

Replacement Theology and the Epistle of I Peter

I. INTRODUCTION

A. I PETER 1:1-2

The First Epistle of Peter begins with information about the author, the recipients, and their location. The author is *Peter* who identifies himself as *an apostle*. The original Greek does not contain an article and therefore emphasizes the qualitative nature. As an *apostle*, he has the authority of the shepherd over the sheep. This is the third of the five Hebrew Christian or Messianic Jewish epistles. These five epistles were written to meet specific needs of the Jewish believers who were scattered as a result of the persecution that arose after the death of Stephen. The Apostles initially stayed in Jerusalem. Hence, when the Jewish believers were scattered, they became as sheep without a shepherd. These epistles were written to instruct the sheep via letter rather than by means of personal instruction. Later, Peter left the Land to join those of the Dispersion and arrived in Babylon, which, in that day, was the center of Judaism outside the Land.

Peter uses three terms to describe the recipients of his letter. First, they are *the elect*, meaning they were chosen by God. This is a fact he highlights in 2:6, 9. Second, they are *sojourners*. The Greek word for *sojourners* is used only three times: here, in 2:11, and in Hebrews 11:13. It is a Greek word meaning “alien nationality” and “temporary resident.” As Jewish believers living outside the Land and living alongside pagan Gentiles, these *sojourners* were considered to be resident aliens. Thus, the term *sojourner* describes their relationship to the world. Third, the recipients are of *the Dispersion*. The word *Dispersion* remains a technical Jewish term to this day and refers to Jews living outside the Land. This word is used twice elsewhere: John 7:35 and James 1:1. In this case, the reference is not to all Jews but to only those Jewish believers dwelling outside the Land. They are twice distinguished from the Gentiles among whom they live (2:12 and 4:3). Some commentators, attempting to deny the Jewishness of the book, claim that in the usage of the word *Gentiles*, Peter means “non-believers.” Paul does use that term that way (I Cor.12:2), and in a context where that meaning is obvious. But even Paul uses that term primarily to mean a non-Jew (Rom 3:29; 9:24, 30-31; 11:11-13, 25; 15:27). There is no exegetical basis for such a conclusion in this passage. That meaning is not consistent with the normal usage found elsewhere in the New Testament (i.e., Rom. 11:11–14). The word *Gentile* should be understood in its common, primary meaning as a reference to non-Jews. Thus, Peter is writing specifically to the Remnant of Israel; the Jewish believers of that day. The word *church* does not appear in this epistle.

Replacement theologies, such as Covenant Theology, try desperately to avoid the normal usage of terms such as *Dispersion* and *Gentile* in order to prove that the church is Israel and, therefore, they redefine these terms. The following quotes are some examples:

The Dispersion (diaspora) was a term used by Greek-speaking Jews to refer to Jewish people “scattered” throughout the nations, “dispersed” from their homeland, Israel (see Jn. 7:35). Here and in James 1:1, “Dispersion” refers to Christians, but this does not imply that Peter was writing only to Jewish Christians (see Introduction on “Destination and readers”). Rather, the term here has a new spiritual sense, referring to Christians “dispersed” throughout the world and living away from their heavenly homeland (yet hoping some day to reach it). The word thus reinforces the meaning of “sojourners” and adds the idea that they are part of a “world-wide” scattering of Christians.¹

But if all the churches in Asia Minor in AD 62-63 were reached by this letter and were the intended recipients of it, then the question of whether Peter is writing to Jewish Christians or Gentile Christians is already answered. By this time, over thirty years after Pentecost, the rapid growth of the church would have meant that there were both Jewish and Gentile Christians in all of these churches. Therefore, while Peter can readily use Jewish terminology to apply to his readers (note the phrase ‘exiles of the Dispersion’ for example in 1:1), this is simply applying to the church in the New Covenant age the language which previously had been appropriate for God’s covenant people, the Jews (see commentary at 2:10, and discussion there on the theme of the church as the new people of God).

There are several indications in the letter that Peter assumed there to be a large segment of Gentile Christians among his readers. He says, ‘You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers (1 Pet. 1:18), and, ‘Once you were no people but now you are God’s people’ (1 Pet. 2:10) – something which he would hardly say of converted Jews. He says their lives had been filled with sin uncharacteristic of Jews: ‘Let the time that is past suffice for doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry’ (1 Pet. 4:3). Then he adds that unbelievers ‘are surprised that you do not now join them in the same wild profligacy’ (1Pet 4:4), something which would not have been surprising to unbelievers if the Christians had previously been Jews following the strict moral standards of first century Judaism.

¹ Grudem, Wayne A., *The First Epistle of Peter* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p. 49.

On the other hand, there were no doubt converted Jews in these churches, for even at Pentecost there were present residents of ‘Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia’ (Acts 2:9). The readers are therefore best thought to be mixed congregations of Jewish and Gentile Christians.²

Peter writes to those who are “sojourners of the diaspora.” The Jews had used the term “dispersion” or “diaspora” to refer to their scattered communities outside Palestine ever since the Exile (cf. the Greek form of Deut. 28:25; Neh. 1:9; and Isa. 49:6); it appears several times in the NT with this meaning (see John 7:35; 11:32) Here in Peter we find a natural transfer of one of the titles of Israel to the church, as we will frequently later (cf. 2:5, 9). The church consists of communities of people living outside their native land, which is not Jerusalem or Palestine but the heavenly city. These people owe their loyalty to that city, from which they expect to receive their king. That their life on earth is temporary and that they do not belong is underlined by the use of “sojourners” (also found in 2:11 and Heb. 11:13): they are pilgrims, foreigners, those who belong to heaven (cf. Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20; Did. 9:4; Ep. Diog. 5:9, “they pass their time on earth, but belong as citizens to heaven”).³

Perhaps the most unusual thing about the Christians to whom he wrote is that they were largely Gentiles, as 1:14, 1:18, 2:9-10, 2:25 and 4:3-4 show (2:25 and 3:6 are less clear than the other four passages which could hardly have been used of Jews).⁴

How Davids’ conclusions that these verses cannot apply to Jews escapes me. For example, the Old Testament verses quoted in 2:9-10 clearly refer to Israel (Jews).

The word *diaspora*, rendered “Dispersion”, was used to denote Jews living outside Palestine (see Jn. vii.35). It is here used to describe Christians, and to suggest that in this world they are not only scattered but also away from their true homeland or metropolis in heaven.⁵

However, a few Replacement Theologians recognized the Jewishness of the epistle:

² Ibid., p. 38

³ Davids, Peter H., *The First Epistle of Peter* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), p. 46-47

⁴ Ibid., pg. 8

⁵ Stibbs, Alan M., *The First Epistle General of Peter* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), p. 74

In some of these places the apostle Paul had preached; into others, such as Bithynia (Acts 16:6, 7), Pontus, and possibly Cappadocia, the Holy Spirit had not permitted him to enter. But Peter was not writing particularly to the converts Paul had made. It is mainly the Jews that Peter has in mind, for to them applies the word *dispersion*. There may have been local congregations almost or entirely composed of Jewish Christians; undoubtedly there were individual Jewish Christians surrounded by Gentiles and unbelieving Jews; but whatever the racial complexion of these churches and localities may have been, and regardless of a verse or two that seem to refer to the Gentiles, Peter addresses the Jews.

That he addresses the Jews in his epistle no more detracts from its value for Gentiles than the fact of its first century date makes it useless today. In discussing the situations the Jews faced at that time and in those places, Peter by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost makes use of principles that are valid for all times and all places. Matthew too addressed his Gospel to the Jews; he quoted Old Testament prophecies with which they were quite familiar; but Christ's acts of redemption and the contents of his teaching are not restricted to any one audience. Accordingly, if Peter gave advice to Jewish Christians about to face Nero's persecution, that advice applies to the Reformation martyrs, to the Korean Christians who faced Japanese persecution in World War II, and should be taken to heart by those who now suffer under the Communists.⁶

Very likely Peter was writing to a congregation or to congregations that were largely Jewish in their make-up. Of them – not to the exclusion of Gentile Christians – but nevertheless of them he says that they are an elect race. Naturally these words do not apply to all the Jews who lived in Peter's day but to the believing Jews only.⁷

Unfortunately, even some Dispensationalists tend to identify the readers as the church in general:

The apostle further identifies them as people who were scattered throughout various locales. Scattered translates *diaspora*, from which root another English term, *dispersion*, derives. Commentaries, theological works, and works on Bible history often transliterate *diaspora* and use it interchangeably with dispersion. In its other two New Testament appearances, *diaspora* is a technical term referring to the dispersing of the

⁶ Clark, Gordon H, *New Heavens, New Earth, A Commentary on First and Second Peter* (Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1993), p 7-8

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 87

Jews throughout the world by the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Both times the word has the definite article (John 7:35; James 1:1). However here Peter does not include the definite article; therefore it is best to interpret the term as a non-technical reference to believers widely distributed geographically.

Though God called Peter to be the apostle to the Jews (Gal. 2:7), the absence of the definite article with *diaspora* argues that Peter was not addressing Jews as such in his salutation. Another passage supports that interpretation. In 2:11 he identifies his readers, not racially or nationally, but spiritually: ‘Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.’ Thus the apostle addressed not only Jews who were dispersed from their native land, but Gentile believers, both of whom spiritually were aliens in the world.⁸

The earthly status of the readers is further described by the added genitive, *of the Dispersion (diasporas)*. The term supplements the thought of their alien status... That indicates that Peter’s readers were scattered minority groups. *The Dispersion* was a standard Jewish way to refer to Jews living among the Gentiles outside of their Palestinian homeland (cf. John 7:35). In James 1:1 the expression “to the twelve tribes which are of the Dispersion” most likely refers to Jewish Christians outside of Palestine. Those who believe that Peter too, was writing to Jewish Christians understand the term to confirm their position. But the lack of a definite article and the failure to mention the twelve tribes detract from the alleged parallel with James 1:1. It seems more natural to understand Peter’s use of the term metaphorically, as a picture of Christians scattered in various areas as minority groups in a non-Christian world.⁹

Peter’s third designation, “a holy nation” (*ethnos hagion*), is also drawn directly from Exodus 19:6. *Nation (ethnos)* means a community of people held together by the same laws, customs, and mutual interests. The term as, Morgan notes, involves “two ideas, those of *government* and mutual *inter-relationships*. It is a common biblical term, especially in the plural, “for the Gentiles as distinct from Jews or Christians.” The term was also used at times of Israel as the people of God united by their covenantal relation to Him making them distinctly His nation. It is in that latter sense that Peter applied the term to the church, which forms a unique international nation having a common spiritual life from God committed to His rule. *Holy* indicates its separation from the nations of the world and consecration to

⁸ MacArthur, Jr., John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2004) p. 15.

⁹ Hiebert, D. Edmond. *First Peter* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984) p. 35

God and His service. Its position of separation demands that the members must not, like Israel of old, stoop to the sinful practices of the world (1:15-17).¹⁰

It is true that a lack of a definite article before the noun emphasizes the nature of the object rather than the object itself, but it does not change the content of the object. For example, in the same passage the word *apostle* does not have the definite article either, but it does not change the content that Peter was indeed an *apostle* and, in fact, he was the Apostle to the Circumcision. By the same token, the absence of the definite article before *Dispersion*, while emphasizing its nature, does not change the content; the epistle is addressed to Jewish believers outside the Land.

However, Hiebert rejects the view that First Peter supports Replacement Theology:

In glancing back over the last two verses, one cannot escape the impression that Peter clearly intended to establish a parallel between Israel and the church. That parallel is discernible in each of the three areas just considered. The four designations of the corporate identity of the church (v. 9a) were all drawn from designations applied to Israel in the Old Testament. That which Israel effectively failed to realize under the law and through law-keeping has now through grace been realized in the church composed of those who by faith have become united to Israel's promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. The assignment given to the nation of Israel to be God's witness concerning Him to the nations was frustrated by their unfaithfulness and sin. The church, now God's chosen people, has the same assignment to be God's witness to the world (v. 9b). In Romans 11 Paul points out that Israel's history of failure is a clear warning to the church (11:17-24). A faithless Christendom will likewise fall under God's judgment. The prophetic message of Hosea, declaring God's forgiving grace to Israel, offers an encouraging parallel to all men today; God will forgive and regard with His favor all who by faith appropriate His unique provision of salvation to Jesus Christ (v. 10). It does not naturally follow from the parallel between Israel and the church that Peter believed that the church has permanently replaced Israel and that the latter will not again enjoy a separate existence under the favor of God. Israel's future is inseparably connected with its acceptance of faith of the returning Messiah (Zech. 12:10-14:11; Acts 3:19-26; Rom 11:25-27).¹¹

Peter describes the believers to whom he wrote as being **strangers** who are **scattered**. They included both Jewish and Gentile people who had become followers of Jesus Christ. They did not live in the heartland of God's people Israel. Neither did they live close to the mother church of Christianity also in Jerusalem. Rather, they

¹⁰ Ibid. pg. 134.

¹¹ Ibid. pg. 137-138

formed the Diaspora (which derives from the Greek word for “strangers”). That is, they had been dispersed or scattered to other cities and countries all over the world. Specifically, he wrote to believers living in what is now northern Turkey, some five hundred to eight hundred miles from the hometown of God’s people and God’s church. They could easily have felt isolated and insignificant. Peter says to these people, “Take courage. Wherever you live geographically, in Christ you are part of God’s elect. He chose you.”¹²

Other Dispensationalists however do recognize that Peter was specifically writing to Jewish believers. One example is William Baker:

First Peter was written just as the early church came near the threshold of violent persecution. The book is addressed to “aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen” (1:1). These were probably descendants of Jewish Christians who had been living in Asia Minor, now the region of modern Turkey, who had made pilgrimage to Jerusalem and were witnesses to the dramatic events of Pentecost (Acts 2:9-11). When they returned they must have shared with great enthusiasm about the risen Christ.

It is not inconceivable that the audience Peter was writing to was mainly Jewish, though the doctrine of the church was by now fully developed, bringing together both Gentiles and Jews into the spiritual body of Christ. But it still seems fair to say that this apostle was focusing his ministry with the scattered Jewish communities of believers throughout the Mediterranean basin.¹³

However Baker does apply 2:1-10 to the church but rejects Replacement Theology:

With verse 9 Peter gives a strong contrast to the fate of those who are disobedient to the gospel. “But” he declares “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, people for *God’s* own possession.” Such language is strongly reminiscent of the kinds of things that pertained to the earthly nation of Israel. The fact that keeps us from identifying the Church with Israel is the way the Bible maintains the distinction between those born as Jews as opposed to those who are not. A Jew is always a Jew, and a Gentile is always a Gentile, although both may happen to be Christians.

Another factor that precludes what is today called “replacement theology” (the Church *replaces* Israel) is a passage like Romans 11:11-27, where a distinction is maintained between Israel and the Church even though both are related to the figure

¹² Walls, David and Anders, Max, *Holman New Testament Commentary, I&II Peter, I,II & II John, Jude* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers 1999) pg. 6.

¹³ Baker, William, *The Books of James & First and Second Peter, Faith, Suffering, and Knowledge*, (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2004) pg. 95.

of the olive tree that probably represents the Abrahamic covenant. That passage concludes with a clear promise of the restoration of national Israel...

In what sense do the ideas of “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession” apply to the Church today? If the Church is distinct from Israel, why does Peter use language that points to identity as replacement theologians claim? Part of the answer is that there are similarities between the Church and Israel. But there are more dissimilarities than similarities, and that forms part of the basis for the dispensational viewpoint.¹⁴

Kenneth Wuest also recognizes the Jewishness of the epistle:

The word “scattered” is from *diasporas*. This word is found in the LXX (The Greek Translation of the Old Testament) where Moses says of Israel, “Thou shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth” (Deut. 28:25), and is probably the earliest example of its use as a technical designation of the Jews who for whatever reason lived outside of Palestine. The word is used in John 7:35 and James 1:1, in both places referring to those Jews who were living outside of Palestine. Peter uses it in the same way. We thus see that the recipients of this letter were Christian Jews. These Jews were living among the Gentiles in the various provinces named by Peter, all of which were in Asia Minor.¹⁵

But he also identifies the term *Gentiles* as meaning the unsaved world:

The word “Gentiles” is from the Greek word referring here, not to Gentiles as in contrast to Jews, but to the unsaved world, the world of people without Christ.¹⁶

Among the dispensational study Bibles, both Scofield and New Scofield recognize the recipients to be Jewish believers:

The Epistle of Peter is the fulfillment of the commission given to Peter by Christ in Luke 22:31-32. Compare 1 Peter 1:1 with James 1:1. Peter was a minister to the Jews (Galatians 2:9) so he writes to the dispersed Jews (1:1). He is the apostle of hope: 1:3, 7, 9, 13; 3:9-15, 4:13; 5:4. Like Paul, Peter sets forth the doctrines of grace. There are a number of parallels in this letter to the words of the Lord recorded in the Gospels; also there are resemblances between the language of this Epistle and the speeches of Peter in Acts.

¹⁴ Ibid. pg. 120-121.

¹⁵ Wuest, Kenneth s., First Peter in the Greek New Testament, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1942) pg. 14.

¹⁶ Ibid. pg. 59

First Peter was written from Babylon (5:13). Geographical notations in 1:1 agree with Babylon as the center of writing however, many understand the name to be a symbol of Rome. The letter is addressed to Hebrew Christians (compare 4:13 with 1:1), with wider application to all believers in Christ.¹⁷

The Epistle of Peter is the fulfillment of the commission given to Peter by Christ in Lk. 22:31-32. Compare 1 Peter 1:1 with Jas. 1:1. Peter was a minister of the circumcision (Gal. 2:9), so he writes to the dispersed Jews (1:1). He is the apostle of hope: 1:3,7,9,13; 3:9-15; 4:13; 5:4. Like Paul, Peter sets forth the doctrines of grace. There are a number of parallels in this letter to the words of the Lord recorded in the Gospels; also there are resemblances between the language of this Epistle and the speeches of Peter in The Acts.

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Charles Ryrie (with whom I rarely disagree with and would be afraid to) sees Peter writing primarily to Gentiles:

Readership *This letter is addressed to “aliens scattered” or literally the “sojourners of the dispersion” (1:1). These were Christians who, like Israel of old, were scattered throughout the world, though the readers of this epistle were predominantly of Gentile rather than Jewish background (1:14; 2:9; 4:3-4).*¹⁹

B. I PETER 1:18-19

In verse 18, Peter emphasizes the redemption. He begins by positively addressing the fact that *ye were redeemed*. The word *redeemed* means “to pay ransom”. Further evidence is found in I Peter 1:18-19. In verse 18 these believers were redeemed from their *vain manner of life*: Pharisaism. They were redeemed from Mishnaic Judaism, which is a Judaism *handed down from your fathers*. This too is a typical Jewish statement referring to traditions passed down by the rabbis, or sages, or *fathers*. These are the traditions of the oral legends of the *Mishnah*. In the past these traditions always had and in the present continue to have a strong pull on the Jewish people. Peter points out that, regardless of how old these traditions are, their antiquity does not prove the correctness of any opinion or doctrine. These Jewish believers have been redeemed but not *with gold or silver*.

¹⁷ Scofield, C.I., *The Scofield Study Bible*, (USA: Oxford University Press, 2002) pg. 1691

¹⁸ Scofield, C. I., *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967) pg. 1332

¹⁹ Ryrie, Charles Caldwell, *The Ryrie Study Bible New Testament*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976) pg. 426

In verse 19, he continues by using a positive approach regarding the issue of redemption by stating its price — the *blood* of the Messiah. His *blood* was *precious*. It was of high value because Jesus was the Lamb of God (John 1:29). Peter emphasizes Jesus as the Passover Lamb: *as a lamb without spot* and without blemish (Ex. 12:5; Lev. 22:19–20; Deut. 15:21). The Passover connection made by Peter also points to the Jewishness of his audience.

Systematic Theologies have largely failed to include an Israelology though they always have a section on Ecclesiology. This is understandable for all Replacement Theologies including Covenant Theology, but it is not understandable for Dispensationalism with its consistent distinction between Israel and the Church. A key subdivision of a complete Israelology would include the concept of the Remnant of Israel and it is that concept that is crucial in understanding what Peter is referring to, especially in 2:1-10.

II. THE REMNANT OF ISRAEL

The doctrine of the Remnant means that, within the Jewish nation as a whole, there are always some who believe and all those who believe among Israel comprise the Remnant of Israel. The Remnant at any point of history may be large or small but there is never a time when it is non-existent. Only believers comprise the Remnant, but not all believers are part of the Remnant for the Remnant is a Jewish Remnant and is, therefore, comprised of Jewish believers. Furthermore, the Remnant is always part of the nation as a whole and not detached from the nation as a separate entity. The Remnant is distinct, but distinct within the nation.

A. ORIGIN

The concept of the Remnant of Israel was true from the very beginning of Israel's history as they began to multiply. As a doctrine, the theology of the Remnant begins with the prophets and the development of the doctrine continues through the New Testament. The historical event that gave rise to the doctrine involves Elijah the prophet. Because of Israel's idolatry in the worship of Baal, God sent a drought upon the nation as a divine discipline, a drought announced by Elijah in 1 Kings 17. The drought was so severe that eventually Elijah had to leave Israel for Phoenicia to find sustenance. In 1 Kings 18, Elijah returned to Israel and challenged the prophets of Baal to a divine duel to determine once and for all who is the true God. Baal failed to consume his sacrifice but the God of Israel consumed His. The prophets of Baal were, therefore, slain and the drought was broken. In chapter 19, Elijah's victory turned sour when Jezebel threatened his life. Elijah understood her actions to mean that Israel would not repudiate the worship of Baal and fled Israel for Judah; in a depressed state he entered into the Negev Desert and prayed to

die. Instead, he was fed twice by an angel and continued his journey to Mount Sinai where he had a unique encounter with God. When God asked Elijah the purpose of his coming to Sinai, the place where the Mosaic Covenant was made, Elijah responded in 1 Kings 19:10:

And he said, I have been very jealous for Jehovah, the God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars, and slain Your prophets with the sword: and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.

This is a severe indictment against Israel by a prophet who suffered and struggled to bring the nation to repentance, but to no avail. This type of indictment, if true, required divine discipline. God's response and action is spelled out in 1 Kings 19:11–13a:

And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before Jehovah. And, behold, Jehovah passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before Jehovah; but Jehovah was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but Jehovah was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but Jehovah was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entrance of the cave.

God's response was to send three noisy things which did not contain the presence of God and then a fourth thing, a quiet thing, which did contain the presence of God: the *still small voice*. This contained God's presence so Elijah *wrapped his face in his mantle*, a natural Jewish response as this was a common Jewish reaction whenever one thought he might be in the presence of God. Then God again asked him why he came to Mount Sinai (v. 13b) and Elijah again issued the same indictment against Israel (v. 14). To this God responded in verses 15–18:

And Jehovah said unto him, Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when you come you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; and Jehu the son of Nimshi shall you anoint to be king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shall you anoint to be prophet in your room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay; and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet will I leave me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.

The parallel of these verses with verses 11–13 should not be missed. In response to Elijah’s indictment against Israel, God sent three noisy things against Israel; while He sends all three things, God’s presence is not in them. The first is Hazael, the king of Syria. Hazael corresponds to the wind. Just as the wind beat against the mountain, Hazael will beat against Israel (2 Kings 8:7–15; 10:32–33; 13:3, 22–25) until he reduced Israel’s holdings considerably. Jehu corresponds to the earthquake; as the earthquake split the mountain, Jehu caused a civil war which totally destroyed the Dynasty and House of Ahab, as well as royal members of the House of Judah (2 Kings 9:1–10:36). Elisha corresponds to the fire. Just as the fire burned against the mountain, Elisha burned against Israel and often where Elisha went, death followed (2 Kings 2:23–24). God did send all three noisy things, but God’s presence was not in them. God then tells Elijah that he was not the only one left who was faithful, for God had seven thousand others. These seven thousand were the Remnant of that day, quite small compared to the nation as a whole. The Remnant corresponds to the still small voice. The Remnant in contrast to Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha, is the quiet thing; so quiet, that Elijah did not know they even existed since twice he stated that he was the only one left. God’s presence was in this Remnant.

It was with this historical Remnant of the seven thousand of Elijah’s day with which the doctrine of the Remnant of Israel began; the Scriptures deal with the Remnant doctrine past, present, and future.

B. ISAIAH AND THE REMNANT

It is Isaiah the prophet who put the Remnant concept into theological terms. It is mostly found in the unit comprising chapters 7–12 and called “The Book of Immanuel” since, in the Hebrew text, that name is found three times (7:14; 8:8, 10). Building on the contrast of the noise and the quiet, Isaiah (8:5–8) points out that the non-Remnant tends to put its trust in that which is noisy (the Assyrian Army), but the Remnant has a quiet confidence in the God of Israel and the One to come, Immanuel. Ultimately the noise will destroy the non-Remnant which puts its faith in the noise, but Immanuel will save the believing (8:9–11). Immanuel thus becomes the point of division between the Remnant and the non-Remnant. For the Remnant, Immanuel will prove to be a sanctuary, but for the non-Remnant Immanuel will prove to be a Stone of Stumbling and a Rock of Offense (8:14–15). The Remnant places its trust in the law and the prophets (8:16) and, therefore, waits upon the Lord (8:17). So important was the doctrine of the Remnant to Isaiah that he named one of his sons *Shear Yashuv* which means “a Remnant shall return” (7:3). With that naming, Isaiah was looking forward to the future final salvation of the Remnant of Israel (10:20–23). Until then, it is God who will protect the Remnant and guarantee its survival (46:3–4).

C. THE ISRAEL OF GOD OF GALATIANS 6:16

The purpose of this section is to present a dispensational view of Galatians 6:16, the *only* passage produced by all Covenant Theologians as evidence that the Church is the spiritual Israel, or that Gentile believers become spiritual Jews. The verse does not prove their case. The passage reads:

And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

The Book of Galatians is concerned with Gentiles who were attempting to attain salvation and/or sanctification through the law. The ones deceiving them were Judaizers, who were Jews demanding adherence to the Law of Moses. To them, a Gentile had to convert to Judaism before he qualified for salvation through Christ. In verse 15, Paul states that the important thing for salvation is faith, resulting in the new man. He also mentions two elements: circumcision and uncircumcision. This refers to two groups of people: Jews and Gentiles, two groups already mentioned by these very terms in 2:7–9:

... but contrariwise, when they saw that I had been intrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter with the gospel of the circumcision (for he that wrought for Peter unto the apostleship of the circumcision wrought for me also unto the Gentiles); and when they perceived the grace that was given unto me, James and Cephas and John, they who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision; ...

In verse 16, Paul then pronounces a blessing on members of the two groups who would follow this rule of salvation through faith alone. The first group is the *them*, the *uncircumcision*, the Gentile Christians to and of whom he had devoted most of the epistle. The second group is the *Israel of God*. These are the *circumcision*, the Jewish believers who, in contrast with the Judaizers, followed the rule of salvation by grace through faith alone. Covenant Theologians must ignore the primary meaning of *kai* which separates the two groups in the verse in order to make them both the same group.

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, former professor of Greek and New Testament Exegesis at Dallas Theological Seminary, has done a detailed study of Galatians 6:16. In his introduction, Johnson makes the following observation:

In spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, there remains persistent support for the contention that the term *Israel* may refer properly to Gentile believers in the present age.... the primary support is found in Galatians 6:16 ...

I cannot help but think that dogmatic considerations loom large in the interpretation of Galatians 6:16. The tenacity with which this application of “the Israel of God” to the church is held in spite of a mass of evidence to the contrary leads one to think that the supporters of the view believe their eschatological system, usually an amillennial scheme, hangs on the reference of the term to the people of God, composed of both believing Jews and Gentiles. Amillennialism does not hang on this interpretation, but the view does appear to have a treasured place in amillennial exegesis.

In speaking of the view that the term refers to ethnic Israel, a sense that the term *Israel* has in every other of its more than sixty-five uses in the New Testament and in its fifteen uses by Paul, in tones almost emotional William Hendriksen, the respected Reformed commentator, writes, “I refuse to accept that explanation.” ...

What I am leading up to is expressed neatly by D. W. B. Robinson in an article written about twenty years ago: “The glib citing of Gal. 6:16 to support the view that ‘the church is the new Israel’ should be vigorously challenged. There is weighty support for a limited interpretation.” We can say more than this, in my opinion. There is more than weighty support for a more limited interpretation. There is overwhelming support for such. In fact, the least likely view among several alternatives is the view that “the Israel of God” is the church.²⁰

The alternate view is that the *Israel of God* is the believing Jewish Remnant within the Church. This is Johnson’s own view and is the common dispensational view. Johnson describes this view as follows:

The second of the important interpretations of Galatians 6:16 and “the Israel of God” is the view that the words refer simply to believing ethnic Israelites in the Christian church. Does not Paul speak of himself as an Israelite (cf. Rom. 11:1)? And does not the apostle also speak of “a Remnant according to God’s gracious choice” (cf. 11:5), words that plainly in the context refer to believing Israelites? 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 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.” ...

²⁰ Toussaint and Dyer, *Pentecost Essays*, “Paul and ‘The Israel of God’: An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study” by S. Lewis Johnson, pp. 181-182. Quoting William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Galatians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1868), p. 247, and D. W. B. Robinson, “the Distinction Between Jewish and Gentile Believers in Galatians,” *Australian Biblical Review* 13 (1965): 29-48.

Perhaps this expression, “the Israel of God,” is to be contrasted with his expression in 1 Corinthians 10:18, “Israel after the flesh” (KJV), as the true, believing Israel versus the unbelieving element, just as in Romans 9:6 the apostle distinguishes two Israels, one elect and believing, the other unbelieving, but both ethnic Israelites (cf. vv. 7–13).²¹

Johnson supports this view on the same three grounds that he rejected the first view. On grammatical and syntactical grounds, Johnson states that “there are no grammatical, or syntactical considerations that would be contrary” to this view and, furthermore, the “common sense of *kai* as continuative, or conjunctive is followed.”²² In other words, it uses the primary meaning of *kai*.

On exegetical grounds Johnson states:

Exegetically the view is sound, since “Israel” has its uniform Pauline ethnic sense. And further, the apostle achieves a very striking climactic conclusion. Drawing near the end of his “battle-epistle” with its harsh and forceful attack on the Judaists and its omission of the customary words of thanksgiving, Paul tempers his language with a special blessing for those faithful believing Israelites who, understanding the grace of God and its exclusion of any human works as the ground of redemption, had not succumbed to the subtle blandishments of the deceptive Judaizers. They, not the false men from Jerusalem, are “the Israel of God,” or, as he calls them elsewhere, “the Remnant according to the election of grace” (cf. Rom. 11:5).²²

As for theological grounds, Johnson states:

And theologically the view is sound in its maintenance of the two elements within the one people of God, Gentiles and ethnic Jews. Romans 11 spells out the details of the relationship between the two entities from Abraham’s day to the present age and on to the fulfillment in the future of the great unconditional covenantal promises made to the patriarchs.²³

²¹ Ibid., pg. 185

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Johnson concludes:

If there is an interpretation that totters on a tenuous foundation, it is the view that Paul equates the term “the Israel of God” with the believing church of Jews and Gentiles. To support it, the general usage of the term *Israel* in Paul, in the New Testament, and in the Scriptures as a whole is ignored. The grammatical and syntactical usage of the conjunction *kai* is strained and distorted—and the rare and uncommon sense accepted when the usual sense is unsatisfactory—only because it does not harmonize with the presuppositions of the exegete. And to compound matters, in the special context of Galatians and the general context of the Pauline teaching, especially as highlighted in Romans 11, Paul’s primary passages on God’s dealings with Israel and the Gentiles, are downplayed.... the doctrine that the church of Gentile and Jews is *the* Israel of God rests on an illusion. It is a classic case of tendentious exegesis.²⁴

For Dispensational Israelology, the conclusion is that the Church is never called, and is not, a “spiritual Israel” or a “new Israel.” The term *Israel* is either used of the nation or the people as a whole, or of the believing Remnant within. It is never used of the Church in general or of Gentile believers in particular. It is Paul’s title for the Remnant of Israel.

D. ROMANS 9:1–11:24 AND THE REMNANT OF ISRAEL

The doctrine of the Remnant of Israel teaches that there is always a segment of the Jewish people who are believers. The teaching of the New Testament is that the Remnant of Israel today comprises the Jewish believers in the Messiahship of Jesus. In the New Testament, that doctrine is primarily found in Paul’s Israelology in Romans 9–11. There is one other passage on the Remnant of Israel relevant to Israel Present which is 1 Peter 2:1–10.

1. FIRST PETER 2:1–10 (SUMMARY)

By taking Peter’s words in 1:1–2 literally, it is clear that the epistle was not written to the Church at large, nor to a body of Gentile believers, but to Jewish believers living outside the land within a majority Gentile population. The term *Dispersion* is a technical Jewish term for Jews who live outside the land. It is used twice elsewhere: John 7:35 and James 1:1, which virtually all commentators agree refers to the Jews of the Diaspora. There is no reason to make I Peter the exception since it fits well into Peter’s calling as the Apostle to the Circumcision (Gal. 2:7–8). Furthermore, Peter twice makes reference to the fact that his readers live among the Gentiles (2:12; 4:3). While many try to make

²⁴ Ibid. pg. 195

the term *Gentiles* mean “unbelievers,” that is neither its Jewish usage nor even the normal New Testament usage as a simple look in a concordance will show. Peter is using the term *Gentile* in its normal usage as meaning “non-Jew.” Peter is addressing Jewish believers living among a majority Gentile population. Expressions such as *vain meaning of life handed down from your fathers* (1:18) have clear Jewish overtones distinguishing the Jewish believers from their past lives in Rabbinic Judaism. In this section of the epistle, Peter draws a contrast between the Remnant and the non-Remnant. His purpose is to show that while the non-Remnant has failed in its calling, the Remnant has not failed.

With Exodus 19:5–6 clearly in his mind, Peter states that the Jewish believers, because of the kind of salvation they have, are two things (v. 5). They are, first, *living stones* and so are part of *a spiritual house*. This spiritual house is the spiritual House of Israel, the Remnant of Israel, or, in Paul’s words, *the Israel of God*. Second, the Jewish believers are *a holy priesthood*. This too was the calling of the nation as a whole. The nation failed, but the Remnant of Israel has not failed and are today offering *spiritual sacrifices* to the Lord.

Peter then goes on to explain the distinction between the Remnant and the non-Remnant (vv. 6–8). He begins with the state of the Remnant (vv. 6–7a) and quotes Isaiah 28:16 to point out that the chief cornerstone is the Messiah who before God the Father is elect and precious so those who believe in Him will not be shamed (v. 6). He then makes the application (v. 7a) and states that while the Messianic Stone is indeed precious, it is only precious for the Remnant. Concerning the non-Remnant (vv. 7b–8), Peter quotes from Psalm 118:22 (v. 7b) to show that it was already predicted that the Messianic Stone would be rejected by the leaders of Israel. He also quotes Isaiah 8:14 (v. 8a) to show that for the unbeliever, the Messianic Stone was to be the stone of stumbling and the rock of offence. Isaiah dealt with the contrast between the Remnant and the non-Remnant. Peter concludes with an application (v. 8b): the non-Remnant indeed stumbled, for those who rejected the Word were destined to stumble. Isaiah predicted that Immanuel would be the point of division between the Remnant and the non-Remnant. Peter teaches that this has now taken place and Jesus the Messiah has become that point of division.

The passage concludes with a further description of the status of the Remnant (vv. 9–10). According to verse five, the Remnant of Israel comprised a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. With Exodus 19:5–6 still in mind, Peter now adds four other descriptions to show the position of the Remnant in contrast to Israel the whole (v. 9a). First, they are an *elect race*. This is based on Isaiah 43:20. Being *elect* shows that they were chosen at God’s initiative (1 Pet. 2:4, 6). This is a reference to their individual election. The use of the term *race* shows that Peter is also dealing with their national election. The Church, however, is not a race but composed of believers from all races. Second, the Remnant of Israel is a *royal priesthood*. In verse five they were called a *holy* priesthood, emphasizing their right to approach the heavenly sanctuary. Now they are

also a *royal* priesthood. Since the High Priest Jesus is a priest-king after the Order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:1–28), these believers are, therefore, a royal priesthood for they are both priests and kings. For now, they are functioning as priests (Heb. 13:15–16), but in the future they will function as kings and will exercise royal kingly authority in the Messianic Kingdom (Rev. 5:10; 20:6). Third, the believing Jewish Remnant is a *holy nation*. Israel became a nation at Mount Sinai and was called upon to be holy and separated from sin to God. However, the nation as a whole failed while the Remnant has not failed. The Church is not a nation (Rom. 10:19), but is comprised of believers from all nations. Fourth, they are *a people for God's own possession*. This is not only based on Exodus 19:5–6, but also on Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Isaiah 43:21; and Malachi 3:17. While they became a nation at Mount Sinai, they became a people with Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. The Remnant is God's own possession for those Jewish believers were purchased by the blood of the Messiah and so uniquely belong to God (1 Pet. 1:18–19).

To summarize, Peter is not drawing a distinction between Israel and the Church or between unbelieving Jews and believing Gentiles. The distinction is between Jews who believe and Jews who do not believe. His point is that while Israel as a whole failed, the believing Remnant of Israel has not failed and so the Remnant of Israel is fulfilling the calling of the nation as a whole. Paul will make the same point in his theology of Israel in Romans 9–11.

2. THE TWO ISRAELS – ROMANS 9:6

In verse six, Paul starts this next unit with the word *but* to show he is about to do some explaining. The problem is not that *the word of God has come to naught*, that the Word of God or God's promises have failed. The Word of God and His promises have not failed. The point is that the Word of God has not fallen off its straight course, the "straight course" is the plan and the purpose of God. The Word of God has not suddenly been frustrated by Israel's rejection. In fact, the rejection by Israel of the Messiahship of Jesus was very much part of the divine program and plan. He then expounds and says, *For they are not all Israel, that are of Israel*. It is important that this verse not be misunderstood. Paul is not distinguishing between Israel and the Church, nor between Jews and Gentiles. Rather, he is distinguishing between Jews who believe and Jews who do not believe, or between the Remnant and the non-Remnant. The first expression, *all Israel*, refers to the believing Jewish Remnant, the believing natural seed. The second expression, *of Israel*, refers to the entire nation, the whole natural seed. What Paul is saying is that there are two Israels: Israel the whole, which includes all physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, i.e., all Jews; and, within the nation of Israel, there is the Israel of God, the believing Israel, the true Israel. The contrast is between Jews who believe and Jews who do not believe. There is one Israel which comprises the entire nation, and within the whole of physical Israel there is a spiritual Israel. The

spiritual Israel is never stated by Scripture to be the Church. Spiritual Israel is always those Jews, within the nation as a whole, who believe. In this way, Paul expounds or elaborates upon statements he made in Romans 2:28–29.

3. THE REJECTION BY ISRAEL IS NOT TOTAL – 11:1-10

The word *then* connects 11:1 with 10:21, showing that the question raised in 11:1 is based on the statement in 10:21, which portrays Israel in unbelief. It also shows that the *people* of 10:21 and 11:1 must be the same: national Israel. In these verses Paul taught that Israel's rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus is not complete or total, because even today there are Jewish people coming to a saving knowledge of the Messiahship of Jesus. He begins with a question: *Did God cast off his people?* The answer comes quickly: *God forbid!* or more strongly in the Greek, “may it never be,” “perish the thought.” The problem was not that God had cast off His people. The fact that Israel has rejected the Messiahship of Jesus does not mean that God has rejected Israel. Israel is still the Chosen People of God. As Paul states, *God did not cast off His people*. If He had, it would mean that no single Jew could ever be saved. To prove it, Paul first cites himself as an example. The fact that Paul himself was a Jewish believer shows two things: first, that Israel's rejection of the Messiah was not total, because Paul was a Jewish person and he believed; and, second, it showed that God has not rejected or cast off His people. Otherwise, Paul would not have been saved. Although the majority do not believe, still God has not cast off His people or rejected his elect nation. The fact that Paul refers to Israel as *his people* in the present age shows that they are still the Chosen People.

Paul then brings out the choice of God (v. 2a). The relationship between God and His people is that of foreknowledge. God had, in His foreknowledge, chosen Israel in spite of His knowledge that Israel would reject the Messiahship of Jesus. The reason God knew this was because of His foreknowledge, and His foreknowledge was based upon His foreordination. The fact that God *foreknew* His people, then chose His people, shows that God *has not cast off his people*. The very concept of the foreknowledge of God forbids the concept of the casting off of Israel. Foreknowledge is not merely “to know beforehand.” The verb “to foreknow” should be understood in its Old Testament Hebrew sense, “to choose in advance.” Since Israel was chosen, God could not cast off Israel.

Then to show that Paul was not alone in his Jewish faith of the Messiahship of Jesus, he next deals with the calling of the Remnant (vv. 2b–10). There are many other Jews who have come to saving faith, both in the past and at the present time. Paul gives the historical example of Elijah (vv. 2b–4). The point is to show that God has always had a Remnant. Although the Remnant may have been quite small at times, God has always had a Remnant. While apostasy was general, it was not universal among Jews. The point Paul is making with the example of Elijah is that what is true today has always been true:

it is the Remnant that comes to saving faith. The Remnant in Elijah's day was only seven thousand strong. What has happened since Christ is nothing new, because throughout Jewish history the majority have always been in the state of unbelief and the Remnant are the ones that have come to saving faith. After giving the illustration of Elijah, Paul gave the application of the illustration (v. 5). *Even so* (the comparison), *then* (the inference); what was true then is true now: *there is a Remnant according to the election of grace*. By declaring that it is the election of grace, Paul gave the standard according to which the Remnant comes into existence. It is not on the basis of the Law of Moses (10:4), but on the basis of grace. Paul uses the Greek perfect tense, which shows the Remnant has existed in the past and still does exist in the present. The present Remnant of verse five corresponds to the seven thousand of Elijah's day. This Remnant is the *Israel of God* of Galatians 6:16. He then gives the explanation (v. 6). He drives the point home that works and grace are mutually exclusive (the same point he made in chapter ten). If it is by grace, it cannot be of works, the reason being that it would make grace no longer grace. No one, not even the Jew, can make any claim on God, but God will save men only by grace though faith, both among the Jews and among the Gentiles. Insofar as the basis of salvation is concerned, law and grace, works and faith are mutually exclusive. Paul next draws a logical conclusion (v. 7). *What then?* The inference is: that which Israel the whole sought, *that he obtained not*. Israel the whole sought righteousness, but as 9:31–33 pointed out, they sought this righteousness on the basis of their own works and the works of the law and did not obtain it. The elect obtained righteousness, while the rest were hardened. Again, the distinction here is not between the Church and Israel, or between Jews and Gentiles, but between Jews who believe and Jews who do not believe. That which Israel the whole failed to obtain, Israel the Remnant did obtain. The Jewish believers have obtained this righteousness of God. This same point was made in 1 Peter 2:1–10. While Israel the whole has failed to obtain the righteousness of God, there is a Remnant within Israel that has not failed. It is this Remnant, the Jewish believers, that is the Israel of God. Again, the distinction is between the Remnant (*the election obtained it*) and the non-Remnant (*the rest were hardened*). Paul then quotes from the Old Testament to show the present hardening of Israel (vv. 8–10). He quotes Deuteronomy 29:4 (the law), Isaiah 29:10 (the prophets) and Psalm 69:22–23 (the writings) to show that Israel as a whole has been hardened.

The point of verses 1–10, then, is that while Israel as a nation has failed to attain righteousness, this rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus is not a total rejection, because there are Jewish people who do believe. These Jewish believers have attained the righteousness of God. At the present time, there are Jewish believers and there is *a Remnant according to the election of grace* but this passage makes one more point. The question Paul raised in verse one shows that some were claiming that since Israel rejected the Messiah and only a minority believed, indicated that God has cast off the people of Israel (early seeds of Replacement Theology?). The point of the Elijah example is to point out that the Northern Kingdom, which would have had a Jewish population of about

two million people only had seven thousand believers. Yet no one was saying back then that God was through with the Jewish people. By the same token, the existence of only a minority of Jewish believers now is not a sign that God has cast off Israel but a sign that He has not cast off Israel. The existence of the Remnant of Israel, no matter how small, will be evidence that God has not cast off Israel.

E. THE REMNANT OF ISRAEL DURING THE TRIBULATION

All individual Jews who become believers during the seven years of the Tribulation are part of the Remnant of Israel. These include the 144,000 Jews. These also include those Jews of Jerusalem who become believers in the middle of the Tribulation (Rev. 11:13). It includes all individual Jews who become believers as a result of the preaching of the 144,000 or the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11. It includes the Remnant of Revelation 12:17 whom Satan will attack in a particular way.

1. THE FACT OF THE REMNANT

The fact that the Remnant will survive is found in Isaiah 10:20–23. Verse 20 states that unlike the rest of Israel, they will lean on the Holy One of Israel. In verse 21, Isaiah declares that ultimately they will return to the God of Israel, a return that can only be accomplished by faith in the Messiah Jesus. Verse 22a points out that in spite of the numerical strength of the Jews, only the Remnant will return to God. Verses 22b–23 talk about a decree of destruction that has been determined upon the whole earth which the Remnant will survive. The words used here are much the same as those found in Isaiah 28:22 where the decree of destruction is issued with the signing of the seven-year covenant beginning the Tribulation. Synthesizing these two Isaiah passages together, it is clear that the Remnant will survive the persecution of the Jews and the massive destruction of the earth during the Tribulation. Hence they are referred to as the *escaped* of Israel here and in Isaiah 4:2; 37:31–32; Joel 2:32; and, Obadiah 17.

2. THE PROTECTION OF THE REMNANT

Another section of Isaiah, 41:8–16, records the protection of the Remnant by God's presence with the Remnant. This is a promise to preserve the Remnant in the midst of tremendous persecution during Satan's campaign to destroy the Jews.

3. THE PROVISION FOR THE REMNANT

According to Isaiah 41:17–20, just as in the wilderness of Sinai God miraculously provided food and water for Israel, He will do so again in the Tribulation when the Jews flee to the wilderness. These miraculous provisions will cause them to reconsider their relationship to God. In another passage, Isaiah 65:8–16, the prophet describes how on one hand God will supply for the Faithful Remnant, whereas He will withhold provisions from the apostates. This passage makes clear that while the apostates will be allowed to suffer and die; the Faithful Remnant will be divinely protected and provided with food and water. By this means the Faithful Remnant will be able to survive the persecutions and devastations of the Great Tribulation.

F. ISRAEL'S NATIONAL SALVATION

1. ROMANS 11:25-36

With the connection and explanatory *for*, connecting this verse with 11:24, Paul made a clear declaration of Israel's final restoration (vv. 25–26a). He pointed out that there were limitations to Israel's hardening in that Israel was hardened only *in part* and only temporarily (v. 25). There was a partial hardening, but never a total hardening, and that was also the point of 11:1–10. The fact that there are Jewish people coming to saving faith proves that the hardening was partial, but Israel was hardened for only a temporary period of time. They were hardened in part until *the fulness* of the Gentiles has come in. The Greek word translated as *fulness* means “a full number” or “a complete number.” In other words, God has a set number of Gentiles that He has destined to come into the place of blessing, the Olive Tree of verses 16–24. After the *fulness of the Gentiles* has come in, after that set number is reached, then all Israel will be saved. According to Acts 15:14, one of the purposes of the Church Age is to call out from among the Gentiles a people for His name. While there is a Jewish Remnant coming to faith in this age, another key purpose is to take out from among the Gentiles a people for His name. This calling out from among the Gentiles will continue until *the fulness*, that set number of Gentiles, is reached. At that time, the Church will be complete and will be removed at the Rapture. Then God will deal with Israel as a nation again, rather than just with Jewish individuals. This national dealing will lead to all Israel being saved (v. 26a). The *mystery* is that of a partial, temporary hardening of Israel until a full number of Gentiles is reached. The *Israel* of this verse most refer to national Israel for that has been its meaning the other ten times *Israel* has been used since chapter nine (which even Covenant Theologians admit) and there is no reason to make this verse the one exception, especially since it makes perfect sense and is a contrast to the *Gentiles* in the previous verse.

2. THE REMNANT OF ISRAEL AND ALL ISRAEL

According to Romans 11:25–27, all Israel will be saved. According to Isaiah 10:20–23, only the Remnant will be saved. This is not a contradiction if it is understood in the context of Israel’s national salvation. As Zechariah 13:8–9 has pointed out, two-thirds of the Jewish population will be destroyed in the persecutions of the Tribulation. This will include the entire non-Remnant so that only the Remnant will survive, the *escaped* of Isaiah 4:2; 10:20; 37:31–32; Joel 2:32; and Obadiah 17. Since the remaining one-third become believers, at that point *all Israel* and the *Remnant of Israel* become one and the same, as Micah 2:12–13 makes clear. Hebrew poetry used parallelism and the first parallel is:

*I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of you;
I will surely gather the Remnant of Israel.*

The *all of You* and the *Remnant of Israel* are one and the same for with Israel’s national salvation the whole nation now becomes part of the Remnant (v. 12). Because of Israel’s national salvation, Messiah returns to rescue them (v. 13).

G. THE REMNANT OF ISRAEL IN THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM

Since all Israel throughout the Messianic Kingdom will remain a saved nation, all Israel will remain the Remnant of Israel throughout that period. Everything said of Israel in the kingdom will be true of the Remnant of Israel. However, certain verses do emphasize the Remnant motif in the Messianic Kingdom and so, for the sake of completeness, these will be brought out in this section.

Concerning the regathering of Israel, Isaiah 11:11 and 16 picture it as the gathering of the Remnant. The same is true in Zechariah 8:6–7. Micah 4:7 emphasizes the salvation of the Remnant. This means that the sins of the Remnant will be forgiven according to Micah 7:18–20. This will also mean that the Remnant will spread the Word of God among the Gentile nations according to Micah 5:7–8. The Remnant will also be in possession of the land according to Zephaniah 2:7 and 9. The same point is made by Zechariah 8:12. They will be sinless in the land and live in security according to Zephaniah 3:13.

III. THE REMNANT AND THE NON-REMNANT

A. I PETER 2:1-10

It should be kept in mind that Peter is writing to Jewish believers. Throughout Scripture, there are always two Israels: Israel the whole that comprises all Jews; and, Israel the Remnant that comprises only believing Jews. Here, Peter distinguishes between the Remnant and the non-Remnant. Replacement Theology, however, relies on this passage as proof that the true Israel is the church. The following are some examples:

So in verses 4 to 10 Peter says that God has bestowed on the church almost all the blessings promised to Israel in the Old Testament. The dwelling place of God is no longer the Jerusalem temple, for Christians are the new “temple” of God (see notes on v. 5). The priesthood able to offer acceptable sacrifices to God is no longer descended from Aaron, for Christians are now the true “royal priesthood” with access before God’s throne (vv. 4–5, 9). God’s chosen people are no longer said to be those physically descended from Abraham, for Christians are now the true “chosen race” (v. 9). The nation blessed by God is no longer the nation of Israel, for Christians are now God’s true “holy nation” (v. 9). The people of Israel are no longer said to be the people of God, for Christians—both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians—are now “God’s people” (v. 10a) and those who have “received mercy” (v. 10b). Moreover, Peter takes these quotations from contexts which repeatedly warn that God will reject his people who persist in rebellion against him, who reject the precious “cornerstone” which he has established. What more could be needed in order to say with assurance that the church has now become the true Israel of God?²⁵

In a footnote the author adds:

‘Blum, p. 231, says that those privileges given to the church do not imply that the church is Israel or that it replaces Israel, and that Rom. 11:13-16, 23-24 guards against such an idea. Certainly we can agree that Rom. 9-11 affirms God’s continuing concern for ethnic Israel and predicts for the Jewish people a great future time of blessings when many will be joined to the church (‘grafted back into their own olive tree’, Rom. 11:24). Peter’s statements do not nullify that promise. But 1 Pet. 2:4-10 does not

²⁵ Grudem Wayne A., *The First Epistle of Peter, an Introduction and Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) p. 113

affirm that God's covenant blessings are presently enjoyed only by those who are in Christ, just as Rom. 9-11 affirms that future enjoyment of covenant blessings will come only through being joined to Christ.²⁶

Having shown how "the stone" divides believers from unbelievers (including the persecutors of these Christian readers), our author returns to the topic of their privileged position in God's temple, using the emphatic "but you" to make the transition and contrast clear. This position is described by transferring to the church the titles of Israel in the OT (for the church is the true Remnant of Israel, as the use of Israel's titles from 1:1 on indicates), in particular the titles found in the *Septuagint* of Exod. 19:5-6 (cf. 23:22) and Isa. 43:20-21 (cf. Deut. 4:20; 7:6; 10:15; 14:2):

"And now...you will be my own people more than any other nation; for the whole earth is mine, but you will be my royal priesthood and holy nation." These are the words you will say to the children of Israel. (Exod. 19:5-6)

And the beasts of the field will bless me...because I have given water in the wilderness and rivers in the desert to give drink to my chosen people, my people whom I have taken as my own that they might recount my glorious deeds. (Isa. 43:20-21)

These titles, which are used elsewhere in the NT as well, particularly in Revelation (Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6; cf. 1 Pet. 2:5), are woven together with a phrase taken first from Exodus ("But you"), then from Isaiah ("chosen people"), then Exodus again ("royal priesthood" and "holy nation"), and finally Isaiah ("God's own people...deeds," the grammar changed to suit the new context in 1 Peter), indicating a long period of meditation on and use of these texts in the church. The emphasis throughout is collective: the church as a corporate unity is the people, priesthood, nation, etc., rather than each Christian being such. This emphasis is typical of the NT in contrast to our far more individualistic concern in the present. The West tends to focus on individuals relating to God, while Peter (and the rest of the NT; e.g., Paul's body-of-Christ language) was more conscious of people's becoming part of a new corporate entity that is chosen by and that relates to God.²⁷

"A race elect" recalls such passages as Deut. 7:6, 7; Isa. 43:10, 20; 44:1, 2, "elect" is applied also to Christ, the cornerstone, in 2:6. As God chose

²⁶ Ibid. pg. 113-114

²⁷ Davids, p. 90-91

Abraham and the Abrahamitic nation, so the readers are now “a race elect.” Israel was chosen on the condition that it should abide in God’s covenant, and when it hardened itself in unbelief, God rejected this race and expelled it out of Canaan as a standing sign for all time. In Peter’s readers his grace prevails as believing ones (v.7), and so they are “a race elect” among all the races of the world. Peter refers to their present state. With the terms “race, priesthood, nation, people,” Peter considers his readers as one body, as belonging to the great *Una Sancta* on earth. Natural descent and all other differences are obliterated, swallowed up by the spiritual condition and status of the readers. How happy they should be to read what the apostle calls them!²⁸

Clark’s comment shows a failure to recognize the contrast of Isaiah 28:16 between the Remnant and the Non-Remnant Israel.

In this passage from Isaiah 28:16 Zion, or Jerusalem, is typical of the church. Christ is the cornerstone, and believers in this age, when there is no longer a distinction between Jew and Greek, are the stones in the walls. Hence Peter’s inspired understanding of Isaiah helps him to feed Jesus’ sheep as Jesus had commanded him (John 21:15ff); and the same inspired understanding helps us to see Isaiah’s meaning and to grasp the significance of Old Testament typology.²⁹

The spiritual state of the Remnant is characterized as newborn babes in need of the milk of God’s Word. This milk will enable them to continue growing until they are ready to partake of the meat.

B. THE STONE OF STUMBLING AND THE ROCK OF OFFENSE —2:4–10

This is a favorite passage for those who teach Replacement Theology. They teach that what the Old Testament stated to be true of Israel, Peter now applies and states to be true of the Church. Thus, they conclude that the Church has replaced Israel. However, there is no hint in the epistle that Peter is addressing the Church as a whole. On the contrary, in the epistle’s introduction (1:1–2), he stated that he was addressing Jewish believers who specifically comprised what was the then Remnant of Israel—the *Israel of God*. It is important to recognize that the contrast Peter makes here is not between the Church and Israel, or between believers and non-believers, or between unbelieving Jews and

²⁸ Lenski, O.K., *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966) pg. 99.

²⁹ Clark, Gordon H., *New Heavens, New Earth, A Commentary on First and Second Peter*, (Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1993), pg. 81.

believing Gentiles. Rather, the contrast here is between the Remnant and the Non-Remnant of Israel. Peter's point is that while Israel the whole failed to fulfill its calling, the Remnant of Israel has not failed to fulfill its calling.

With the assumption that Peter is addressing the Church, Grudem, comments:

4. This verse begins a new section (vv. 4-10) in which Peter uses extensive Old Testament imagery to show that New Testament believers (both Jew and Gentile) are in fact a new 'people of God' who have come to possess all the blessings of Old Testament Israel but in far greater measure.³⁰

In verse 4 the discussion begins with the *living stone*. The phrase *unto whom coming* means that these Jewish believers have come to the Messiah—the Living Stone. Jesus is the Messianic Stone of the Old Testament, and He is a stone that was *rejected by men*. This was prophesied of Him in Psalm 118:22 and fulfilled in Matthew 21:42–44, Mark 11:10–11, Luke 20:17–18, and Acts 4:11. He was *elect*, chosen by God the Father, and *precious*, of high value.

In contrast to the one Living Stone—the Messiah, verse 5a contains the plural *as living stones* in reference to Jewish believers. Because they have salvation, they are also *living stones*. They have become partakers of Messiah's living nature and are part of a *spiritual house*. The *house* is the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). The Israel of God is not comprised of the Church but comprised of the Jewish believers. The term *Israel of God* is equivalent to the term the *Remnant of Israel*.

In verse 5b, the Jewish believers are also identified as *a holy priesthood*. In the *Septuagint*, the Greek version of the Old Testament, the word *priesthood* is also found only twice: Exodus 19:6 and 23:22, where it is used to describe Israel as a *royal priesthood*. Peter's point is that only Jewish believers—only the Remnant—have fulfilled Israel's original calling to be a kingdom of priests as described in Exodus 19:6. The rest of Israel, the non-Remnant, has failed. Interpreters who ignore the context have often used this verse in an attempt to teach that the kingdom of priests is inclusive of the whole Church. However, the doctrine of "the priesthood of all the believers" cannot be supported from this verse. Peter is speaking specifically of Jewish believers in this context. It is a fact that all believers are a spiritual priesthood, but this fact is based on Revelation 1:6, 5:10, and 20:6.

³⁰ Grudem, Wayne A., *The First Epistle of Peter, An Introduction and Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), pg. 97

Having pointed out that Jewish believers are living stones and a holy priesthood, now in verses 6–8, Peter begins to draw a distinction between the Remnant and the non-Remnant by describing the state of the Remnant in verses 6–7a. In verse 6, he quotes Isaiah 28:16: *Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone*. The *stone* is Jesus the Messiah who is both *elect* and *precious* according to verse 4. Those who believe on the *Stone* will not be shamed or disappointed due to a failure on the part of the *Stone*; the *Stone* will never fail them. In the context of the Isaiah passage, the prophet makes a distinction between the Remnant and the non-Remnant. Next, in verse 7a, Peter uses the word *therefore* to make his application: *Therefore*, the stone is *precious*. However, the stone is *precious* only for the believing Jewish Remnant.

At this point in verses 7b–8, Peter describes the state of the non-Remnant. Verse 7b contains a quote from Psalm 118:22 to demonstrate the predicted rejection of the *Stone*. He was *rejected* or disapproved of by the builders who were the leaders of Israel. Even though Jesus, as the *Stone*, was disapproved of by the leaders, God overruled the rulers and designated Him to be *the head of the corner*. Verse 8a contains a quote from Isaiah 8:14. The context of that verse also distinguishes between the Remnant and the non-Remnant. Peter describes the *Stone* in two ways here. First, He is the *stone of stumbling*; He is a *stone* against which one accidentally strikes and injures himself. Second, He is the *rock of offence*; this is a trap set to trip someone up, causing a large boulder to fall upon him. Peter's point is this: by rejecting God's *Stone*, the non-Remnant bring upon themselves the injury of the *Stone* and the ruin of the *Rock*. The non-Remnant *stumble* over the Messiahship of Jesus and, as a result, the boulder falls on them and crushes them. In verse 8b, Peter gives the application: the non-Remnant stumbled.

Having described the state of the non-Remnant, Peter again refers to the Remnant and describes their state in verses 9–10. Verse 9a describes the position of the Israel of God, the Remnant of Israel, using four characteristics. First, based upon Isaiah 43:20, they are *an elect race*. They are *elect* because they were chosen by God's own initiative as stated in 2:4, 6. Again, Peter is not referring to the Church as a whole. The Church is not a *race* of people but is comprised of believers of all races. Nevertheless, the Jewish people are a *race* in the biblical sense, and the Jewish believers are the *elect race*. The second characteristic Peter uses to describe the Israel of God is that they are *a royal priesthood*. Verse 5 identifies the Jewish believers as a holy priesthood to emphasize the fact that they have the right to enter the Heavenly Sanctuary. Now, they are called a *royal priesthood* because Jesus is King and, according to Hebrews 7:1–28, His priesthood is after the Order of Melchizedek. The Melchizedekian Priesthood was a royal priesthood for Melchizedek was both priest and king. Jesus is also both Priest and King. By the same token, Jewish believers are of a *royal priesthood*. Peter's point is that in Exodus 19:6, the nation was called to be a nation of priests; a national *priesthood*. The nation failed, but the believing Remnant has not failed; they are fulfilling this calling. The third characteristic Peter uses to describe the Israel of God is that they are *a holy nation*. Israel

became *a nation* at Sinai and became *holy* through their separation from the whole of humanity. The Jewish believers are distinct from all Israel because they are the believing Remnant. This cannot be said of the Church because the Church is not *a nation*. The Church is comprised of believers from all nations, but the Church as an entity is not *a nation*. The Jewish believers, as the Israel of God, do comprise *a holy nation*. The fourth characteristic Peter uses to describe the Israel of God is that they are *a people for God's own possession*. This statement is based upon Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, 26:18; Isaiah 43:21; and Malachi 3:17. Peter identifies them as *a people*. Through Abraham, the Jews became a people and, during the time of Moses, they became a nation; a nation *for God's own possession*. Jewish believers were purchased by the blood of Messiah and they uniquely belong to God. Therefore, these four characteristics of Jewish believers distinguish the Remnant from the non-Remnant.

In verse 9b, Peter describes the purpose of their calling: *To show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*. The background for this teaching is Isaiah 43:20–21, which states: *the people which I formed for myself, that they may set forth my praise*.

Finally in verse 10, Peter refers to Hosea 1:10–2:1 and 2:23. Lenski comments;

Those who believe that the readers of this epistle were former Jews and not former Gentiles encounter a difficulty here; Peter could not say of Jews that they have not been granted mercy.³¹

McArthur comments:

In principle, Peter applied to the church – particularly to its Gentile members – the prophet's words concerning the Jews (cf. Hos. 2:23; Rom. 9:22-26). As unbelievers, the Gentiles knew no compassion from Christ – they **once were not a people**. But now they had become the **people of God**, because they had **received His mercy**.³²

However, in the context of Hosea, the prophet is speaking of national Israel. While positionally, Israel is always the People of God, experientially they may not experience the benefits of this position due to disobedience: for a period of time, Israel is experientially *not my people*, although in the future, they will repent and become *my*

³¹ Lenski, R.C. *The Interpretation of The Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966) pg. 104.

³² MacArthur, John, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary I Peter*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004) pg. 132

people again. Peter applies this passage to the Remnant. He contrasts their former state with their present state. Formally, they were members of the non-Remnant. Externally, they were *not my people* and, internally, they had no divine *mercy*. Presently, they have externally become *my people* and, internally, they *have obtained mercy*. The Hosea context deals with Israel: that for a period of time Israel, experientially at least, was not to be God's people. However, in the future, when Israel undergoes a national salvation, they will again experientially become *my people*. What will be true of Israel as a nation in the future is true of the Remnant of Israel in the present: they have experientially become God's people again because they are members of the believing Remnant.

C. I PETER 2:11-12

¹¹*Beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; ¹²having your behavior seemly among the Gentiles; that, wherein they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

Peter begins this discussion about daily living by addressing this issue both negatively and positively. In verse 11, he addresses it negatively: *abstain from fleshly lusts*. Their separation from the non-Remnant, as Jewish believers, has made them both *strangers and pilgrims*. They must therefore abstain from fleshly lusts, *which war against the soul*.

Peter then addresses the issue positively in verse 12. These Jewish believers are to live a spiritual lifestyle among the Gentiles: *having your behavior seemly among the Gentiles*. Those commentators who do not understand that Peter was writing to Jewish believers interpret the word *Gentile* to mean "unbeliever."

No new sentence begins here in the Greek text, for this verse is the positive counterpart to verse 11: not only are the readers to abstain from sinful desires (v. 11), they are also to continue to "Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles". Conduct here refers to a day-by-day pattern of life (see note on this word at 1:15). Peter calls unbelievers Gentiles, not because he thinks that his readers were all Jewish Christians, but because he once again assumes that Christians (both literal Jews and literal Gentiles within the body of Christ) are the "true Israel". Therefore all who are not Christians (both literal Jews and literal Gentiles) are truly "Gentiles" (cf. 4:3).³³

³³ Grudem, Wayne A., *The First Epistle of Peter, An Introduction and Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), p. 116

“Your behavior” (tēn anastrophēn humōn), the object of the participle “having” stands emphatically at the beginning of the verse. It denotes the varied activities of daily life (cf. 1:15) lived under the watchful eyes of “the Gentiles,” their non-Christian neighbors. Some like Wand, suggest that the term *Gentiles* implies that the readers were Jewish Christians; but the term is equally appropriate if they had a non-Jewish background since the expression well marks the present contrast between them as Christians and their Christ-rejecting neighbors. The Jews used the term to designate the non-Jewish masses as sinful and idolatrous, as “the heathen” (cf. 1 Cor. 12:2; 1 Thess. 4:5). For Peter the term readily indicated the distinction between believers in Christ and the pagans whose evil practices they once shared (4:4).³⁴

Again the term *Gentile* is rarely used in Scripture as being synonymous with the term unbelievers and when it is, it is in a context when that meaning is clear (I Cor. 12:1-3). The term *Gentile* is often used of believing Gentiles (Rom. 11:11–15; 15:25–27). When a Jew writes the word *Gentile*, he does not mean “unbeliever;” he means a “non-Jew.” Again, Peter is writing to Jewish believers living in the Dispersion; Jewish believers living outside the Land; Jewish believers living *among the Gentiles*. This is the way the verse should be understood. As Jewish believers living among the *Gentiles*, there is a certain lifestyle to be modeled.

D. I PETER 4:3

In 4: 3–6, Peter presents another responsibility of these Jewish believers, which is to not live according to the conduct of the *Gentiles*. In dealing with this issue, Peter points to a past, a present, and a future aspect. The past aspect is found in verse 3. In the past, they shared in *the desire of the Gentiles*, which was to fulfill the lusts of the flesh. Again, the use of the term *Gentiles* demonstrates that Peter is writing to Jewish believers who are living among a Gentile majority. Here again, Covenant Theology likes to change the meaning of the term:

He then explains what he means by doing what the Gentiles like to do. (Since Peter has frequently viewed Christians as the new people of God, the true Israel, earlier in this letter [see the summary at 2:10] it is quite natural for him to carry through this terminology by using the term “Gentiles” to refer not to people who are not Jews, but to people who are not Christians.)

The fact that unbelievers are ‘surprised’ that Christians do not join in their profligacy suggests that Peter’s readers included not only many who had been converted from Judaism, but also many won from a Gentile

³⁴ Hebert, D. Edmond, *First Peter*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), pg. 145-146.

background, for there would be no surprise involved if former Jews, who had previously led a morally upright life, did not participate in pagan life.³⁵

In those pre-conversion days life was spent not doing *the will of God* (verse 2), but working or executing (the verb is *kateirgasthai*, ‘to carry into effect’) *the will* (RV ‘the desire’; Gk. *boulēma*, ‘deliberate purpose’, cf. Acts xxvii. 43) *of the gentiles*, i.e. of godless men...³⁶

In their pre-Christian days the recipients wrought the desire of the Gentiles. The perfect tense *wrought* (*kateirgasthai*) defines that activity as terminated. The readers had given themselves to and carried out *the desire of the Gentiles* (*to boulēma tōn ethnōn*), the dominating intention and purpose of the pagan world.³⁷

However, there are no exegetical grounds to claim that when Peter writes the word *Gentiles*, he means “unbelievers.” In the past, these Jewish believers have been tempted to also follow the *Gentiles* in fulfilling the lusts of the flesh.

CONCLUSION

It is important that a proper systematic theology first goes back to the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) and get a clear understanding of the Remnant of Israel. Once that is understood, then it will be far easier to see and understand how New Testament writers have that concept in mind as they portray the role of the Remnant of Israel today in connection with Israel as a whole and with the church.

³⁵ Grudem, Wayne A., *The First Epistle of Peter, An Introduction and Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), pg. 168 - 169

³⁶ Stibbs, Alan M., *The First Epistle General of Peter*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), pg. 149.

³⁷ Hebert, D. Edmond, *First Peter*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), pg. 244.