

Jesus and Israel. One Covenant or Two? by David E. Holwerda.
William B.Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich.,1995. Softcover, 193pp.

Dispensational pre-millennialism has attained a wide following among modern evangelicals. It insists that the Old Testament prophecies are to receive their literal fulfillment in restored Israel rather than in the church. Hal Lindsey popularized and sensationalized this view.

The World Council of Churches emphasize the common roots of Judaism and Christianity, and affirms continuing election of Jewish Israel. It argues that God uses two covenants and two religions, Judaism and Christianity. The Jews are believed to be the people of God apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Jewish thinkers are not uncomfortable with this two-covenant theology.

Is the state of Israel a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies? Will there be a literal temple with memorial sacrifices in Christ's millennial reign? Are there two ways of salvation, one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles?

Holwerda, professor of New Testament studies at Calvin Theological Seminary, argues for a spiritual fulfillment of Bible prophecies. Jesus is now Israel. As Abraham's seed and God's true Son, He relives Israel's history and thereby restores Israel. The restored Israel, still a flesh and blood historical reality, is the church. The church is the continuation of Old Testament Israel, carrying out its mission in the world . The temple prophecies find their fulfillment in Jesus and His disciples. The temple is no longer restricted to a geographic place. Ezekiel's temple of glory is Jesus. And according to 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1, the church is the temple of the living God. In the Old Testament the promise of the land is central. The New Testament appears to be strangely silent about the land. The promise of the land is now universal in scope. God's people are no longer confined to a geographical territory. In Christ the promise of the land applies to any land, the entire created earth.

The city of Jerusalem was central to Israel's hope for freedom and peace. But this city had become a city of slavery by its insistence on submitting to the law as the means for gaining righteousness and inheriting the promises. All of the prophecies associated with the earthly city are still in force. But since the earthly city has failed, God Himself must build the city of fulfillment and create the citizens who meet the conditions for inhabiting the city. Holwerda states, " The city that God builds is now above - where Christ is - and the citizens who inherit that city are those who believe in Christ and keep the covenant."

Can Jewish Israel still lay claim to being the elect people of God even after rejecting Jesus as their Saviour? Holwerda rightly insists that " belief in Jesus is the only way to understand Moses and to appropriate the promises made to Abraham and his seed." ... " The way of salvation for both Jew and Gentile is the same because both must call on the name of Jesus to be saved." On the basis of Romans 11, Holwerda believes that the apostle Paul had reason for hope in the salvation in Israel. God, who is sovereign and gracious, can still bring Jewish Israel to faith in Jesus Christ.

Every interpreter must guard against claiming finality for his own understanding of fulfillment of prophecy. And in this regard Holwerda does not claim to be an exception. He asserts that we cannot draw an elaborate scenario of what God has in mind for the future. " God's fulfillment of his word is filled with such surprises that we can respond only with amazement. We should expect the unexpected and that it will surpass our expectations." Holwerda is so right. Over the years I have heard and read many dogmatic statements about events pertaining to Israel, the temple, and so on. Many had to change their interpretations as events overtook their predictions.

Holwerda's book is spiritually enriching, Christ exalting, faithful to Scripture, filled with refreshing new insights, devoid of polemics, sensitive to the evil of anti-Semitism, written from the historic Reformed perspective.

Johan D. Tangelder