



Did God Divorce Israel?

By Pastor John

Replacement theology (also known as supersessionism and fulfillment theology) essentially teaches that the church has replaced Israel in God's plan. Adherents of replacement theology believe the Jews are no longer God's chosen people, and God does not have specific future plans for the nation of Israel. Among the different views of the relationship between the church and Israel are the church has replaced Israel (replacement theology), the church is an expansion of Israel (covenant theology), or the church is completely different and distinct from Israel (dispensationalism/premillennialism).

Replacement theology teaches that the church is the replacement for Israel and that the many promises made to Israel in the Bible are fulfilled in the Christian church, not in Israel. The prophecies in Scripture concerning the blessing and restoration of Israel to the Promised Land are spiritualized or allegorized into promises of God's blessing for the church. Major problems exist with this view, such as the continuing existence of the Jewish people throughout the centuries and especially with the revival of the modern state of Israel. If Israel has been condemned by God and there is no future for the Jewish nation, how do we explain the supernatural survival of the Jewish people over the past 2,000 years despite the many attempts to destroy them? How do we explain why and how Israel reappeared as a nation in the 20th century after not existing for 1,900 years?

The view that Israel and the church are different is clearly taught in the New Testament. Biblically speaking, the church is distinct from Israel, and the terms church and Israel are never to be confused or used interchangeably. We are taught from Scripture that the church is an entirely new creation that came into being on the day of Pentecost and will continue until it is taken to heaven at the rapture (Ephesians 1:9–11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17). The church has no relationship to the curses and blessings for Israel. The covenants, promises, and warnings of the Mosaic Covenant were valid only for Israel. Israel has been temporarily set aside in God's program during these past 2,000 years of dispersion (see Romans 11).

Contrary to replacement theology, dispensationalism teaches that, after the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18), God will restore Israel as the primary focus of His plan. The first event at this time is the tribulation (Revelation chapters 6–19). The world will be judged for rejecting Christ, while Israel is prepared through the trials of the great tribulation for the second coming of the Messiah. Then, when Christ does return to the earth at the end of the tribulation, Israel will be ready to receive Him. The remnant of Israel who survive the tribulation will be saved, and the Lord will establish His kingdom on this earth with Jerusalem as its capital. With Christ reigning as King, Israel will be the leading nation, and representatives from all nations will come to Jerusalem to honor and worship the King—Jesus Christ. The church will return with Christ and will reign with Him for a literal thousand years (Revelation 20:1–5).

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament support a premillennial/dispensational understanding of God’s plan for Israel. The strongest support for premillennialism is found in the clear teaching of Revelation 20:1–7, where it says six times that Christ’s kingdom will last 1,000 years. After the tribulation the Lord will return and establish His kingdom with the nation of Israel, Christ will reign over the whole earth, and Israel will be the leader of the nations. The church will reign with Him for a literal thousand years. The church has not replaced Israel in God’s plan. While God may be focusing His attention primarily on the church in this dispensation of grace, God has not forgotten Israel and will one day restore Israel to His intended role as the nation He has chosen (Romans 11).

Ultimately, the Bible portrays God's relationship with Israel as one of enduring love, faithfulness, and mercy. While there are instances where Israel is depicted as unfaithful and deserving of judgment, God's desire for reconciliation and restoration remains constant. Despite the language of divorce used in certain passages, God's covenantal promises to Israel endure, and He continues to call His people to return to Him in faith and obedience.

In conclusion, while the Bible uses the metaphor of divorce to describe God's relationship with Israel, it does not mean that God completely abandoned or rejected His people. Instead, it underscores the seriousness of Israel's unfaithfulness and the consequences of sin. However, God's love and mercy prevail, offering hope for reconciliation and restoration through faith in Jesus Christ. As believers, we are called to embrace this message of reconciliation and to share it with all people, Jew and Gentile alike. God has not replaced Israel with the church, as each entity has its unique plan and destiny in biblical instruction.

(Excerpts taken from Got Questions)