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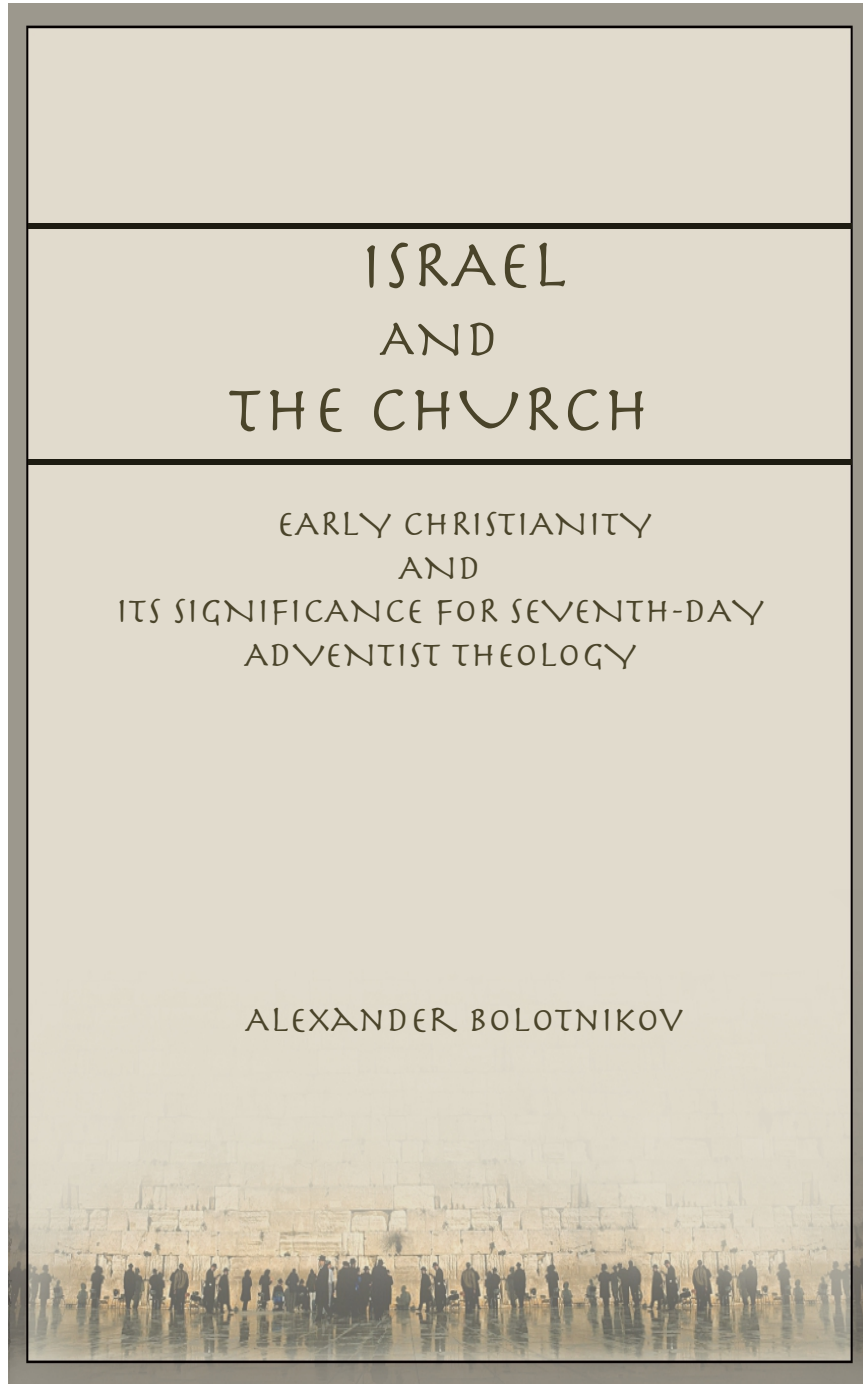
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## ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

EARLY CHRISTIANITY  
AND  
ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST THEOLOGY

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alexander “Sasha” Bolotnikov is the Director of Shalom Learning Center (NAD Jewish Ministry Training), as well as a pastor in the Oregon Conference. Raised in Communist Russia as an atheist, he discovered his Jewish roots when he was passed over for advanced educational opportunities. He responded by immersing himself within Jewish culture and became a powerful opponent to the Christian teaching of Jesus as the Messiah.

Meeting a Seventh-day Adventist in university brought him into a connection with the real Jesus. His heart was won. He served as a professor at Zaoksky University in Tula Oblast, Russia, before earning his MA in Hebrew and Biblical Languages from Andrews University. He recently earned a Ph.D. from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio.



principles of God's commandments. The apostasy in the Church happened only because it has lost its original Hebraic perspective on Scripture.

According to Paul, the Church has not come to replace Israel, but was formed as a result of Gentile believers in Jesus being 'grafted in' (Rom. 11:19) to the 'holy root' (Rom. 11:16), the remnant of Israel, those who entered into the New Covenant with God on the Day of Pentecost and for many years afterward.

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# ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

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## EARLY DEBATES AND THEIR IMPACT ON SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST THEOLOGY

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The role of Israel in the plan of salvation and in last day events presents one of the hottest debating topics in Christianity. Throughout the two thousand year history of Christianity this debate has continued. This discussion is deeply rooted in the historical events that occurred during the period of the Jewish–Roman wars between the destruction of the Temple (70 AD) and the Bar Kohba rebellion (136 AD).

This was a really challenging time for newly emerged Christianity. As we look at the political and social environment of this time, we observe a form of Christianity which by the middle the 2<sup>nd</sup> century essentially disengages itself from its Jewish roots.

### CHRISTIANITY BETWEEN 70 AD & 136 AD

Let us look at the historical environment that influenced the development of Christianity before the destruction of the Temple

- Beginning from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, Hellenism, the blend between Greek philosophical thinking and Near Eastern paganism, became the dominant mode of thinking<sup>1</sup> in the

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<sup>1</sup> The earliest example of this philosophical thinking and its application to Biblical interpretation can be found in the works of St. Justin (ca. 100-165) also known in the Eastern Orthodox tradition as Justin the Philosopher. His work *The First Apology* clearly demonstrates usage of the Greek Philosophical approach.

calls the Old Covenant based on the temple obsolete and 'ready to vanish away' (Heb. 8:13).

God's intent to do away with the geographical aspect of His presence represents one of the most important traits of the New Covenant. This is why Jesus said when answering the question about the true place of worship posed by Samaritan woman, "...the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:21-23). In other words, while salvation is indeed coming from the Jews, who, in accordance with the precepts of the Torah, established a specific place for God's presence in Jerusalem and worship there, the time is coming when worshippers will not need to come to a specific location to encounter the Divine presence, but will be able to experience God's presence in spirit. This is why Paul specifically says, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (I Cor. 3:16).

Therefore the Bible presents a story of how God made His New Covenant with the House of Israel in the book of Acts chapter 2. On the day of Pentecost, the same day when God made the Old Covenant at Sinai with the twelve tribes of Israel, the Holy Spirit rested upon twelve Jews, who were disciples of Jesus. This was done at the Temple in front of the crowd of Jewish pilgrims who came from all the Jewish diasporas across the Roman and Parthian empires for the festival. As a result of this miracle and the message preached by Peter, 3000 Jews from across the world entered into New Covenant relations with God.

The book of Acts is clear that while God eventually abandons the Temple in Jerusalem, He begins using Jews in the Diaspora, who are more numerous than the ones in Judea, to spread the Gospel across the Roman empire. As a result of the work of these Jews, Christian communities were formed in Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus and other important cities.

This is why the long-held belief that the Church replaced the Jews does not concur with the historical reality. Jews were at the very foundation of Christianity and unfortunately were pushed away from it when the Church chose to become Hellenistic and abandon the

concerned about preserving their identity, since the creation of Israel actually solved this problem.

## CONCLUSIONS

There is a definite need to find an improved Biblical approach to the issue of Israel and the Church in our Adventist theology. This approach should be such that it would neither belittle the people of Israel, Jewish culture and the Hebrew Bible, nor would it attempt to belittle other nations. At the same time, this approach would strengthen the Adventist position in key Biblical areas such as the Law and the prophecy discussed in this article.

While it is true that both futurists and especially Millennialists deny the conditionality of Biblical prophecies that talk about the return of Israelites to their land, the Old Testament has prophecies about Israel that cannot be considered conditional. The conditional aspect of all conditional prophecies is always based upon the blessings and the curses of the covenant recorded in Lev. 26 and Deut. 28. The blessings of the covenant are conditional on the fact that the people follow the divine commandments, otherwise the curses follow. However, as discussed earlier, even after the curses of the covenant fall upon Israel, God promised to remember His covenant with them (Lev. 26:42-45). This promise cannot be conditional, because it manifests God's mercy to the remnant and his desire to forgive their sins, **'for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more'** (Jer. 31:34).

In essence by making the new covenant **'with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,'** God intends to put His **'law in their minds, and write it on their hearts'** (Jer. 31:31&33). The Epistle of Hebrews 8:10-12 reiterates this promise to Israel and in Chapter 9 explains that **'the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary'** (Heb. 9:1). In the earthly sanctuary located in Jerusalem, the two tablets with Ten Commandments were inside the Ark of the Covenant, which was in the Most Holy compartment. By making a new covenant God wants His commandments to be written on the hearts of His people instead of upon stone tablets. For this reason the epistle of Hebrews

vastly expands of the Roman Empire. This Hellenistic mentality was absolutely foreign and hostile to Hebraic thinking<sup>2</sup>, which is rooted in the Hebrew Bible and its Early Rabbinic interpretation.

- Presenting his story of the emergence of early Christianity, Luke, the author of the book of Acts, describes the majority of the first Christians as coming from either a Jewish background or being gentile converts to Judaism or being gentiles seeking conversion who attended Jewish synagogues. This means the majority of the first Christian congregations in the first century were 'splinter groups' from different synagogues. They were viewed in much the same way as we sometimes view 'offshoots.' We recognize they share common beliefs, yet they aren't quite part of us. Historians call this merging movement 'Judeo-Christianity'<sup>3</sup>.
- While Christianity was clearly distinguished from the other Jewish parties/sects of the 1<sup>st</sup> century by its unequivocal stand on the divine and messianic role of Jesus, it adopted the Hebraic approach to the interpretation of Scripture that was taught by Jesus and followed by His disciples<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Thorlief Boman *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, New York: W. W. Norton, (1960).

<sup>3</sup> The earliest use of the term "Judeo-Christian" in the historical sense dates to 1829 in the missionary journal of Joseph Wolff, a Jewish convert mentioned in the *Great Controversy* (cf. Joseph Wolff, . *Missionary Journal of the Rev. Joseph Wolff, Missionary to the Jews* III, (London: James Duncan 1829), p. 314). The earliest followers of Jesus composed an apocalyptic Jewish sect, which historians refer to as Jewish Christianity (Cf. Alister E. McGrath, *Christianity: An Introduction*, (Blackwell Publishing: 2006), p. 174)

<sup>4</sup> The term 'Hebraic' implies an understanding based on the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) as well as the understanding of the fact that Judaism in the First Century represents a proper cultural and religious background for the New Testament. Cf. E. P. Sanders *Jesus and Judaism* (Fortress Press, 1985).

- Nevertheless, in spite of its distinct beliefs in Jesus, Pagan Roman authority regarded newly emerged Christianity as a sect or an offshoot of Judaism<sup>5</sup>.
- On the other hand, the leadership of mainstream Judaism was hostile to the followers of Jesus<sup>6</sup>, especially those who came from a Jewish background. Before the destruction of the Temple, rabbis and the priests persecuted those Jews who accepted Jesus as their Messiah<sup>7</sup>.

The destruction of the Temple changed the dynamics of relations between Jews, Christians and the pagan Roman authorities. The following is the description of the historical situation that affected Judaism and Christianity in the period between 70 and 136 AD.

- The Jewish-Roman war of 66-70 AD that led to the destruction of the Temple practically wiped out the Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots and other smaller Jewish sects, leaving the Pharisees with the role to form a post-Temple Judaism<sup>8</sup>. In this situation, the surviving Jewish leaders were no longer in the position to oppose and more over persecute Christians.
- On the other hand, Christianity experienced strong growth. Because of the war and deteriorating conditions in the Roman Empire, many people, Jews and non-Jews alike were seeking for the true God and were finding Him in the Gospel preached by Christians.

<sup>5</sup> In 98 AD after the murder of Domitian, Nerva relaxed a special tax on Jews in such a way that Christians were exempt from paying it. This was the first attempt to distinguish Christians from the Jewish community. Douglas R. Edwards, *Religion & Power: Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greek East*, (Oxford University Press 1996).

<sup>6</sup> There are a number of passages in *Midrashim* that tell stories about Rabbis who resisted any contacts with the followers of Jesus. Sf. Midrash Esther Rabbah. Cf. Phillip Alexander *Jewish Believers in Early Rabbinic Literature (2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*, in *The Early Centuries Jewish Believers in Jesus*, O. Skarsaune and R. Hvalvik, eds., (Hendrickson, 2007), 659-708.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Acts 5:12-33.

<sup>8</sup> H. Graetz *History of the Jews*, v. 1 (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society), 1941.

prophecies talk about the reunification of all twelve tribes of Israel. However, according to the historical narrative of 2 Kings 17, the ten tribes that comprised the northern kingdom of Israel were resettled by the Assyrian king Shalmaneser in around 720BC to Assyria, where they assimilated to the point that any traces of distinct tribes could not be found even in the time of Judah's return to the land in 457 BC, let alone today.

On the other hand, there is another disturbing teaching surfacing in Adventism that suggests that the creation of the State of Israel was entirely a deception with the goal to mislead Christians into futuristic theology. To suggest that God in His mercy played no role in the establishment of a homeland for the Jews is clearly anti-Semitic in nature. It suggests that the existence of the Jewish people makes those preachers theologians who advocate supersessionism very uncomfortable. These teachers go so far to support replacement theology they attempt prove that the Jews, genetic descendants of the Biblical Israelites, do not exist but are rather mere 'converts' to Judaism. This fails to understand the nature of Israel from its emergence as a nation and denies solid Biblical principles of interpretation.

Meanwhile, the state of Israel has enjoyed relative prosperity for the past 65 years, despite the fact that modern Israel does not constitute the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy and does not play any role in last day events, it does not mean that God was not behind its creation. The state of Israel was created following the horrible events of the Holocaust, which took the life of six million Jews. While some preachers dare to claim that the Holocaust represented God's vengeance upon the Jews who rejected Christ, God apparently acted in a totally different way. The fact that Israel was able to withstand vicious attacks right at its inception testifies to the fact that God acts in their day-to-day history and was not willing to lose His people.

The creation of Israel after the Holocaust helped many Jews to obtain new hope in God—Hope which was almost lost in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. As a matter of fact, in spite of the widespread opinion that exists among some Christian circles that Jews are absolutely closed to the Gospel message, many Israelis know and read the Gospels and are open to accepting Jesus as their Messiah. This happens because in their home country of Israel, Jews feel much less

Jews, he spoke their free access to the Judeo-Christian community without any specific conversion procedures, something usually required by rabbinic Judaism before acceptance within the community. In the Christian community, the equal status of those who were born Jewish and those who were not born of Jewish parents did not mean that a baptized gentile remained a pagan whereas Jews had to become Hellenists, as many Christians often understand it. Even though the Temple in Jerusalem had completed its function and mission, Jesus clearly taught that “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). In other words, while in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek”, it was the Greek who needed to become one of ‘Abraham’s seed’, not the Jews who had to abandon their Jewish heritage.

This is the reason when Paul speaks of non-Jews, he uses the analogy with adoption “Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, therefore God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:3-5). Therefore it is the Gentile who becomes part of the people of God through adoption into the family of Israel, not a Jew who has been adopted into the paganism, as the Medieval Church often required Jews to do.

Unfortunately many Millennialists do not have a proper understanding of the nature of the modern Israel created. Most of the Old Testament prophecies about the return of Israel to their land, which the Millennialists often refer to, speak about gathering of the twelve tribes into their land and reestablishing of the Davidic kingdom. The state of Israel created in 1948 neither resembles nor attempts to recreate a theocratic order that existed during the reign of David. In fact, the founders of the modern Israel were staunch atheists. More so, most of the Orthodox Jewish community was strongly against the creation of the state, because it was founded on secular principles. Even today there are some Ultra-Orthodox Jews who do not recognize the state of Israel, because its character does not concur with their vision of the Torah. More so, according to this Ultra-Orthodox understanding, only Messiah can actually rebuild the Temple as well as restore the Davidic kingdom.

The biggest problem with the current state of Israel being fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies is found in the fact that these

- However, as stated above, while the first non-Jews in the Christian congregations were either converts to Judaism or just former attendees of the synagogues, the second wave of gentiles did not have such a ‘synagogue’ experience<sup>9</sup>. This brought serious challenges to Christianity. The Hellenistic and Gnostic approaches to the interpretation of Scriptures introduced by these ‘newly converted’ pagans<sup>10</sup> strove with the core of the teachings of Jesus and His disciples.
- On the other hand, the unsuccessful revolt led by Bar Kokhba resulted in the increased persecution of Jews as well Christians across the Roman Empire<sup>11</sup>. (Generally, Romans regarded anyone who believed in only One God as A Jew.)
- Also, after the destruction of the Temple and the crush of the Bar Kokhba rebellion, anti-Semitism emerged in the Roman Empire. Jews are deprived of their rights; they were being mocked for their religion; the Sabbath and the Torah are publicly ridiculed in Greek literature and Roman theaters.<sup>12</sup>
- Under the pressure of this persecution, many Christian leaders began to look for ways to distinguish themselves from the Jewish community. Thus, the best way separate from Judaism was to abandon worshiping God on the Biblical Sabbath<sup>13</sup> and to abandon recognition of Biblical holy days.

As we compare these historical conditions, the situation that appeared after the Bar Kohba rebellion completely changed the dynamic of Jewish-Christian interaction. While before 70 AD, it was Jewish

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, (Oxford University Press, 2003), 95-135.

<sup>11</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity*, (Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977).

<sup>12</sup> Many stories, especially in *Midrash Eikhah* (Lamentations) *Rabbah*, document different ridicules and persecutions Jews experienced after the 70 AD. Some stories are also documented by Josephus in *Judean War*. Cf. Graetz, v. 1.

<sup>13</sup> The core of his doctoral dissertation Bacchiocchi presents different Patristic sources, which prove that there was a tendency among the early church fathers, such as Justin the Martyr and Ignatius of Antioch, to abandon Sabbath in order to avoid persecution, since Romans confused Christians with the Jews who revolted against them. Cf. *From Sabbath to Sunday*.

leadership who pushed both Jewish and non-Jewish Christians away from the synagogues, after 136 AD it was Christian leadership, which decided to become proactive in pulling away from the Jewish community. The result made Christianity more and more Hellenistic.

To justify such a move, the church fathers<sup>14</sup> of the second century commenced an unprecedented anti-Jewish campaign. In their writings, Origen, Justin and the anonymous author of the epistle known today as Pseudo-Barnabas despised the laws of Torah and ridiculed Jews for their foolishness in keeping the Sabbath literally. They argued that the sole intent in all laws in the Torah was to show the allegorical symbolism of the plan of salvation<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, from their perspective, the Temple should never have been built ever, and the Sabbath was not meant to be observed. Rather it only represented the second coming of Christ.

Such an ideology of disengagement from the Jewish community, followed by the rejection of the Hebraic approach to interpreting Scripture and substitution of Hellenistic methods of interpretation laid the foundation for Christian supersessionism, also known as replacement theology<sup>16</sup>.

## REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY: ITS ORIGINS AND HISTORY

Scripture was the major obstacle for the advancement of this anti-Jewish paradigm shift in Christianity. Many passages in the Hebrew Bible talk about God's love to Israel and His covenant with the Jewish people. This presented a problem for the early church fathers, who

<sup>14</sup> Such as Justin, Origen and his followers from the Alexandrian school.

<sup>15</sup> Pseudo-Barnabas, ch. 6.

<sup>16</sup> It is an odd word, supersessionism. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, a reference work that defines almost everything, has no entry for it. The term is traditionally used for the conviction that the church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people. Israel has lost its place and Christianity now occupies it. Supersessionism is shorthand for the dominant Christian theological position regarding the Jews." Cf. Christians and Jews: Starting Over - Why the Real Dialogue Has Just Begun by Dr. Luke Timothy Johnson.

In the same way the New Testament is very clear regarding the fact that simply being a Jew does not place someone automatically in better position before the Lord. "For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?" (Rom. 2:25-27). On the contrary, Paul is clear that "There is neither Jew nor Greek" (Gal 3:28) and in Jesus everyone has equal standing becoming "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29).

On the other hand, such an equality in regard to salvation does not imply that Scripture has changed its Hebraic nature and become Hellenistic. As discussed above, Jews remain the keepers of the "Oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2) even in our days.

Millennialist often embrace the idea about two different paths of salvation for the Jew and for the Gentile. This in a way echoes a traditional Jewish view that the 'sons of Abraham' are responsible for keeping the entire Torah, whereas the 'sons of Noah' are responsible for only seven commandments. For some Christians such an approach provides an excuse to opt out 'from the requirements of the commandments of the Law claiming that they are only for the Jews.

However, the idea of Noahide laws found in Judaism is clearly non-Biblical and originated in rabbinic tradition. In fact Torah does not provide another way of salvation for those who were not born from the seed of Abraham, except becoming part of the nation of Israel through the right of circumcision. "One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you" (Ex. 12:49).

Similar ideas can be seen in the New Testament, where Paul tells the Colossians that, "in Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands" (Col. 2:11). In other words, the New Testament does not have separate sets of requirements for those Christians who are of Jewish origins compared to those who are of Gentile origins.

When understood within the context of 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism, it becomes clear that when Paul spoke about Gentiles being equal to the



these texts, which are written by a Jew and a former Pharisee. Looking at these passages within the context of 1st century Judaism will provide important insights for understanding these texts, which the opponents of Adventism use to challenge Adventist teaching.

Unfortunately, replacement theology cultivates a negative attitude toward everything which is perceived to be Jewish. As a result exegetes and theologians travel down the traditional Hellenistic path used by the medieval church, which in its essence advocates the nullification of Biblical Sabbath.

## ADVENTISM VS. MILLENNIALISM DEBATE: ITS STRENGTHS AND PITFALLS

This situation in the Adventist – Millennialist debate calls for a better biblical approach—one that does not have these anti-Jewish overtones, which by implication belittle the Hebrew Bible and discredit the Jewish background of the New Testament. The following is the summary of the problems that arise in the Adventist – Millennialist debate and suggested biblical solutions of these issues.

As discussed earlier in the paper, the usage of 'chosen' in the Old Testament is often misunderstood. While traditional supersessionism often claimed that the Jews in the Old Testament were a privileged nation and later lost their privileges, Millennialists claim that Israel has never lost its privileges with God.

Our response may be one which clarifies this understanding. God has never given to anyone any special privileges, but He chose descendants of Jacob for the purpose of being heralds of His truth to the world. "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries all around her' (Ezekiel 5:5). By placing Israel in the center of the world God gave them responsibility, not special favors. On the contrary, when Israel fell into idolatry, He was the One who would relentlessly discipline them. "Therefore, as I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will also diminish you; My eye will not spare, nor will I have any pity. Moreover I will make you a waste and a reproach among the nations that are all around you, in the sight of all who pass by' (Ezek. 5:5, 11).

wanted to blot out any Hebraic or Jewish traditions from the Christian church and replace them with pagan Hellenistic rituals<sup>17</sup>.

Describing God's address to the church of Smyrna in the second chapter of the book of Revelation, John mentions a specific group of people. "...the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (Rev 2:9). Some Biblical commentators believe that this statement talks about the Jews who persecuted Christians in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD in Smyrna referring to the martyrdom of the disciple of John Polycarp (AD 69-155), who was the leader of the church at that time.

However, it is hardly possible to conclude that this biblical statement speaks about the Jews. On the contrary, it refers to those who are not Jews but disguise themselves as such. In fact, unlike Polycarp, who was a staunch defender of the Sabbath and of traditional observance of Passover in the Christian church<sup>18</sup>, his opponent Anicetus, the bishop of Rome, had a totally different agenda<sup>19</sup>.

Many historical writings point to the fact that the majority of the church fathers of the second century, such as Justin the Martyr and Ignatius of Antioch, advocated the idea that God rejected the Jews who killed Christ<sup>20</sup>, and by rejecting the Jews made the church a New Israel. Therefore they concluded that Christianity must rid itself of everything Jewish and introduce new laws and worship on a new Sabbath, the first day of the week<sup>21</sup>.

Such a pattern of thinking is synonymous to the ideas proposed by Marcion, a church authority in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century, who argued about two different Gods: a merciless Yahveh of the Old Testament and merciful Jesus represented in the New Testament<sup>22</sup>. In spite of the fact

<sup>17</sup> Eastern Orthodox Theologian Georges Florovsky argues in his works that the church needed to have Christianized pagan rituals in order to reach barbarians with the Gospel. Cf. *Scripture and Tradition: an Orthodox View*; The Ways of Russian Theology.

<sup>18</sup> Irenaeus, *Advensus Hereses*. See also Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). "Polycarp". *Encyclopædia Britannica* (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press.

<sup>19</sup> William Cave, *Primitive Christianity: or the Religion of the Ancient Christians in the First Ages of the Gospel*. 1840, revised edition by H. Cary. Oxford, London, pp. 84-85.

<sup>20</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 11-32.

<sup>21</sup> Ignatius to the Magnesians 8:1, 9:1-2, 10:3

<sup>22</sup> Erwin Fahlbusch, Gospel of Marcion, *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, v. 3, p. 398.

that Marcion was declared a heretic, by the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century<sup>23</sup>, Christianity had divided the Scriptures into two opposing sections. The consensus was that the Old (called in some Christian traditions 'Dilapidated'<sup>24</sup>) Testament contained 'evil laws,' and was written for the Jews, who constantly transgressed them. This was why the New Testament replaced the irrelevant and harsh Old Testament laws with the new religious orders written for Christians<sup>25</sup>.

### CHRISTIANITY FROM 300 TO 500 AD.

The legalization of Christianity in the Roman Empire in the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century brought additional compromises between Christianity and Paganism—in particular, acceptance of the 'Day of the Sun', the first day of the week, as the day of worship by Christians in accordance with the edict of emperor Constantine from 321 AD. Four years later in 325 AD, the First Universal Church Council in Nicea decided to replace the traditional Jewish-Christian Passover with Easter and connected the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus to the spring solstice<sup>26</sup>, instilling in the minds of Christians the image of Jesus as the rising sun.

This action was followed by another decision at the Council of Laodicea in 360 AD<sup>27</sup>. According to this decision any Christian who continued to worship on the Jewish Sabbath must be condemned. This move signified the complete disassociation of 4<sup>th</sup> century Christians from their Judeo-Christian roots and from the biblical principles taught by Jesus and His disciples.

On the other hand, the legalization of Christianity had given the church an opportunity to freely preach its message to the pagans. Of course by the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, this message had already become largely unbiblical and contained many Hellenistic and pagan

<sup>23</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 1.2

<sup>24</sup> Such as Synodal Bible translated in Russian Orthodox tradition, 1872.

<sup>25</sup> The term 'Old Testament' was first used in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

<sup>26</sup> Eusebius, 5:24(2). See also Sacha Stern, *Calendar and Community*, (Oxford: 2001), 65-80.

<sup>27</sup> Phillip Schaff (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils (A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, vol. XIV)*, "The Canons of the Councils of Ancyra, Gangra, Neocæsarea, Antioch and Laodicea, which Canons were Accepted and Received by the Ecumenical Synods"

cannot happen on the earth, especially after the calamities that preceded the coming of Christ.

Note that both of the apocalyptic books of the Bible, Daniel and Revelation talk solely about the Temple in Heaven and do not contain any hint about the restoration of a Temple in Jerusalem. While for traditional futurists, restoration of the Temple would serve only the goal of the anti-christ deceiving the Jews, it is not clear what purpose the restored Temple will serve in the eschatological scenario presented by the pro-Jewish Millennialists.

According to the widely accepted Christian position also shared by the Millennialists, Temple services were performed with the goal to typify the plan of salvation and to point to the ultimate 'Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). Since the sacrifice on Calvary was completed once and for all, and Jesus, the ultimate lamb of God, ascended to heaven to become 'a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens' (Heb. 8:1) serving in 'the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands' (Heb. 9:11), is not clear in this case what role the restored Temple on earth will play.

However, refuting Millennialist views using replacement theology is very counter-productive. In spite of the obvious inconsistency of their theology, the fascination of Millennialists with Israel and the Jewish people as a whole leads many of them on the path of searching for their Hebraic roots. Because of this search, many former evangelical Christians who adhere to the Millennialist views accept Ten Commandments including the biblical Sabbath and began tithing and following the dietary laws outlined in Leviticus. Using anti-Jewish rhetoric with these people will simply turn them away from the Adventist message.

Moreover, the anti-Jewish overtones that are present in replacement theology do serious damage to the Adventist teaching about the permanence of the Law. Since the acceptance of the Sabbath, Adventists have been bombarded continually by the evangelicals who argue — based on Acts 15, the Epistle to Galatians and selected verses from the Epistles to Romans, Colossians and Ephesians — that the commandments of the Law were done away with. In order to gain a proper perspective on these passages and to prove that they do not nullify the Law, it is important to look beyond the plain Greek language of

## MILLENNIALIST APPROACH TO THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL AND ITS CHALLENGES FOR THE ADVENTIST MESSAGE

Such a theology represents a modified version of the old-style futurism, replacing traditional Christian anti-Judaism with a strong pro-Jewish attitude. The following is a recap of the major traits of the millennialistic approach to the role of Israel in last days' events<sup>46</sup>:

- Israel is a special nation chosen by God whose status is higher than any other nations on the Earth;
- God has two paths: one is for Israel and one is for the Church;
- The creation of Israel presents the fulfillment of prophecies found in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel about God returning His people to their land;
- The restoration of the Temple is a highlight of God's plan for Israel, which gives start to the Millennial kingdom.

As mentioned above, this theology, while futuristic in its nature, definitely communicates a totally different attitude toward Israel and the Jews. This represents a departure from the traditional more than 1900-years' Christian attitude toward Jews as staunch Christ-killers. Nevertheless, with all its positive spins this theology has its major shortcomings.

The fact that the statement about the millennium, literally a one thousand year long period occurs only twice in the Greek text of the New Testament, in chapter 20 of the book of Revelation, presents the biggest problem of such an approach. The first occurrence talks about Satan being chained in the Abyss (Rev. 20: 2), whereas the second occurrence talks about those who are raised from the dead at the second coming of Christ (Rev. 20:6). According to 1 Thess. 4:17, the ones who are raised at the coming of Christ, together with those who are alive at the moment of His advent, are 'caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord'. Therefore it is clear that the thousand-year reign with Christ

<sup>46</sup> Derek Prince, *The Destiny of Israel and the Church* (Derek Prince Ministries International, 1999).

ideas. The book of Revelation refers to this period of church history as the 'Church of Pergamus.' As John prophetically describes, in this church there are those "who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality" (Rev. 2:14). In the Bible, especially in the Hebrew Scriptures, sexual immorality is often associated with unfaithfulness to God and idol worship<sup>28</sup>. Worshiping icons, images of the saints and relics as an attempt to Christianize pagan customs was introduced to Christianity as a 'missionary tool to barbarians' at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>29</sup>.

These practices led to a major alteration in Christian worship practices. The first Judeo-Christians gathered mainly for one purpose—to study Scripture<sup>30</sup>. This was consistent with the concept of synagogue (Greek – place of assembly) introduced by Ezra in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC (see Neh. 8). Thus Christian worship was not focused on ritual but on learning to "know God and" to "obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thess. 1:8).

However for barbarians who were used to their pagan temple rituals, the public reading of Biblical passages was too boring. Therefore, in order to please the barbarians and appeal to their mentality and superstitions, Christianity decided to create its own style of temple service. It is interesting to note that the structure and functions of these Christian temples/cathedrals mimicked the one that once stood in Jerusalem. There was the most holy place where only ordained priests could enter. There was a sacrificial service of the holy bread, otherwise known as mass<sup>31</sup>. There was the institution of a priesthood, which consisted of a special consecrated group of men who possessed special qualities—qualities which enabled them to cleanse the regular people of their sins<sup>32</sup>. By the end of 5<sup>th</sup> century, Western Christianity had also

<sup>28</sup> Jer. 3, Ezek. 16.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers*, (Fortress Press: 2005), 222-258.

<sup>30</sup> *Eerdmans' Handbook to the History of Christianity*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 122-123.

<sup>31</sup> Council of Trent, Session XXII (Sept. 17, 1562), On the Sacrifice of the Mass, canons 1–3, trans. in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper, 1919), Vol. 2, pp. 184, 185.

<sup>32</sup> Nicean and Post Nicean Fathers 2:12: Gregory the Great, Leo the Great.

acquired the office of the high priest, giving this title to the patriarch of Rome<sup>33</sup>. We know him today as the Pope.

The Bible contains a clear prophetic explanation of these historical developments. In Revelation 13:1-10, John talks about the antichrist church-state power depicted as a seven-headed beast, which forces all the world to worship himself and the dragon “called the Devil and Satan” (Rev 12:9). The same image of antichrist appears in the chapters 7 and 8 of the book of Daniel depicted as the ‘little/conspicuous horn.’ While chapter 7—using political language—presents a little horn as an oppressive political system, which attempts to undermine God’s law, chapter 8—using cultic religious language—describes this conspicuous horn as the power which defiles the Heavenly Sanctuary (Dan. 8:10-14). In particular, such a defilement is described in Daniel 8:11 as taking away the daily priestly activity from ‘the Prince of the host’. In other words, by introducing an earthly priesthood and by asserting power to perform High Priestly functions, Christianity of the Dark ages de facto usurped the role, which belonged to Christ and Him alone.

On the other hand, Christian ‘temples and temple services’ absorbed the elements of both Hellenism and barbarian paganism. Unlike the temple in Jerusalem, a single location and “the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide” (Deut. 12:11), cathedrals were built in every city. There are additional contrasts.

- While the Temple was supposed to be absolutely free from any presence of the elements of death, cathedrals became a burial place for bishops and rulers. Such a usage of the cathedral was consistent with pagan customs of treatment of the dead.
- While in the Temple the image of cherubim was present only on the Ark of the Covenant inside the Most Holy and on the veil at the entrance to the Most Holy, cathedrals were full of images and statues, of different saints, which were worshipped in the manner similar to the pagan deities.

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<sup>33</sup> According to *Annuario Pontificio (Papal Yearbook)* one of the Papal Titles is *Pontifex Maximus*, the High Priest. According to Posnov’s and Talberg’s account of the Church History, during the East-West great schism, the patriarch of Constantinople accused the bishop of Rome of carrying the title that belongs to Christ and Him alone.

millennia. They preserved a knowledge of the Sabbath when Papal persecution had almost entirely wiped out those Christian communities which remained faithful to it.

The 70-week prophecy deals solely with the fact that the mission of the Temple-centered theocratic state of Israel outlined in the Old Covenant, and described in Hebrews 8 and 9 is over. This absolutely fails to justify the interpretation that the Jews as a nation should be written off.

## THE ISSUE OF ISRAEL IN THE DEBATE BETWEEN ADVENTISTS AND MESSIANIC COMMUNITIES

During the past several decades, especially after the victory in the Six Day War of 1967 that resulted in Israel gaining control over all of Jerusalem, the popularity of futurism has significantly decreased. These events spurred the emergence of many pro-Israel Christians who have an affinity and fascination with the Jewish people and culture. Most of these Christians are unaware of the background where the return of the Jews to their land is needed only to bring about the secret rapture of the Church<sup>45</sup>.

These newly formed groups, which include Christian Zionists and different Hebraic Heritage and Messianic congregations, anticipate the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem but do not believe that it would become a seat for the antichrist. On the contrary, they believe that the restoration of the Temple will bring the Messiah-Jesus who will save Israel and establish His millennial kingdom with the capital in Jerusalem.

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<sup>45</sup> For the summary of the latest evangelical views on Israel cf. Graig Blaising *The Future of Israel as a Theological Question*, in *To the Jew First*, D. Block and M. Glaser, eds., (Kregel, 2008).

More so, the idea that after the stoning of Stephen the preaching of the Gospel to Jews ceased contradicts not only the history described in the book of Acts, but it also puts the entire defense of the Sabbath in the New Testament in jeopardy. In other words, Adventists use the texts from the book of Acts such as 13:14 & 42; 17:2 and 18:4 to demonstrate that after the death of Jesus His disciples continued to observe the Sabbath. Note that these verses are part of the stories about Paul, who on all his missionary trips began his preaching in the synagogues where he always found Jews, Greek visitors and proselytes who accepted his message.

Ignoring these facts and insisting that after 34 AD the Gospel stopped being preached to the Jews puts the entire Sabbath argument at risk, for it supports the concept that all things 'Jewish' were displeasing to God, and that God had changed His attitude to the idolatry of the Gentiles.

On the contrary, the evidence from the book of Acts points to the number of Jews who accepted Paul's message in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4), Athens (Acts 17:10-13) and in Ephesus (Acts 18:19-20; 19:8-10). In fact, the book of Acts points out that in Athens, Paul's Jews in the synagogue received Paul much more favorably than the Greeks in the Areopagus (Acts 17:19-32).

Even in Corinth where many Jews from the local synagogue opposed Paul, and he had to tell them, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6), he left the synagogue together with Crispus, who was 'the ruler of the synagogue, and believed on the Lord with all his household' (Acts 18:8).

This highlights an important fact: in most of the cases described in the book of Acts, the preaching of the Gospel in the different cities of the Roman empire began with the Jews and proselytes at the local synagogues. These groups of followers of Jesus functioned as seeds for further development of the churches in the area. Their understanding of solid principles of study and familiarity with the Hebrew Scriptures was something the Christian leadership in Jerusalem was depending upon.

Therefore Scripture does not support the interpretation of Daniel 9:24, which many Adventists have used in the past. Jews played a vital role in the spreading the Gospel outside the borders of Judea. They played a vital role in preserving the knowledge of Hebrew for the past two

- While the Israelite Sanctuary service included a yearly cycle of feast days that typified the plan of salvation, the new Christian temple service incorporated many pagan festivals by giving them new names associated with church traditions.
- While the Sanctuary, and subsequently the temple, was the type of the real Heavenly Temple described throughout the book of Revelation, the 4<sup>th</sup> century Christianity adopted the Hellenistic neo-Platonic theory of 'heavenly shadows' for each earthly reality<sup>34</sup>. Such allegorical interpretation completely excluded the existence of the real sanctuary in heaven and subsequently the high priestly ministry of Jesus therein.

As a result of the transformations that occurred in the church between the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, Christianity completely altered the nature of its worship. The church went from the house/assembly style, with its focus on scripture, to a quasi-temple service that attempted to mix Old Testament Temple rituals with Hellenistic pagan traditions. All of these new customs distorted the Levitical laws that had once governed the ancient Israelite Sanctuary and presented it as a distorted caricature.

However, the existence of the Jewish people, whose traditions preserved the original Old Testament Scriptures, presented a threat to the 'new Christian order' propagated by church leaders, apologists and theologians of that time. The rhetoric about God rejecting the Jews and cursing them for their disobedience served as a smoke screen for the real intentions of the Church—to 'change times and law' (Dan 7:25) permanently.

The theory itself was formulated and systematized in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century by St. Augustine, who in his book *The City of God* presented the Church as a New Heavenly Jerusalem. In other words, Augustine's theology of Kingdom-Church implied the church must replace the Old Testament kingdom of Israel and become the new Israel with new temples, priests and kings. In such a setting, the old apostate Israel with its laws and Scriptures must be completely cut off. These ideas

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. St. Augustin, *The City of God*.

constitute what is known today as replacement theology or supersessionism.

For this reason beginning from the early Middle Ages, Jews who decided to become Christians were required to renounce their adherence to the principles of the Torah including the Sabbath and dietary laws—publicly declaring these laws to be evil and obsolete. Instead, Jews were supposed to swear to attend mass every Sunday, participate in Christmas and Easter liturgies and eat all food, especially pork<sup>35</sup>.

## REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY: ITS DANGERS AND PITFALLS FOR SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

Here is a recap of the basic principles that constitute Christian supersessionism that emerged in the Early Middle Ages.

### WHAT SUPERSESSIONISM TEACHES

Jews used to be God's special people but:

- Because of their disobedience, God nullified the Old Jewish Covenant and replaced it with a New Christian Covenant;
- Because the Jews killed Jesus, God took everything from them and gave it to Christians, making the church into a new Israel;
- Because the Jews rejected Jesus, God rejected them, destroyed their Temple in Jerusalem and gave the priesthood to the Church, thus making the Church a New Temple;
- Because the Jews failed to keep the covenant, God nullified all promises He gave to them through the prophets; therefore all these promises of blessings will be given to the Church;
- Because the Jews are cursed by God and deemed to be lost, they can only be saved if they renounce their Jewishness, stop

<sup>35</sup> S. Dubnov, *The History of the Jews of the Middle Ages*, v. 1 31-35.

just begun. It is often overlooked by the theologians that in the 1st century more than 60 percent of the Jews lived outside of Judea in the different provinces of the Roman and Parthian empires. According to Acts 11:20-26, Jews from the Diaspora in Cyprus and Cyrene came to Antioch and shared the Good News with the Hellenists there. Then it was a Levite by the name of Barnabas who was sent by the 'Jewish church' in Jerusalem to help in establishing the church in Antioch where believers were first called 'Christians.'

The 70-week period described in Dan 9:24 must be considered in the context of the entire prophecy of Dan. 9:24-27 that talks about the termination of the function of the Temple in Jerusalem. In fact, chapter 9 begins with the distressed prayer of Daniel, who, based on the vision recorded in Chapter 8, thinks that the Temple will not be restored for another 2300 years. The answer Daniel receives focuses on the Temple and on the theocratic temple-centered state of Israel and its capital, Jerusalem. Daniel is assured the Temple will be restored, in accordance with the edict of Artaxerxes in 457 BC.

The 70-weeks were given for this theocratic state to fulfill its mission. We are told that in the middle of the 70th week the sacrifice would cease. The followers of Jesus understood this to point to his death, which made sacrifices obsolete.

In the prophecy Daniel is told that the sacrifice would cease and the Temple and Jerusalem will be destroyed. This occurred literally in 70 AD. Nowhere in this passage can we find any mention of the rejection of the Jewish people by God. Rather we see the supernatural deliverance of those Jews who embraced Jesus just prior to the temple's destruction.

In a way, using Dan. 9:24 and this specific anti-Jewish interpretation to refute futuristic theology represents a reiteration of the supersessionism of the early Church Fathers. Such a position, while it appears to defend the historicist interpretation of the apocalyptic books, in reality creates a conflict with other significant church doctrines.

Since its inception, the Seventh-day Adventist church has used the historicist approach to interpret Revelation 13:1-10 and its seven-headed beast as the papacy. If the Church replaced Israel after 34 AD, this means that this 'True Israel' altered the biblical Sabbath and introduced a host of false doctrines.

mean that the people of Israel have to be treated as nonexistent. On the contrary, Jeremiah in his book clearly speaks, "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31).

The words 'Israel' and 'Judah' in this verse cannot be applied to the Church. The text does not speak about the 'covenant', but about 'the new covenant'. The word 'new' here implies that at some point in time there was a covenant, which is considered as 'old.'

It is impossible to make a new covenant with someone who was not a party to the old one. This is why the words of Jeremiah 31 are cited in the Epistle to Hebrews, who were a party to the Old Covenant. The Church was never a party to the Old Covenant made between God and Israel at Sinai. In fact Jeremiah 31:32 speaks, "not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke." Since the Church did not exist, it could not have broken the covenant Jeremiah is referring to. When we look at this particular prophecy, it definitely appears like God indeed intends to give Israel a second chance and wants to place His commandments in their hearts.

While it is true that the 70 weeks (the 490 year period) ended 3-1/2 years after the crucifixion, which happens to be the year of the stoning of Stephen, there is nothing in the text of Dan. 9:24 that would explicitly suggest that the preaching of the Gospel to the Jews was stopped and switched to the Gentiles. On the contrary, the entire reason for the stoning of Stephen was that a number of the synagogues were angry at him because he led Jews to accept Jesus.

The story of Stephen begins with the statement "Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). More so, in spite of the persecution that followed the execution of Stephen, the book of Acts tells us that "those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only" (Acts 11:19).

In other words, while the preaching of the Gospel was stopped in Judea because of the persecution from the Temple authorities and the Pharisees, in the Jewish Diaspora, the spreading of the message had

following their 'evil Torah' and accept the traditions of the Church.

- Therefore, after the crucifixion of Jesus, Jews are no longer considered to be a chosen people, thus they effectively ceased to exist as a nation.

While it is true that the idea of the existence of a special God-chosen nation does not fit into the framework of the 'everlasting gospel' that Adventists preach 'to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people' (Rev 14:6), it must be noted that the understanding of the Biblical term 'chosen' is often imbalanced for both Christians and Orthodox Jews. God never had any intention of creating a higher race of His favorites, nor had He ever commanded the Israelites to look down on other nations. According to the plan of redemption outlined in the Old Testament, all nations were supposed to come up to Jerusalem to the Mountain of the House of the Lord (Isa. 2). There they were to learn the precepts of the Torah, 'for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem' (Isa 2:3). God chose Israel solely to be the messengers of His truth in the pagan world, so that anyone who wanted to be saved could come to Jerusalem and join the assembly of Israel.

While it is also true that under the New Covenant, the geographic location of Jerusalem as the place of God's dwelling is no longer valid, and the true worshippers 'will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father' but 'in spirit and truth' (John 4:21, 23), we must not forget that Jesus still taught that 'salvation is of the Jews' (John 4:22). In other words, the absence of the geographical 'place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide' (Deut. 12:11) does not negate the fact that Scripture can only be properly understood through a Hebrew (i.e Jewish), not a Hellenistic approach.

While it is true that 'those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers... asked Pilate that He should be put to death' (Acts 13:27-28), this does not mean that all Jews rejected Jesus. Even a casual study of the Gospels shows that Jesus was not welcomed specifically in Jerusalem, unlike many cities of Galilee such as Capernaum where even the chief of the synagogue welcomed him. Jerusalem's elite could not overcome their pride to accept a Galilean. This is why the words "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent

to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! ' (Matt 23:37) are addressed specifically to Jerusalem not to Israel. On the contrary, on a number of occasions the Gospels report that 'many of the Jews who...had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him' (John 11:45, 12:10-11).

Jewish believers in Jesus together with the apostles who were definitely Jewish were at the core of the first Christian church. As noted above, the influx of Hellenists and their influence in the early second century was the primary cause of the deviation from Biblical truth in the early church. This would eventually lead to apostasy.

While it is also true, that a number of prophecies that talk about God's blessings upon Israel in the last days are predicated on Israel's faithfulness to His covenant, and therefore conditional, we must not forget that although Israel due to its unfaithfulness had to endure the curses of the covenant and lost their land (Lev. 26), God has not forsaken His covenant with them. On the contrary, after enumerating all the woes that would befall Israel in the case of their disobedience to the Torah, God still says, 'Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God' (Lev 26:44). As a result of such a promise God has not destroyed the Jewish people, even though they lived without their homeland for nineteen centuries.

The idea that God destroyed the Jerusalem Temple as a punishment to Jews for killing Christ is a major tenant of replacement theology. Note that there is no prophecy in the Bible that would interpret the destruction of the Second temple as a divine punishment to Jews as a nation for not accepting Christ. The only prophecy that specifically deals with the events of 70 AD is found in Daniel 9:27. While Daniel talks about the death of the Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, there is no mention of any kind of specific punishment. Unlike the prophecies that predicted the Babylonian captivity, which could be prevented should Israel have repented, the destruction of the Second Temple is inevitable and thus unconditional.

For centuries, the accusation of being God-killers haunted those Jewish people who lived among Christians. Even today, some Christians

originated among Catholic theologians, Protestants began adopting it in the 1840s and 1850s. In a way, this was a protestant reaction to the spread of Adventism. It eventually led to the abandonment of the historicist method of interpretation of the books of Daniel and Revelation by most Protestant groups.

Since the idea of severing the second half of the 70th week threatens to undermine the entire historicist approach, there definitely has to be a biblical response to it. As demonstrated above, the parallel between Daniel 9 and Revelation 13 is absolutely artificial and flawed and does not fit the context of the book of Revelation. This is just one of the plentiful pieces of biblical evidence.

The most common refutation used by Seventh-day Adventists is based on the words from Dan. 9:24 "Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy". The text is understood to mean that the Jews are being given one last chance to rectify their disobedient behavior. Therefore after 70 prophetic weeks (equal to 490 years), God will completely abandon His covenant with the people of Israel<sup>44</sup>.

Based on Dan. 9:25, which provides the beginning date for the 70-weeks period, the probationary time for the Jews ended in the year 34 AD with the event known as the stoning of Stephen, described in Acts 6-7. For this reason, since God has finally broken His covenant with Israel, Jews are no longer chosen and are basically nonexistent. Subsequently, any prophecy that talks about God's faithfulness to Israel has to be applied to the Church, whereas any prophecy that mentions return of the people of Israel to their land is conditional. Thus the creation of the state of Israel does not have any biblical significance and does not play any role in last-days events.

While it is true that many prophecies that talk about the return of the people of Israel into their Land must be understood in their historical context, which is the return for the Babylonian captivity, this does not

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<sup>44</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Andrews University Press, 1983).



12 is shown, it would immediately put the decision to sever the second half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week in Dan. 9:27 under suspicion.

- As mentioned above, the interpretation that the words about the man of sin or son of perdition who 'sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God' describes antichrist sitting in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem is definitely out of touch with reality. Those who preach such an interpretation have absolutely no understanding of either the structure of the Temple (where no man can actually be sitting) nor of Judaism and its views regarding the restoration of the Temple. In fact, according to the Jewish understanding, the Temple can be restored only by the Messiah himself. Therefore regardless of the desire of some futurists for the Jews to rebuild the Temple, they will not start this project until the Messiah returns. This can put the entire futuristic picture of the last days' events in jeopardy.
- Futurists insist that the seven-headed beast, the antichrist of Rev. 13:1-10, should come for 3-1/2 years before the coming of Christ but do not have any coherent interpretation of the two-horned beast described in Rev 13:11-17 that comes after the seven-headed beast. Based on the text of Revelation 13, it is absolutely impossible to place the antichrist before the second coming of Jesus, because in that case there is no place for the second beast, whose understanding in futurism is very vague.

## ADVENTIST – FUTURIST DEBATE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE ISSUE OF ISRAEL

Despite these inconsistencies, futurism presents a serious threat to Seventh-day Adventist theology, one of the few remaining protestant groups that assert that historicism is the correct method of interpretation for the apocalyptic books of the Bible<sup>43</sup>. In fact, while the idea of a secret rapture and 3-1/2 years of tribulation at the end of time

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed analysis of different approaches to the interpretation of the apocalyptic books of the Bible see Kenneth A. Strand *Foundational Principles of Interpretation, in Symposium on Revelation*, book 1, Frank Holbrook, Ed., (Biblical Research Institute General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, MD, 1992).

carry this idea to such an extreme that they argue that the holocaust was a divine retribution to Jews for their apostasy<sup>36</sup>.

The death of the Messiah was an absolutely unavoidable consequence of our sins. The Temple, as a key element of the 'first covenant' (Heb. 9:1), with its sacrifices, had fulfilled its typological function, and in order to manifest 'the way into the Holiest of All' (Heb. 9:8), it had to 'vanish away' (Hebr. 8:13). In spite of different speculations regarding what might have happened if all Jews had accepted Jesus, the Bible does not provide any alternative plan of redemption besides the substitutionary death of the Messiah for our sins. This is why accusing someone of killing Jesus contradicts the core principles of Christian faith, which is grounded on the fact that every sinner is indeed responsible for the death of Jesus. Thus any Christian who accuses someone else of killing Christ, de facto declares himself sinless.

Based on all the problems outlined above, traditional Christian supersessionism comes into serious conflict with Biblical teachings, which constitute the core doctrinal principles of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

- If the Christian church has indeed become God's Israel, in the full sense of its meaning, then Adventists will have to accept that Augustinian church-state theology is correct, since Old Testament Israel was a theocratic state. This definitely contradicts the teaching of Seventh-day Adventists who have always understood that any kind of modern theocratic state as an antichrist power<sup>37</sup>.
- If the New Testament church indeed assumes the theocratic statehood of Israel, then Adventists would have to accept the institution of the earthly priesthood and high priesthood. This contradicts the ultimate foundational belief in the High Priestly

<sup>36</sup> While such statements do not appear to be an official position of any church or scholar, this view presents a popular understanding among the lay members and preachers especially in the countries of Eastern Europe. Some western preachers express similar views. See Walter Veith, *Heritage Of Israel* DVD lecture Cf. <http://walterveith.com/walter-veith-Rekindling-the-Reformation.html>

<sup>37</sup> i.e. The interpretation of the beast from Rev. 13 as a papacy, cf. SDA Bible Commentary, v.7 to the book of Revelation.

ministry of Jesus in the Heavenly Sanctuary, on which Adventism was built. In fact, the Augustinian concept of the sanctuary as the earth was the sole reason for Miller's misunderstanding of Daniel 8:14 which led to the Great Disappointment.

The message of the Bible in regards to Old Testament Israel is clear. The theocratic Temple-centered 'church state' accomplished its mission. This mission was to sustain and support the sanctuary service, which typified the plan of salvation and through sacrifices presented in symbols the substitutionary atonement. After Calvary under New Covenant, this function was no longer needed. Therefore no one, neither the modern state of Israel nor the Christian church has the right to claim to be a 'new Old Covenant Israel.'

This does not mean that God has done away with the Jews. Liquidating the theocratic Temple-centered state does not constitute a liquidation of the nation/people. The new covenant was to be made 'with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah' (Jer. 31:31). In his epistle to Romans, Paul asks 'has God cast away His people?' and immediately answers, 'Certainly not!' (Rom. 11:1). In the context of this verse Paul clearly speaks about the Jewish people, calling himself 'an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin'.

What was the source of Paul's angst then? It was that many of his fellow Jews failed to recognize what their carefully preserved teachings clearly pointed toward. Yet, he clearly asks, 'What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?' and immediately answers 'Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God' (Rom. 3:1-2).

The question may be asked, "If the Jewish approach to interpreting scripture was valid, why did they fail to recognize Christ?" It could also be asked just as validly, "Why were the Jews at Thessalonica commended when they applied these same principles to examine whether what Paul was teaching was so." Unfortunately many adherers of the replacement theology fail to recognize that not all Jews rejected Jesus, as well as not all the Gentiles accepted Jesus or followed biblical teachings He proclaimed.

commentators that the idea of the secret rapture, supposedly based on Matt. 24:40-41 and 1 Thess. 4:16-17, is taken out of context. Both texts talk about the coming of Christ accompanied by the blast of the trumpet and resurrection of the dead. The idea of an antichrist actually sitting in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, besides its overt anti-Semitism, finds no validation within scripture.

The following are the examples of the inconsistency in the futuristic interpretation of eschatological events.

- Futurist theologians connect Rev. 13:5, which talks about the 42 month rule of the beast, with Dan. 9:27, which mentions the second half of the week. Yet they apply two different principles of the time calculation. The 42 months they take literally, whereas the 'half of the week', which is 3-1/2 days is understood through the year-day principle.
- Futurist theologians connect Rev. 13:5 with Dan. 9:27, but overlook the parallel between Rev. 13:5 and Rev. 12:7 & 12, that talk about the women hiding in the desert from the dragon 'called the Devil and Satan' (Rev. 12:9) during the same period of time. According to the text of Rev. 12, the woman runs to the desert in order to escape the dragon because he failed to devour her child. Connecting these two adjacent chapters in Revelation would undermine their theory about an antichrist deceiving the Jews who would accept him as their messiah. Rev. 12:17 speaks about the dragon waging war with the descendants of the woman 'who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ'. It is clear this text cannot speak about Jews being deceived by the antichrist. Moreover, the 1260-day period, in which the woman hides in the desert, happens before that. This means that the 3-1/2-year period of tribulation does not directly precede the Second Advent. In fact, according to the text of Rev. 12, the dragon attacks the woman after her child is 'caught up to God and His throne' (Rev 12:5). Since this text definitely talks about the ascension of Christ, placing a time gap of indefinite length between these two events does not make any sense. Therefore, if the connection between Rev. 13 and Rev.

While in the early stages of Christian apostasy, Israel was an obstacle for the Church in its intentional deviation from Biblical principles, at the end of the Middle Ages this new teaching arose to protect the same Church that arose from that apostasy. Now, Jews are needed to get Christians to heaven. While the early Church Fathers preached that God cursed Jews for their disobedience and took away their land from them, a segment of post-medieval theologians wanted the Jews to go back to their land to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

The following is a recap of the role of Israel in the last day events as seen through the prism of futuristic interpretation<sup>42</sup>:

- Jews will return to Israel and rebuild the Temple;
- The antichrist, who is a Jew from the tribe of Dan, will come and set himself in the Temple;
- This will start the time of tribulation;
- Jews will be deceived by the antichrist and accept him as the messiah;
- The church will be raptured secretly to heaven, while the Jews stay on earth suffering from the antichrist.

While this theology, in itself, was very controversial, the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 gave it strong momentum. It is interesting to note, that futurists apply those passages from the prophetic books, which talk about God returning Israel to the land to the creation of modern state of Israel. Futurists see this development as a part of God's eschatological plan. On the other hand, they believe that as soon as all the Jews have been gathered in Israel and have rebuilt the Temple that they will be trapped by the deception of the antichrist. In other words, according to at least one arm of futurist theology, God wants to gather Jews in Israel only in order to deceive them. Such a position appears to be very anti-Jewish.

The entire futuristic approach to the interpretation of the apocalyptic books is not based on the Bible. It is clear for many modern bible

It appears that a clearer understanding of the nature of the conditionality of the covenant between God and Israel and the conditionality of the Old Testament prophecies is vital to understanding Israel and the Church today. If God has not written the Jewish people off, in spite of the absence of theocratic Old Testament Israel, and if the Jewish people still appear to play a special role in God's plan of redemption, what is this role?

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<sup>42</sup> Such interpretations can be found in the Scofield Reference Bible (Oxford University Press: 1917).

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# CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN DISCUSSION

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## CHALLENGES TO SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST ESCHATOLOGY

As discussed earlier, the issue of Israel as a ‘cursed’ nation became entrenched within the early centuries of Christianity. However, the theme of Israel appeared with a new perspective when it became a part of the Counter-Reformation theology developed by the Catholic Church in the 16th century<sup>38</sup>.

### FUTURISM

The problem for Roman Catholicism was that the European reformers of the 16th – 18th centuries viewed the seven-headed beast of Revelation 13:1–10, as well as the ‘little horn’ of Daniel 7–8, as the Pope, the antichrist. In other words, the reformers adopted the historicist approach to the interpretation of the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. Such historicist thinking eventually led to the emergence of the Millerite movement, which gave start to Seventh-day Adventism.

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<sup>38</sup> In the Counter Reformation, after the Council of Trent, both Cardinal Bellarmine (1542–1621) and Blasius Viegas (1554–1599), a Portuguese Jesuit, gave as their counterinterpretation the view that the abolishing, or taking away, of the “daily” was, instead, the Protestant abrogation of the mass. Cardinal Bellarmine added that an individual Jewish Antichrist, yet to come, would further abolish the daily, or continual, sacrifice of the mass. Thus Reformation and Counter Reformation spokesmen alike, in charges and countercharges, connected the “daily” with the true and false sacrifice and priesthood of Christ and the true worship of God. The contention of the one was the antithesis of the other, but both identified the “daily” as the worship of God. Cf. SDA Bible Commentary, v. 4.

In order to combat the rise of Protestantism back in 16th century, Catholic theologians needed to find a way to disprove the reformer’s theory about the pope being an antichrist. This struggle led to the birth of futurism, an alternative approach to interpreting the apocalyptic books of the Bible<sup>39</sup>.

### ISRAEL IN FUTURISM

Futurists reject the year–day prophetic principle. Instead, they take the 1260 days/42 month period of the antichrist rule described in Revelation 13 literally and place it at the end time. This is done by connecting Revelation 13 with the passage in Daniel 9:27, which says, ‘Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.’<sup>40</sup>

Futurist theologians see parallels between the 1260 day period in Rev. 13 and the second half of the last week in Dan 9:27, since both time periods amount to 3-1/2 years. Therefore they detach this second half of the 70th week, placing it in the distant future at the end of time before the Second Advent of Christ. They call it the time of tribulation. The church, however, will be able to escape the last day tribulation because it will be secretly raptured.

One of the major scriptural proofs of this theory is taken from 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4: “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God”. The ‘man of sin’ in this verse is understood to be the antichrist, who is supposed to be sitting in the temple of God<sup>41</sup>.

Since the Temple of God was destroyed in 70 AD, the temple must be rebuilt in order for the antichrist to actually sit in the temple. Thus, the only people who can rebuild the temple are, of course, the Jews. This is how the issue of Israel is again raised in Christianity.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> John Wolwood, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary* (Chicago, 1966).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Hal Lindsey, *There’s a New World Coming* (Santa Ana, CA: 1973).