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Christian Approaches to the State of Israel - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2007/10/10 15:10

Christian Approaches to the State of Israel John M Wilson In, UOur Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1989 A Summary by John R. Kleinheksel Sr.

Dr. Wilson suggests the two main approaches and then offers his â€œthird wayâ€•.

1) Replacement Theory This is the view that the Church of Jesus has â€œreplacedâ€• Israel. The Churchâ€™s â€œNewâ€• Covenant has superseded the â€œOldâ€• Covenant of Judaism. Thus the Jewish people and state have no theological legitimacy. In its extreme form, the best that world Jewry can now hope for is to be part of the new people of God, the Churchâ€"but without nationality, land, or statehood (p. 264).

2) Restoration Theory This view affirms Jewish restoration to the land as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy that the land is hers by divine right. This view is held by â€œpremillennialistsâ€• (who take the 1000 years mentioned in Rev. 20, literally), who tend to give modern Israel unquestioning support (plus speculation on detailed prophecies soon to be fulfilled).

Before giving his â€œthird wayâ€•, John Wilson critiques these views. As to â€œreplacement theoryâ€•: The New Testament seems to affirm a future for ethnic Israel: the nature of that future, however, deserves further comment. In Romans 9-11, Paul climaxes his theological discourse by addressing the theme of Jew and Gentile in the future plan of God. The main thrust of Paulâ€™s argument is that the destiny of Jew and Gentile is so intimately connected that the later does not find God except through the former (as in the metaphor of the olive tree). In Romans 11, Paul is emphatic that despite Israelâ€™s unbelief, God has not rejected his people (v. 1). Israel still belongs to God and is called a â€œholyâ€• people (v. 16) and â€œloved on account of the patriarchsâ€• (v. 28). Israelâ€™s historically unique preservation lends added support that it still has a vital role to play in the history of redemption (cf. v. 15). This divinely willed coexistence of Godâ€™s ancient covenant people and the Church in the present age is, to Paul, a great â€œmysteryâ€• (vs. 25). He is convinced, that God â€œdoes not change his mind about whom he chooses and blesses (v. 29, TEV) .

With regard to â€œrestorationâ€• Christians, Dr. Wilson writes: In truth, no one has the privilege to lay claim to any land simply on the grounds of â€œdivine right.â€• The corridors of time are strewn with the wreckages of individuals and soc ieties who have been tragic victims of those who had a â€œbiblical mandateâ€• or some â€œdivine voiceâ€• giving appr oval to their inhumane acts. . .. . . Therefore, we argue that no solution to the problem of the land may be imposed on a ny people on the grounds that â€œit is willed by God.â€• This also means that military conquest may not be used to pro ve a nationâ€™s right to a given land (ibid, p. 266).

Then Dr. Wilson quotes with approval historian Dwight Wilsonâ€™s cautionary word to fellow premillennialists: â€œ. . .f every action is pre-ordained, then there is no need to measure oneâ€™s actions by moral law, since the decision to o bey or disobey the
standard has already been made. Is Israel is the elect, and Jewish history is predetermined by God and foretold by prop hecy, then ordinary rules of international law do not apply to Godâ€™s chosen people; and there is no absolute standar d by which they can be judged. This is not implicit in the premillenarian view of prophecy, but it is what has worked out i n practice in the response to Israelâ€• (Dwight Wilson, Armageddon Now! p. 143), .

John Wilson continues his critique: Upon close examination of Scripture, many of the details about Israelâ€™s future m ust remain obscure and uncertain for several reasons. 1) The hermeneutic employed by the New Testament writers in dicates that many OT prophecies were fulfilled in ways totally unexpected by both the OT authors themselves and the Je wish people of Jesusâ€™ day.

2) The language of prophecy has a certain indefiniteness about it. Prophecy is written in poetry rather than prose and s o partakes of a certain measure of ambiguity with it numerous figures of speech.

3) Some Christians frequently use unsound biblical exegesis to arrive at the supposed prophetic details about Israelâ€ ™s future. These questionable interpretations often derive from an eisegetical approach (reading into the t4xt) characte

rized either by sensationalism or sheer speculation. This approach often results in a unwarrantable attitude of arrogant anticipation and dogmatic certainty.

4) Christians have seldom taken time to allow Jews the right to interpret their own Scriptures. Often the Church has be en too anxious to tell Jewish people how to interpret their own Bible, which it received from them (ibid, p.267).

Additional cautionary comments by John Wilson before he articulates his â€œthird wayâ€•: Markus Barth seems correc t in cautioning Christians not to consider the return of Jews to the land as a realization of eschatological promises in Scri pture. . . .Nevertheless we would insist, in the very least, that the State of Israel is a remarkable sign of Godâ€™s contin uing love, preservation, and purpose for his people (p. 268). , Jews have an ongoing role in the furthering of Godâ€™s ultimate redemptive purposes. But no matter what standard or position one adopts, Christians must not be blind to Jose ph Klausnerâ€™s objection that Christianity has sought to remove the national and political aspects of the prophetic hop e (The Messianic Idea in Israel, p. 10). God works through the sacred and the secular. . . .f God can call a pagan Persia n named Cyrus â€˜his anointedâ€™ (Isa. 45:1), and another pagan king, Nebuchadnezzar, â€˜my servantâ€™ (Jer. 25: 9), and accomplish his holy purposes among the nations through both, who can say what plans God may yet have in sto re for those who from of old have been his people? (ibid, p. 268).

Real estate theology is, at best, precarious theology. . . .For centuries Jews suffered discrimination and victimization at t he hands of Christians whose theological convictions seemed to permit such unjust activity. . . .Therefore, we conclude, as long as Arabs and Jews argue from nonnegotiable theological absolutes, human beings can offer little hope for peace (ibid, p. 268, 269).

3) The â€œRespect for Justiceâ€• Theory This third option, which I support, lies between the other two. It recognizes that this complex issue must be resolved neither by abandoning all theological concern of whatever stripe, nor simplistic ally on the grounds of divine right. Rather, in this view, oneâ€™s understanding of the right of the Jewish people to a se cure homeland is based primarily on the issues of justice, morality, and history. We begin by recognizing that both Arab s and Jews seek the right to selfdetermination, national identity, and legitimate human rights. Arabs desire a homeland, and Jews desire a secure state with recognized borders. None of these goals will be fully realized until each group acce pts the reality of the other with a spirit of mutual respect, humility and trust. Though the Bible, as we have sought to dem onstrate, bears witness to Godâ€™s unceasing relation to his covenant people and their historic homeland, we must pri marily pursue the prophetic concern for justice, righteousness compassion, and peace. If Christians support the right of Israel to exist as a nation--and they shouldâ€”they should do so on the basis that it is moral, just, and humane rather tha n simply on the grounds that â€˜it fulfills prophecy.â€™ The creation of the State of Israel has allowed the Jew, once th e â€˜outsider of history,â€™ to re-enter history. Christian encouragement and support of Israel today for juridical and m oral reasons can be interpreted only as a giant step forward in seeking to right an ugly historical wrong. Built by the han d of survivors of a holocaust that claimed six million lives, Israel always has the issue of Jewish survival as a central con cern. Modern Israel is not a theocracy. As a secular state, Israel was not, even during the time of the prophets, and is n ot now, the kingdom of God. Therefore, todayâ€™s Christian should not blindly condone all Israeli acts. Israelâ€™s o wn prophets call the people to practice justice and compassion to those they consider â€˜strangersâ€™ in the land. Thi s term often means the displaced, homeless, and powerless. Justice, however, is a two-way street. Only when bitterne ss, hostility, and hatred give way to a spirit of compromise, friendship, and recognition will all residents of the land know peace. While not dismissing specific biblical texts that point to both an historical and future relation of the pole of Israel t o the land, this third approach responds to Zionism from a different, yet not contradictory, point of view. We have argue d that this perspective focuses on history and on the burning biblical issues of justice, compassion, and moral sensitivity. All too often the church has been so intent on looking toward the future that it has failed both to deal with the present an d to learn from the past. Our task is to â€˜follow justice and justice aloneâ€™ (Deut. 16:20), and then let God worry ab out whether this path, in any specific way, fulfills his future prophetic plan for Israel. Either way, it accomplishes that pas sion for justice which the prophets demanded (Amos 5:24; Mic. 6:8) .

JRK critique: Admirable â€œthird wayâ€•, BUT, it does not take into account the â€œinjusticeâ€• of the Western power s imposing Jewish persons (and their state) on the native people, including treating them as the Nazis treated the Jews, confiscating their land, (â€œfor security purposesâ€• as the rationale), using the hostility this engenders as an excuse to intensify draconian reprisals and fence-building, thus making resolution impossible).