguided beliefs many people have regarding Israel today, even if they do not know how they came to believe that way.

Justin was also the first person to refer to the Church as “spiritual Israel.” He declared:

“For the true spiritual Israel, and descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham. . . are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ. . .”²

He was conveying the idea that that God has created a new kind of Israel that has nothing to do with the one we read about in the *Tanakh*. The only problem is that the phrase “spiritual Israel” is found nowhere in Scripture. It is an example of eisegesis—making the Bible say what you want it to say. Yet it is set forth as truth and as a justification for a theology that is corrupted by preconceived bias.

¹ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 16. His accusation would later be repeated by Origen in *Contra Celsum* 2:8, and Martin Luther in *On the Jews and Their Lies* (LW 47:138), all of whom lived in eras when it seemed impossible for Israel to become a nation again.

² *Ibid.*, 11.

Justin then continued spreading his version of the good news until he was martyred in Rome about thirty years later. So what do we learn from this story?

- It took 100 years from the time of the death of Yeshua for the rejection of the Jews in God's plan to be articulated. The assumption was that the perception of the previous century had to be in error and needed correcting, even if that prior understanding was grounded in the teachings of those who sat at the feet of men who walked with Yeshua.
- It was catalyzed by the tragic circumstances that had just taken place in Judea without regard to the principle established in Scripture that even though God chastens, He also restores (Dt 30:1-3; Jer 30:3,10,11). So the removal of the Jewish people from the land should not have been seen as a finality. And the same should be true for Israel within God's plan for this world. In other words, Justin was very near-sighted and ill-informed about what the totality of Scripture had declared.
- And this doctrine was instigated by a new believer in the faith.

Origen

The spark of replacement theology had been ignited, and others would pick up the torch, adding their own unique applications. At the beginning of the third century, one of those leaders to come on the scene was Origen.

He developed a system of interpreting Scripture known as the allegorical method. In this system, the real meaning of a passage lies beneath the plain meaning of the words.³ He rejected the grammatical and historical sense of Scripture that was employed by the Apostles, saying there is no true literal understanding of a verse because he had no confidence in the historical veracity of the text.⁴ As a result, it always must have an underlying mystical meaning that has to be deciphered.

The allegorical method should not be confused with the use of figures of speech in the Bible. There are many places where metaphors, similes, personification and parables are used in addition to direct statements. According to the literal method of interpretation, the author intends to communicate a specific meaning using various literary genres to get his point across. This can include both direct and figurative speech, but the meaning is still plainly understood. The subject would refer to real persons or places, with a real-time place in history, even if figurative speech was used to describe the event in the past or the future. The biblical authors employed a layered approach that acknowledged deeper meanings like typologies, while at the same time retaining the overall plain meaning of the text. So Isaac and Joseph in the book of Genesis, for example, are considered to be types of Christ, but are still very real persons who lived at specific times of history.⁵

But that is not what the allegorical method is about. Origen taught that the plain message of the author was insignificant and that every word must only be understood symbolically by the reader. It always had a hidden meaning that had to be drawn out of the text and the historical nature of Scripture was minimized or denied.⁶

³ cf. Origen, *Commentary on Canticles*, Book 3, on Cant. 2:9.

⁴ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1:42.

⁵ Paul, for example, employed a Hebraic way of biblical interpretation that was widely practiced in those days that incorporated **פְּשָׁט** (*peshat*) – the “plain or literal” meaning of the text, **רֵמֵז** (*remez*) – “hints or deeper meaning” like typologies, and **דְּרָשׁ** (*derash*) – “seeking or inquiring” by comparing texts.

⁶ Origen, *De Principiis*, Books 3 and 4; and commentary on John, Book 10:13.

Origen applied the allegorical method to the word Israel in the Bible. He sought to refute the historical legitimacy of Israel as a physical nation. But he did it selectively. According to Origen, every reference to Israel actually meant the Church as long as that reference was *favorable*. Conversely, if the reference was *critical* of Israel, that meant it applied to Jews. In theological terms, this is known as a dual hermeneutic—an erratic method that is applied in different ways, depending on your preconceived notions.

Origen even went so far as to discredit the genealogy of Yeshua in Matthew and Luke.⁷ By saying His lineage lacked historical significance, it negated Yeshua’s legal right to the throne of David, which further implied that the kingdom of Israel meant nothing in God’s plan.

Origen also held some heretical beliefs, including being an advocate of universalism in which the whole world will be saved, including the Devil himself. Twice Origen was excommunicated from the Church for heresy (231 and 232 A.D. in Alexandria).

But even though many of his doctrinal teachings were rejected, Origen’s allegorical method of interpreting Scripture had taken root. An influential theological school was established in Caesarea that affirmed Origen’s allegorical method as being the only valid means of interpretation. Other Church fathers picked up on it and perpetuated it. Augustine, for example, later said that “the literal interpretation kills, but allegorical interpretation gives life.”⁸ From this point onward, there was no turning back on the road to the theological replacement of Israel.

Eusebius

One of the students in the school of Origen late in the third century was Eusebius. He became a historian who compiled the writings of the church that covered the period from the end of the New Testament up until his day. His book, *Ecclesiastical History* is widely considered to be the primary documentation of the history of the Church. Today it is used in seminaries and is often quoted in books on church history.

There’s just one rather crucial error associated with this substantial work—Eusebius intentionally omitted nearly every quotation from the earliest Church leaders who supported the literal establishment of the kingdom of Israel under the reign of Messiah. And the only exception to this blatant censorship was his critical comment about Papias (who was discipled by John and Philip):

“These ideas, I suppose, he [Papias] got through a misunderstanding of the apostolic accounts, not realizing that the things recorded in figurative language were spoken by them mystically.”⁹

Eusebius concluded that Papias must not have heard it right from John and Philip. This point should not be taken lightly. Here we have a supposed man of God neglecting to include the beliefs held by the earliest church leaders about the Messianic kingdom and the place of Israel within God’s plan, thus leaving the impression that it never took place. The problem is that people who never take the time to read the original sources would naturally accept the description of history promoted by Eusebius as being valid. Eusebius is responsible for a deception that impacts the way Christians interpret the Bible today.

According to Eusebius, there was no longer a place for the Jews in the plan of God. If they did not fit into God’s plan, He had no more need for them. They were therefore rejected and replaced, not only theologically but historically in his writings. The Church became the “New

⁷ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2:32. In contrast, in his commentary on John (Book 1:6) he extolled the lack of a genealogy in the fourth gospel.

⁸ Augustine, *De Spiritu et Littera* 5:1.

⁹ Eusebius, *Church History* 3:39.

Israel.” And Eusebius has led us to believe that this has *always* been the case.

Marcion

During these formative days of the Church, there was another development that impacts what we believe today. It began in the city of Sinope, on the southern shore of the Black Sea, where a man named Marcion became bishop of that region. He then decided to relocate to the city of Rome. Upon his arrival, shortly after the year 140 A.D., he became involved in the community of the Church of Rome. But he also had significant questions regarding the beliefs of the Church and his unorthodox ways of thinking led to a great controversy. With great brashness, he declared, “I will divide your Church and cause within her a division, which will last forever.”¹⁰

Indeed a division was begun within the Church to the point that Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, called this rebel, “the firstborn of Satan.” Eventually Marcion was excommunicated. But by then the division in the Church was great and its implications were ominous. His doctrinal views spread throughout the Greco-Roman world. Marcionite churches sprang up throughout the Mediterranean, as far south as Egypt, and as far east as Persia. They were well organized, with their own bishops and ecclesiastical structures. In fact, this new sect had a strong chance of becoming the universal form of Christianity, since the church of Rome had not yet reached its dominant status. It was rightly termed the most dangerous foe Christianity has ever known.

Marcion believed that Jesus was the son of the highest God who was unknown to humanity prior to His incarnation. He was not the God of the Hebrew Bible. That was a lesser God who had created the world but had erred by allowing it to become a defective place of suffering. The God of the Hebrews, according to Marcion, was jealous, wrathful, and legalistic. The Messiah was supposed to be an earthly king for Israel alone and the prophetic Hebrew writings did not point to Jesus, who was just suddenly sent by an even more powerful deity than the Hebrew God. And Jesus would reveal the nature of this God who was not judgmental, but entirely loving. He came to set people free from the wrathful creator god of the Old Testament.

It is important to recognize that Marcion was the originator of the concept that the Old Testament represented Law and the New Testament represented grace and love. In order to support these beliefs, Marcion set out to produce the very first Christian canon, or collection of the books of the Bible that were considered authoritative. Unlike the subsequent efforts that ultimately determined the canon of the 66 books that became the Bible as we know it, Marcion’s canon was very limited. No part of the *Tanakh* was included because he considered it to be a stumbling block to the intellectually refined Gentiles. He accepted only the gospel of Luke and rejected Matthew, Mark and John. He accepted ten of Paul’s epistles, but not the book of Acts or the writings of Peter and John. And even within his accepted books, he removed any passages that associated Christianity with Judaism, mutilating them to suit his agenda. He deftly omitted some words while adding others, and changed even simple prepositions that greatly altered the meaning of a text.

His campaign was to remove every vestige of Jewish belief and practice from the Church. And many people bought into this new gospel. The Marcion movement was declared to be heresy. But Marcionism competed with orthodox Christianity for well over 300 years before it was finally eliminated.

Unfortunately, while Marcionism was officially suppressed by the Church, it has had a

¹⁰ Epiphanius, *Panarion* Part 42, 2:8.

continuing impact on what Christians believe and practice. It can be said that the spirit of Marcion lives on in the heart of the Church. How many teachers today avoid the *Tanakh* and spend virtually all of their time in the New Testament? Moreover, just as Marcion desired a Christianity that was undefiled from any Jewish influence, many voices can be heard today decrying any practice that has a Jewish character or background as being forbidden “judaizing.”

Some people like Marcion would prefer to think of there being two very distinct worlds—the Old Testament time of Law and a completely different New Testament time of grace. But when we have the entire set of biblical books to consider, we can see that Adonai, the Almighty God from everlasting to everlasting, is a God of justice *and* love. There is grace (חֶסֶד *chesed*) in the Old Testament. And elements of the Torah are retained in the New Testament. All this to say that the lack of interest in the *Tanakh* and the opposition to Torah that is present today can be traced to the heretical teachings of Marcion.

Constantine

Others followed in establishing an anti-Judaic character in the Church. Much of that antagonism can be attributed to Constantine, the first Christian emperor of Rome. In the year 321 A.D. he enacted the “Venerable Day of the Sun” edict that formally established Sunday as the day when business and government would rest and would be closed in the Roman Empire (thus setting the stage for the Council of Laodicea in 363 A.D. which renounced Saturday as the Sabbath and formalized Sunday as the Christian Sabbath).

In 325 A.D. Constantine convened 318 Church leaders (none of which were Jews) to Nicea in present-day Turkey. The bishops produced a creed that clearly affirmed the long-standing belief that Yeshua was fully God and fully man. But they also decreed that the Resurrection could no longer be observed in conjunction with the Passover date of Nisan 14 according to the Hebrew calendar. To do otherwise was now considered heretical. Constantine himself had this to say at the council:

“We ought not, therefore, to have anything in common with the Jews, for the Savior has shown us another way; our worship follows a more legitimate and more convenient course (the order of the days of the week); and consequently, in unanimously adopting this mode, we desire, dearest brethren, to separate ourselves from the detestable company of the Jews. . . it would still be your duty not to tarnish your soul by communications with such wicked people [the Jews]. . . it is right to demand what our reason approves, and that we should have nothing in common with the Jews.”¹¹

Without question, there was a radical change in the way believers worshipped and lived their lives after the tumultuous fourth century. Based on the changes instituted at the Council of Nicea, the theology of the Church officially took on an anti-Judaic character. There was a pervasive effort to repudiate every vestige of Jewish culture. The church of Constantinople mandated acceptance of this profession:

“I renounce all customs, rites, legalisms, unleavened breads and feasts of lambs of the Hebrews, sacrifices, prayers, aspersions, purifications, sanctifications and propitiations, and fasts, and new moons, and Sabbaths, and superstitions, and hymns and chants and observances and synagogues, and the food and drink of the Hebrews; in one word, I renounce absolutely everything Jewish, every law, rite and custom. . .”¹²

¹¹ “The Letter of the Emperor to all those not present at the Council,” in Eusebius, *Vita Const.*, Lib. iii., 18-20.

¹² *Assemani, Cod. Lit. I, p. 105.*

Indeed, history had not only been revised, a new history was being written. No longer would there be room for belief in a restoration of the kingdom of Israel under the Messiah. Instead there would be a kingdom of the Church under Constantine, followed by the Popes. And the plunge into the spiritual darkness of the Middle Ages had begun.

For 1500 years the allegorical method dominated the Church in every way. But unless you had the time like the monks to ponder Scripture all day long looking for hidden meanings, the Bible was useless as a guide to daily living. The allegorical method was a primary factor leading to the spiritual deadness of the Middle Ages.

One thousand years later, the Reformation sought to restore true spiritual life to the Church, to overturn unwarranted traditions of men, and to return the Church to biblical foundations. Most notably, Luther and Calvin restored the meaning of passages on salvation to their plain sense, which meant salvation by grace through faith, not works and indulgences.

But they practiced a double standard. The words of Scripture were to be understood in their normal plain sense, except in the case of Israel, where they continued to interpret the term allegorically. It might be said that on their way back to the Bible they stopped at Augustine, Constantine, Eusebius and Origen. It was a journey that didn't quite make it all the way back home.

Unfortunately, it would have grave consequences. The steps toward eliminating the Jews historically and theologically would provide justification for later generations of haters of Jews to eliminate them physically. And a great contributor to this tragic path was an otherwise esteemed man of the Church. . .

Martin Luther

Early in his life Martin Luther spoke favorably regarding the Jewish people. He was hopeful for their salvation and called upon Christians to treat them with kindness in *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* (1523). But toward the end of his life he became embittered by the lack of Jewish responsiveness to his message. In turn he wrote the extremely vitriolic book, *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543). In this diatribe he called for these harsh measures:

First to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them. This is to be done in honor of our Lord and of Christendom, so that God might see that we are Christians, and do not condone or knowingly tolerate such public lying, cursing, and blaspheming of his Son and of his Christians.” (p. 268).

Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed. . . I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them. . . (p. 269).

If we wish to wash our hands of the Jews' blasphemy and not share in their guilt, we have to part company with them. They must be driven from our country” (p.288).

Everyone would gladly be rid of them. . . I wish and as that our rulers who have Jewish subjects exercise a sharp mercy toward these wretched people. . . They must act like a good physician who, when gangrene has set in, proceeds without mercy to cut, saw and burn flesh, veins, bone and marrow” (pp. 289-292).

These are the people to whom God has never been God but a liar in the person of all the prophets and apostles, no matter who much God had these preach to them. The result is that they cannot be God's people” (p. 291).

It was the last thing that Martin Luther ever wrote. Afterward his health deteriorated until his death at the age of 62. But his legacy both as a reformer and enemy of the Jewish people

lived on. When the Nazis came on the scene in Germany four centuries later, they readily applied the words of Luther as justification for their persecution of the Jews. As they came to power and held massive rallies in the city of Nuremberg, the participants would march past a glass case containing a copy of *On the Jews and Their Lies*.

His words provided a blueprint that the Nazis followed in legislations and other state-endorsed actions depriving Jews of the civil rights and ultimately their lives.

Measures advocated by Luther	Nazi legislation and actions
1. Synagogues burned	<i>Kristallnacht</i> (Nov. 9-10, 1938)
2. Jewish homes destroyed and people forced into grouped housing	Lodz, the first Jewish ghetto sealed off (Apr. 30, 1940)
3. Jewish religious books banned	The Main Office for Press and Propaganda of the German Student Union proclaimed a nationwide “un-German” literary purge (May 15, 1933)
4. Jews forbidden to travel freely	Reich Ministry of Interior decree restricting the freedom of movement of Jews (Nov. 28, 1938)
5. Jewish wealth confiscated	“Decree on the Confiscation of Jewish Property” (Oct. 3, 1938)
6. Jews forbidden to have professional and business careers and required to perform manual labor	“Law for the Reestablishment of the Professional Civil Service” (Apr. 7, 1933), “Decree on the Exclusion of Jews from German Economic Life” (Nov. 12, 1938), and the “Frank Edict” imposing forced labor (Oct 26, 1939).
7. Jews must be driven from the country	Deportation orders begin (Feb. 12, 1940)
8. Get rid of the Jews	The Final Solution enacted at the Wannsee Conference (Jan. 20, 1942)

This illustrates the real tragedy when people come along and build on the errors that we make, and will take them to a more extreme degree. According to Origen and Eusebius, “you have no right to live to among us as Jews.” Luther taught, “you have no right to live to among us.” Hitler took it the final step by deciding, “You have no right to live.” That’s exactly what happens when you open yourself up to error and others capitalize on it.

Down through the ages, replacement theology has been used as justification for physically eradicating the Jewish people. Surely the early church fathers did not have such a thing in mind. Nor would Luther have ever imagined the extreme measures the Nazis would employ to carry out their destruction of the Jews. But that is the nature of human history. Once we head down the slippery slope of error, straying from the purity of God’s plan, virtually

anything is impossible.

So it is very important for us to know that replacement theology has its roots in a faulty theological method and in an environment of animosity toward the Jewish people as well as the Jewish culture. So even though allegorization is not as prevalent as it was long ago, the primary fruit that it produced—replacement theology—took root and has persisted until this day. And while there is a growing interest in the Jewish roots of the faith among some Christians today, Jewish cultural practices have been ostensibly purged from the church. One might conclude that Origen and Marcion would be at least somewhat pleased at what has transpired.

It is a history that has the nature of a seduction. With eloquent and passionate arguments by advocates, many Christians have been led to believe in something that is unwholesome and harmful. And it is also a case of simple ignorance. Not many Christians know this history, even though it has been recorded for centuries. Yet the historical chronicle shows that the creators of replacement theology included:

- A new convert who used a flawed means of biblical interpretation and did not fully comprehend the nature of the death of Messiah.
- A deceiving historian.
- A heretical denier of the inspiration of the Old Testament.
- A Roman emperor who hated all things Jewish.
- And a bitter reformer at the end of his life who wanted to spew invectives toward Jews.

The result has been:

- Unbiblical concepts like “spiritual Israel.”
- A false understanding of the death of Messiah.
- Making the Bible impossible to understand plainly.
- Generations of seminary students being exposed to incomplete church history while assuming it to be accurate.
- A lack of understanding and distaste for the Old Testament.
- The lost blessing of the biblical culture, including the feasts.
- And an excuse for anti-Semites past and present to use as justification for their opposition to Israel and the Jewish people.

These are the skeletons in the closet of replacement theology that should be widely known by believers today, but sadly that is not the case.

Personal implications

We need to recognize that our beliefs are influenced by the beliefs and actions of others who precede us.

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul wrote:

“The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Tim 2:2)

Rarely do we receive information from the original source. It is mediated, or transmitted to us via the voices or writings of one or more people. And as such, it is subject to the biases of the mediators who are capable of adding or taking away from the original content, thus shaping the message that is received by the audience. So whether we realize it or not, that which we

believe has been influenced by what has preceded us.

For that reason, teachers of the Word of God need to turn as closely as possible to original sources. That means seeking the meaning of Hebrew and Greek words, not just the English translations. It means reading the writings of antiquity, not just the summaries and comments others have on them. And it means tracking the way that beliefs have developed over time historically

It is essential to understand the actual meaning of Scripture

Paul went on to say to Timothy:

“Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.” (2 Tim 2:14-15)

He then added in v. 18 that “going astray from the truth. . . upset(s) the faith of some.” The error of the allegorical method has indeed caused great harm to the Church. And while the Bible is often rather difficult to understand, we can know God’s message to us and that the plain meaning of His Words is sufficient. That requires work on our part. We have to be in the Book itself. And we have to gain the skills to handle it grammatically, historically and culturally.

We stand in violation of the Word of God when we claim to find some kind of hidden personal meaning unique to ourselves:

“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” (2 Peter 1:20-21)

The responsibility of teachers is very great. But listeners are also responsible to make sure what they are hearing is indeed biblical truth. It is good to be a bit of a skeptic. That means hearing something someone has to say and checking it out for yourself:

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1)

False prophets or teachers are usually quite convincing and they carry some form of status or leadership. That is why we must test everything we hear against the Word of God, because being wise about the use of the Bible is so important for all of us.

We have a responsibility to take a stand for the truth.

Paul concludes 2 Tim 2 with a metaphor involving vessels that are gold and silver, and those that are made of wood and clay. He tells us that the common earthly vessels are youthful lusts and ignorant speculations (vv. 22-23). The rare precious vessels are righteousness, faith, love, peace, and good teaching. (vv. 22,24).

Having a biblically accurate understanding of God’s calling and purposes for Israel is one of those precious vessels. But unlike the way people tend to hoard gold and silver, we are exhorted to give this treasure of truth away.

When it comes to those who have given in to the error of replacement theology, Paul offers this challenge just as he did to Timothy:

“with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.” (vv 25-26)

May we all become fully equipped to take on that challenge. For as we will see, it is not just about the nation of Israel or the Jewish people, it is about the assurance of our salvation and ultimately the battle for the universe.