

IS CHRIST THE FULFILLMENT OF NATIONAL ISRAEL'S PROPHECIES? YES AND NO!

Robert L. Saucy¹
Former Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology
Talbot School of Theology

Some believe that Jesus fulfills Israel's prophecies to such an extent that there is no more theological significance for national Israel. This article asserts that the fulfillment of Israel's promises is related to Jesus, the ultimate Israelite. But this truth means the restoration and significance of national Israel, not Israel's non-significance.

* * * * *

Introduction

The question of whether Scripture teaches a restoration of Israel as a nation, which of course implies a land, is much disputed today especially among evangelicals. Since the Holocaust and the modern establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, Christians have become more favorable to a biblical teaching of a future for Israel or the Jews. For many, however, this does not involve the reestablishment of Israel as a national entity, but rather individual personal conversion of Jews and their incorporation into the church which is commonly understood as a new Israel. One prominent supporting plank of this non-national future for Israel is the assertion that Christ as the new Israel takes the place of national Israel and consequently fulfills in Himself the promises concerning that nation.

In this paper I will argue that “yes,” Christ is the fulfillment of all of the promises concerning national Israel. But “no,” Christ is not the fulfillment in the sense that the prophecies of an eschatological restoration of the nation of Israel and its function in the divine plan of salvation history are no longer valid as prophesied. As the question of the fulfillment of Israel's prophecies is scripturally global, we will only be able to outline some primary issues that in my mind have a bearing on issue.

¹ Dr. Robert L. Saucy entered the presence of the Lord on March 12, 2015. Permission to publish this article was granted by the Saucy family.

The Position that Christ Supplants National Israel and Fulfills Her Eschatological Prophecies

The belief that Christ supplants national Israel, and therefore fulfills her promises in biblical prophecy, is presented with variations. Because of the limitations of this article, we will not be able to discuss these in detail, but rather focus on the general position that Scripture, especially the New Testament, teaches that Christ is Israel and therefore the eschatological prophecies of national Israel are carried forth in Him and His new people, the church. Any future for ethnic Jews or Old Testament Israel is found only with individuals in the church.

To note a few examples of this belief, in his discussion of the Old Testament basis for Christian mission, G. Ernest Wright says, "Second Isaiah presents the people of God [i.e. Israel] with an eloquent and deeply moving portrayal of their mission, one fulfilled in Christ and become the pattern for the Church's life in the world."² More recently, Graeme Goldsworthy asserts that Christ "is the end of God's saving acts in the history of Israel (Rom. 1:1–4) and thus fulfills all prophecy (Acts 13:32–33). The real meaning of prophecy always lies in the person and work of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:10–12)." "The whole history of Israel is thus caught up into the redemptive revelation of God, which climaxes in Jesus Christ."³

Understanding Israel as called to represent humanity before God in an Adam→Israel→Christ sequence of representative agents, N. T. Wright sees Christ as Israel in person who has assumed the role of the nation after it failed in its national mission. He writes,

As in the thought-patterns of much apocalyptic writing, Israel is to be Yahweh's agent in the eschatological drama. . . . Now, in Paul's revision of the scheme, Israel's role is taken by her anointed king, and this Messiah has acted out her victory in himself, being raised from the dead in advance of his people. That which Israel had expected for herself, whether metaphorically or literally, has come true in the person of her representative, the Messiah.⁴

² G. Ernest Wright, "The Old Testament Basis for the Christian Mission," in *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 18. H. H. Rowley similarly says, "Deutero-Isaiah believed that Israel was called to be a missionary people. Yet we must not forget the relation of the Servant to the missionary purpose. Nor must we forget that if in some sense Israel was the Servant, it was in an individual that the function of the Servant was to be fully realized. . . ." H. H. Rowley, *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1944), 76.

³ Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 50, 56. Cf. also Hans LaRondelle: "The New Testament truth that Jesus Christ incorporates the Israel of God as a whole and thus brings the essential fulfillment of Israel's history and prophecy in His own life, is crucial to the Christian understanding of Israel's eschatology." "Israel's mission and destiny have found completion in Jesus Christ. In His resurrection, Israel's hope of restoration has been realized: Hans LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 65, 68.

⁴ N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 28. Further statements of Wright: "The list of Jewish privileges in [Romans] 9:4 f. is not arbitrary, but echoes precisely those privileges which, throughout Romans up to this point, Paul has shown to be transferred to the Jews' representative Messiah, and, through him, to all those who are 'in him', be they Jewish or Gentile" *Ibid.*,

Similarly, Michael Horton sees Israel as analogous to Adam and Christ in its responsibility for human salvation through obedience. Like Adam, Israel fails in its responsibility, but Jesus fulfills “as the covenant Servant what he proclaimed as covenant Lord.”⁵ (We will briefly touch on the validity of viewing Israel’s role as analogous to Adam and Christ in the divine plan of salvation later when we consider the purpose of national Israel.)

Without explaining exactly what Israel’s purposes were, Strimple also explains that since “Israel...failed to fulfill the purposes of her divine election, the Lord brought forth His Elect One, his Servant, his true Israel.” Israel’s national promises are thus fulfilled in Him and the new spiritual Israel in Him.⁶ Premillennialist Russell Moore similarly sees Jesus as the “substitute” for Israel and thus the fulfillment of the promises related to national Israel.⁷

A final expression of Christ’s fulfillment of Israel’s national promises relates to the Promised Land. W. D. Davies asserts, “For Paul, Christ had gathered up the promise into the singularity of his own person....The land, like the Law, particular and provisional, had become irrelevant.”⁸ More recently, Gary Burge likewise says, “The New Testament locates in Christ all of the expectations once held for ‘Sinai and Zion, Bethel and Jerusalem.’ For a Christian to return to a Jewish territoriality is to deny fundamentally what has transpired in the incarnation.”⁹ Since land and nation are inherently related, such fulfillment of the land promise in the person of Christ also entails a similar fulfillment of all of Israel’s national promises.

As a result of Christ’s fulfillment of its prophecies, national Israel is perceived only as an illustration or type of Christ and His salvation work in the church. Referring to Old Testament revelation of Abraham’s call to be “the father of the people of God” and the subsequent history of that people including the restoration of a “remnant of Israel,” Goldsworthy says, “Through these stages the *type* is progressively clarified. The fulfillment of all this is referred to as the *antitype*,” which he explains

237; cf. similar statement concerning Romans 2:25–29 and Philippians 3:2–11, “[Paul] has systematically transferred the privileges and attributes of ‘Israel’ to the Messiah and his people,” *Ibid.*, 250.

⁵ Michael S. Horton, *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 219.

⁶ Robert Strimple, “Amillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 88–89.

⁷ Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 118. Noting that “The New Testament applies to Jesus language previously applied to the nation,” Moore says, “The identification of Jesus with Israel—as her king, her substitute, and her goal—is everywhere through the apostolic understanding of the Old Testament.”

⁸ W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974), 179. Cf. also James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary, Romans 1–8* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 213.

⁹ Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 129–30. Cf. Barth: “There does not exist any more a holy mountain or a holy city or holy land which can be marked on a map. . . . The reason is that all prophecy is now fulfilled in Jesus....” Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), II.1, 482.

as Christ and the church in Him.¹⁰ Horton similarly describes national Israel and its calling as “typological of the true Israel, the faithful Adam, who is also the true heavenly temple and everlasting Sabbath of God.”¹¹

Much of the present explanation of Christ as the fulfillment of Israel's national prophecies thus fits well with Soulen's description of the teaching of supersessionism which has dominated the church for most of the past two thousand years.¹² “God chose the Jewish people after the fall of Adam in order to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus Christ, the Savior. After Christ came, however, the special role of the Jewish people came to an end and its place was taken by the church, the new Israel.”¹³

Christ: The Fulfillment of Israel's Prophecies

That Christ is the fulfillment of Israel's promises, including the national promises, cannot be denied, and to my knowledge it has never been denied by any who believe in a future for national Israel. Scripture expressly declares that God's historical purposes are all fulfilled in Christ. The “mystery” of His plan of salvation is “the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth” (Eph. 1:10; cf. 3:9–11). It was the Father's “good pleasure . . . to reconcile all things to Himself” through Christ (Col. 1:19–20), or as Lohse explains, “Through Christ . . . the universe has been reconciled in that heaven and earth have been brought back into their divinely created and determined order through the resurrection and exaltation of Christ.”¹⁴ Explaining that Paul's varied use of the terminology “in Christ” expresses “instrumentality” as well as “locality” or sphere, Seifried concludes that “in Christ” conveys Paul's belief that God's saving purposes are decisively effected through Christ.¹⁵ As the apostle says, “as many are the promises of God, in Him [Christ] they are yes” (2 Cor. 1:20). In short, “God's promises all find their ‘Yes’ of fulfillment in Christ.”¹⁶

¹⁰ Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible*, 67–68; cf. also 184, 187–89; cf. also Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 231.

¹¹ Horton, *Lord and Servant*, 130.

¹² See Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church: The Origin and Effects of Replacement Theology* (Waynesboro, GA.: Authentic Media, 2000); R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 25–56; Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 87–101.

¹³ R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 1–2. According to Soulen this supersessionism sees the Old Testament, including its prophecies, pointing forward to Christ “in a carnal and prophetic way.” All of Israel's history and promises look forward to a “definitive and spiritual” redemption in Christ and the church (27).

¹⁴ Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 59.

¹⁵ M. A. Seifried, “In Christ,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 433 (italics added). Seifried notes that effect of Christ extends finally to all things: “the divine purpose for creation, redemption and the consummation of all things is comprehended with the “sphere” of Christ...” (434).

¹⁶ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 202.

Throughout biblical history God is the Redeemer and King who establishes His kingdom on earth. As Mowinckel says, "The kingdom will be established by a miraculous divine intervention: it will be God's own work, not the work of man."¹⁷ As we will see later, Scripture clearly gives a place for the instrumentality of humans in this divine work. But Christ, as the one in whom the fullness of deity dwells, is uniquely the one who effects it. Humans may serve as a voice or a lighthouse, but He is the Word and the Light. Thus, the story of the Bible including creation and redemption is all fulfilled in Christ. In the words of Oscar Cullmann, "As the Son of Man, second Adam, Jesus fulfills the destiny of the man created by God; as Servant of Yahweh he fulfills the history of his people."¹⁸

Christ's Fulfillment of the Promises Does not Negate Israel's Participation

Granting that Christ is the fulfillment of all God's covenant promises, does this logically and biblically exclude national Israel's participation in this fulfillment? I would suggest that the biblical evidence of what is often, and perhaps unhappily, termed "corporate personality" speaks to this issue with the conclusion that Christ's fulfillment does not deny a role for national Israel in this process. By "corporate personality" I am referring not to the idea of a primitive mentality that had no clear recognition between the individual and the group, but rather to those instances in Scripture where there is a tension between the group and an individual ideal or representative of the group.¹⁹ In this tension both the individual and the group, or the one and the many, are real and both maintain their identity.

The Old Testament Evidence

The Old Testament provides a number of instances where we find an identification of one and many or the incorporation of many into a representative head. We will note them without attempting any analysis of their structure and how they relate to each other.

¹⁷ Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* (New York: Abingdon, 1954), 171; cf. also Aubrey Johnson: "... While Israel is the chosen instrument of God for achievement of His purpose, ... the assurance of ultimate victory is found, not in the weapons of His followers, but in His own omnipotence. When all is said and done, the deeds must be Yahweh's deeds, and it is He alone who can really make wars to cease throughout the earth," *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967), 95.

¹⁸ Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 138.

¹⁹ For a critical discussion of "corporate personality" see J. W. Rogerson, "The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality: A Re-examination," *The Journal of Theological Studies*. XXI (April: 1970), 1–16. See also, Jean de Fraine, *Adam and the Family of Man* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1965); H. H. Rowley, "The Servant of the Lord in the Light of Three Decades of Criticism," in *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 3–57. Russell Phillip Shedd, *Man in Community: A Study of St. Paul's Application of Old Testament and Early Jewish Conceptions of Human Solidarity* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1964). For an interesting discussion of the "corporate Christ," see C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 47–96.

Adam

In the creation story we immediately find that the Hebrew word 'adam has an individual and collective aspect. In Genesis 1 it encompasses both male and female or humanity (vv. 26–27) which is its prominent use, while in Genesis 2 and later it is clearly a reference to an individual (e.g. 2:18; 3:17; 4:1; 5:3). The Apostle Paul's analogy of Adam and Christ makes this concept of the one and many in Adam explicit in the New Testament (cf. Rom. 5:12–19; 1 Cor. 15:21–22). Adam is he and his posterity.

The "Seed" of the Woman and the "Seed" of Abraham

The Protoevangelium in Genesis 3:15 presents another example of this corporate relationship of the one and the many. The singular masculine pronoun *hu'* could be understood as a singular "he" referring to the woman's seed as the Messiah, or as a collective noun referring to the "seed" as the human race. The use of "seed" in Genesis and the remainder of the Pentateuch in relation to Abraham suggests that "seed" in both instances—seed of the woman and seed of Abraham—is used both for a collective of many and a single individual who is ultimately the Messiah.²⁰

The Son of Man and the Saints, and the King and His People

Daniel's reference to "one like a Son of Man" is also commonly recognized among evangelicals as a corporate individual, i.e. the Messiah.²¹ In 7:13–14 Daniel records seeing this "Son of Man" coming before "the Ancient of Days" to receive "dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him." Four verses later in the interpretation of the vision (v. 18) Daniel is told that "the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever." And again in verse 23 Daniel sees the same "Ancient of Days" who gave the kingdom to the Son of Man pass judgment in favor of "the saints of the Highest One" who are now seen as taking "possession of the kingdom."

It is impossible to identify the "Son of Man" as simply a personification of "the saints of the Highest One" as some propose.²² For we are told that all the people "serve" or "worship" this Person (v. 14). Furthermore "the Son of Man" is clearly an individual in the New Testament and in two Old Testament apocryphal works that

²⁰ For a good thorough discussion of the meaning of "seed" in relation to the woman and Abraham, see John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), especially 321, 443, 449, 473–80; 587–90.

²¹ The earliest interpretations among Jews and Christians understood the "one like a Son of Man" as an individual and with most identifying it as a reference to the Messiah. John J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 306–08.

²² J. A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*. ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 283, 317ff.

refer to the “Son of Man”—Enoch and Fourth Esdras. It is thus best to see the Son of Man again in a corporate individual who encompasses the many within Himself.²³

The relationship of the Son of Man and the saints is no doubt an example of the same phenomenon as that of the king and his people. David is called “the lamp of Israel” (2 Sam. 21:17) and of the later Davidic king, Zedekiah, it is said “Under his shadow we shall live among the nations” (Lam. 4:20). As the light and life of his people the king is the person who in a sense embodies his people as a collective person.²⁴ This reality is seen in the relation of the eschatological remnant of Israel and her Messiah in whom she has her life.²⁵

The Servant of the Lord

The question of whether the singular Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 41–53 is an individual or a collective reference to a group is best understood as both—the people of Israel and an individual Person who encompasses Israel within Himself.²⁶ Clearly there are statements concerning the Servant in those portions known as the Servant Songs²⁷ that cannot be applied to the people of Israel. At one point, the Servant has the task of bringing Israel back to the Lord (49:5–6). This fact and the vicarious sufferings of an innocent Servant in the Fourth Song are impossible to apply to sinful Israel (Isa. 53:4–6, 9; cf. 49:5).

On the other hand, there are many references in this section dealing with the Servant of the Lord that identify the Servant as Israel (cf. 41:8–9; 42:19; 44:1–2, 21–22; 43:10; 45:4; 48:20). It is impossible to believe that Isaiah is talking about two completely distinct servants in this section especially since the Servant in the Servant Songs remains unidentified. It thus seems best to see the Servant as again a collective, i.e. Israel, and an individual who encompasses the group within Himself. In one instance the Servant, whose task it is to restore Israel to the Lord and therefore cannot be equated with the nation, is explicitly referred to as “Israel” (49:3) in whom the Lord would display His glory (49:3). But previously the same thing was said of redeemed Israel, that in her God “shows forth His glory” (44:23). Thus we again have a situation where the many are incorporated into one without denying the reality of either.

²³ Jean de Franje, *Adam and the Family of Man*, 202–11; cf. T. W. Manson, “The Son of Man in Daniel, Enoch and the Gospels,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 32 (March 1950): 190; Russell Shedd, *Man in Community*, 39, 139–43.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 152–70; Aubrey Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel*, 1–3.

²⁵ V. Hertrich, “ἀειμίμα κτλ,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. IV Gerhard Kittel, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 209; Ernest Best, *One Body in Christ* (London: SPCK, 1955), 208–14.

²⁶ For a brief discussion of the various interpretations of the identity of the Servant of Isaiah’s Servant Songs, see C. G. Kruse, “The Servant Songs: Interpretive Trends since C. R. North,” *StBTh* 8 (1978), 1–27. See also Jean de Franje, *Adam and the Family of Man*, 182–202; C. R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah* (London: Oxford, 1948); H. H. Rowley, “The Servant of the Lord in the Light of Three Decades of Criticism,” in *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays* (London: Lutterworth, 1952), 1–57.

²⁷ Isaiah 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12.

Conclusion

All of the examples of the “corporate Person” in the Old Testament that we have considered finally relate to the Messiah and His people. In each instance the reality that the One is in a sense the life and light of the many, and thus may be said to fulfill their destiny, does not by this negate or replace the many either as individuals or in the fulfillment of their calling. In all of these instances the one involves the inclusion of the many, not their substitution. Focusing especially on the Servant of the Lord, which by the very name involves function, there is no evidence that the One Servant of the Lord, in whom Israel’s ministry is fulfilled, thereby supersedes Israel as a people and nation. Nor does it deny that Israel as a people can still have a function as the Lord’s Servant in and through the One Servant.

As we will consider more fully later, Isaiah sees the incapability of Israel to fulfill her servant mission. But he also sees Israel redeemed by the work of the unique Servant and in the later chapters of his book gives many instances where Israel is used by the Lord in the service of God’s salvation for the nations.

This scenario with regard to the picture of the Servant in the Old Testament is acknowledged by many. Noting that most interpreters “are content to find an embodiment of the conception of the Servant in Christ. . . and to leave any collective fulfillment without thought or word,”²⁸ H. H. Rowley sees “the Servant Israel” as “at once an individual, who both represents the whole community and carries to its supreme point the mission of the nation, while calling the whole people to enter into that mission, so that it shall be its mission and not merely his.”²⁹ Westermann similarly states that the “discussion of Israel as Yahweh’s servant probably indicates Israel’s future task in service to Yahweh. The collective interpretation may, in a limited way, prove correct to the extent that the labor of God’s servant in the songs, even if he is explicitly described as an individual, simultaneously involves Israel’s future task.”³⁰

This issue in Israel’s prophecy of “the Servant” is well summed up in the explanation of John Oswalt. Recognizing the servant teaching as both collective (Israel) and individual, and also rejecting the view that the prophet sees Israel failing and the individual servant taking its place, Oswalt says,

Instead of abandoning the idea of the people’s becoming true servants . . . [Isaiah] rather asks, and answers, the questions of *how* they can become such servants. How can the broken, sinful Israel ever be the servants of God as he

²⁸ H. H. Rowley, “The Servant of the Lord in the Light of Three Decades of Criticism,” in *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament*, 56–57.

²⁹ H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel* (London: SCM, 1956), 121–22. Rowley apparently sees the Church as inheriting the mission of Israel as the servant (cf. “The Servant of the Lord in the Light of Three Decades of Criticism,” in *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament*, 55–57). This, of course is another issue not in any way addressed in Isaiah’s discussion of the Servant. The point here is simply Rowley’s acknowledgement that the fulfillment of the Servant in the One does not eliminate the participation of the many, which in Isaiah is generally understood as the nation of Israel.

³⁰ C. Westermann, “עֶבֶד ‘ebed servant” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, edited by Ernest Jenni and Claus Westermann (Peabody MA: Hendriksen, 1997), 828.

has promised? The answer is 'the Servant.' Because he will be what they could not, and indeed will be that for all people, they can become what God has promised: his servants who can reveal his redeeming light. Thus chs. 54 and 55 depict a nation which through the ministry of the Servant, have become servants of God (54:17), redeemed and clean (54:8), a witness to God's glory and a light to the nations (55:4–5). Thus perhaps a better figure for the total Servant-concept is that of a circle where the movement is from the circumference to the center and back again.³¹

The New Testament Evidence

The prime evidence that the work of Christ does not eliminate the function or service of those in Him is Christ and the church.

The Corporate Christ

The Old Testament indication that the Messiah is an individual who incorporates His people within Himself is even more evident in the New Testament. We will content ourselves with noting perhaps the two most significant evidences of this reality. The first is the prepositional phrase "in Christ." While "in Christ" often has an instrumental sense of "through Christ," there are also instances that seem to have a clear local or incorporative idea.³² In these instances, as Best expresses it, "Christ is the 'place' in whom believers are and in whom salvation is."³³ This local sense seems especially clear in Ephesians 2:6 where Paul describes believers as "seated with Him [i.e. Christ] in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1 is also often cited as an example: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ" (cf. also 2 Cor. 5:17). Finally, the apostle's declaration that Jew and Greek, slave and free man, and male and female "are all one in Christ Jesus" clearly expresses the concept of Christ as a corporate Person. As Longenecker explains, "The 'in' of the

³¹ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 52.

³² The concept of Christ as a "corporate Person" has come under criticism in favor of understanding the phrases "in Christ" and "body of Christ" as metaphors for a "defining 'sphere'" and not references to a real entity (cf. M. A. Seifrid, "In Christ," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993], 434–35. But see also interpreters who uphold the local sense of ἐν in some Pauline references to "in Christ" and the concept of a "corporate Christ," e.g. (Best, *One Body in Christ*; de Fraine, *Adam and the Family of Man*, 245–70; Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 170–73; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary, Ephesians* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), 21–22; Moule, *The Origin of Christology*, 47–96; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 97–98; cf. M. J. Harris, "en," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3, edited by Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 1190–93; Albrecht Oepke, "ἐν," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 541–42.

³³ Best, *One Body in Christ*, 8.

equation is local and personal; 'Christ Jesus' is viewed in universal and corporate terms."³⁴

A second evidence, closely related to the phrase "in Christ," is the description of God's people as "the body of Christ"—an entity which is one composed of many (Rom. 12:4–5; 1 Cor. 12:12–27; Eph. 4:4–16). Writing to the Roman believers, Paul says, "we who are many, are one body in Christ" (Rom. 12:5). This body is not only "in Christ" or simply belonging to Christ, in a sense it is Christ as the apostle explains in 1 Corinthians 12:12: "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ." The body composed of the many are not identical to Christ.³⁵ But the many are Christ's own body, i.e. the many and Christ are conceived as a corporate entity, an inclusive Person.³⁶

Christ Is the Fulfillment of the Promises of the Church

As the fulfillment of all of God's covenant promises of salvation, Christ is the fulfillment of the promises of the church as well as of Israel. In truth, the church has no covenant promises other than those originally promised to Israel in the Old Testament. Those outside of Israel prior to Christ, the apostle says, were "strangers to the covenants of promise" (2:12)—i.e., the covenants with Abraham, David, and the new covenant which brings these earlier promises to reality.³⁷ Now in Christ these who had no covenants are "fellow partakers of the promise"³⁸ along with Israel to whom the promises originally belonged (3:6). Thus if Israel's promises are fulfilled in Christ, so also are the promises of the church.

Now we might ask, if the salvation promises related to the church are all fulfilled in Christ, does this negate any function for the church in the fulfillment of those promises, as its asserted in relation to the promises of national Israel? Clearly this is denied in the New Testament. Christ is the final prophet (Heb. 1:1–2), yet He gave the gift of prophecy and prophets to function in the church (1 Cor. 12:10, 18; Eph.

³⁴ Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 41, *Galatians* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), 158; cf. Sailhamer who sees the "one" in v. 28 as the "individual 'seed of Abraham'" of v. 16 (*The meaning of the Pentateuch*, 536); Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921), 207–08.

³⁵ As Best explains, "He and the Church form a 'whole'" which is "in some way identified with himself." Nevertheless he is distinct from the Church "since it is he who redeems, nourishes, and unifies it, and fills it with all his own divine fullness." *One Body in Christ*, 186.

³⁶ Moule, *The Origin of Christology*, 811; cf. Oepke who, commenting on 1 Cor. 12:12, says, "so Christ' makes sense only if it is self-evident that the one body of the community is not other than the body of Christ Himself. v. 27 is to the same effect, and this certainly cannot be regarded merely as an imprecise way of putting a pure comparison" (Eduard Schweizer, "σῶμα κτλ," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 1070–71); Best, *One Body in Christ*, 99.

³⁷ Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 359.

³⁸ The singular "promise" in 3:6 is probably a reference to the general promise of messianic salvation which in 2:12 is described as "the covenants of the promise" (Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 447). But it is also understood as the Holy Spirit mentioned in 1:13 as the substance of the promise (O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 235–36).

4:11). He is the great high priest (Heb. 4:14) who fulfills the office of the priest offering Himself as an atoning sacrifice once for all (Heb. 2:17; 7:26–27; 9:24–28; 10:11–14) and continuing to make intercession for His people (Heb. 7:25). But we also are a priesthood called to function as priests through Christ (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 16). Paul saw himself ministering the gospel as “a priest” offering Gentile converts as an “offering” acceptable to God (Rom. 15:16). Believers in Christ also function as kings (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:4, 6). Finally, Paul explains his apostolic commission from the risen Lord as fulfilling the mission of the Servant of the Lord originally proclaimed through Isaiah: “I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles, that You may bring salvation to the end of the earth” (Acts 13:47).

The New Testament thus clearly reveals that despite the fact that God’s saving plan, including all of the covenants of promise, is fulfilled in Christ, the people of God still have a ministry to perform in that salvation purpose. How are we to understand this relationship? The answer is that in “Christ” we are united with Him in His work. He is working through His people in the application and thus fulfillment of His saving work. For the understanding of our “kingly and priestly” ministry in Revelation 1:6, Beale rightly tell us to look at “how Christ himself functioned in these two offices.” “Believers spiritually,” he explains, “fulfill the same offices in this age by following his model especially by being faithful witnesses by mediating Christ’s priestly and royal authority to the world. . . . It is the light of God’s presence that they are to reflect to the world.”³⁹

Bock expresses the same thought in his explanation of Paul’s application of the ministry of the Servant of the Lord to his own ministry. Calling attention to the fact that the “Isaianic servant imagery was applied in this instance not to Jesus, but to “his followers,” Bock says, “Paul takes up the task of the Servant. His task is like the messenger of old. . . . There is a unity between what God spoke in days of old and what the Lord Jesus commands His disciples now. What Jesus was (Luke 2:32), his disciples now become.”⁴⁰ The broad principle of the relationship of the function of Christ and His people is well summed up by Legrand’s comment on mission in all of Scripture. “Mission is first and foremost the God who comes.” But mission is also “exercised in function of a people, creating this people and in turn developing through it.”⁴¹

Conclusion

We have seen that both in the Old and New Testament there is the phenomenon where many are united with one forming a corporate entity or an inclusive person. It is clear in the New Testament with the case of Christ and the church that although Christ represents and fulfills the purpose and destiny of His people, the people in and

³⁹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 193.

⁴⁰ Darrell L. Bock, “The Use of the Old Testament in Luke-Acts: Christology and Mission,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1990 Seminar Papers*, no. 29, edited by David J. Lull (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 508.

⁴¹ Lucien Legrand, *Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 152; cf. also 85–86, 88, 127–28.

through Him also participate in this fulfillment. There is no reason not to see this same reality in relation to the prophecies of the Messiah and His people in the Old Testament. *Thus, the fact that Christ is the fulfillment of national Israel's covenant promises cannot be said to necessarily lead to the conclusion that national Israel has no further participation in the fulfillment of those promises.* The question is then not whether Christ fulfills the promises, but whether the church has taken the place of national Israel and in her stead is fulfilling the prophesied ministry of the nation in the fulfillment of God's saving purposes.

The Purpose of Israel and the Biblical Promises Related to that Purpose

The question of whether the promises that are related to national Israel are fulfilled by the church or are yet to be fulfilled by that nation involves many facets of biblical teaching. We will content ourselves by focusing on two primary issues that seem vital to this question: (1) What is the purpose of the nation of Israel and the biblical covenant promises related to that promise? and (2) Does Scripture teach that the church fulfills Israel's purpose and related promises? Some related questions such as whether Israel's sin forfeited its future fulfillment of the promises, and whether the promises as portrayed in the Old Testament prophecies have been altered so that fulfillment is no longer to be expected, will be briefly touched as we consider the two primary issues.

The General Purpose of God's Creation of the Nation Israel

The issue of the fulfillment of Israel's national covenant promises and their purpose requires an understanding of the nature of those promises. As noted earlier, some see Israel as called to represent mankind in God's saving program in a position analogous to Adam and Christ. For example, Wright says, "The first [of two tasks undertaken by Christ], involving the obedience unto death, is essentially (in Paul's mind) the task by which the old Adamic humanity is redeemed, that is, the task with which Israel was entrusted."⁴² And again, "Jesus, as last Adam, had revealed what God's saving plan for the world had really been—what Israel's vocation had really been—by enacting it, becoming obedient to death, even the death of the cross."⁴³

These statements appear to suggest that the obedience or disobedience of Israel was intended by God to have a salvific effect on all mankind even as Adam did negatively and Christ did positively. Thus it is concluded that through disobedience national Israel failed to achieve its purpose, but Christ as the seed of Abraham and the

⁴² Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 38.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 40. Agreeing with Wright that Adam represented humanity before God analogously to Adam and Christ, Horton writes, "Thus the story of Adam (humanity generally) is concentrated in the story of Israel, particularly focused on the active obedience of Christ. I would elaborate Wright's conclusion still further at this point by correlating the covenant of creation to both Adam's trial and that of Israel in the wilderness and in the land. The exegetical links that bind Adam, Israel, and Christ suggest that the covenant of creation and its renewal at Sinai (as a legal covenant) is the valid category here" (*Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology*, 239–40). Also, "Adam and Israel failed, but Jesus himself fulfilled as the covenant Servant what he proclaimed as covenant Lord" (219).

true Israel by His obedience did fulfill national Israel's purpose thereby negating any need of a further purpose of national Israel in God's salvific plan. But there is no suggestion in Scripture that, in fact, the nation of Israel was called to be the saving agent of humanity. Unlike both Adam and Christ who were without sin at the point of their testing, Israel was a sinful people which God clearly acknowledged in the gracious provision of the sacrificial system. Thus, Israel as a nation was not created to do all that Christ did. In terms of Isaiah's Servant of the Lord, while the servant Israel is united to the one servant Messiah, it could not and did not do all that the One Servant Messiah was to do.

The foundational statement of Israel's purpose is stated in the Lord's words at the establishment of that nation in the covenant at Sinai: "you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests [or a priestly kingdom] and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:6). In relation to "kingdom of priests," Noth says, "Israel is to have the role of the priestly member in the number of earthly states. Israel is to do 'service' for all the world...; this is the purpose for which Israel was chosen."⁴⁴ Commenting on these same words, Beale says, this "summary of God's purpose for Israel" meant that Israel was called "to be a kingly and priestly nation mediating⁴⁵ Yahweh's light of salvific revelation by witnessing to the Gentiles.... It is the light of God's presence that they are to reflect to the world."⁴⁶

The description of Israel as a "holy nation" also signified a ministry to the world. Israel was to be "set apart, different from all other people by what they are and are becoming—a display-people, a showcase to the world of how being in covenant with Yahweh changes a people."⁴⁷ More insight into the purpose for which Israel was created as a nation will be evident in the following consideration of the means through which she is to fulfill her mission. Here we will simply sum up God's purpose for that nation in the words of Isaiah, "And in Israel He shows forth His glory" (Isa. 44:23; cf. 43:7; 60:7, 13, 21; Ezek. 39:13; Zech. 2:5).

The Manner through which Israel Fulfills Her Purpose

Israel's mission, as is often pointed out, is not fulfilled by going out to the nations proclaiming the revelation of God. Rather as Isaiah's words just cited—"in Israel He shows forth His glory." Israel is the place where God intended to glorify

⁴⁴ Martin Noth, *Exodus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 157.

⁴⁵ The dispensational use of the word "mediate" to describe Israel's future role in "dispensing the blessings of God to the nations" in the future has been criticized on the basis that according to the New Testament, this mediatorial role belongs to the one mediator, Christ (1 Tim. 2:5) (cf. Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004], 118). Dispensationalists, however, refer to Israel's mediating ministry with the same meaning as that of Beale in the citation above, namely, bringing "Yahweh's light of salvific revelation" to others—which is now the ministry of the church—and not mediation in the sense of reconciling God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). The work of Christ as mediator therefore does not preclude the possibility of Israel's function as a mediator of God's blessing to the nations in the future, any more than it precludes that function for the church today.

⁴⁶ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 193.

⁴⁷ John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 3: *Exodus* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 263.

Himself before the onlooking nations of the world.⁴⁸ Commenting on these words of Isaiah and the prior context which calls for heaven and earth to rejoice over the redemption of Israel, Goldingay says, "What happens to Israel is the basis of the whole world's praise. Instead of human beings committing themselves to making deity reflect their attractiveness, Yhwh is committed to making human beings reflect the divine attractiveness. Specifically Israel is designed for that."⁴⁹

In other words, Israel's mission was to be fulfilled essentially by her existence through whom God would reveal Himself to the nations. As Martin-Achard explains in his discussion of Israel's role in Isaiah's prophecies, "The Chosen People's business is to exist: its presence in the world furnishes proof of Yahweh's divinity; its life declares what He means for Israel itself and for the universe. The mission of Israel consists in reflecting the glory of God by accepting His gifts and judgment alike.... The miracle by which Israel lives extols its God's greatness before the whole universe."⁵⁰ God desired to reveal His glory in Israel that the nations might come to know Him both by Israel's public life in covenant with Him and through God's historical actions with Israel in public history.

Displaying God's Glory through a Righteous Nation among Nations

Just prior to entering the Promised Land, Moses, looking forward to Israel as a "great nation," instructed the people with these words: "See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'" (Deut. 4:5–6). The same thought is repeated in 26:18–19: "The LORD has today declared you to be His people, ... and that you should keep all His commandments; and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, for praise, fame, and honor; and that you shall be a consecrated people to the LORD your God."

⁴⁸ Missiologist David Bosch says, "Israel would, however, not actually go out to the nations. Neither would Israel expressly call the nations to faith in Yahweh. If they do come, it is because God is bringing them in. So, if there is a 'missionary' in the Old Testament, it is God himself who will, as his eschatological deed *par excellence*, bring the nations to Jerusalem to worship himself there together with his covenant people" (*Transforming Mission* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991], cf. John Goldingay's words: "God does not commission Israel to go out on a mission or crusade. From the beginning, it fulfills its vocation more by being than by acting. To put it another way, the First Testament assumes that Yhwh's self-revelation to the world comes about through Yhwh's own action by means of Israel rather than by Israel's action or Israel's action that Israel interprets as Yhwh's action. The principle is established by Yhwh's first words to Abraham. Yhwh intends so to bless Abraham that he will become a blessing—that is, a means of other people's blessing. That will come about as all peoples pray to be blessed as Abraham is blessed (Gen 12:1–3). It will not come about because he does something, except go where Yhwh tells him (and pray: see Gen 18). In Second Isaiah, 'the Chosen People's business is to exist ... The mission of Israel consists in reflecting the glory of God by accepting His gifts and judgments alike'" (*Israel's Faith: Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006] 203–04).

⁴⁹ John Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40–55: A Literary-Theological Commentary* (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 249.

⁵⁰ Robert Martin-Archard, *A Light to the Nations*, 31.

The *torah* or instruction that God revealed to Israel was designed not to be a burden, but a means through which God would bring about a righteous life of wisdom and understanding in all of the societal structures of the community of Israel and so reveal God and His life to the other nations of the world. Israel's task was thus "to be the means of Yhwh's teaching coming to the world and to be a witness to the world, not least by embodying how Yhwh's covenant with a people works out." In short, the nation of Israel was to be "a paradigm for the blessing of the nations."⁵¹

In his summary on the determinative role of the Davidic king in the service of Yahweh in establishing God's justice and righteousness in the nation of Israel, Aubrey Johnson writes,

The implications of Yahweh's choice of the Hebrews were now unfolded. . . . Yahweh's ultimate purpose was now clear; it was that of a universal realm of righteousness and peace, in which not merely the twelve tribes of Israel but all the nations of the earth should be united in one common life. This was Israel's mission to the world; and the successful direction of that mission had been entrusted to the House of David. The purpose of the Davidic covenant was to ensure righteousness within Israel and thus make righteousness safe for the world.⁵²

Dumbrell points to the importance of Israel being a nation for this mission in his comments on the description of that people as a "holy nation." "Probably . . . We are here . . . thinking of Israel as offering in her constitution a societary model for the world. She will provide, under the direct divine rule which the covenant contemplates, the paradigm for the theocratic rule which is to be the biblical aim for the whole world."⁵³ Merrill similarly writes, "As God's kingdom they would model what it means to have dominion over all things as an extension of his sovereignty."⁵⁴

Displaying God's Glory in Historical Acts with Israel as a Nation

God reveals himself not only in speech and the inner working of the Spirit, but also in historical acts.⁵⁵ The creation of a righteous nation would, of course, be a

⁵¹ Goldingay, *Israel's Faith: Old Testament Theology*, 221. In the same vein, Mascarenhas writes, "Israel is called to be a model. Its task is to live according to the way that Yahweh has set for it. An obedient Israel becomes a light to the nations because it becomes a path-setter, as one who is blessed because it has lived according to God's way. Nations can look up to a blessed Israel and come to the knowledge of the 'way' that leads to blessing" (Theodore Mascarenhas, *The Missionary Function of Israel in Psalms 67, 96, and 117* [Dallas, TX: University Press of America, 2005], 276–77).

⁵² Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel*, 138.

⁵³ W. J., Dumbrell, *Creation and Covenant* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 87.

⁵⁴ Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 159–60. G. Ernest Wright similarly comments, "God's revealed purpose was that the whole earth shall become his kingdom, and the Israelite was called to play his role in the universal cosmogony of the age yet to be born." G. Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts* (London: SCM Press, 1952), 25.

⁵⁵ On the importance of recognizing the God of the Bible as a God who acts in history and consequently the importance of the Old Testament record of his historical acts with Israel for the church, see

public demonstration of the saving work of God. But here we are thinking of historical demonstrations of power that cannot be evaded by the nations of the world. Since the creation of Israel, God has performed such acts which have all focused on that nation.⁵⁶ Even God's act in Christ, although having universal significance, was first His deed *par excellence* in Israel.⁵⁷

God reveals Himself in Israel, according to Scriptures, both through acts of judgment and blessing.⁵⁸ This theme is prominent in the prophecy of Ezekiel which according to Zimmerli "announces that what happens to Israel historically is in fact Yahweh's own dealing with both His people and the nations."⁵⁹ This revelation is for Israel herself, but especially for the nations who in Gowan's words are portrayed as "spectators who will learn something about the true God from his works in history."⁶⁰

God's revelation of Himself through judgment on His people is seen in His purpose for bringing desolation through Babylon: "Thus all flesh will know that I, the LORD, have drawn My sword out of its sheath" (Ezek. 21:5). Numerous other statements declare God's intention to make Himself known to Israel and nations through judgment of His people (cf. 5:8, 13; 6:14; 7:9; 12:15ff.; 15:7; 39:21–24; Deut. 29:24–25). While most of Ezekiel's statements of judgment refer in the first place to the Babylonian exile, they are not exhausted by that event. Some clearly pertain to the future and are inherently related to Israel's final restoration which according to Ezekiel's portrayal clearly transcended Israel's restoration from the Babylonian exile (cf. 39:21–24).

God also makes Himself known through His gracious acts toward His people Israel. Both Israel and Egypt along with the surrounding nations would know that Yahweh was God through His mighty actions in the Exodus (cf. Exod. 6:7; 7:5; 14:4, 18; Josh. 2:10). The prophets frequently predicted the same revelatory power in God's future actions of redeeming Israel from her oppressors and restoring her as the place of God's glory. Isaiah declares that God will "feed . . . [Israel's] oppressors with their own flesh, and they will become drunk with their own blood . . . And all flesh will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior and your redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob" (49:26). Similarly God says through the prophet Ezekiel, "When I bring them

Wright, *God Who Acts*, 15–31. See also, David W. Torrance, "The Witness of the Jews to God," in *The Witness of the Jews to God*, ed. David W. Torrance (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1982), 2–4.

⁵⁶ Daniel I. Block says, "All of God's dealings with Israel were public—before the eyes of the nations. Israel was to be the agent through whom the nations would come to know that he is Yahweh." *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapter 1–24* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 658.

⁵⁷ Th. C. Vriezen, "Theocracy and Soteriology," in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. Claus Westermann (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1963), 218.

⁵⁸ Arendt Th. Van Leeuwen sees God's dealing with Israel as a paradigm of his dealing with all nations: "Israel . . . represents all mankind, in unity and scattering, in pride and sin and fall. God's judgment on his people is his judgment upon all the earth; and when the Lord has mercy on his people and gathers them again, the action adumbrates his blessing which he has promised to bestow on each and every nation. Israel then is the vanguard of the nations; her history is the centre and epitome of all history and the revelation of God's purposes for all mankind" (*Christianity in World History* [New York: Scribner's, 1964] 101. See also, Torrance, "The Witness of the Jews to God," 7–12.

⁵⁹ Walther Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1982), 88.

⁶⁰ Donald E. Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 49.

back from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, then I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of the many nations” (39:27; cf. 36:22–36).

The sight of the Lord’s powerful historical intervention to rescue the nation of Israel from her oppressors and glorify Himself in her through gracious blessing will be the means of bringing salvation to the nations. They will see the Lord’s action on behalf of Israel and submit to Him, desirous of the same blessing.⁶¹ This connection is clear in the Psalmist’s prayer, “God be gracious to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us—that Your way may be known on the earth, your salvation among all nations. . . . God blesses us, that all the ends of the earth may fear Him” (Ps. 67:1–2, 7). The same thought is evident in the Psalmist’s anticipation of the time when the Lord would “arise and have compassion on Zion” and “be gracious to her” with the result that “the nations will fear the name of the Lord and all kings of the earth Your glory” (Ps. 102:13–15; cf. Is. 52:7–10; 55:3–5).

In summary, Israel was created and commissioned to be a place on earth where God would display His glory through a model kingdom before all the nations of the world. He would do so through spoken instructions as well as overt historical actions of judgment and mercy with the goal that through His dealing with Israel the world would come to recognize Him as the only true God and submit to His gracious blessing of salvation.

The Promised Fulfillment of Israel’s Purpose

As we have seen earlier, the rationale for seeing Old Testament Israel’s promises now fulfilled in Christ is the failure of national Israel to obey the Lord. As a result Israel’s calling is being fulfilled in Christ and the church in Him as a “new Israel.” I would suggest that two important facts of biblical teaching mitigate against this conclusion: (1) the prediction of Israel’s failure, and (2) the promise of restoration despite failure.

The Prediction of Israel’s Failure

The rebellious disobedience of the nation Israel is a clear theme in the prophecies related to that nation. The Apostle Paul applies Old Testament teaching to the disobedience and even divine hardening of Israel in his time (Rom. 11:810; citing Deut. 29:4; Is. 29:10; Ps. 69:22–23). Isaiah portrays Israel as “blind” and “deaf,” incapable in that state of fulfilling its mission as the Lord’s servant (Isa. 42:16–19; 43:8–13, 22–28; 44:4–8; 56:10; cf., 6:9–10; 8:17–22). Most importantly, it was foretold that this disobedience of the nation would climax in the rejection of their Messiah, the

⁶¹ Commenting on the prayer for Israel’s Davidic king at the end of Psalm 27—“May all nations bless themselves by him. May they count him fortunate” (Goldingay’s trans.)—Goldingay says, “Why should they do that? The wording again goes back to Yhwh’s promise to Abraham (e.g. Gen. 12:1–3) and takes up that promise’s assumption about the interrelationship of Yhwh’s work with Israel and with the nations. Yhwh will so bless Israel that the nation will covet the same blessing for themselves” (*Israel’s Faith: Old Testament Theology*, 743).

crucified Servant (Isa. 53:1–3; cf. John 12:38; Rom. 10:16).⁶² Thus the Old Testament is filled with the history of Israel's failure to fulfill its calling as God's "holy nation" and "priestly kingdom" in the service of His salvation plan for the world. But Israel's failure is not the end of the prophetic story.

The Promises of Israel's Restoration and Fulfillment of Purpose

Along with the theme of Israel's sinful failure to be the nation that it was formed to be, the Old Testament proclaims the future restoration of the nation and the fulfillment of its God-given destiny.⁶³ During Israel's sinful decline through disobedience to the Sinai covenant, the prophets made greater reference to the covenant with Abraham which guaranteed Israel's existence by a divine oath (cf. Isa. 29:22–24; 41:8–10; 51:2–3; Jer. 33:24–26; Micah 7:20).⁶⁴ God would remain faithful to His promise covenants and bring Israel back from her rebellious way. She would be restored as a nation to live in her Promised Land (cf. Lev. 26:43–44; Isa. 11:11–12; 48:9; 49:8–12; Jer. 30:3, 10, 11; 31:8; Ezek. 20:33–44; 34:11–16; 37:37; Amos 9:11–15). She would then fulfill her purpose as God's witness to the nations as they are drawn to God's glory radiating in her (Isa. 2:1–4; Jer. 33:9; Zech. 8:13; cf. also Scriptures above in discussion of Israel's purpose).

All of this would come about as a result of a spiritual transformation which the Lord would bring through the gift of a new covenant which would bring about a new heart in the people through the indwelling Spirit and a righteousness of life resulting in abundant blessing of God. As the Lord says through the prophet Ezekiel, "I will give them one heart and put a new spirit within them . . . that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God" (Ezek. 11:19–20; cf. also 36:25–29; Jer. 31:31–34). The obedience of Israel would result in untold blessings in the sight of all nations, drawing them to God's salvation.

These prophecies of Israel's restoration and fulfillment of purpose refer to the same Israel who had a history of disobedience. It is the blind and deaf disobedient servant to which the spiritual transformation and restoration as a nation are promised again and again in Isaiah, not a new spiritual Israel. According to Ezekiel it is the Israel that God brought out of the land of Egypt and who had profaned the Lord's

⁶² On Isaiah 53:1–6 as a reference to Israel's rejection of Christ at his first coming, see, John N., Oswalt, *The book of Isaiah. Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 381.

⁶³ For an interesting rather comprehensive discussion of the prophetic hope of Israel that rejects supersessionism, see Goldingay, *Israel's Faith: Old Testament Theology*, 350–516,

⁶⁴ Ronald E. Clements, "אֲבִרָהָם," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, ed., G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 57–58; cf. Goldingay's comment: "In the context of exile where Israel's failure has imperiled the covenant relationship, the emphasis of the Abraham covenant would remind Israel that its relationship with God originally rested on divine choice and that this failure of theirs need not mean its termination. The hierarchical nature of the covenant means that Israel's relationship with Yhwh rests on the immense security of its having come into being because of Yhwh's sovereignty. It does not rest on Yhwh's sentiment nor on the fickleness of Israel's choice of Yhwh. It is thus not so surprising that after a while Yhwh commissions messengers with the words 'Comfort, comfort my people, says your God;' (Is 40:1)" (*Israel's Faith: Old Testament Theology*, 189).

name by their disobedience (20:9, 13, 16, 21–22) that is going to be renewed and restored through a new purging even as their fathers were judged in the wilderness (20:34–44).

It is Israel as a *nation*, and not an Israel of people gathered from all nations as is the church today. In connection with the promise of a new covenant, the Lord declared that only if the fixed order of nature ceased would “the offspring of Israel also . . . cease from being a *nation* before Me forever” (Jer. 31:35–36, emphasis added). It is as a nation among nations that Israel will become a blessing to other nations that they might receive the same salvation and become God’s people alongside of it (cf. Isa. 19:23–25).

That it is the same historical Israel is also clear from the fact that God’s name is at stake in the destiny of this nation. From the beginning God’s name was publicly attached to the nation of Israel. He had created it, redeemed it from slavery, given it the Promised Land, and judged it for disobedience. He had given it many covenant promises. Throughout her history, Israel often wanted to be like the other nations, but God insisted on maintaining His special relationship with her because for Him to let her go and begin with a different people would bring discredit on His name (Ezek. 20:9, 14, 22).⁶⁵

Thus He declares that He will ultimately restore them for the sake of His name: “You will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the land which I swore to give your forefathers. . . . Then you will know that I am the LORD when I have dealt with you for My name’s sake” (Ezek. 20:42, 44). And in Israel’s restoration, the Lord will fulfill his original intent with Israel: “I will prove myself holy among you in the sight of the nations” (Ezek. 20:41). I think that Goldingay is correct in his belief that the prophets could never conceive of God creating a new Israel that would replace the original Israel and fulfill its promises, for He “would not accept such a denigrating of the divine holiness.”⁶⁶

The essence of Israel’s place and purpose in God’s plan of salvation for the nations is summed up well in von Rad’s summary of Isaiah’s prophecy relating to that nation:

Once Yahweh has performed his work upon Israel, there will be a universal ‘twilight of the gods’ among the nations, for the heathen will realize the impotence of their idols. The heathen will be put to shame (Is. XLI, II, XLII. 17, XL. 24), they will come to Yahweh (Is. XIV. 24); indeed, because they are convinced of the greatness and glory of the God of Israel, they will even bring home the Lord’s scattered people (Is. XLIX. 22f.). ‘Kings shall see it and arise, princes, and prostrate themselves’ (Is. XLIX. 7). Then . . . Yahweh can make a direct appeal to the nations to avail themselves of this hour of the dawn of salvation: ‘Be saved, all the ends of the earth’ (Is. XLV. 22); ‘let the coastlands

⁶⁵ Goldingay, *Israel's Faith: Old Testament Theology*, 360. Block similarly says in his comments on Ezekiel 20–32–44, “The divine reputation depends on the fate of his people. All of God’s dealings with Israel were public—before the eyes of the nations.” Block, *The Book of Ezekiel; Chapters 1–24*, 658.

⁶⁶ Goldingay, *Israel's Faith: Old Testament Theology*, 361,

put their hope in Yahweh and wait for his arm' (Is. LI. 5). This ought not to be called a 'missionary idea,' . . . Israel is thought of rather as a sign of which the Gentiles are to become aware, and to which in the course of the eschatological events, they will resort of their own accord. They will come to Israel and confess that 'God is with you only, and nowhere else, no god besides him'; 'only in Yahweh are salvation and strength' . . . (Is. XLV. 15f., 24).⁶⁷

This picture of the calling of Israel and her eschatological role of blessing for the nations remained an unfulfilled hope for the Old Testament people of God. Even after the Babylonian exile the promise of a final fulfillment remained alive as evident in Zechariah's prophecy: "It will come about that just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you that you may become a blessing . . . So many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the Lord" (Zech. 8:13, 22). The question is whether Scripture sees the fulfillment of these covenant promises made to Israel and if so, how?

The Church Does Not Fulfill Israel's Promises

We have seen that Christ is the fulfillment of Israel's covenant promises as well as those for the church. We have also seen that Christ's people participate in the fulfillment of that role as is evident in the present ministry of the church in the world. The question is whether the fulfillment of the covenants which involved the participation of the nation of Israel through which God promised to bring his salvation to the world are going to be fulfilled through that nation or through the church as a "new Israel."

In strong support of Israel's promises being fulfilled by that nation, the New Testament rather clearly teaches that the Old Testament covenant promises still belong to the Israel of the Old Testament even as they are now largely in unbelief (Rom. 9:3–5; 11:29). The Apostle Paul expressly declares that God has not rejected His Old Testament people, but rather will in the future bring about their salvation for the blessing of the world (Rom. 11, see especially vv. 12, 15, 26). As we have seen, the Old Testament does not teach the abandonment of national Israel in God's saving plan, nor is any abandonment of Israel because of failure taught in the New Testament. But aside from this rather clear teaching which we cannot develop here, I want to suggest several other things that make it difficult to see the church fulfilling Israel's Old Testament promises.

A Different Manifestation of the Kingdom

The church is a manifestation of Christ's kingdom, but it is not the manifestation of the kingdom that was prophesied for Israel. As a spiritual community of God's people, the church cannot manifest a paradigm of the kingdom of God before the nations as is prophesied through the theocracy of Israel where all of the structures of

⁶⁷ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 248–49.

human society are ruled by God, and there is no Caesar governing the people along with Christ as is true during this age of the church.

According to the New Testament, the power of the kingdom presently reveals itself through the church in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9) after the example of Christ who displayed God's power in the weakness of His earthly life and crucifixion (cf. 2 Cor. 13:4). Paul did not see himself or other believers as reigning during this age (1 Cor. 4:8ff.). In the prophecies related to the restoration of Israel, the kingdom's power is clearly manifest in overt glorious power before world. If today the power of the kingdom that is manifest through the word and the Spirit is essentially *influential* love, with the restoration of Israel that power of the kingdom will also include *coercive* force.

Finally, as has been already implied, contrary to the present manifestation of the kingdom's power through the church in spiritually changed lives and communities, the restoration of Israel will entail a display of God's kingdom power in public historical acts of salvation before the eyes of the nations, a manifestation that cannot be explained away as is often done in relation to present salvation in the church. It is difficult if not impossible to see any analogy between God's activities with the church and the many prophecies of God displaying His glorious power in the historical action of defeating Israel's enemy nations and restoring her to an exalted place for the purpose of the salvation of the nations. This is particularly difficult if the coming of Christ brings the final judgment of all people.

A Radically Different Experience of God's People in Witness

The nation of Israel was called to reveal God's glory to the world through word but also through historical actions of God in relation to that nation. As we have seen, this takes place through acts of judgments, but Israel's witness to the nations was to be primarily through God's historical actions in restoring and blessing that nation before the eyes of the world. Freed from the persecution and oppression of the nations, the spiritually transformed Israel would live in their land in God's peace and prosperity exalted among the nations who look to the God of Israel for the same blessing.⁶⁸

The experience of believers in the church in the world during this age is radically different. Like the Apostle Paul who as a chosen instrument to bear the Lord's name before Israel and Gentiles must "suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:15; cf. 2 Cor. 11), the experience of the church in its witness to God's glory is suffering (cf. 1 Pet. 4:12–19). We live as aliens among the nations which are headed toward the domination of anti-Christ, hated and persecuted until the end of the age (cf. John 15:18–

⁶⁸ The exaltation of Israel is not for the pride of Israel or pay-back for her oppression by the nations, but rather for God's service in bringing his salvation to the nations. D. W. Van Winkle concludes his study on the relationship of the nations to God and to Isaiah 40–55 by saying, "The prophet does not envisage the co-equality of Jews and gentiles. He expects that Israel will be exalted, and that she will become Yahweh's agent who will rule the nations in such a way that justice is established and mercy is shown. This rule is both that for which the nations wait expectantly and that to which they must submit: ("The Relationship of the Nations to Yahweh and to Israel in Isaiah XL–LV," *Vetus Testamentum*, 35 [1985], 457). See also Robert Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 303–05.

21; Matt. 24:9). Unless one radically reinterprets the prophecy of Israel's witness in its restoration, it seems impossible to see the experience of the church as the fulfillment of Israel's witness.

A Different Evangelization of the Nations

Finally, the biblical teaching of the effect of the witness of Israel and that of the church is strong evidence that the church is not fulfilling Israel's national promises. As we have seen the Old Testament declares that it is God's plan to glorify Himself before the nations of the world that they may come to know that He is the true God (cf. Ezek. 36:22–23, 26; 37:28; 39:21, 13; Is. 45:14). This concern for coming to know God is also expressed in relation to Israel and her spiritual restoration, thus indicating that this knowledge that the nations would gain was not simply the recognition of God's existence, but “above all else the adoration that kneels because of divinely inspired recognition.”⁶⁹

This is evident from other references indicating that God's revelation in Israel will bring the nations to acknowledge and worship Him (cf. Isa. 19:21–25; 45:14–24; 60:1–3). The nations will come to Zion to worship and learn God's ways (Isa. 2:2–4; 55:4–5; 66:18; Jer. 3:17; Mic. 4:1–4). Because of the Lord's blessing of Israel, the nations will desire to associate with her and seek the same blessing of the true God for themselves (Zech. 8:20–22). Whether voluntarily in worship or involuntarily, all nations along with Israel will bow the knee and every tongue will swear allegiance to the true God (Isa. 45:23; cf. 49:7).

The broad conversion of the nations along with the involuntary submission of those whose hearts are not changed leads to world peace. The Lord's reign through His Messiah in restored Jerusalem will be worldwide. He will “judge disputes between nations.” And instead of taking up the sword against each other, “they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (Isa. 2:4, NET; cf. Mic. 2:3; Jer. 3:17; Zech. 9:9–10). In his prophecy of the final destruction of Babylon—the great symbol of human antagonism to God—Jeremiah connects this peace with God's restoration of Israel. Speaking of Israel's strong Redeemer, the prophet declares, “He will vigorously plead their [Israel's] case so that He may bring rest to the earth” (Jer. 50:34; cf. Is. 14:1–3, 7, 16). In the words of Laetsch, “Judah's enemies forgot that Israel was the covenant nation of the Lord of Hosts, ‘their Redeemer.’ As such He will plead their cause, not by lengthy speeches, but by mighty deeds. He will quiet the world.”⁷⁰ Similarly, Ezekiel in his “image of a huge tree offering nourishment and protection for all creatures” depicts the Messiah enthroned in Israel restoring “shalom not only to his own people but also to the world” (17:22–24).⁷¹

⁶⁹ Walther Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 88.

⁷⁰ Theo Laetsch, *Bible Commentary: Jeremiah* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1952), 358. Laetsch refers this prophecy to Cyrus' gaining the goodwill of the nations through permitting all deported people to return to their homelands. But the description of Babylon and its fall and destruction in chapters 50–51, along with the exhortation for God's people to escape from the city (e.g. 50:8; 51:6, 45) and the promise of forgiveness (50:20) and a new covenant (cf. 50:5), clearly transcend this historical situation (cf. Peter R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968], 224–25).

⁷¹ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 551, 554.

The effect of the witness of the church during this age is quite different. While the evangelization of the church will reach all nations (Matt. 24:14), there is no reference to the nations acknowledging God to the extent that they come to the church to learn the ways of God. The spiritual condition of the world at the end of the age just prior to the Lord's return is likened to the days of Noah—a total lack of concern for God with even the faith of many believers wanting (cf. Matt. 24:10–12, 37–39). There is also no indication that God will bring peace to the world through the witness of the church. Instead the New Testament indicates, as we have already seen, that the church will suffer persecution until Christ comes. There will be strife and war among the nations culminating in a final anti-Christ ruler (cf. 2 Thess. 2:3–12; Rev. 19:17–19).

In sum, although both national Israel and the church are called to be God's witnesses to the world, Scripture portrays some radical differences between national Israel and the church in the nature and effects of that witness. Unless one radically reinterprets the biblical prophecies concerning Israel—which in my opinion Scripture never does—or simply denies that some of the national promises will ever be fulfilled, it seems impossible to affirm that the church is presently fulfilling or will fulfill in the future all of the covenanted promises made with historic Israel.

Conclusion

Is Christ the fulfillment of national Israel's promises? Scripture answers this question with both a "yes" and a "no." As the One in whom all of God's covenant promises of salvation are summed up, yes, Christ is the fulfillment of Israel's national covenant promises as well as the promises in which the church participates. For all these promises are facets of His historical program of salvation.

On the other hand, Scripture also teaches that the people in union with Christ, or "in Him," also participate through Him in His fulfillment of God's salvation program for the world. Even as the church presently has a priestly ministry in Christ, the great High Priest, so Israel was called to have a priestly ministry in the service of God. Although the church and Israel have similar functions as witnesses to the glory of God in the world, we saw that the witness of Israel as a nation was prophesied to be significantly different in nature and effect. Without radical reinterpretation of Israel's prophecies, it is impossible to see them fulfilled by the church.

Nowhere does the New Testament expressly teach the replacement of national Israel by the church and reinterpret Israel's promises accordingly. Rather it reaffirms the promises to historic Israel and thus its restoration (cf. Rom. 9–11). The fulfillment of Israel's national prophecies by that nation is in harmony with the apostle's picture of the participation of both the present church and that nation in God's plan of salvation for the world. Presently because of Israel's "transgression" the church is bringing the "riches" of salvation blessing for the world. But "how much more" will salvation's blessing flow to the world through the "fullness" of Israel, i.e., through God's historical action of redeeming and restoring the full number of Israel as a nation before the eyes of the world and making it the showplace of His glory that will draw the nations to Him (Rom. 11:12; cf. v. 15).