

**WHAT DOES CHRIST AS “TRUE ISRAEL”  
MEAN FOR THE NATION ISRAEL?:  
A CRITIQUE OF THE NON-DISPENSATIONAL  
UNDERSTANDING**

Michael J. Vlach, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Theology  
The Master’s Seminary

*Non-dispensationalists often claim that Jesus’ identity as “true Israel” means there is no longer any future significance for Israel as a national entity. For them, if Christ is “true Israel,” this means that all who believe in Christ whether they are Jew or Gentile are now part of Israel by relation of their identification with Jesus, the true Israelite. Thus, national Israel’s place in the plan of God no longer exists. This approach, though, draws incorrect conclusions concerning how Jesus relates to Israel. Jesus is identified with Israel and He is the true and ultimate Israelite. But this identification serves as the basis for national Israel’s restoration, not Israel’s non-significance in God’s plans.*

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**Introduction**

Israel continues to be a major point of disagreement between dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists. Dispensationalists maintain that the nation Israel will be saved and restored to a place of service to the nations when Jesus returns and reigns over the nations (see Isa 19:24–25; Zech 14; Matt 25:31). Thus, Israel, as a nation, has a role to play in God’s future plans, including leading the nations in example and worship (see Isa 2:2–4). Non-dispensationalists, on the other hand, often argue that the church is now the fulfillment or replacement of Israel with the implication that Israel will not be restored as a nation.<sup>1</sup> For them, since Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel, there is no need for a restored national Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> Some non-dispensationalists affirm a future salvation of many Jews, but this salvation of Israel is not viewed as a restoration of Israel in which Israel as a nation has a role to play that is unique to the nation.

Important to the evangelical non-dispensational understanding of Israel is Christ's role as "true Israel." In sum, the non-dispensational argument often goes like this—*Jesus is the complete fulfillment of Israel. He is the "true Israel." As a result, all those who are "in Christ" whether Jew or Gentile are now Israel based on their identification with Christ. Thus, there is no future restoration for the nation Israel.* Or in other words, since Jesus is true Israel, those who belong to Him are now "Israel," so there will be no restoration of national Israel.

The problem with this view is that it is not found in Scripture. In fact, it is refuted by explicit texts in both testaments that indicate otherwise. *Our purpose here is to show that this non-dispensational understanding of what Christ as "true Israel" means for the nation Israel is not biblical.* Instead, Christ's identification with Israel is the basis for national Israel's restoration not the revocation of the nation's significance. Because Christ identifies himself with Israel and is Israel's corporate Head, He is able to restore the nation that currently is undergoing a temporary hardening and rejection. So instead of leading to the end of national Israel's significance in the plan of God, Christ's identity as Israel guarantees the nation Israel's significance. I will argue that the non-dispensational view is correct in identifying Jesus Christ with Israel but is incorrect on the implications of this truth.

### **The Non-dispensational View of Christ as "True Israel"**

To demonstrate the non-dispensational perspective, I will reference the writing of four non-dispensational scholars—Robert B. Strimple, Kim Riddlebarger, Russell D. Moore and Vern Poythress. All four have explicitly addressed the implications of Christ as "Israel" in a way that supposedly refutes the dispensational understanding of Israel. These four men have argued that Christ's identity as "Israel" means that the dispensational understanding of a future restoration of the nation Israel is in error. Before looking at their statements, though, I want to make a point of clarification. I agree with these men when they link Jesus with Israel. The cluster of OT passages that Matthew uses to link Israel's experiences with Jesus in Matthew 1 and 2 indicates that Jesus has an important connection with Israel (compare Matt 1:22–23/Isa 7:14; Matt 2:15/Hos 11:1; Matt 2:17–18/Jer 31:15). Jesus is the head of Israel and He represents everything God intended for Israel to be. There is no problem with this understanding. What I am disputing, though, is the *implications* some give in regard to Jesus being identified with Israel. These critics of dispensationalism are claiming that Jesus' identification with Israel rules out a restoration of the nation Israel. My understanding, though, is that Jesus' representation of Israel is the basis for the restoration of the nation. This is explicitly stated in Isa 49:3–6, a passage that will be looked at later. But now our attention is on the four critics of dispensationalism.

In addressing his view on Israel, the amillennialist, Strimple, states, "The true Israel is Christ. He is the suffering Servant of the Lord."<sup>2</sup> He then says, "Since Christ is the true Israel. The true seed of Abraham, we who are *in Christ* by faith

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<sup>2</sup> Robert B. Strimple, "Amillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 87.

and the working of his Spirit are the true Israel, the Israel of faith, not of mere descent.”<sup>3</sup> For Strimple, since Christ is “Israel” all who believe in Him by faith are Israel. This means that there is no future restoration of the nation Israel as dispensationalists understand since Christ and all who believe in Him are now “Israel.” Strimple argues that Matt 2:15’s use of Hos 11:1, in which Christ’s departure from Egypt is declared a fulfillment of Israel’s exodus from Egypt centuries earlier, is support for this view.<sup>4</sup> Strimple uses Matt 2:15 to declare: “Christ is the true Israel of God, the one in whom Israel’s history is recapitulated and God’s purposes for Israel come to fulfillment.”<sup>5</sup>

Riddlebarger, too, argues against a literal fulfillment of Old Testament promises to the nation Israel based on his understanding of Christ as the “true Israel.” In his book, *A Case for Amillennialism*, Riddlebarger chides dispensationalists who take passages like Isa 41:8–9 and Isa 42:1–7 to refer to a future restoration of the nation Israel to her land:

Dispensationalists, who interpret such passages literally, assign the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecies to a future earthly millennium in which Israel will coexist with Gentiles under the reign of the Davidic king.<sup>6</sup>

He then challenges the dispensational understanding by stating: “Is this how the New Testament interpreted these messianic prophecies regarding the servant of the Lord? Who is this servant of the Lord—the nation of Israel, or Jesus, Israel’s Messiah?”<sup>7</sup> For Riddlebarger the prophecies of Isaiah are “fulfilled in the messianic mission of Jesus.”<sup>8</sup> He then appeals to several passages that link Jesus with the servant of Israel spoken of in Isaiah—Matt 8:17; Luke 1:54, 69; Acts 3:13; 8:34–35. He also refers to the Matt 2:15/Hos 11:1 connection in which Matthew links Jesus with Israel’s exodus experience and Galatians 3 and Paul’s discussion of how Gentiles are now related to the seed of Abraham.<sup>9</sup> Riddlebarger declares:

The ramifications for this on one’s millennial view should now be obvious. The New Testament writers claimed that Jesus was the true Israel of God and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. So what remains

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 88–89.

<sup>4</sup> Matt 2:15 declares: “He [Jesus] remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.’” Here Matthew quotes Hos 11:1 to link Jesus coming out of Egypt as a child with the nation Israel’s exodus from Egypt. Hosea 11:1 is referring to the historical fact of the exodus, while Matt 2:15 is applying that exodus to an event in Jesus’ life.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>6</sup> Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 69.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 69–70.

of the dispensationalists' case that these prophecies will yet be fulfilled in a future millennium? They vanish in Jesus Christ, who has fulfilled them.<sup>10</sup>

Note that for Riddlebarger, the coming of Jesus as “the true Israel of God” means prophecies related to a future kingdom involving Israel “vanish.” Thus a literal fulfillment of OT promises to the nation Israel vanished away into thin air. Riddlebarger’s logic can be summarized in my words as follows:

In the OT the nation Israel was identified as the “servant of the Lord.”  
The servant, the nation Israel, was promised a future restoration.  
The New Testament indicates that Jesus is the fulfillment of the servant of the Lord.  
Because Jesus is the true servant of the Lord, He is the true Israel.  
Therefore, do not expect a literal restoration of the nation Israel since Jesus is the true Israel.

I will argue that this logic does not work. But now on to another critic of the dispensational understanding.

Moore argues that dispensationalists are part of those who “miss the radically Christ-centered focus of the New Testament argument”<sup>11</sup> when it comes to the kingdom and Israel. For Moore, dispensationalists are mistaken when they speak of “millennial Israel as having a ‘mediatorial’ role in dispensing the blessings of God to the nations.”<sup>12</sup> This is because dispensationalists do not understand that Jesus is now the true Israel and that He now possesses the mediatorial role (see 1 Tim 2:5).<sup>13</sup> For Moore, Christ as Mediator means that the nation Israel no longer is a mediator of God’s blessings. As Moore states, “Thus, when dispensationalists speak of the ‘future’ of Israel, they should speak of it in terms of the ‘future’ of Jesus—a future He promises to share with His ‘friends.’”<sup>14</sup>

Also, Poythress, who wrote a book evaluating dispensational theology, links his non-dispensational understanding of Christ as true Israel with the New Covenant:

Because Christ is an Israelite and Christians are in union with Christ, Christians partake of the benefits promised to Israel and Judah in Jeremiah. With whom is the new covenant made? It is made with Israel and Judah. Hence it is made with Christians by virtue of Christ the Israelite. Thus one might say that Israel and Judah themselves undergo a

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>11</sup> Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 117.

<sup>12</sup> Moore points out that “the New Testament applies to Jesus language previously applied to the nation—the ‘firstborn’ or the ‘son of God (Ex. 4:22–23; Matt. 2:15),” 118.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

transformation at the first coming of Christ, because Christ is the final, supremely faithful Israelite. Around him all true Israel gathers.<sup>15</sup>

For Poythress the concept of Israel undergoes “transformation” because of Christ who is the “supremely faithful Israelite.” All those who are in Christ are now Israel. Since this transformation of Israel has taken place there is no need for a literal fulfillment of OT promises with the nation Israel.

In sum, the non-dispensationalist argument asserts that since Christ is the true Israel all who are in Christ are Israel; thus, there is no need for a future restoration of the nation Israel with any type of mediatorial role. Or to put it in the form of an argument:

Premise 1: Israel was God’s chosen nation and servant in the Old Testament.

Premise 2: Jesus now fulfills Israel and is the true Israel.

Premise 3: As the true Israel, Jesus assumes and fulfills the nation Israel’s mediatorial role.

Premise 4: All who are in the true Israel—Jesus Christ, are also Israel.

Conclusion: There is no future role for the nation Israel in the plan of God.<sup>16</sup>

### **A Critique of the Non-dispensational View**

There are problems with the non-dispensational argument both at the premise and conclusion levels. Before looking at these problems, though, it should be noted again that dispensationalists often agree with Premises 1 and 2. Dispensationalists affirm that Israel was a nation in the Old Testament. No surprise here. But what may be surprising to some is that many dispensationalists also accept Premise 2 that Jesus is identified with Israel. For instance, Craig Blaising states, “I agree with Strimple that the New Testament presents Christ as Israel.”<sup>17</sup> This author, too, believes that Christ is identified with Israel and that Matthew 1 and 2 indicates a strong connection between the nation Israel and Jesus. Jesus is the corporate Head of Israel who represents Israel.

Some clarification is necessary, though, in regard to identifying Jesus as the “true Israel.” This combination of terms is not found in the Bible. Jesus does not call himself “true Israel” and neither do the other NT writers. This does not mean the concept has no validity, but the reader should understand that this is not the language of the NT. Another potential problem is that in calling Jesus “true Israel,” the impression could be given that the nation Israel is not truly Israel anymore. But

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<sup>15</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 2d. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1994), 106.

<sup>16</sup> We are not using the exact language of any one theologian but we believe that the wording of this argument represents the traditional non-dispensational understanding of Christ as true Israel. We understand that some may word things differently.

<sup>17</sup> Craig A. Blaising, “A Premillennial Response,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, 145.

such thinking should be rejected. This is not a case of “true Israel” vs. “false Israel” or “non-Israel.” To make a comparison, most theologians would agree that Jesus is “true” or “ultimate” Man (see Rom 5:12–21), but this does not mean that the rest of us are “false man” or “not really man.” A proper understanding of Jesus as “true Israel” (if we use that title) should be in the context of understanding Jesus as the corporate Head of Israel. He embodies perfectly everything God intended for Israel to be. In this sense we can say Jesus is “true Israel” because He embodies Israel perfectly. Plus, it should be understood that with the corporate solidarity concept, the “one” represents the “many”—the one does not substitute the many.

It is with Premises 3 and 4 and the Conclusion that dispensationalists disagree with non-dispensationalists. As will be shown, dispensationalists agree with non-dispensationalists on the *identity* of Jesus as “Israel” (Premise 2). However, they disagree with non-dispensationalists on the *implications* of Jesus being the true Israel (Premises 3, 4 and Conclusion).

Concerning Premise 3—“As the true Israel, Jesus assumes and fulfills the nation Israel’s mediatorial role”—this position is not supported by Scripture if by it one means that the nation Israel has no future mediatorial purpose in God’s plans. This understanding is assumed more than proven. In fact, we do not see one verse in Scripture that indicates that Jesus’ identity as “Israel” means the end of national Israel’s significance in the plan of God. Matthew 2:15 is often put forth as support for the non-dispensational understanding but in reality it is not support for their view. Matthew 2:15 identifies Jesus with Israel, but as will be shown, the NT on multiple occasions affirms the importance of national Israel in God’s future plans. Plus, as mentioned, dispensationalists like myself and Blaising believe Matt 2:15 teaches Christ as “Israel” but we do not see how this passage brings to an end national Israel’s identity and function in the plan of God.

Moore mentions 1 Tim 2:5 which states, “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” This supposedly is evidence that since Christ is *the* Mediator, there is no role for the nation Israel as a mediator.<sup>18</sup> But does this verse rule out a mediatorial function for Israel or anyone other than Christ in the kingdom of God? The answer is no. The context of 1 Tim 2:1–6 is salvation. This passage mentions “God our Savior who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (3–4). Certainly, when it comes to salvation and being in a right relationship with God, Jesus is the only mediator. But does this passage mean that no one else has a functional role in Christ’s kingdom as mediators? Certainly not. Jesus promised the church that those who overcome will have “authority over the nations” (Rev 2:26). Thus, Christians will have mediatorial roles to play in the future kingdom of Christ. Revelation 5:10 promises that the saints will “reign upon the earth.” Again, Jesus appears to share His reign with others, and in that sense, they are mediators. Also, Jesus promised the apostles mediatorial positions of authority over the tribes of Israel in Matt 19:28 when He said they would be on thrones “judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Thus, we do not see how Christ’s role as Mediator in salvation rules out a functional mediatorial rule for others, including the nation Israel, in His kingdom. Both Old and New Testament passages are filled with examples of people other than Christ

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<sup>18</sup> Moore, 118.

being involved with His mediatorial rule over the earth. In fact, the original mandate given to God’s image bearers was to rule and subdue the earth and all of God’s creation for God’s glory (see Gen 1:26–28). This is completed perfectly in the Eternal State when the nations (including Israel) are reigning forever and ever over the New Earth (see Rev 22:3–5). It simply does not follow that because Jesus is ‘The Mediator’ that God will not use ‘other mediators’ for His purposes.

As part of his argument, Moore asserts that language applied to Israel in the Old Testament such as “firstborn” and “son of God” are now applied to Christ.<sup>19</sup> But how does the fact that Jesus is identified with Israel by those terms now show that there is no future significance for the nation Israel in the plan of God? Why would it not be the case that titles such as “firstborn” and “son of God” can be fulfilled in Christ, but also apply to others as well? We see this with other concepts. Christ is the singular true seed of Abraham according to Gal 3:16, but this does not rule out others being the seed of Abraham as well (see Gal 3:29). “Temple” terminology is used of Christ (John 2:21), the Christian (1 Cor 6:19), the church (Eph 2:21) and a last days temple in Jerusalem (2 Thess 2:4), but no one sense of this term cancels out the others. Strimple appeals to Gal 3:7–9, 29 to show that since believing Gentiles are sons of Abraham they must be part of Israel. But Paul does not identify believing Gentiles as part of Israel. He quotes Gen 12:3 to show that Gentiles are related to that part of the Abrahamic Covenant that predicted blessings to the Gentiles in the first place. In Rom 4:11–12 Paul indicates that Abraham is the father of both believing Gentiles and believing Jews, but he never says that being related to Abraham makes a Gentile part of Israel.

### **Isa 49:3–6, Jesus as the Servant, and the Restoration of the Nation Israel**

Isaiah 49:3–6 is important because it explicitly states that the coming Servant of the Lord (i.e. Jesus) is going to restore the nation Israel:

He said to Me, “You are My Servant, Israel,  
 In Whom I will show My glory.”  
 But I said, “I have toiled in vain,  
 I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity;  
 Yet surely the justice due to Me is with the LORD,  
 And My reward with My God.”  
 And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His  
 Servant,  
 To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him  
 (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD,  
 And My God is My strength),  
 He says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant  
 To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of  
 Israel;  
 I will also make You a light of the nations  
 So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

According to verse 3, the LORD is speaking to “My Servant Israel.” Strimple is right when he states that Christ “is the suffering Servant of the Lord.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, one thing both dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists affirm is that the Servant is referring to Jesus Christ. Verse 5 then states one of the purposes of this “Servant.” The Servant’s role is “to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him.” Verse 6 also states that the role of the Servant is “to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel.” God will also “make” the Servant be “a light to the nations” (v. 6).

*What is significant here is that the Servant is clearly linked with Israel (v.3), yet He is also distinct in some way since He is the one who will “restore” Israel.* The nation Israel cannot restore itself, for it is sinful. But the Servant—who is Jesus Christ, the true Servant of Israel—can restore the nation Israel and bring blessings for the nations. Thus, this passage teaches that Jesus will restore the nation Israel and bring light to the nations. He will also restore Israel to her land (Isa 49:8). The presence of the true Israelite, Jesus, does not mean that the people of Israel lose their significance. On the contrary, the people of Israel are restored and made what they were supposed to be because of Jesus Christ. As Blaising observes, “Isaiah 49 shows that the servant ‘Israel’ will bring national Israel back to God and also extend Yahweh’s salvation to the ends of the earth” (49:5–6). Robert Saucy rightly concludes that Isaiah 49 refutes the non-dispensational position on Israel:

This use of “Israel” for the coming Messiah, however, cannot be made the basis of teaching that all who finally are “in Christ” are therefore equal to Israel. Isaiah is applying the honorific title of “Israel” to the Messiah because he is the true servant who will finally accomplish the task of Israel. But this does not indicate a change in the meaning of Israel or the rejection of the nation as the servant.<sup>21</sup>

Saucy also makes the valid point that Israel is viewed as “a corporate personality” in which the head ministers to the body so that that the body may accomplish its mission.<sup>22</sup> This means that Israel, who was given a mission to the nations, will be able to accomplish its mission because of the Servant—Jesus Christ. Thus, Isa 49:5–6 explicitly contradicts the argument of some non-dispensationalists. Not only does Christ as true Israel not mean the end of the nation Israel in the plan of God, but the presence of Christ means the restoration of the nation Israel. As Robert Thomas explains, “Through the Servant’s redemptive work on behalf of the nation

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<sup>20</sup> Strimple, 87.

<sup>21</sup> Robert L. Saucy, “Israel and the Church: A Case for Discontinuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 242.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

(cf. Isa. 53:6), the nation will eventually be one with Him and thereby glorify the Lord.”<sup>23</sup>

The fourth premise of the non-dispensational view that “All who are in the true Israel—Jesus Christ, are also Israel,” is also challenged by dispensationalists. This issue of whether believing Gentiles become Jews and thus part of Israel involves a discussion of several passages and goes beyond what can be fully covered here. But a few points should be observed. There are seventy-three references to Israel in the New Testament. Of these, seventy clearly refer to ethnic Jews. Three references—Rom 9:6; 11:25–26; and Gal 6:16—have sometimes been understood by non-dispensationalists to broaden the concept of “Israel” to include believing Gentiles. But there are no strong reasons to depart from the regular ethnic understanding in those passages. In Rom 9:6 Paul states, “For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.” Paul’s point is that the true “Israel” is comprised of those who are Jews by lineage and believers in Jesus Christ. John Murray has noted that Rom 9:6 is teaching that “there is an ‘Israel’ within ethnic Israel.”<sup>24</sup> Gentiles are not in view here.

With Rom 11:25b–26a, Paul declared, “a partial hardening has come to Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved.” Some see a reference to the church with Paul’s reference to “Israel” here. But this is highly unlikely. The other ten references to “Israel” in Romans 9–11 clearly refer to ethnic Israel. It is thus difficult to view “Israel” in verse 26 as meaning anything other than ethnic Israel. As Murray pointed out, “It is exegetically impossible to give to ‘Israel’ in this verse any other denotation than that which belongs to the term throughout this chapter. . . . It is of ethnic Israel Paul is speaking and Israel could not possibly include Gentiles.”<sup>25</sup>

Some have interpreted Gal 6:16 to mean that Paul broadened the concept of Israel to include believing Gentiles. This verse states, “May peace be on all those who follow this standard, and mercy also be on the Israel of God.” But this, too, is a reference to ethnic Jews who have believed in Christ. After launching a blistering critique of the Judaizers who wanted to add circumcision and the Mosaic Law to the gospel, Paul reached out to those ethnic Jews who had not fallen for the error of the Judaizers and recognized them as the true “Israel of God.” As S. Lewis Johnson stated:

What more fitting thing could Paul write, it is said, in a work so strongly attacking Jewish professing believers, the Judaizers, than to make it most

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<sup>23</sup> Robert L. Thomas, “The Mission of Israel and of the Messiah,” in *Israel, the Land and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God’s Promises*, ed. H. Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 264.

<sup>24</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Reprint, 1997; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 2:9.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:96. Ladd states, “It is quite impossible in light of the context and the course of Paul’s thought in this passage to understand ‘all Israel’ to refer to the Church.” George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Popular Expositions on the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 119. See also Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 275–76; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 576.

plain that he was not attacking the true believing Jews. Judaizers are anathematized, but the remnant according to the election of grace are “the Israel of God.”<sup>26</sup>

Paul’s use of “Israel” is similar to that used by the other biblical authors. It always refers to ethnic Jews. In the case of Rom 9:6 and Gal 6:16 it is used even more narrowly to describe ethnic Jews who have believed. Never, though, does Paul use “Israel” to describe Gentile believers. As Ernest DeWitt Burton declares, “There is, in fact, no instance of his [Paul] using Ἰσραηλ [Israel] except of the Jewish nation or a part thereof.”<sup>27</sup>

Finally, dispensationalists disagree with the conclusion of the non-dispensationalist that “There is no future identity or mediatorial role for the nation Israel in the plan of God.” This claim is refuted by multiple passages in the New Testament that explicitly affirm the importance of Israel in God’s plan even after the arrival of Jesus. Gabriel told Mary that her coming Son, Jesus, would “reign over the house of Jacob forever” (Luke 1:33), which is a reference to Jesus’ future reign over Israel. Matthew 19:28 states:

And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Here a prophecy of Jesus indicates the presence and significance of the “twelve tribes of Israel.” Jesus, the Son of Man, will be sitting on “His glorious throne” while his disciples will be in positions of authority over Israel. Thus, in the *eschaton* Jesus, the true Israel, exists alongside “the twelve tribes of Israel,” which refers to the nation Israel. Jesus does not indicate that His identity as “true Israel” extinguishes national Israel’s identity and significance.

After forty days of kingdom instruction from the risen Lord (Acts 1:3), the disciples asked Jesus the question, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). The disciples do not believe that Jesus’ identity rules out a restoration of the kingdom to Israel. Jesus’ answer to their question is significant: “He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority’” (Acts 1:7). Jesus does not correct them or say, “Don’t you get it. I am the true Israel. There is no future restoration of the nation Israel.” Instead, Jesus assumes the correctness of their question but informs them that the timing of Israel’s restoration is not for them to know, but is only in possession of the Father. They are to be concerned with the proclamation of the gospel to the world.

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<sup>26</sup> S. Lewis Johnson, “Paul and ‘The Israel of God’ An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study,” in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, eds. Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 185.

<sup>27</sup> Ernest DeWitt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, in *International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1921), 358.

Does the pouring out of the Spirit and the inauguration of the church with the events of Acts 2 change the concept of Israel? The answer is, No. With Acts 3:19–21, Peter addressed the leaders of Israel (3:12) and told them to “repent” and “return” so that their sins could be wiped away and “times of refreshing” would come. He then reminds the men of Israel that “It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED’” (Acts 3:25). So even with the beginning of the church era, these unbelieving representatives of Israel are still viewed as “sons of the prophets and of the covenant” God made with their fathers. Peter also said that “God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways” (3:26). This parallels the truth of Isaiah 49 that the “Servant” would bring blessing to the nation Israel. There is no indication here that Jesus’ role as “Israel” brought an end to national Israel’s identity as “Israel.”

With Rom 9:4 Paul declared that the “Israelites” belong to “the covenants” and “the promises.” Paul linked the salvation of “all Israel” with Old Testament promises in Rom 11:26–27. Paul also drew upon the Old Testament hope when he announced that “Christ became a servant to the circumcision . . . and for the Gentiles” (Rom 15:8, 9). With the Book of Revelation, John the apostle pointed to future significance for the twelve tribes of Israel (7:4–8) who are distinguished from a “great multitude” from “every nation and all tribes” (7:9). Again, the ministry of Jesus has significance for both the nation Israel and the Gentiles.

There simply is no scriptural evidence for the non-dispensational view that Christ’s identity as “Israel” means the non-significance of the nation Israel in the future. The Scripture actually teaches the opposite—Christ’s role as true Israel means the restoration of the nation Israel. Some, like Strimple, have tried to link the identity of Israel to typology claiming that the nation Israel functioned as a type that has given way to the superior anti-type—Christ.<sup>28</sup> But this argument is based on a faulty understanding of typology in which all things that are physical or national are assumed to be shadows or types that must be transcended by greater spiritual New Testament realities. If the nation Israel is a type that gives way to the greater New Testament antitype, why then does the New Testament address the future significance of the nation Israel (see Matt 19:28; 23:39; Acts 1:6; Rom 9:4; 11:26; Rev 7:4–8)? If Christ is the fulfillment of Israel in such a way that there is no significance for the nation Israel, why is the future of the nation Israel still addressed as much as it is? Instead, the conclusion we should draw is that New Testament reaffirmations of Israel’s place in the plan of God are evidence that Israel is not a type that is transcended.

## Conclusion

In sum, the non-dispensational argument that Christ as “true Israel” means there is no longer any significance for Israel as a nation is refuted by the following reasons:

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<sup>28</sup> See Strimple, 84–100.

1. No writer in the Bible states that Jesus' identification with Israel means the end of national Israel's significance.
2. Isaiah 49 specifically predicts that the Servant and ultimate "Israel," Jesus Christ, would restore the nation Israel and bring light to the nations.
3. Jesus did not view His identity and ministry as the end of national Israel's existence; instead, He affirmed national Israel's place in the *eschaton*.
4. Even after the church started the apostles affirmed a future for the nation Israel.

As Christians we should acknowledge and celebrate Jesus Christ's identification with "Israel," but we must also draw correct implications from this truth. Jesus, the true Israelite, will restore national Israel and bring light and blessings to the Gentiles. Thus, the non-dispensational view that the nation Israel no longer has a place in God's future plans because Christ is "true Israel" is not consistent with what the Bible teaches and should be rejected.