



The Covenants to Israel Guarantee an Earthly Kingdom for All; Literal Hermeneutics & Dispensationalism Inspire Optimism & Depress Anti-Semitism

On this subject one must listen to Van Ruler again in his chapter "The Necessity of the Old Testament for the Christian Church." [Van Ruler, *Christian Church*, pp. 75-98.]:

... the Christian church really has to make something out of the Old Testament. It is unquestionably the book of the people of Israel. In the Old Testament this original and final element, this faithfulness to the earth and time, is more plainly visible. In my view this means that, in this respect, we have to speak most emphatically of the greater value of the Old Testament as compared with the New. The Old Testament has a more positive concern with creation and the kingdom, with the first things and the last, with the image and the law, with sanctification and humanity, with ethos and culture, with society and marriage, with history and the state. These are precisely the matters at issue in the Old Testament. For this reason the Old Testament neither can be nor should be expounded Christologically, but only eschatologically, in other words, theocratically [divinely governed]. There is in it a profound confidence in the goodness of the world, the serviceability of man, and the possibility of sanctifying the earth.

For the consciousness of the Christian church throughout the centuries there has always been a surplus [Jewish Pivot] in the Old Testament that it could not assimilate. This surplus is not just the cultus. The church has spiritualized this or brought it into its own liturgy or used it as a witness to the message of Golgotha or simply said that it has been superseded by Christ.

In my view Martin Buber \bū' ber\ (1878-1965; German Jewish writer) is completely correct to level against the Christian church throughout the centuries the accusation that it has never really been faithful to this Old Testament belief, this grand vision of the God of Israel, this visionary faith in the possibility of the sanctification of the earth. From the necessity of the cross of Christ, which the church has accepted on the basis of the New Testament, the false conclusion has been drawn that no more can be made of the earth. The Christian church has treated the Old Testament just as uncertainly and unsuitably as it has treated the Jews.

Does everything end in the church? Does everything, not only Israel, but history and creation exist for the sake of the church? Or is the church only one among many forms of the kingdom of God, and does its catholicity [universality] consist precisely in the fact that it respects, acknowledges, and holds dear all forms of the kingdom, for example, even the people of Israel?

Douglas, J. D. (Genesis. Ed.). *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 50:



Anti-Semitism. A term coined in the late nineteenth century which signifies hostility toward Jews. In the ancient world, Jews were ridiculed and often persecuted, particularly in Alexandria and later throughout the Roman Empire, on two main grounds: religious exclusiveness seen in their rejection of idolatry, and social exclusiveness arising from their stress on food laws and ritual purity. Christian antagonism to Jews ensured that the conversion of the Roman Empire brought them little relief. In the Middle Ages, the wealth of many Jews, gained through money-lending as well as trade, provoked hostility. Wild accusations were made: that Jews murdered Christian children at Eastertime (this developed into the "blood accusation," current from the thirteenth century, that they used Christian blood for ritual purposes); that they desecrated the Host; that they poisoned wells, etc.

The French Revolution worked in the Jews' favor. The National Assembly repealed all repressive measures against them (1791), and the Constitution of Year iii gave them equal rights (1795). Some repressive legislation subsequently enacted was set aside by the July Revolution of 1830. Absolute religious equality was granted throughout the North German Federation (1869), and this was subsequently extended to the German Empire. Nevertheless, modern anti-Semitism arose in Germany in the 1870s. This seems to have resulted from growing Jewish prosperity, influence, sensitivity, and belligerence. The situation was exacerbated by signs of unified Jewish influence in the *Alliance Israelite Universelle* and by the migration of Jews from Eastern Europe, especially Russia and Romania, to Germany (and then to England and America).

Anti-Semitism flourished in Germany (where it came to a head in the Nazi atrocities), Austria-Hungry, France, Romania (where a resolution of the Berlin Congress of 1878 that all Romanian citizens should enjoy equal civil rights was circumvented by the declaration that Jews were foreigners), and Russia (where massacres took place in the early twentieth century). Jews were treated as scapegoats in both Germany and Russia, where millions were liquidated. Today, anti-Semitism often takes the form of anti-Zionism. In the Middle East, the influence of European anti-Semitism and endemic intolerance of ethnic and religious minorities has strengthened anti-Zionism in Arab countries.

Anti-Semitism has causes deeper than Jewish particularism and allegations of ritual killings, secret literature, low Jewish standards of behavior, etc. Its deepest roots lie in Christian, especially fundamentalist, soil. It may well be true, as James Daane has argued, that the belief that the Jews were responsible for the death of Christ and that the Jewish nation lies under the total and final curse of God are the causes of its strength. A third factor (is the) belief that the spiritual life of the Jews was degenerate at the time of Christ.

Just a few years after Van Ruler raised those questions, another Dutch theologian, Gerrit G. Berkower, observed a new openness among his colleagues to the (Millennialist's) philosophy of history:

Time was when most theologians regarded (Millennialism) as a fantastic, earthbound eschatology. A remarkable change has taken place. While the critics of (Millennialism) find its description of the millennial times objectionable and unacceptable, the same critics praise the (Millennialist's) fidelity to God's purpose for the earth. It is this motif, they say, which has made (Millennialism) a current that has never been wholly set aside in the Church. The (Millennialist's) hope for Christ's kingdom on earth is sometimes called the anti-spiritualistic motif in millennialism. It is the faith that God's salvation has meaning not only for heaven, but for earth as well. For *this* earth. [G. C. Berkower, "Review of Current Religious Thought," *Christianity Today* 6 (October 27, 1961), p. 40.]



Yes, the dispensationalist, by means of consistent literal interpretation, is enabled to be optimistic about what God is yet going to do with *this* earth. The greatest and grandest display of God's glory is yet to come when the multiformity of his kingdom program will consummate in a many-splendored unity. The earliest prophecy of God's Word, Genesis 3:15, presents in microscopic fashion, God's twofold solution to a twofold problem occasioned by sin:

Genesis 3:15 - And I will put enmity between you and the women and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.