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# ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

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Israel and the Church is a journal for biblical and theological reflections concerning Israel and the Church in God's plan for this world in the light of His coming Kingdom.

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# *Listening and Sharing*

**KEES DE VREUGD**  
editor

I think it was already in 2006, in Jerusalem, that we announced an international magazine, to further deepen the biblical insights in God's plan with Israel.

The plan has taken a long route. It was taken up again during the preparations of the Twelve Theses. Finally, here is the first issue of 'Israel and the Church', as a direct fruit of the Twelve Theses Summit we held in Holland, February 2018.

This first issue contains lectures on the twelve theses, that were held during the summit. As an addition, Rev. Willem Glashouwer has put the twelve theses in the perspective of the classical creeds that are known from history, and that are kept in churches of various denominations.

It is our goal to publish 'Israel and the Church' twice a year. We hope to receive contributions from all branches and from all 'corners of the earth', so that we can strengthen each other as a worldwide movement. Every region may have its own questions, and its specific concerns. Together, we want to listen to and share what the Spirit says to the churches.

We pray that the Almighty God of Israel, the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, may bless this new publication.

# Bless and be blessed

## **Thesis 1**

As members of the body of Jesus Christ we believe and confess that God has chosen Abraham, Isaac and Jacob because He wanted to bless all the nations of the world in and through them. In this way, salvation has come through Israel to us.

## **Thesis 2**

It is our calling to bless Israel, for we owe our salvation to the Firstborn Son of this nation. Through Jesus the Jew we, as believers from the nations, are included with Israel to be 'children of Abraham', the father of all who believe.

REV. HENK POOT

**want to start my explanation of the first two theses with a reading of Psalm 72, verse 18 and 19:**

*Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel  
Who alone does wondrous things  
Blessed be his glorious name for ever;  
May his glory fill the whole earth  
Amen and Amen.*

**THE HEART OF THE NATIONS**

One could say that according to the Bible the centre of the earth is the holy land, the glorious land, as the prophet Daniel calls it. And that the heart of that glorious country is the city of Jerusalem and the heart of Jerusalem is mount Zion where the holy temple once stood. The prophet Jeremiah speaks about the throne of God. And Psalm 132 says about Jerusalem: *'For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for his habitation; This is my resting place for ever, here I will dwell, for I have desired it.'* (verse 13 and 14) And another psalm says: *'The LORD bless you from Zion.'* (Psalm 134) This place is the connection with the heavens and from this place God is giving his blessing not only to the people of Israel but to all the nations of the earth.

Here are the gates of heaven and here the atonement of our sins took place, here the Holy Spirit descended from the heavens

on the days of Pentecost, and it is here that the history of salvation will end, here the Messiah will return and the kingdom of Israel will be restored. From here God's glory will fill the earth. But as important as Jerusalem is, so is Israel.

In Jeremiah chapter 31, Israel is called the chief of the nations, but it is also the heart of the nations. And as our heart and not our brains are the connection with our soul, so is Israel the connection of the nations with God:

- Without the people of Israel no revelation. No Bible.
- Without Israel no Abraham, no Moses, no David, no Psalms, no Prophets, no Apostles.
- Without Israel no Old Testament and no New Testament.
- Without Israel no worship.
- Without Israel no sacrifices and no redemption.
- Without Israel no Jesus and no Saviour.
- Without Israel no outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- And even no Christianity.
- Without Israel no future.

It is not that God didn't have the opportunity to do it otherwise, but He chose - and we have to obey, accept, believe this reality - to

do it through the bed of Israel. Israel is the river through which revelation and salvation runs to the rest of humanity.

*Isaiah 43:10: 'You are my witnesses, says the LORD and my servant whom I have chosen.'*

So out of Jerusalem and through the people of Israel, the LORD shows his mercy and love and glory to mankind.

### **A BLESSING FOR THE NATIONS**

God blessed the nations through Israel and Israel is still a blessing for the nations: e.g. the first cell-phone was made in Haifa, for many people it is a blessing. Israel has the highest concentration of high-tech industries in the world after the United States and Japan. With the method of nano-technology Israeli scientists have achieved an unusual record: they have packed the entire Hebrew Bible unto a gold-plated silicon chip, smaller than



the head of a needle. 52% of all Nobel prize winners in the area of medicine are Jewish, in the field of economics 40%. And that is only physical blessings. How many famous people were Jewish: writers such as Heine and Kafka, musicians such as Mendelssohn, Rubinstein, Bernstein etc.

Isaiah 27:6 says that in the future Israel will fill the face of the world with fruit, and that is not only oranges. But most of all, they have blessed us with the Bible and our Saviour and Master Jesus Christ.

### **SALVATION IS FROM THE JEWS**

Jesus is the Son of God. We all know the famous verses in the prophets: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9).

*'Bethlehem Ephratha from you come forth for me, one whose origin is from old, from ancient days'.*

He is the brightness of God's glory, through whom God created the world (Hebrews 1:1,2), The image of the invisible God, writes Paul to the Colossians, all things were created through Him and for Him (Colossians 1:16).

But at the same time He is the seed of Abraham and the son of David and the son of a Jewish woman called Miriam or Mary. He could say and pray: *'Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.'* (John 17:5) And He was circumcised, He wore tzitzit, He went to the synagogue and observed the sabbath and all the biblical commandments. He was a real Jew. He was, He is Immanuel: one could say with Zephaniah: *'Do not fear, o Zion ... The LORD your God is in your midst'* (3:16-17), and He was and is a Jew the same time, the Saviour of Israel and the concentration of Israel.

He is the Servant of the LORD in the midst of the Servant of the LORD, God's firstborn son in the midst of God's firstborn son Israel (Hebrews 1:6 and Exodus 4:22). His task and calling is manifold. It is everything that Moses and the prophets have told about the coming Messiah: He will be the perfect

prophet and teacher, the good shepherd who will lead the flock of Israel. He will deliver Israel from all her enemies, He will smite the nations with a rod of iron, He will gather the dispersed from Juda and the ten tribes from the four corners of the world and bring them back, He will restore Jerusalem, the city of the great King, and He will be a light unto the nations.

But first of all, He will sacrifice Himself as the Lamb of God, taken out of the flock of Israel, to purify the sins of Israel and even the sins of all mankind. First of all... and at the end of all, He will be the King on the throne of David, not in Rome or in New York, but in front of the united nations in Jerusalem on Mount Zion.

#### **ISRAEL AND THE GENTILES**

'A light unto the nations', He was and is, and even more: that wonderful light that shone forth from Jerusalem, unites believers from all the nations with the chosen people of God. Paul says in Ephesians 1: as a part of God's plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1:10).

But we, gentile believers, must never overlook, when we are called members of the body of Christ, that we are members of the body of a Jewish Messiah. He never denied or laid down His human flesh, never laid down His Jewishness. It belongs to the very identity of the Church. And we must remember that our Saviour has still a lot of things to fulfil: The bringing home of all the tribes of Israel, the judging of the nations, the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel. Our ingathering is of course very important, but there are more things to do.

And when we speak of Paul, who began to preach to us gentiles: he also was and always remained a Jew. He was not the founder of

a new non-Jewish religion. He did not found Christianity as Jesus did not.

In the days of Paul and first-century Judaism, the view of the nations outside Israel was not a very pleasant and positive one. They formed the strange world which almost two centuries

ago in a bitter confrontation with Hellenism had put an end to orthodox Judaism and to the unique and exclusive identity of the Jewish nation as the chosen people of God.

So there were many Jews who were very much opposed to the entering of pagans in the house of Israel. And Paul himself was very much against it. He was not so much opposed, I think, against some kind of new

religion outside Israel, or in other words of the so-called gospel leaving Jerusalem and the borders of Israel, but he was very much against bringing the nations in, and the living together of people that ate kosher and were circumcised with people who did not.

So his conversion on the road to Damascus was not the conversion to Christianity and a farewell tot Judaism and the Torah. It was his conversion as a Jew to bring the light from Jerusalem to the nations, in the authority of the Jew Jesus, in order to invite Japheth in the house of Shem and to engraft wild branches against their pagan nature into the olive tree of Israel. While others like John, James and Peter were trying to guide the Jewish people.

#### **JEWS ARE JEWS AND GREEKS ARE GREEKS**

Israel and the nations are united under one head, Jesus the Messiah, but as a new people that is still very differentiated:

- Jews remain Jews and we remain wild branches. Japheth does not change into Shem.
- Jews stay loyal and obedient to the law

## **The identity of the land and of Jerusalem has not changed**

and the commandments God gave them. And the new believers have to respect that. They are guests coming in.

- Israel has blessed them, and the Jewish followers of Christ accept that also former heathens now participate in the spiritual blessing of the Lord, the worship and the care of the God of Israel and the future of the redemption. They are also called children of Abraham now.

(1) But that does not mean that Israel has lost his place in the history of salvation. The last sentences of the prophet Isaiah say: *'For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your descendants and your name remain.'*

Israel, also that part of Israel that does not recognise Jesus as the Messiah, remains the beloved and elected people of God. He remains to have his prophetic role in history, he will continue playing his part in the unfolding of the history.

The Jews are not discharged from their calling to be a servant of the Lord and to worship Him and to keep His commandments. Those who believe in Jesus are only the first fruits of the rest of the Jewish nation. And that rest, in fact a large part of the Jewish nation, is serving God and blessing us in a special manner.

We all know the famous words of Paul when he says that the rejection of Jesus by the Jews does not mean their rejection by God. Their rejection means the reconciliation of the world. He writes to the Christians in Rome: *'They are enemies regarding the gospel for your sake.'* (Romans 11:28)

And in a certain way their rejection of Christianity is a blessing for the Church also

in another way: If the Church wants to listen to their critique when they tell us that the Messiah is also the one who will deliver Israel from their enemies, that the Church is not the fulfilment of the kingdom and that the future redemption takes place not in heaven but here, on this planet. That it is not enough to say that all is well with my soul, that is not the end of the story.

(2) The promises for Israel also remain valid, among which is the ingathering of the exiles and the defeat of all the enemies of the Jewish people.

(3) The identity of the land and of Jerusalem has not changed either. It remains still the land that shall be married by the bridegroom Israel and Jerusalem will be again a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD (Isaiah 62:3).

Yes, it is true, and Jesus foresaw it and spoke about it, the city of Jerusalem would be deserted and the city would be trodden down by the

gentiles. There would come a time that the temple would be destroyed and not only the one in Jerusalem but also the temple on the Gerizim, of the so-called Samaritans. There would come a time when neither Jews nor Samaritans could worship in their temple, but only until the times of the gentiles would be fulfilled (John 4:21, Luke 21:24). When the gospel would be preached to the whole world as a testimony to all nations, then the end would come (Matthew 24:14) and the fortunes of Jerusalem would change. The words of the Lord about Jerusalem remain still valid. Zechariah 8: *'I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy. Thus says the LORD: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts, the Holy Mountain.'* (verse 3)

The spreading of the gospel, when the light

**In the end,  
the gospel  
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upon the city**



shone forth from Jerusalem, did not mean the rejection of Jerusalem. In the end, the gospel of the Kingdom will return to Jerusalem and the light will arise upon the city. 'Darkness', it says (Isaiah 60), *'shall cover the earth and thick darkness the people, but the LORD will arise upon you and his glory will be seen upon you.'*

4) And all this will happen because the God of Israel remains the same, as the universal King for Whom all nations will bow, He is still the God of Israel. He doesn't change from a national God into a universal God. As the national God of Israel, He was the only universal God from the very start of creation. In his study *'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people'* [*'Freut euch ihr Völker, mit Gottes Volk'*], the German theologian Klaus Wengst writes: 'For Paul, the particularity of Israel in its relation to God is not sublimated into some universalism. Rather is God, 'in Jesus the anointed one', also God for the nations, even as Israel's God, and in his enduring relation to Israel.'

[*'Die Besonderheit Israels in seiner Beziehung zu Gott gilt Paulus nicht als in einem Universalismus aufgehoben. Vielmehr ist Gott 'im gesalbten Jesus' auch Gott für die Völker gerade als Israels Gott und in seiner bleibenden Bezogenheit auf Israel.'* (page 446)]

5) At the same time we must also say that the gentiles who are grafted in the olive tree remain wild branches. They are unified by God through Christ, but they don't become Jews. They are gentiles and they remain people of the nations. They share in the spiritual blessing of Israel and at the same time they share in the promises of God for the nations: In the midst of the nations they will come to the city of Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel and to keep the feast of tabernacles. They will be part of the nations who will travel to the court of the King of Israel to learn Torah, the ways of the God of Jacob. They share the fulfilling of the promises of Isaiah 2: *'for out of Zion shall go forth the Law and the words of the Lord from Jerusalem and He shall judge between the nations and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares.'*

The last chapter of Isaiah, I already mentioned, chapter 66, declares that *'the people of the nations shall bring the children of Israel as an offering unto the LORD [...] to my holy mountain Jerusalem, just as the Israelites bring their cereal offerings in a clean vessel to the LORD. And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites'* (verse 20).

### **ONLY SOME OF THEM**

Is it a strange thought when I say that we as gentile believers in Christ will stay among the nations in the world to come? We are the first fruits as there are also first fruits in Israel and as the first fruits, that is my opinion, we will reign with Christ over the nations. Jesus said in the parable of the talents: 'Well done, good and faithful servant, you have been faithful over little, I will set you over much, enter the joy of your master' (Matthew 25:21).

## **Is the establishment of the State of Israel the Kingdom that has been promised?**

### **THE DISPERSION OF THE JEWS IS AN ABNORMALITY**

We believe that there is no breach in the promises of God. We believe that exile is an abnormality. Is the establishment of the State of Israel the Kingdom that has been promised? No, it isn't. But it wasn't only a human enterprise either. It took place only three years after the Valley of dry bones, according to the Scriptures in the same chapter, in the same decade (Ezekiel 37). Is it the fate of Israel to stay in exile for ever and to disappear among the nations? No it isn't. The twelve disciples will sit on twelve

thrones to reign over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28).

### **EXILE AND DISPERSION ARE ABNORMALITIES**

God says about Jerusalem: *'This is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever.'* (Ezekiel 43:7)

We believe that these are the days that God is turning back the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem. We believe that the ingathering and the restoration of the Kingdom of David is a work that will be done by the Messiah Himself. But He is doing it today, we live in Messianic times. It is according to the Scriptures that we as people from the nations are brought in, in His work. It is really a new form of discipleship to support Israel and the ingathering of the tribes.

And it is also according to the Scriptures that all the nations are against it. The Bible says: in the days of Messiah, *'The LORD will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the nations and all the nations of the earth will come together against it.'* (Zechariah 12) They will try to lift Jerusalem, to give it another place, another identity. And that is what we witness.

We witness in our generation the days of Messiah. And we all hope that soon the glorious day will come, that the Messiah will appear to complete His work and to glorify the name of the God of Israel in the face of all the nations. May his glory fill the whole earth, Amen we Amen.

It is so important for the Church to choose the right position in these times, not the side of those who want to deprive Israel and Jerusalem from its very secret and identity, but to bless them and to confirm them.

### **THE NATIONS BLESSING ISRAEL**

It is our calling to bless Israel (thesis nr. 2), and for me that means loving them, supporting the Jews, but not least to confirm them as the nation of God, the chosen people. Paul

says: If the gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also be of service to them in material blessings. They are in debt to them. And there is of course the well-known promise of God to Abraham: *'I will bless those who bless you'*. And the teaching of Jesus about the nations that will be judged according to their attitude towards His brothers. But on the other hand there is not so much mentioning of the nations blessing Israel. The nations are called to bless the God of Israel, when they see His great wonders among His people.

Psalm 102 says: *'Thou wilt arise and have pity on Zion. It is the time to favour her, the appointed time has come'* and then: *'The nations will fear the name of the LORD and all the kings of the earth thy glory.'* They will worship the LORD (verses 14, 16, 23). Paul writes to the Romans: *'Rejoice ye Gentiles, with His people.'* (Romans 15:10).

Maybe we should say that blessing Israel is an indissoluble part of worshipping God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

- \* If the God of Israel is faithful to his people,
- \* If Jesus is a Jew,
- \* If our faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit, when it comes forth from the heart of God and from the heart of Jesus,
- \* If we are not members of a new religion, but through Jesus Christ gentile members of the centuries old Qahal Adonai,

then it is impossible to forsake the love of Israel. It touches the heart of whom we are. It is definitely a Signum Ecclesiae (hallmark of the Church, *ed.*).



# 'Children of Abraham'



The Twelve Theses are not meant as a final and definitive saying. Rather as a help, an instrument to reflect on what the Bible says about Israel, the nations and the Church. It helps us to concisely formulate our message. But I hope it will help the churches to reflect anew on the biblical position of Israel, the nations, and the Church, and to discover how much richness there is in the Bible concerning these matters.

KEES DE VREUGD

**purposely put it in this order: Israel, the nations, and the Church.**

Working on the theses has caused me to think this over again. And the more I am doing so, the more I come to the conclusion that the Bible is first and foremost interested in the relation between Israel and the nations.

I also on purpose put it somewhat bluntly, in order to sharpen our view. From Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, it is about Israel and the nations, and more precisely, about the restoration of Israel and the nations to God's original purposes. In that sense, the Church, as the community of believers in Jesus Christ, consisting of Jews and gentiles, is a derivative of this relation, and an avant-garde of sorts of that kingdom, in which both Israel and the nations are restored to their original destiny: the orientation on the God of Israel and His Messiah, Who will dwell in the holy city of Jerusalem.

**3. We believe that the Church has not replaced Israel. By faith in Jesus Christ we also have become 'children of Abraham', the father of all who believe.**

In the elaboration, we state: It is our strong conviction that the Church has not replaced or superseded Israel in God's economy. The presupposition that the promises that were given to Israel now have been transferred to the Church is a terrible aberration and a sin before God.

The promises given to Israel are first and foremost: the promise of the land, the promise of restoration and return, and the promise of the Messiah. That is how I read it, in any case. These promises are not just fulfilled in the (first) coming of Christ, and now expanded to the whole world, as fulfilment and enlargement theologies want it. They are still open, are warranted, affirmed in the coming of Christ (see Romans 15:8: *'Christ has become a minister of the circumcision ... to affirm the promises to the fathers.'*)

There is nevertheless a promise with a universal tenor: the promise of being a blessing for the nations. I will enter into that now.

**CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM**

We find this expression, or synonyms of it, in John 8:39; Romans 9:7 (the Greek here uses two different terms: 'seed' - sperma and 'children' - tekna); Galatians 3:7 ('sons'

-hyioi); Galatians 3:29 (sperma). In Galatians 3:26 believers are even addressed as 'sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus'. I note in passing that other translations of this verse are possible, or even preferable, like: 'Sons of God in Christ Jesus, through faith' - Christ's faith, that is, namely his faithfulness to God.

Romans 9:6,7 is a passage that quite easily could wrong-foot us. As if Paul is saying here that there is a split, a break, within Israel. In various translations we read: '*Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.*' This is often understood as, that the part of Israel that has accepted Jesus Christ is called the true Israel, whereas the other part is rejected. And when Paul speaks of all Israel that will be saved (Romans 11:26), he refers to the church of Jews and gentiles as the true, spiritual Israel.

## 'The deliverer will come from Zion'

In my understanding, this runs counter to the inner logic of chapter 9. Let us consider the next verses. Vs. 7 says: '*In Isaac your offspring [literally: 'seed'] shall be called.*' Here the word 'seed' is mentioned, that also plays a part in Galatians 3. Isaac is the seed - and then Jacob. They are the children according to the promise - another keyword in Galatians 3, too - and not to the flesh - though they are as much Abraham's physical offspring as Ishmael and Esau. But God's choice is Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau. Ishmael and Esau are rejected as God's instrument in bringing blessing to the world. On the other hand, they are the first-called to bless Israel, as can be understood from the story of Esau and Jacob (cf. Genesis 32:26). And they are still to receive a blessing through Jacob/Israel. But, as Paul points out, the line of God's election is Abraham - Isaac - Jacob. And Jacob is Israel, in other words, the twelve tribes. And so, when

all of Israel will be saved, it is indeed all of Israel, the twelve tribes of Jacob. '*The deliverer will come from Zion: he will turn godlessness away from Jacob....*' (Romans 11:26)

In the following of Romans 9-11, Paul several times refers to the prophecy of Hosea. Now Hosea's prophecy concerns the northern ten tribes, the kingdom of Israel, as opposed to the kingdom of Judah. He prophesies judgment on Israel, but he also tells about the restoration of Israel. It will again be 'My people'. Moreover, the two tribes of Judah will reunite with the ten tribes of Israel. Why should Paul not also have the plain meaning of the prophecy in mind, when he is citing Hosea? I think this reveals the inner logical structure of chapters 9-11.

And it also solves the problem of interpreting verse 6b. This verse forms the logical link between the verses 1-5 and the following. Instead of reading it as an affirmative sentence, we could also read it as a question, a rhetorical question: for are not all those who are from Israel, Israel? Otherwise, the word 'for' does not make sense. And he continues in the same vein: but not because they are seed of Abraham are they all children, but '*in Isaac seed shall be called for you.*' In other words, the inheritance is qualified. The line of the promise is not in contradiction with the line of physical offspring. Rather, God's choice qualifies the true inheritors: Israel is, and remains, Israel. God doesn't go back on it. Verses 6/7 therefore cannot be a limitation of Israel, but fences Israel in, as it were, against the brother nations, who, although they descend from Abraham, do not inherit the promise and the election to be an instrument in God's purposes. Yet: Israel's election (also) turns towards them. Ishmael and Esau are the first-called to bless Jacob/Israel. In Romans 9, it is without a shade of doubt that Israel is and remains the son/child.

### GALATIANS 3

I think that we should bear this in mind when we read Galatians. Israel is the son - the firstborn son, even. However, my suggestion

would be that in Galatians a different aspect of the meaning of the word 'son' is at stake. And that there is a different objective towards the nations: it is about the receiving of the promise. Blessing, salvation for the nations is part and parcel of the promise to Abraham. In Galatians 3, this promise is connected with the gift of the holy Spirit, which those receive, who believe in Christ. By faith, that is. In this vein they are sons of Abraham. Not by circumcision. That is the exclusive preserve, or the prerogative, of the physical descendants. For Israel, circumcision is a sign of God's covenant with them. At the same time, that includes a prescription, or a task, namely: to live according to the covenant (compare Romans 2:25-29). In that way, Israel is a witness of the Eternal One, a light to the nations.

However, imputed righteousness even precedes circumcision and obedience. Abraham believed, and it was credited him as righteousness. Belief, faith, means to trust. It is also: to be faithful, loyal, reliable. To this applies: it is the faithfulness of the Messiah through which the nations may receive salvation. And vice versa, everyone who puts his trust in the promised Messiah, is a child of Abraham. Not in the physical sense - that is only Israel itself, and the Messiah of Israel, but in a broader sense.

'Son' in Hebrew does not only mean 'descendant', but also belonging to a certain group with shared characteristics. Here, being a son of Abraham means sharing, participating in the faith of the Messiah and His people, sharing in the blessing that was promised. That blessing is the Spirit - the Divine Presence, in Hebrew: the Shekhinah. The Shekhinah extends also to the nations. The nations participate in the Shekhinah. Therefore, believers from the nations can even be called 'sons of God' (Galatians 3:26). I see in this expression a parallel with 'sons of Abraham'. To me, this clarifies matters even more: Israel is God's firstborn son (Exodus. 4:22). Through Israel, and specifically through the Messiah Jesus - the



promised 'seed' - believers from the nations, may now also be called sons of God, and therefore also sons of Abraham. But here, too, Israel precedes. Is this way of speaking alien to Judaism? I must admit, I did not find any reference to this broader sense of son of Abraham in Jewish texts. However, Judaism fully recognises that all peoples are children of the Most High.

### THE LAND PROMISE

In the second place I note, that Galatians 3 understood in this sense does not deny the promise of the land to Israel, but rather confirms it. As I have noted before, the promises to the fathers could be summed up as: land, offspring/nation, and being a blessing to the nations.

In Galatians 3, Paul also speaks of promise and promises. Some argue from Galatians 3 that through Christ the land has been expanded to include the whole earth. Is that correct? Or could we also read it differently, affirming the enduring validity of the land promise to Israel? We should note that Paul is arguing against those 'pseudo-brothers' that want to force new gentile believers to

take upon them Jewish customs (Galatians 2:14), especially circumcision (cf. Galatians 2:3 and 5:2-3), dietary and purity laws (cf. Galatians 2:12), and set times (Galatians 4:10). This would blur the distinction between Israel and the nations, and moreover, it runs counter to the Gospel of grace, and counter to the practice of the brothers in Jerusalem and the decision taken by the apostolic council (Acts 15). In this vein, Paul is arguing, that Christ is the seed, and therefore the One who inherits the promises. He does so by way of midrash (Jewish Bible interpretation) on the basis of the singular of the noun 'seed' in Hebrew. Before that, however, he points out what it is all about: that salvation comes to the gentiles, was from the outset the purpose of God electing Abraham. And this is through faith. Again, the distinction and the unity of Israel and the nations is at stake, and thus the purpose of Israel's calling as a priestly kingdom.

Two times in this chapter, Paul speaks of the promises, plural (verses 16 and 21). As I have pointed out, this could refer to the differentiation in offspring, land, and blessing to the nations.

For the rest, he speaks about the promise, singular. Now, according to Paul's application, this promise is tied to the gift of the Spirit (verse 14). The gift of the holy Spirit is the main issue in this chapter. Did the gentiles receive the Spirit through faith or through 'works of the law'? The answer is, of course, by faith. And that is not just the case with the gentiles. Also 'we, who are Jews by birth and not gentile sinners' (Galatians 2:15), received the promised Spirit through the faith. In that vein, both Jews and gentiles can appeal to Abraham, who for his trust in God was justified.

However, even the Palestinian theologian Munther B. Isaac, dean of Bethlehem Bible College, has argued that in Galatians 3, too, the promise should not be 'emptied of its reference to the land'. In my humble opinion, then the meaning could only be that the

gentiles receive their portion on the earth as a derivative of Israel receiving its portion. The land of Israel, inhabited by the people of Israel, remains the centre of a kingdom, that at the same time has a worldwide, even universal outreach.

However, does that pertain to all the promises that were given to Abraham? Paul cites from the book of Genesis the words 'and to his seed'. This passage appears several times in Genesis (13:15; 17:8; 24:7). It is remarkable that this is every time in the context of the promise of land to Abraham. Obviously, the plain meaning is that the promise of the land pertains to Isaac and Jacob and his offspring. Paul does not deny that, nor expand the meaning of it. He is building his argument on quotations from the Scripture, thereby not giving the one and only possible interpretation, but applying the Scripture to his own argument. The question at stake is: do gentile believers have to fulfil the Mosaic law in order to receive the Spirit? And the answer is: no, because God promised to Abraham that all the nations would be blessed in him through faith. To this promise, all those who are in Christ,



are heirs, since through Christ they are seed of Abraham, even the Greeks (verse 28). However, they are so as Jews, and as gentiles. Just as the difference between the sexes remains, even though they are one in Christ. There is principal unity, but it remains a unity in diversity.

Therefore, the promise of the land remains for Israel. And if the scope of it should be expanded, then it is to mean that, like Israel, every nation will receive the blessing in its own land.

Summarising, this means that both Israel and the nations, and in fact creation as a whole, are restored, as Israel and as the nations (cf. Galatians 3:28; Rom. 11), each in its own land. As such, however, they are reconciled to each other, and to God, and now live as a reconciled community of mankind before God (Eph. 2).

This brings me to a thought I want to explore briefly in connection with theses 4 and 5:

#### **4. We believe that all the Covenants since Abraham have been made with Israel.**

The elaboration reads:

We believe that the Church has been engrafted through faith in Jesus Christ into the New Covenant made with the House of Israel and the House of Judah. Of this new Covenant the signs are the broken body and spilt blood of our Lord. We believe that He is the seed of Abraham so that the promised blessing for the nations has come through Him, and Abraham has become the father of all those who believe.

The elaboration and clarification directly confine this to the new covenant. Other covenants (for the plural, see Romans 9:5) are treated under other theses. Believers are engrafted on the new covenant, we say in the elaboration. The vocabulary hints at Romans 11, the image of the olive tree. However, reflecting on the remarks I made to the



previous thesis, I tend to say: all covenants, including the new covenant, are made with Israel. But they have an effect for all the nations. Also for us, therefore. The new covenant therefore, too, is made with Israel, and exclusively with Israel. But the nations may walk with that light.

#### **5. We believe that the Lord will be faithful to all the Covenants He made with Israel, as well as to all the promises He gave to the Church.**

In fact, I have argued that the promises given to the Church could be summed up in just one promise: the blessing of the holy Spirit. This is the indwelling of the Divine Presence, or in other words, the orientation towards Jerusalem. Every other promise is first and foremost preserved for Israel, even - I believe - the promise of governing the nations. The nations pick the fruits of that renewed covenant with Israel: the promise, the blessing of the holy Spirit. Because God renews the covenant with Israel, Israel reaches its destiny and the nations receive blessing.



# *Hardening, blindness and repentance of the Church*

REV. CORNELIS KANT

**In Romans 11 Paul says: 'I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.'**

Paul speaks about a temporary hardening of a part of the Jewish people until... He calls it a 'mystery'. The early Church on the contrary did not understand that the rejection of Jesus as their Messiah by the larger part of the Jewish people was a divine mystery. They just saw it as stubbornness and unwillingness to believe. Many Christians in the first century felt confirmed in this view about Jews when Jerusalem and the holy Temple were destroyed by the Romans. They saw it as a divine sign of rejection and curse of the Jewish people. Church father Justin Martyr (AD 100-165) wrote in his Dialogue with the Jew Trypho that Judaism has become obsolete and that the Christian Church is now the true Israel: 'By killing the true Justice you have reached the climax of your depravity.'

### **THE CHURCH AS THE 'NEW ISRAEL'**

This way of thinking would become fundamental in Christian theology concerning the Jewish people in the centuries ahead. Only Messianic Jews and Christians out of the [gentile] nations could be the new Israel. The role of the Jewish people was definitely finished.

Despite the wrong ways people make in their way of thinking and their theology, God's covenants and promises to the Jewish people will all remain and completely be fulfilled. The prophet Isaiah writes: 'On this mountain He will destroy the shroud that enfolds

*all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations (...)* He will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.' (Isaiah 25:7-8) In beautiful metaphorical words he speaks about a sheet that covers us as nations, and also about the removal of the disgrace that people inflicted on the Jewish people. Just as Paul writes: 'For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.' (Romans 11:32 NKJV)

Over the ages, however, the Christian Church had developed a replacement theology in which there was no place for Israel and the Jewish people. The impact of this theology was not restricted to only the theory of believing. Jews more and more became victim of limitations and even discrimination, antisemitism and brutal slaughtering of hundreds of thousands of Jews over the ages. It began with anti-Judaism, developed to antisemitism, and finally in our present time to antizionism. Many theologians and pastors have written books and sermons against Judaism and the Jews. A lot of them tried to wipe out the Jewish roots of our Christian faith.

### **TWO FORMS OF REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY**

In replacement theology, two theories could be distinguished: punitive and economic supersessionism.

**Punitive supersessionism** believes that the Jewish people are no longer God's people, because they have rejected Jesus as their Messiah and even killed Him. So the Lord God has broken His covenant with them as a punishment. Over the ages, this has been the most dominant theory.

They often rely on a Bible verse like Acts 28, where Paul teaches Jews in Rome about Jesus and the Kingdom: 'He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. They disagreed among

themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: *'The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet: 'Go to this people and say, 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.' For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' Therefore I want you to the Gentiles, and they will listen!'* (Acts 28:23-28)

## 'Old and New Testament are a unity.'

When you read this text isolated from the whole Bible it really gives the impression that God has punished the Jewish people for their disbelief. However, when we relate this text to Paul's statement in Romans 11 about the mystery, then we recognise that the real issue is going to a much deeper dimension. In one or another hidden way, God's hand is behind this. The simple judgement 'punishment' is thus a false one.

**Economic supersessionism**, which after World War II has evolved as the dominant theory in Christian theology, poses that the role of biblical Israel and the Jewish people was just a temporary one. Since the coming of Christ and the spreading of the gospel of salvation worldwide, the unique role of Israel as God's people has been finished. In defense of this theology, often Galatians 3: 26-28 is quoted: *'So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.'*

When read isolated, this text also gives the impression that the Jewish people have no further role of importance anymore. However, when we take into account the whole Bible, we discover that it is not Paul's intention here to abolish Israel's unique position and role. His intention and objective is to express that, since the gospel has become universal, it has become possible also for non-Jews to become a child of God, receive salvation and have access to the Kingdom of God. We do not need anymore to become a Jew to be a part of God's people, but only by being born again and believing in Jesus Christ. Israel, however, just remains Israel and the Jewish people just remain the Jewish people. In Romans 15: 8, Paul says: *'For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed.'* So there is no abolition, but rather on the contrary confirmation. God's covenants and promises for the Jewish people just remain. Old and New Testament are a unity and there is no breaking point or dividing line between them.

### REPENTANCE

It is the anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic way of thinking and feeling in the Christian Churches over the ages, that has led to these kinds of misinterpretation and abuse of these Bible texts. And even to the development of a totally wrong and false theology in which Israel and the Jewish people are set aside and even persecuted and brutally murdered. In Galatians 6:12, Paul wishes God's peace and mercy upon all Christians and upon 'the Israel of God'. These wishes are completely in line with the Psalms 125 and 128 where the poet also wishes 'peace be on Israel'. What a beautiful expression of God's continuous love and communion with Israel, His people.

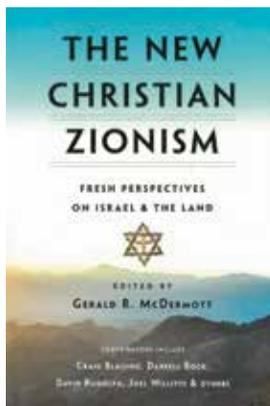
That is why we are expressing in the seventh thesis: *'True repentance will show itself in producing fruits worthy of repentance in acts of love and solidarity with the Jewish people and with Israel.'*

## Theology and Israel Fresh Perspectives

Four or five decades ago, many mainline churches would basically stand favorable with regard to the Jewish state – prompted by the horrors of the Holocaust and the miracle of the subsequent resurrection of the Jewish people. On the other hand, they would frown at the absolute support for Israel by so-called ‘fundamentalists’, who based their support on certain apocalyptic expectations. In the theological debate, Christian support for Israel became associated with end time speculations, conservative politics, and the neglect of international laws. This association was dubbed Christian Zionism and considered unhealthy and dangerous. Is that a correct view?

People and land of Israel are central to the story of the Bible. This might seem obvious. But the average Christian account of the story of salvation moves from creation and fall straight to Christ’s dead and resurrection. Israel only serves as an illustration of false paths. It is imaginable, therefore, that solidarity with the present Jewish people and the state of Israel can count on just a very small base.

Continuous theological reflection on Israel is necessary. It is necessary to formulate a biblically and theologically coherent view on our support and our solidarity. If we want to reach out to other Christians and churches, we must know what we are talking about, and we must present a story that is not easily



disregarded or put aside. We must deepen our insight in what the Bible says. We need an understanding of the history and the actuality.

Therefore, we have our twelve theses. But fortunately, there are also good books that can help us. Mc.Dermott’s *New Christian Zionism* is one of them. It deals with subjects, such as: what do we mean by Israel? How does the Bible

speak of Israel and the nations? How is the relation between the Old and the New Testament? Does the New Testament speak about the People and the Land of Israel?

Historically, it is not just about the history of the Jewish people through the ages. In the introductory chapter, it presents a concise view on Israel, arguing that it is time for Christians, and not just Jews, to make a case for the Jewish people and their land. It succinctly refutes theological and legal-historical objections, and unnerves misunderstandings and false allegations. In the following chapters, these points are developed into different directions, historical, biblical, theological, and towards the future. In short, this book is a most needed contribution to the Christian debate about Israel.

*Gerald R. Mc.Dermott (ed.), The New Christian Zionism. Fresh Perspectives on Israel & the Land. InterVarsity Press 2016. ISBN 978-0-8308-5138-6 (print); ISBN 978-0-8308-9438-3 (digital)*

*Israel  
and the renewal  
of all things*

REV. WILLEM J.J. GLASHOUWER



**T**he final three of the XII Theses deal with the future and the renewal of all things.

10. We believe and confess that Jesus has come as the Messiah of Israel to turn godlessness away from Jacob and to redeem the nations. As the body of Christ we celebrate the mystery of salvation through the crucified and risen Lord, and with great anticipation we expect His coming in Glory and the bodily resurrection of the righteous dead. Maranatha!
11. We pray for the Peace of Jerusalem and are longing for the great day of the coming of the Prince of Peace to Jerusalem. We fervently wait for the day that times

of refreshing may come from the Lord, of which Jesus and the Apostles together with all the prophets of Israel have been speaking throughout the ages. Messiah will come and rule and reign from sea to sea, from shore to shore – as far as nations will exist on the face of the earth. ‘He will be our Peace.’ Then the blindness and the deafness will be taken away from the eyes and the ears and the hearts of Israel, as well as the veil that has covered the face of the nations.

12. We finally believe and confess that the LORD Himself will be the guarantee of the renewal of all things, of the (re)new(ed) heavens and of the (re)new(ed) earth. One day God will be all and in all. Hallelujah!

We are privileged to live in a time, in which we see how the people of Israel are restored into the land of the Promise. That makes us grateful. But it also causes a feeling of urgency. God's plan of salvation for His creation has entered a new, decisive stage. How do we relate to it? And how do we relate to Israel? How does the Church relate to Israel?

### DEMONIC POWERS IN CONTROL

Things that are happening on planet earth sometimes find their origin in the heavenly realms that surround us, in the unseen world. Powers of darkness inspire political leaders and governments. Demonic forces play their game. Behind the political power of Persia is the prince of the Persian kingdom, says the angel who came to Daniel. And only because Michael, one of the chief princes, came to the rescue in this battle, I was able to come to you to share with you the vision about the future, the angel explains (Daniel 10:12-14). And after this I have to return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come (Daniel 10:20). Revelation 16:13-16 speaks about evil spirits who go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. *'Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon'*. The valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:1-3), a valley that runs across Israel from North to South.

With that in the back of our minds, let's look at events of today. Things that are happening in and around Israel against Israel, Jerusalem and the Jewish people should always draw our attention. We should learn to look at the developments in the world from the perspective of Israel and Jerusalem. From God's perspective. From a biblical perspective. Put our feet in Jerusalem and then look at the map of the world and the behavior of the nations. Why do the nations rage? Psalm 2 (NASB) has the answer: *'Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed,*

*saying, 'Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!'* That is why the nations rage. It is against the Almighty God and His Anointed One. And against His City of Jerusalem and against His land and against His people Israel. Psalm 83:2-8 (NASB) says: *'Your enemies make an uproar, and those who hate You have exalted themselves. They make shrewd plans against Your people, and conspire together against Your treasured ones. They have said, 'Come, and let us wipe them out as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more.' For they have conspired together with one mind; Against You they make a covenant: The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagrites; Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assyria also has joined with them; They have become a help to the children of Lot.'*

### GOD IS IN CONTROL

But Psalm 2 continues to say: *'He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them. Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury, saying, 'But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain.'*



## The Saviour was given to Israel in the first place

All the events of our days point towards the coming of the Prince of Peace. Christianity celebrates Christmas, the birth of Jesus Christ. In many churches the beautiful passage of Isaiah 9:6-7 (NKJV) is read: *'For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice. From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.'*

What does that mean: 'unto us'? Who are these 'us'? It means Israel. It means the Jewish people. Like in Psalm 105:7-11 (NKJV): *'He is the LORD our God; His judgments are in all the earth. He remembers His covenant forever, the Word which He commanded, for a thousand generations, The covenant which He made with Abraham, And His oath to Isaac, And confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, To Israel as an everlasting covenant, Saying, 'To you I will give the land of Canaan as the allotment of your inheritance.'*

'Us' means them. The Jewish people, Israel. A Child is born to them. And His beautiful names are: Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of course, this Saviour has become our Mighty God as well. But He was given to Israel in the first place.

And one day - who knows how soon - the decree of the Lord will be executed. As Psalm 2 continues: *'I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession. 'You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.'* He is the Mighty One of Israel. He will break down all the resistance of the raging nations. Therefore Psalm 2 gives this solid piece of advice: *'Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the LORD with reverence*

*and rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!''*

### **BOUND FOR A THOUSAND YEARS**

Revelation 20:1-3 (NIV1984) states: *'And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.'*

The powers of darkness fear Him. They know that one day, they will be thrown into the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels. When Jesus came, these powers of darkness - according to Matthew 8:28-34 - started to scream: *'What do you want with us, Son of God?'* they shouted. *'Have You come here to torture us before the appointed time?'* They know that one day they will be tortured, and that the Son of God has everything to do with that. The only thing they did not understand was this: is it already now? Before the appointed time? And they were right, so Jesus gives them permission to enter into the pigs and they rush the whole herd off into the lake of water, not yet into the lake of fire. First He will throw them in

the Abyss where they will be held in custody for thousand years.

One day, He will cast them into the lake of fire. And they know it. They understand that the return of the Jewish people back to the Promised Land and the restoration of Jerusalem - the City of the Great King (Matthew 5:35, Psalm 48:2) - is pointing towards the coming of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. And the demons hate that. They hate His coming in Glory. Because it is the beginning of their end. So they will try every trick in the book to prevent that to happen, by turning the nations against Israel and the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem. And if they cannot ultimately prevent this from happening, then at least postpone it as long as possible. By all kind of political tactics and ultimately war.

But He Who sits in the heavens laughs. And one day, Jesus will come to fulfil the promise that the angel Gabriel gave to His mother Mary (Luke 1: 32-33, NIV): *'He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob; His kingdom will never end.'*

### **ISRAEL HAS (THE) FUTURE**

Isaiah 41:8-14 (NIV1984) says: *'But you, O Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham My friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, 'You are My servant'; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish. Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all. For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you. Do not be afraid, you worm Jacob, little Israel, do not fear, for I myself will help you,' declares the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.'*



Sometimes one can become terror-stricken. When one reads the endless stream of publications in the newspapers or one looks at the social media about what happens in the world at home and abroad - with all the negative news and comments about Israel and the Jewish people with wave after wave of sometimes almost pure hatred against Israel and the Jewish people, you can become panic-stricken.

There seems to be no end to it. Half-truths and complete lies. Fake-news and real news. An endless stream of information in which you can almost drown in fear. In the Western world and coming from the Islamic world as well, as part of their 'jihad' against Israel and the Jewish people. In 'jihad' people are not just permitted to lie, but one must lie. And if your enemy believes you, you are smarter than him. You just gained a small victory over him. And when finally sometimes the real truth comes out, people have long forgotten what this was all about, and the first negative impression about Israel and the Jewish people lingers on for a long time.

What is Israel to do? Is there in the end any future for that tiny Jewish nation in that tiny little country on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea? With Jerusalem that is considered to be the third holy city of Islam, after Mecca and Medina?

### **GOD HOLDS THE FUTURE**

Until one starts to read the Bible. With all the mighty promises for little Israel, for worm Jacob. Promises given to them by the Almighty God. The Everlasting One. The Creator of heaven and earth. Nobody knows what the future will hold. Only He Who holds the future knows what the future will hold. The Creator of Israel Who by a biological miracle, a special act of creation created this nation. Abraham was too old and Sarah was too old to have any children, Genesis 17: 17. And yet, Isaac was born, as a miracle of God. A nation whom I created for My glory, whom I formed and made, says God, Isaiah 43:7. My firstborn son, says God,

Exodus 4:22-23. Israel His first-born son, and Jesus His only-begotten Son, also created by God Almighty Himself through the power of the Holy Spirit, Luke 1:30-35, Matthew 1:18-24, John 1:14 (KJV).

And suddenly you realise: God is on their side. He gave everlasting promises to them. He made everlasting covenants with them. And everything He promised to Israel He will fulfil for Israel. Just as all the promises He gave to the Church He will fulfil for the Church. It never gets out of His hand. Israel has the guarantee of the Creator of heaven and earth for their existence. As long as heaven and earth are in existence, there will be Israel. Says God.

Jeremiah 31:35-37 (NIV1984) says: *'This is what the LORD says, He who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar - the LORD Almighty is His Name: 'Only if these decrees vanish from My sight,' declares the LORD, 'will Israel ever cease being a nation before Me.' This is what the LORD says: 'Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done,' declares the LORD.'*

He will never reject His firstborn son. Not even for what they have done, He says. And one day, the hostile nations will be ultimately and definitively be defeated. Just read Isaiah 63: 1-6 and Revelation 19: 11-16 - and Psalm 2.

### **KINGDOM**

First we have seen the signs of the Kingdom in Israel, performed by Jesus the King Himself when He was on planet earth in Israel among His Jewish people, as pockets of light in a surrounding darkness.

Then came the signs of the Kingdom in the whole world by the power of the Holy Spirit, during the two thousand years of preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom to all nations (Matthew 24:14). These as well were signs and wonders, as pockets of light in a surrounding

darkness. Ultimately the Kingdom of peace and justice will be inaugurated worldwide, when the King will again be among us, and will sit on the throne of His father David, ruling over the House of Jacob. Peace will flow forth from Jerusalem, and the nations will train for war no more (Isaiah 2:2-4). Of His Kingdom there shall be no end, because He was resurrected from the dead and lives forever.

All the covenants made with Israel will have their final fulfilment in the Kingdom to come. Then... all the Promises made to Abraham will be fulfilled... the Promised Land will have its promised borders... the Priesthood of Levi will function again... the Kingship of the House of David will be established forever... Jerusalem and the Temple will be the center of the world... the New Covenant will be fully implemented for Israel... the Covenant of Peace will be fully operational... the wisdom of Torah will be the guiding light for all nations.



## FINALLY

Everything - heaven and earth - will become new. This renewal is already starting now among God's children. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! The coming of Christ, His day, however must be first, before the new breaks through and everything will become totally new. First Christ's reign in the whole world. After that the new heavens and the new earth. Then creation itself will be liberated as well. Reconciliation and redemption, deliverance in the biblical sense of the word are not only for the redemption of men's souls. Ultimate redemption will also include the redemption of our bodies. This does not mean, as in Greek philosophy, that the soul is set free from the body, but that the body itself is set free from everything that has entered into the body through sin: sicknesses, mortality, hereditary abnormalities, weakness and lack of power, etcetera. We only use a very small part of our brains. Its capacity could be so much greater, even now, were it not for the fact that the brains have this blockade caused by sin. How incredibly much greater the potential of the new resurrection body will then be. The body itself will be set free from all bondage, together with creation itself.

Once again: there will be a little foretaste of this, also for creation, in the thousand years of Christ's reign, His Kingdom of Peace and Righteousness, but it only will be totally perfect when God will be all in all. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 (NIV1984): *'Then the end will come, when He [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For He 'has put everything under His feet'.* Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under Him, it is clear that this does not include God Himself, who put everything under Christ. When He has done this, then the Son Himself will be made subject to Him who put everything under Him, so that God may be all in all.

## BOOKS

## Learning Messiah

Israel's election, calling, and history make up a big part of Scripture. It could be said that they belong to the 'DNA of the Bible.'

But why is it then that the Christian narrative about the Messiah, Israel, and the nations, often seemed to have and sometimes even still has a different 'genetic structure'? Does Israel - together with its election and promises - leave God's stage through a side door, when Jesus appears on stage? Does a changing of roles take place, within a different story? Does the Messiah function within it as some kind of 'black hole' in which the eternal election and calling of Israel disappear? How do we read God's way?



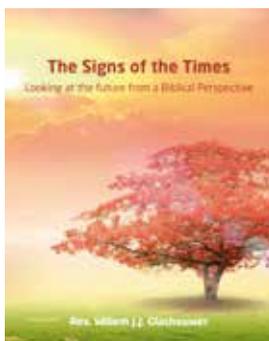
The Holocaust made us realise that our de-Jew-ized reading and preaching of Scripture contributed in various ways to this catastrophe. And we find ourselves confronted by the question: How does the narrative of the Bible then look when the whole of Scripture plays a decisive role, and the faithfulness of God toward Israel stays in the center? This book presents an answer to

these questions, calling us to learn to read God's way anew, and to walk in it.

*Edjan Westerman, Learning Messiah. Israel and the Nations: Learning to Read God's Way Anew. Wipf and Stock 2018, 432 pages. ISBN 978-1-5326-54251*

## The Signs of the Times

Earthquakes scourge planet earth. Environmental disasters are looming. Sources of energy are diminishing. Overpopulation of human beings is reaching its billions. Weapons of mass destruction are being produced even by smaller nations and are ready to be used as weapons of war. Terrorist groups are trying to get a hold of them. Radical Islam is worldwide on the rise. Faith in a personal God is in Europe rapidly declining. Anxiety and fear for the future are increasingly laming the lives of many, as a deadly stranglehold. Is planet earth heading for an all devastating Third



World War? Is there any hope? What is the message of age-old Biblical prophecies? Do they have any meaning for today? Are we standing at the beginning of the end of mankind and planet earth? Or are we rapidly approaching the dawn of a splendid new future? Is Israel a sign of hope? Rev. Willem J.J. Glashouwer looks at fifty-two signs of the times mentioned in the Bible.

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# Why 'Twelve Theses'?

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**T**hroughout the ages, Christianity has formulated its Christian faith. The Church Fathers meant well. They tried to protect the mystery of the Trinity and of the two natures of Christ against all kinds of attacks and heresies.

Although the way they formulated and expressed the facts of faith is basically Greek-philosophical in nature, they were not thinking to give an ontological statement about God or Christ or the Holy Spirit. They were simply trying to protect the mystery that is there against all kinds of attacks. So one could put various question marks behind some of these formulas. But basically they were right and beautiful. And 'Christians for Israel' in its almost 40 years of existence has regarded them in general as the basic statements of faith for their ministry, and never felt the inclination to produce a new set of statements of faith expressing our Christian belief. The early church produced many beautiful creeds. To mention some of them:

## **APOSTLES' CREED**

The Apostles' Creed (Latin: Symbolum Apostolorum or Symbolum Apostolicum), sometimes entitled Symbol of the Apostles, is an early statement of Christian belief.

It is widely used by a number of Christian denominations for both liturgical and catechetical purposes, most visibly by liturgical Churches of Western tradition, including the Catholic Church, Lutheranism and Anglicanism. It is also used by Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists.

The Apostles' Creed is Trinitarian in structure, with sections affirming belief in God the Father, Jesus Christ His Son and the Holy Spirit. The Apostles' Creed was based on a Christian theological understanding of the Canonical gospels, the letters of the New Testament and to a lesser extent the Old Testament. Its basis appears to be the old Roman Creed known also as the Old Roman Symbol. Because of the early origin of its original form, it does not address some Christological issues defined in the Nicene and other Christian Creeds. It thus says nothing explicitly about the divinity of either Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Nor does it address many other theological questions which became objects of dispute centuries later.

The first mention of the expression 'Apostles' Creed' occurs in a letter of AD 390 from a synod in Milan and may have been associated with the belief, widely accepted in the 4th century, that under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, each of the Twelve Apostles contributed an article of

the creed. This creed is called the Apostles' Creed not because it was produced by the Apostles themselves, but because it contains a brief summary of their teachings. It sets forth their doctrine 'in sublime simplicity, in unsurpassable brevity, in beautiful order, and with liturgical solemnity'. In its present form it is dated no later than the fourth century. More than any other Christian creed, it may justly be called an ecumenical symbol of faith.

### **NICENE CREED**

The Nicene Creed, also called the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed, is a statement of the orthodox faith of the early Christian Church in opposition to certain heresies, especially Arianism. These heresies, which disturbed the Church during the fourth century, concerned the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and of the Person of Christ. Both the Greek (Eastern) and the Latin (Western) Church held this creed in honor, though with one important difference: the Western Church insisted on the inclusion of the phrase 'and the Son' known as the 'Filioque', a theological point of discussion that ultimately in AD 1054 led to the split between the churches of the East and the Church of the West, thus being one of the causes of the Great Schism between Rome and the rest of the Church. In the article on the procession of the Holy Spirit this phrase still is repudiated by the Eastern Orthodox Church.

In its present form this Nicene Creed goes back partially to the Council of Nicea (AD 325) with additions by the Council of Constantinople (AD 381). It was accepted in its present form at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, but the 'Filioque' phrase was not added until 589. However, the creed is in substance an accurate and majestic formulation of the Christian faith of the Early Church, as formulated at the First and Second Ecumenical Councils. It was defined by the Church Fathers of those first two councils (held in Nicea and Constantinople, respectively) to

combat various heresies: notably Arianism, Apollinarianism, Macedonianism - also called Pneumatomachianism - and Chiliasm. So Christ's coming reign on earth was rejected at that stage of Church History! One more reason to come up with an addendum to these Creeds!

Some scholars believe that the Nicene Creed promulgated by the First Ecumenical Council was based on an earlier baptismal creed used in Palestine (the Apostles' Creed), while others regard its more likely origin as being a creed issued early in AD 325 in Antioch, a so-called 'Syrian Creed'.

### **ATHANASIUS**

The Coptic Church has a tradition that the Nicene Creed was authored by St. Athanasius of Alexandria (AD 293-373), whose theology was instrumental at the Nicene council, despite his being only a deacon at the time. Athanasius was the champion of orthodoxy against Arian attacks on the doctrine of the Trinity. This led to the composition of the so-called 'Athanasius' Creed', named after him, but not written by him. The Athanasian Creed, also known as Pseudo-Athanasian Creed or Quicumque Vult (also Quicumque Vult), is a Christian statement of belief focused on Trinitarian doctrine and Christology. The Latin name of the creed, 'Quicumque vult', is taken from the opening words, 'Whosoever wishes'. The creed has been used by Christian churches since the sixth century. It is the first creed in which the equality of the three persons of the Trinity is explicitly stated. It differs from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan and Apostles' Creeds in the inclusion of anathemas, or condemnations of those who disagree with the creed (like the original Nicene Creed).

Widely accepted among Western Christians, including the Roman Catholic Church and some Anglican churches, Lutheran churches (it is considered part of Lutheran confessions in the Book of Concord), and ancient, liturgical churches generally, the

Athanasian Creed has been used in public worship less and less frequently, but part of it can be found as an 'Authorized Affirmation of Faith' in the recent (2000) Common Worship liturgy of the Church of England.

It was designed to distinguish Nicene Christianity from the heresy of Arianism. Liturgically, this Creed was recited at the Sunday Office of Prime in the Western Church; it is not in common use in the Eastern Church. The creed has never gained acceptance in liturgy among Eastern Christians since it was considered as one of many unorthodox fabrications that contained the 'Filioque' clause.

Today, the Athanasian Creed is rarely used even in the Western Church. When used, one common practice is to use it once a year on Trinity Sunday. Although Athanasius did not write this creed and it is improperly named after him, the name persists because until the seventeenth century it was commonly ascribed to him. It is not from Greek (Eastern), but from Latin (Western) origin, and is not recognised by the Eastern Orthodox Church today. Apart from the opening and closing sentences, this creed consists of two parts, the first setting forth the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, and the second dealing chiefly with the incarnation and the two-nature doctrine.

### **MARTIN LUTHER**

The 'Ninety-five Theses' or 'Disputation on the Power of Indulgences' are a list of propositions for an academic disputation written in 1517 by Martin Luther, professor of moral theology at the University of Wittenberg, Germany, that started the Reformation, which profoundly changed Europe. In the Theses, Luther claimed that the repentance required by Christ in order for sins to be forgiven involves inner spiritual repentance rather than merely external sacramental confession. He argued that indulgences led Christians to avoid true repentance and sorrow for sin, believing that they could forgo it by purchasing



an indulgence. They also, according to Luther, discouraged Christians from giving to the poor and performing other acts of mercy, since they were led to believe that indulgence certificates were more spiritually valuable. Luther sent the 'Theses' enclosed with a letter to Albert of Brandenburg, the Archbishop of Mainz, on 31 October 1517, a date now considered the start of the Reformation and commemorated annually as Reformation Day. Luther may have also posted the 'Theses' on the door of All Saints' Church and other churches in Wittenberg in accordance with University custom on 31 October or in mid-November. The 'Theses' were quickly reprinted, translated, and distributed throughout Germany and Europe.

There is no doubt that this Reformation added tremendously to the personal faith of many Christians worldwide. And the 5-point star of the Reformation still shines: only by faith, only by grace, only through Jesus Christ, only to the Glory of God and only the Holy Bible. They are called the 5 solas. To sum them up:

First, there is *Sola Fide*, which means salvation is by 'faith alone'. We are saved by faith in Christ, not faith plus works. Faith plus works has never and will never equal salvation. Faith equals justification that results in good works, but our works do not contribute to or merit salvation.

Second, there is *Sola Gratia* or salvation by 'grace alone'. We are saved by God's unmerited favor - His goodness shown to us and received by us through faith in Christ's sacrifice. This depicts salvation as a work where God works in our hearts. It is not a synergistic work where we coordinate God's efforts with our own good works. Salvation is by grace alone.

Third, there is *Solus Christus*, which reminds us salvation is through 'Christ alone'. This refers to His sacrificial work, but it also refers to His priestly, mediatorial work. We



celebrate and we thank our pastors and priests, but we are not dependent upon them for a right standing with God, or for access to Him.

Fourth, there is *Soli Deo Gloria*, which means that salvation is accomplished for 'God's glory alone'. Our salvation is for His Glory; we are the beneficiary, but He is the One to be praised. As the Old Testament prophets declared, we are saved 'for His Name's sake'. Salvation is of the Lord.

Fifth and finally, is *Sola Scriptura*. By *Sola Scriptura* we mean that 'Scripture alone' is the final authority for our lives and for the church. Since God's Word is inspired and true, it is our final and sufficient authority.

Christians for Israel respects all these 'statements of faith' - and many more could be quoted that are held dear by many churches and denominations. We as a Christian ministry are not a church, but we want to serve the Church worldwide and Christianity at large.

### **ISRAEL IS LACKING**

But with all due respect to these and other great Creeds and Theses, we feel that there is one thing basically lacking. There is not a word about Israel, the Jewish people, the Promised Land, the earthly city of Jerusalem or the Kingdom of God. And instead of Christianity proclaiming the hope that we have on the basis of the Bible and God's everlasting covenants with Israel, the Church over the centuries issued one negative statement after another about Israel and the Jewish people, thus creating an atmosphere in which persecution of the Jews could flare up any minute, and ultimately leading to the murder of six million Jews in the Christian countries of Europe.

That is why a small international group of interdenominational theologians composed XII THESES of our biblical faith and hope about Israel and the Jewish people. Why twelve Theses? There are twelve tribes of

Israel, twelve apostles were sent into the world to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom, the New Jerusalem has twelve gates and twelve fundaments, and in twelve articles (= the Apostle's Creed) we confess the faith of the Church of all times. Grateful for what we have received in them, we repeat these words, as a summary of Scripture's witness concerning our salvation.

**'We are privileged  
to live in a time,  
in which we see  
how the people  
of Israel  
are restored  
into the land  
of the Promise.'**

However, Scripture testifies about more. The election of Israel, God's covenants with Israel, the Kingship of Christ on the throne of David, the restoration of Israel and ultimately of the whole of creation, the bodily resurrection of the righteous dead, the prophetic future of the earthly city of Jerusalem, etcetera - it is not in the beautiful words of the Creeds of the Church. The classical words of the confession need an addition.

We are privileged to live in a time, in which we see how the people of Israel are restored into the land of the Promise. That makes us grateful. But it also causes a feeling of urgency. God's plan of salvation for His creation has entered a new, decisive stage. How do we relate to it? And how do we relate to Israel? How does the Church relate to Israel? Ultimately, we hope that the Twelve Theses will be a wakeup call for the Church.

