

Review of
Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged
by
Barry E. Horner

In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul warned Gentile believers not to be arrogant toward Israel, which was becoming hardened by unbelief and was soon to experience national judgment. For the most part, the history of Gentile Christian thought has failed to heed that warning. Instead, many have dismissed Israel from having any future place in the plan of God. Oftentimes, this is done by re-conceptualizing the meaning of Israel and reinterpreting its place in the biblical text. The end result is the same; Israel has been excluded from the plan of God in any real, national sense.

Challenging this mindset, which has fixed itself in the traditions of Christian thought over twenty centuries, is the aim and purpose of Barry Horner's book *Future Israel*. Of particular concern for Horner is the oftentimes strident supersessionism, or replacement theology, that characterizes much of Reformed thought, Horner's own tradition. After setting the historical context, Horner profiles contemporary manifestations of Reformed supersessionism both in their actual claims and in their hermeneutical operations. He then counters them with biblical arguments for the future of a national Israel in the plan of God, focusing particularly, but not exclusively, on Paul's argument in Romans 11.

The issue, Horner says, is not anti-Semitism per se, but "classic anti-Judaism, which involves opposition to the biblical legacy of Torah mediated through Abraham and Moses." It is this classic anti-Judaism which denies that "Israel, incorporating individuality, nationality, and territory, has a future according to the mind of Abraham's God" (p. xx). Nevertheless, in spite of the prevalence of anti-Judaism, there have been dissenters, and one of the virtues of Horner's work is the profile he gives to this dissent along with the exposé of key supersessionists.

The first chapter sets forth the paradigmatic anti-Judaism of Augustine and Calvin, along with the equally paradigmatic dissent of Horatius Bonar and Charles Haddon Spurgeon. The second chapter consequently contextualizes the Augustinian paradigm and then traces its history to the early twentieth century. The third and fourth chapters provide exposés of American and British Reformed writers hostile to the notion of a national future for Israel. These include Albertus Pieters and Loraine Boettner, but extensive attention is given to Gary Burge, O. Palmer Robertson, the 2002 “Open Letter to Evangelicals and Other Interested Parties: The People of God, the Land of Israel, and the Impartiality of the Gospel” (signed by several Reformed scholars and posted on the website of Knox Theological Seminary), and the Anglican Colin Chapman. The treatment of Chapman includes comments on the views of Stephen Sizer, N. T. Wright, and others.

The fifth chapter sets in contrast to this history of anti-Judaic theological thought the rise of Jewish and Christian Zionism in the context of political and military opposition. The chapter includes a poignant extract from the diary of Theodore Herzl, recounting his meeting with Pope Pius X.

The sixth and seventh chapters present another historical survey, this time focusing on supersessionist hermeneutics. Horner begins by focusing on individuals such as Patrick Fairbairn, Gerhardus Vos, and George Eldon Ladd, but particularly valuable is the extended attention, critique, and reformulation he gives in chapter seven to the Reformed notion of a “Christocentric hermeneutic.”

The eighth and ninth chapters challenge supersessionist reinterpretation of the land promise, both in its presuppositions about the nature of the eternal state and in its treatment of the land promise in the biblical covenants. Chapters 10–12 follow this up with an extended consideration of Romans 11, both in terms of its own teaching and as a hermeneutical reference point for several other contested New Testament texts. There are a number of excellent studies on the exegesis of Romans 11, and Horner is clearly dependent on them. However, where Horner goes beyond most of them, in my opinion, is in his

development of the implications of Romans 11:28, the notion of unbelieving Israel as *God's beloved enemy*. This conception of the covenant status of unbelieving Israel is crucial for understanding God's treatment of Israel and Gentile nations even in Old Testament history. Paul's statement indicates that the covenantal status remains through the dispensation of Israel's hardening, to the coming of Messiah, and beyond. It is the framework in which to understand everything that has happened to Jews in this dispensation, and to Gentiles in relation to Jews, even up to the founding of the modern state of Israel and beyond that point to the present day. But most importantly, this covenant relationship is the evangelical basis for contemporary missions to the Jews, and focuses and enriches the understanding of that mission even as it helps to sweeten the tone.

Horner's own tone throughout the book is sobering. The reader may find his style – survey punctuated with frequent criticisms – bracing, although never, in the opinion of this reviewer, inappropriate. In actual fact, the book is compelling, engaging the reader's interest. The exposés of contemporary Reformed authors are enlightening, but the book is especially valuable for reminding readers today of key nineteenth century Reformed theologians who did affirm the future of Israel, including Spurgeon, J. C. Ryle, and especially Horatius Bonar.

At times, Horner's need to confront and oppose supersessionist slogans forces him into some unnecessary dichotomies – for example, Judeo-centric versus Christocentric – or simplistic criticisms such as: “The hermeneutical principle that imposes the NT revelation of Jesus Christ on the OT in such a way that the new covenant (upper layer) has become the controlling hermeneutic whereby the old covenant (lower layer) is Christologically reinterpreted” (p. 179). The issue is not Christocentricity per se, or the interpretation of the old covenant by the new covenant per se, but the supersessionist manner in which these are done and the way the terms are used as slogans for a supersessionist agenda. In actual

fact, Horner himself recognizes the inadequacies of these labels, and the reader will not have gone far before Horner nuances them.

Horner's reference to premillennialism, however, could be further differentiated. While all premillennialists envision a future earthly kingdom during the millennium, not all have fully appreciated the spiritual materialism of the eternal state. Seventeenth and nineteenth century premillennialists can generally be distinguished on this issue, and it is the unique position of classical dispensationalism to have embraced both views at the same time!

Overall, *Future Israel* is a significant work, and this reviewer hopes that it receives the attention it deserves. Horner not only explains why Christian anti-Judaism must be challenged (as his subtitle reads), but he has in fact challenged it, and in the opinion of this reviewer, effectively so.

The significance, however, should not be limited to eschatology alone, if one considers eschatology as simply one area of theological thought – the last, coming at the end, after all other theological considerations have been finished. Actually, to see eschatology this way is, in my opinion, to misunderstand it and to impoverish theological thought generally. The significance of Horner's work lies in its challenge to the generally held overall understanding of the story of the Bible, a challenge to the entire structure of biblical theology as it is understood by many today. Recognition that Israel has a future in the plan of God is the first step. Tracing out the ramifications for the scope and structure of that plan must follow.

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