

Answering the "Replacement Theology" Critics

(Parts 1-4)

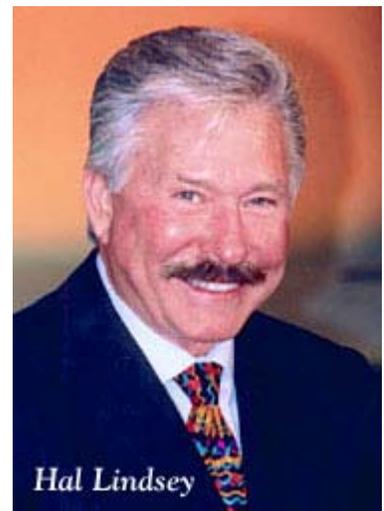
by [Gary DeMar](#)

"Please unsubscribe me from all mail from American Vision. Your replacement theology viewpoint is not in accordance with Scripture." -from an email received at AV

Replacement theology has become dispensationalism's latest prophetic boogeyman. If you want to end a debate over eschatology, just charge your opponent with holding to replacement theology. What is "replacement theology," sometimes called "supersessionism," and why do dispensationalists accuse non-dispensationalists of holding it? Here's a typical dispensational definition:

Replacement Theology: a theological perspective that teaches that the Jews have been rejected by God and are no longer God's Chosen People. Those who hold to this view disavow any ethnic future for the Jewish people in connection with the biblical covenants, believing that their spiritual destiny is either to perish or become a part of the new religion that superseded Judaism (whether Christianity or Islam).[1](#)

"Replacement theology" is dispensationalism's trump card in any debate over eschatology because it implies anti-semitism. Hal Lindsey attempted to use this card in his poorly researched and argued *The Road to Holocaust*.[2](#) He wove an innovative tale implying that anyone who is not a dispensationalist carries the seeds of anti-semitism within his or her prophetic system. This would mean that every Christian prior to 1830 would have been theologically anti-semitic although not personally anti-semitic.



As Peter Leithart and I point out in *The Legacy of Hatred Continues*,[3](#) it's dispensationalists who hold to a form of replacement theology since they believe that Israel does not have any prophetic significance *this side of the rapture!* Prior to the rapture, in terms of dispensational logic, the Church has replaced Israel. This is unquestionably true since God's prophetic plan for Israel has been postponed until the prophetic time clock starts ticking again at the beginning of Daniel's 70th week which starts only after the Church is taken to heaven in the so-called rapture. Until then, God is dealing redemptively with the Church. Am I making this up? Consider the following by dispensationalist E. Schuyler English:

An intercalary[4](#) period of history, after Christ's death and resurrection and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, has intervened. This is the present age, the Church age. . . . During this time God has not been dealing with Israel nationally, for they have been blinded concerning God's mercy in Christ. . . . However, God will again deal with Israel as a nation. This will be in Daniel's seventieth week, a seven-year period yet to come.[5](#)



According to English and every other dispensationalist, the Church has replaced Israel until the rapture. The unfulfilled promises made to Israel are not fulfilled until after the Church is taken off the earth. Thomas Ice, one of dispensationalism's rising stars, admits that the Church replaces Israel this side of the rapture: "We dispensationalists believe that the church has superseded Israel during the current church age, but God has a future time in which He will restore national Israel 'as the institution for the administration of divine blessings to the world.'"[6](#)



Dispensationalists claim that their particular brand of eschatology is the only prophetic system that gives Israel her proper place in redemptive history. This is an odd thing to argue since two-thirds of the Jews will be slaughtered during the post-rapture tribulation, and the world will be nearly destroyed. Charles Ryrie writes in his book *The Best is Yet to Come* that during this post-rapture period Israel will undergo "the worst bloodbath in Jewish history."[7](#) The book's title doesn't seem to very appropriate considering that

during this period of time most of the Jews will die! John Walvoord follows a similar line of argument: “Israel is *destined* to have a particular time of suffering which will eclipse any thing that it has known in the past. . . . [T]he people of Israel . . . are placing themselves within the vortex of this future whirlwind which will destroy the majority of those living in the land of Palestine.”⁸ Arnold Fruchtenbaum states that during the Great Tribulation “Israel will suffer tremendous persecution (Matthew 24:15–28; Revelation 12:1–17). As a result of this persecution of the Jewish people, two-thirds are going to be killed.”⁹

During the time when Israel seems to be at peace with the world, she is really under the domination of the antichrist who will turn on her at the mid-point in the seven-year period. Israel waits more than 2000 years for the promises finally to be fulfilled, and before it happens, two-thirds of them are wiped out. Those who are charged with holding a “replacement theology viewpoint” believe in no inevitable future Jewish bloodbath. In fact, we believe that the Jews will inevitably embrace Jesus as the Messiah this side of the Second Coming. The fulfillment of Zechariah 13:8 is a past event. It may have had its fulfillment in the events leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Contrary to dispensationalism’s interpretation of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus’ disciples warned the Jewish nation for nearly forty years about the impending judgment (Matt. 3:7; 21:42–46; 22:1–14; 24:15–22). Those who believed Jesus’ words of warning were delivered “from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10). Those who continued to reject Jesus as the promised Messiah, even though they had been warned for a generation (Matt. 24:34), “wrath has come upon them to the utmost” (1 Thess. 2:16; cf. 1 Thess. 5:1–11; 2 Pet. 3:10–13).

Before critics of replacement theology throw stones, they need to take a look at their own prophetic system and see its many lapses in theology and logic.

Read [Part Two](#) of this article...

¹. Randall Price, *Unholy War: America, Israel and Radical Islam* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2001), 412.

². Hal Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989). The address for Bantam Books is 666 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York.

³. Gary DeMar and Peter J. Leithart, *The Legacy of Hatred Continues: A Response to Hal Lindsey’s The Road to Holocaust* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1989).

⁴. Inserted into the calendar.

⁵. E. Schuyler English, *A Companion to the New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 135.

⁶. Thomas Ice, “The Israel of God,” The Thomas Ice Collection: www.raptureready.com/featured/TheIsraelOfGod.html#_edn3

⁷. Charles C. Ryrie, *The Best is Yet to Come* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1981), 86.

⁸. John F. Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962), 107, 113. Emphasis added.

⁹. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, “The Little Apocalypse of Zechariah,” *The End Times Controversy: The Second Coming Under Attack*, eds. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 262.

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Answering the "Replacement Theology" Critics

(Part 2)

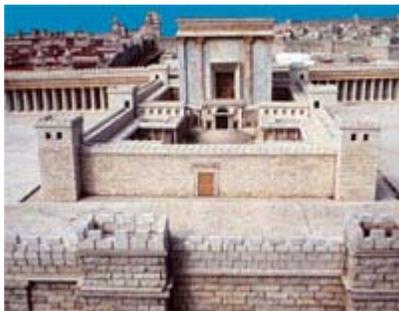
by [Gary DeMar](#)

The pre-tribulational rapture is a necessary doctrine in dispensational theology in order to maintain the Israel-Church distinction, a distinction that has been in effect for nearly two millennia, a thousand years longer than the premillennialist's earthly millennium. The dispensationalists begin with the claim that God's redemptive program to Israel failed at Jesus' first coming. Because of this failure, so the argument goes, God turned His attention to a new redemptive people called "the Church" and a new redemptive era called the "Church Age." Like the pre-trib rapture doctrine, there is no verse that actually describes such a distinction. Nowhere do we find a verse or series of verses that describe how God has postponed His covenant promises to deal with an unknown entity called "the Church."



As I and others have pointed out, the biblical arguments for a pre-trib rapture are not only spurious, they are non-existent. Tim LaHaye's answer to the charge that there is no single verse that teaches the doctrine is that there's no single verse that can be found that teaches any of the other four rapture positions. This is hardly a good argument. Could it be that since there is no verse supporting any of the five rapture positions that there is no rapture and thus no Israel-Church distinction? That is the logic of LaHaye's "defense."

I want you to notice something about dispensationalists and how they answer the charge that there are no verses that specifically describe what they claim is biblically necessary. When I point out that there is no single verse to support the pre-trib rapture, dispensationalists will maintain that the doctrine is developed from a series of verses that when put



together infer the pre-trib rapture. For example, the dispensationalist will say that the seven-year tribulation period is clearly taught in Scripture. When I ask where, I'm taken to Daniel 9:24-27. In order to get a seven-year tribulation period, the dispensationalist must first prove that there is a gap of nearly 2000 years between the 69th and 70th weeks. He must also demonstrate from these verses that the antichrist will make a covenant with the Jews during a post-rapture tribulation. Then there must be proof of a *second* rebuilt temple that skips over the first rebuilt temple that stood in Jesus' day. Read Daniel 9:24-27 without the necessary dispensational preconceptions, and see if you find these required dispensational distinctives in these verses. Dispensationalists will argue that the "he" of 9:27 is the antichrist. Does the text say "he" is the antichrist? It does not.

One would expect the antichrist of Revelation to make a covenant with the Jews during the so-called seven-year tribulation period since Revelation is an expansion of Daniel's 70th week. There is no mention of the antichrist making a covenant with anyone, either in Daniel 9:27 or in Revelation. In fact, there is not a single biblical example of antichrist making a covenant with anyone. It's *Jesus* who makes a covenant with the many: "this is *My* blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of the *many* for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). The Bible couldn't be anymore clear. You can read from the first verse to the last verse of Revelation and not find any mention of "antichrist" or "seven-years," let alone a seven-year tribulation period.

Now consider the land promises. Dispensationalists insist that the land promises made to Abraham have never been fulfilled. When it is pointed out that there is a verse that emphatically states that the land promises made to Abraham have been fulfilled, dispensationalists will go to other verses in an attempt to disprove what Joshua 21:43-45 clearly teaches: "So the LORD gave Israel *all the land* which *He had sworn to their fathers*, and *they possessed it and lived in it*" (21:43). Dispensationalists claim that this verse does not really say what it seems to say. Let's assume for a moment that the dispensationalists are right. Then how could God have said it if He did want to tell us that He had given Israel all the land which He had sworn to their fathers?

On the one hand, dispensationalists cannot find one verse that explicitly teaches the pre-trib rapture, and yet they teach it as biblical truth. On the other hand, when the Bible does tell us that the land promises have been fulfilled, they won't believe it. Dispensationalists are the real replacement theology advocates. They replace God's Word with a system that has no biblical support. [Go to PART 3](#)

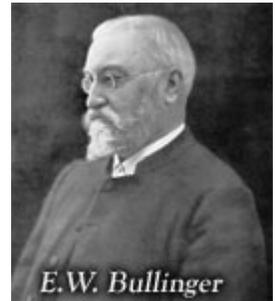
Answering the "Replacement Theology" Critics (Part 3)

by [Gary DeMar](#)

Now that we've gotten some preliminaries out of the way, what is the truth behind the charge that non-dispensationalists believe in "replacement theology," that the Church replaces ethnic Israel and her promises and that God is through with Israel forever? As I will show, the Gospels and Acts demonstrate that the first New Covenant believers were Jews who were defined as the Church by Jesus and Stephen. The use of the word Church in a Jewish context demonstrates the truth that the Church is not a "mystery parenthesis."

One of the arguments that dispensationalists use to prove the pre-rib rapture is that after Revelation 3, the word "church" no longer appears.¹ This must mean, according to a basic tenet of dispensationalism, that the church will be "raptured" so God once again can deal covenantally with ethnic Israel. The age of the church parenthesis is over when the rapture occurs. Dispensational logic is clear: The presence of the word "church" means the church is a present reality, while the absence of the word "church" means the church is absent from the earth.

Dispensationalists believe the church is a parenthesis in God's plan with Israel because she rejected Jesus' offer of the kingdom. The majority of classic dispensationalists are "Acts 2 Dispensationalists." They believe the church began at Pentecost. Other dispensationalists believe the church started when Paul is told to "bear [Jesus'] name to the Gentiles" (Acts 9:15), when Paul started his mission to the Gentiles (13:2), or with Israel's rejection of the kingdom of God and the sending of God's salvation to the Gentiles (28:26–28), a view made popular by E. W. Bullinger (1837–1913). Some also see the transition from Israel to the Church taking place in Acts 8 or 11. For our discussion, it's only important to know that all the dispensational systems claim the Church does not begin until after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.



Any mention of the church prior to Pentecost would destroy the entire parenthesis argument. Jesus tells His disciples that He will build His church "on this rock" (Matt. 16:18). If the Church is a "mystery," and the supposed parenthesis does not begin until at least Acts 2, then why is there this mention of the "Church" when Jesus is dealing almost exclusively with the "house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24)? The dispensationalist will argue that Jesus is describing the future: "I will build My church." But if the Church is a mystery that does not come into being until Pentecost, then why didn't Peter ask, "What is the church?"

The Church is mentioned again in Matthew's gospel: "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer" (18:18). This church discipline discussion takes place within a Jewish context. Notice that Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 19:15 and the requirement of two witnesses (Matt. 18:16). "Tell it to the church" is the Greek way of saying "tell it to the congregation," that is, the assembly of Israelites. If the person in this context is to be treated as a "Gentile and a tax-gatherer," it's obvious that he is being treated as a non-Jew, excommunicated from the Jewish assembly. These two references in Matthew, the most Jewish of the gospels, are a clear refutation of the claim that the Church does not begin until Acts 2 or later.



The Church is as old as covenantal believers. This is why Stephen could describe Israel as the "church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38). The New American Standard Version obscures this fact by translating the Greek word *ekklesia* as "congregation" instead of "church." The translators do offer a marginal note that reads, "Or, church (Gr., *ekklesia*)." The Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, often abbreviated as LXX, uses the word *ekklesia* 73 times (e.g., Deut. 9:10; 18:16). To say that the church is a post-Pentecost "mystery" unknown by the writers of the Old Testament is a myth that ignores the New Testament evidence found in Matthew and Acts based on word usage alone. If for the dispensationalist the absence of the word church in Revelation means the church has been raptured, then the presence of the word church in the gospels means the church is a Jewish reality.

The first NT believers were Jews. They continued the legacy of the Old Covenant assembly of believers, what the NT defines as the church. Nothing was postponed. All was fulfilled. As we will see, Gentiles were grafted into an already-existing Jewish church.

Read [Part Four](#) of this article...

1. Actually, “the church” as a universal body of earthly believers does not appear anywhere in Revelation, not even in chapters 2 and 3. It’s always “the church in” (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). These are seven local churches that existed in the first century. The word “churches” is used in the same way (1:4, 11, 20; 2:7, 11, 17, 23, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 22:16).

All Promises Made to Israel Have Been Fulfilled: Answering the "Replacement Theology" Critics (Part 4)

by [Gary DeMar](#)



Non-dispensationalists like me would say that all the promises made to Israel have been fulfilled, and the redemption of Israel according to those promises made it possible for Gentiles to be grafted into an already existing Jewish assembly of believers that the Bible calls the Church. Soon after Jesus' ascension, the gospel is preached to "Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men, *from every nation under heaven*" (Acts 2:5). If this is not God dealing specifically and solely with Israel, then I don't know what is. To say that the Church is a "mystery" unknown to the OT prophets contradicts what Peter states in Acts 2:16: "*this* is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel." "This," a near demonstrative, is a reference to the events of Pentecost. If Joel predicted what was happening, and the dispensationalists claim that Pentecost is the beginning of the Church Age, then the Church is not a mystery; it is the fulfillment of Bible prophecies made first and foremost to Israel.

Dispensationalist Thomas Ice understands the implications of this logic, so he must add a word to Acts 2:16 to make it fit his parenthesis eschatology. He rewrites the verse to read, "But this is [like] that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." He tries to explain the addition of "like" this way: "The unique statement of Peter ('this is that') is in the language of comparison and similarity, not fulfillment."¹ He's begging the question, assuming what he must prove. Dispensational author Stanley D. Toussaint writes, contradicting Ice on his point, "This clause does not mean, 'This is *like* that'; it means Pentecost fulfilled what Joel had described."² After saying this, he goes on to argue: "However, the prophecies of Joel quoted in Acts 2:19–20 were not fulfilled." So which is it? He says the fulfillment will come "if Israel would repent." But Israel did repent: "Now having heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent. . .'" (2:37–38). The result? "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (2:41).



Dispensationalists will argue that "all Israel" must be saved (Rom. 11:26), and all Israel was not saved in the first century. In the Romans context, "all Israel" is the believing elect remnant (11:5). Dispensationalists don't interpret "all Israel" to mean every Israelite who has ever lived. They don't even understand "all Israel" to mean every Jew alive during the post-rapture great tribulation since they believe that two-thirds of them will be slaughtered (*cf.* Zech. 13:8). They mean by "all Israel" *the remnant!* If "all Israel" can mean a remnant in a post-rapture scenario, then it certainly can mean a remnant in a pre-destruction of Jerusalem scenario.

Peter addresses the crowd at Pentecost as the "men of Israel" (Acts 2:22). He expands his message to include "all the house of Israel" (2:36). The "brethren"—Jewish brethren—want to know what they, as Jews, must do to be saved. Peter



tells them, "For the promise is for *you* and *your* children. . ." (2:39). There is nothing in this chapter that indicates that the Abrahamic promises are not being fulfilled right then and there. Peter continues to preach to his countrymen by informing them that "Jesus the Christ" was "appointed for *you*" (3:20). The "restoration of all things" (3:21) is the pre-ordained redemptive work of Jesus to fulfill what all the prophets have written. Peter tells them that the prophets "announced *these days*" (3:24). "It is *you* who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed'" (3:25). There is no mention of a postponement of the promises—"an intercalary period of history"—made to Abraham. These Jewish believers, the recipients of the promises spoken by the prophets

(3:24), made up "the church" (5:11). We learn later that Gentiles became a part of this existing Jewish Church to take part in the promises given to Israel (10:34–48). Notice Peter's conclusion: "And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also" (10:45). "To the Jew first" (Rom. 1:16; 2:9–10), Paul writes, because now, in Christ, "there is neither Jew nor Greek," for we

“are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Paul makes the same point in Romans 11 when he describes that the Gentiles were grafted into an existing Jewish body of believers that Acts describes as “the church” (Rom. 11:12–21).

1. Tim LaHaye, ed. *Prophecy Study Bible* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000), 1187, note on Acts 2:16.

2. Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 358.