



A THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE

ISRAEL, THE CHURCH AND THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM

Two Christian friends explore
promise, fulfillment, land, people, and future

DAVID • LUCAS

A Future for Israel | Fulfillment in Christ

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Reading guide and glossary

This essay is a fictional, friendly conversation. David and Lucas do not represent an entire denomination. They formulate strong versions of various Christian views and correct each other where popular slogans fall short.

“Replacement theology” is often understood to mean that the church has completely replaced Israel and that the Jewish people no longer hold any special theological significance. Because many covenant theologians reject this description, the essay also uses more precise terms: fulfillment, continuity, future Jewish turning, historical premillennialism, and dispensationalism.

“Israel” can refer to Jacob, the biblical people, the Jewish people throughout the ages, the believing remnant, or the modern State of Israel. “Messianic kingdom” can refer to the current reign of Christ, a future millennial kingdom, or the new creation. Each passage must therefore be read separately.

The document deals with theology and history. It does not offer a comprehensive assessment of current international politics or international law. All people are image-bearers of God; antisemitism, anti-Palestinian racism, terrorism, collective guilt, and religious justification of injustice are rejected.

Outline of Content

- Promise and Fulfillment: Abraham, Land, New Covenant, and Christ
- Key Texts: Romans 9-11, Acts 1, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Galatians, and Revelation
- History: Early Church, Augustine, Reformation, Darby, Scofield, and Reflection after the Shoah
- Denominations: Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Messianic Jewish
- Jewish Messianic Expectation, Palestinian Christian Voices, and Shared Ethical Boundaries

Infographic 1 - The Spectrum of Christian Models

FIVE CHRISTIAN MODELS

Not a simple binary, but a spectrum of continuity and future expectation



Note: Variants exist within every model; political support for a government does not automatically follow from an eschatological model.

The labels show family resemblances, not watertight boxes. In particular, “future Jewish turning” occurs in both covenant theological and premillennial traditions.

Prologue - Two Bibles on the table

In a quiet reading room next to the church, two friends slide their Bibles toward each other. David is a pastor in an evangelical congregation and expects that God will visibly fulfill his promises to Israel in a future messianic kingdom as well. Lucas teaches church history and reads the land and kingdom promises Christologically: not as abolition, but as fulfillment in Christ and in the one people being gathered from Jews and nations. Both confess Jesus as Messiah, the resurrection of the body, his second coming, and the final judgment.

David - Let's make one agreement. I don't want to immediately call your view "replacement theology," as if you believe that God carelessly traded in Israel. Tell me yourself what you mean.

Lucas - And I will not reduce your position to political propaganda. A future for Israel can be theologically professed without religiously approving every decision of the modern state.

David - Then we begin with the most important distinction: biblical Israel, the Jewish people throughout history, and the state of Israel founded in 1948 are connected realities, but not necessarily identical.

Lucas - Exactly. A prophetic promise is not a blank check for a government. And criticism of state policy must never turn into antisemitism or a denial of Jewish safety. At the same time, love for the Jewish people must not make Palestinians, including Christians, invisible.

Thus, their conversation does not begin with a map, but with a prayer for truth, humility, and peace.

IN-DEPTH

In this essay, the two positions are deliberately not linked to moral superiority. Both a strong doctrine of continuity and a pronounced expectation of the future can be professed humbly, faithfully to Scripture, and peacefully; both can also derail ideologically. The discussion therefore tests not only conclusions but also the path leading to them: word usage, context, canonical coherence, historical elaboration, and the consequences for living people. In this context, the word "state" takes on a modern political meaning, whereas "Israel" has multiple historical and theological functions in the Bible. Anyone who equates these two without argument skips precisely the step at issue in the debate.

1. Three meanings of “Israel”

Lucas - In Scripture, “Israel” can mean Jacob, his descendants, the northern kingdom, the covenant people, a believing remnant, or-according to some interpreters-the renewed people around the Messiah. Whoever makes every use equal determines the outcome in advance.

David - But that fluidity must not mean that “Israel” in prophecies becomes “church” unnoticed. In Romans 9-11, Paul generally speaks of his relatives according to the flesh. When he says that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable, I hear a lasting significance of that people.

Lucas - I acknowledge that lasting significance. My question is what form it takes. Paul knows only one olive tree. Gentile believers are not planted alongside Israel in a second tree; they are grafted onto Israel’s own root. Unbelieving branches can be grafted in again through faith.

David - That image preserves both unity and distinction. The branches are not nameless. Paul warns Gentile Christians: you do not bear the root, the root bears you. That excludes arrogant substitution.

Lucas - Agreed. Therefore, I prefer to speak of fulfillment, expansion, or Christological reconfiguration rather than replacement. The church is not a pagan successor to Israel, but a messianic community that began with Jewish apostles and in which people from the nations share by grace.

Their first conclusion is small but important: terminology must explain and not condemn. “Replacement theology” can be a caricature; “Israel theology” can likewise conceal divergent models.

EXEGETICAL DEEPENING

Romans 9:6-“not all who came forth of Israel are Israel”-can indicate both discontinuity and inner differentiation. Paul does not simply say that a new pagan people replaces the old; he refers back to Isaac and Jacob to show that God’s promise always ran through electing grace. Galatians 6:16, “the Israel of God”, is grammatically disputed: some interpreters understand it to mean the entire church, others specifically Jewish believers in Christ. It is precisely this uncertainty that makes it unwise to use a single verse as a decisive slogan. The broader canon holds election, judgment, remnant, expansion, and restoration simultaneously.

2. The promises to Abraham

David - Genesis 12 connects people, land, and worldwide blessing. Genesis 15 and 17 give the land a concrete character. If God swears unconditionally, why should the geographical component disappear?

Lucas - Because the New Testament does not diminish the promise but opens it up. Paul calls Christ the seed of Abraham and says that whoever is in Christ is Abraham's offspring and heirs. Romans 4 even speaks of Abraham as heir of the world. The land does not become worthless, but eschatologically broadened.

David - Broadening does not have to abolish the original. When a promise becomes worldwide, the specific land can remain a sign and center. After the exile, the prophets speak of return, cities, fields, and Jerusalem with striking concreteness.

Lucas - And Hebrews 11 says that Abraham looked forward to the city of which God is the builder. The patriarchs sought a better, heavenly homeland. The concrete gift functions sacramentally: it points to new creation.

David - Perhaps, therefore, the alternative is not literal or spiritual. biblical fulfillment can be material *and* greater. My objection only arises when "greater" practically means "no longer for the original recipients."

Lucas - My objection arises when "literally" makes the Messiah an appendix. All promises find their yes in Christ. No Christian land theology can be built up outside of him.

EXEGETICAL DEEPENING

The Abrahamic cycle contains various layers: personal calling, numerous offspring, the land of Canaan, royal descendants, and blessing for all families of the earth. Paul concentrates the worldwide blessing in Christ, but does not cite the land motif in the same way. That is why Christians differ on the question of whether silence means cessation. A fruitful approach recognizes typology without evaporation: the earlier sign is real, but receives a greater horizon through Christ. The new creation is then not a competitor of the land, nor does the land exhaust the full inheritance of Abraham.

3. Sinai, new covenant, and one people

Lucas - Jeremiah 31 promises a new covenant with the house of Israel and Judah. Jesus says at the cup that this new covenant is sealed in his blood. The Epistle to the Hebrews applies Jeremiah to the church. That is strong fulfillment language.

David - But precisely the addressees “Israel and Judah” remain. The fact that Gentiles share in the new covenant does not prove that Israel as a people has no future participation. It may actually mean that the church shares in advance in what is ultimately realized broadly among Israel.

Lucas - Ephesians 2 says that Christ has broken down the dividing wall and made one new man out of Jew and Gentile. Two permanently separated covenant peoples thus seem difficult.

David - Distinction is not the same as separation. In the body, man and woman, Jew and Greek, exist without difference in access to God, but their historical identity does not evaporate. I do not defend two paths to salvation. Everyone is saved by grace, by faith in the Messiah.

Lucas - Then our positions intersect. The question is not whether there is one salvation, but whether within that one salvation there still exists a collective calling for ethnic Israel and a special place for the land.

They write in the margin: unity in Christ prevents two paths to salvation; God's faithfulness prevents pagan triumph.

CANONICAL DEEPER EXPLORATION

The new covenant is promised to Israel and Judah in Jeremiah, instituted by Jesus in the Gospels, and applied to the apostolic church in 2 Corinthians and Hebrews. That pattern does not allow for two one-sidedness. Gentile Christians cannot say that the covenant began apart from Israel; they receive Israel's promised gift. At the same time, no one can claim access to the new covenant outside the blood of Christ and the work of the Spirit. The open question is whether Jeremiah's collective formulation implies a future broad participation of ethnic Israel. Romans 11 makes that reading plausible, but does not prescribe a separate order of salvation.

4. Romans 9-11 - the focal point

David - Paul begins with sorrow for his relatives. He distinguishes between Israel according to the flesh and the children of the promise, but in chapter 11 he speaks of hardening that is “in part” and “until.” Afterwards: thus all Israel will be saved. The natural reading is a future, broad turnaround of the Jewish people.

Lucas - That is possible, and many non-dispensationalists believe the same. But “all Israel” can also mean the entire people of God, or the sum of the believing remnant throughout the ages. The phrase “and so” can mean wisely-through the ongoing interaction of Jewish remnant, Gentile mission, and new inoculation-not necessarily afterwards in a strict timetable.

David - Yet in the same passage Paul contrasts Israel with the fullness of the Gentiles. If “Israel” suddenly means the church, the argument becomes opaque. Moreover, he quotes Isaiah: the Redeemer will come out of Zion and turn away wickedness from Jacob.

Lucas - I admit that a future Jewish turning stands strong exegetically. But that does not yet prove a restored state, temple sacrifices, or millennial geopolitical rule from present-day Jerusalem. Romans 11 is about salvation and grace, not about borders.

David - Agreed. Whoever directly translates Romans 11 into a political map says more than Paul. My larger model connects Romans 11 with Ezekiel 36-37, Zechariah 12-14, and Revelation 20.

Lucas - And that is precisely where the hermeneutical discussion lies: may those texts be combined as a single chronological scenario, or must prophetic images be read from the perspective of the cross, resurrection, and new creation?

TEXT OBSERVATION

The structure of Romans 9-11 is theological and pastoral. Chapter 9 defends God’s word despite Israel’s unbelief; chapter 10 emphasizes human responsibility and the proximity of the word of faith; chapter 11 warns Gentiles and opens hope. Whoever reads only chapter 9 may become fatalistic; whoever reads only chapter 10 may forget God’s election; whoever reads only chapter 11 may force an end-times scheme. Paul does not end with a map but with worship: from Him, through Him, and to Him are all things. That doxology limits any triumphalist application.

5. “All Israel will be saved”

Lucas - Let us honestly list the key readings. One: “all Israel” is the church from Jews and Gentiles. Two: it is the total believing remnant from Israel throughout history. Three: it is a future majority or representative fullness of ethnic Israel. Four: it concerns Israel as a whole at the end, without claiming that every individual is saved.

David - My preference is three or four. The olive tree metaphor speaks of natural branches being grafted back in. That is not merely the conversion of isolated individuals, for that already took place in Paul’s time. His hope looks further.

Lucas - I also lean toward a future broad reversal, but place it within the one church. That does not make me a dispensationalist. Puritans, some Reformed theologians, and contemporary Catholic interpreters could expect a future Jewish recognition of Christ without a separate system of salvation.

David - That is an important intermediate position. The debate is often presented in an unnecessarily binary way.

Lucas - And pastorally, we must be careful. Christian expectation must not treat living Jews as pawns in our end-time scheme. Romans 11 commands awe and humility, not speculative curiosity.

David - Mission also requires humility. I believe that Jesus is the Messiah for Jew and Gentile, but proclamation after centuries of coercion and persecution must reject every form of manipulation.

EXPLANATORY DEEPER ANALYSIS

The Greek *houtōs* in Romans 11:26 normally means “thus” or “in this way,” not automatically “and afterwards.” Yet the passage contains time indications: hardening is partial and lasts until the fullness of the Gentiles enters in. The combination may point to a salvific-historical turning point without the precise chronology being fixed. “All Israel” need not mean every biological individual either; collective terms can designate a people in representative fullness. The most responsible formulation is therefore often more modest than popular books of prophecy: Paul grounds a real hope, but gives no date, percentage, or political mechanism.

6. Acts 1 and the restoration of the kingdom

David - After forty days of teaching about the kingdom, the disciples ask: “Will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus does not answer that the expectation is wrong; he says that times are not for them and sends them as witnesses. That sounds like postponement, not abolition.

Lucas - Or Jesus shifts their question from national power to the worldwide mission of the Spirit. Acts unfolds the kingdom from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. The throne of David is linked in Acts 2 to the resurrection and exaltation of Christ.

David - Shifting need not exclude later completion. The Spirit forms the missionary vanguard of the kingdom; the visible government can follow at the Second Coming.

Lucas - But Luke ends with Paul proclaiming the kingdom of God in Rome. The kingdom is already at work under the cross. A model that shifts the kingdom almost entirely to a future Jewish dispensation misses that present reality.

David - That is why I prefer progressive over rigid classical dispensationalism: the kingdom has already begun in Christ, but is not yet completed. Israel and the nations share the same Messiah, while prophetic particularity can remain.

Once again, the difference proves to be a matter of “already and not yet”: how much has already been fulfilled, and what form has not yet taken?

NARRATIVE DEEPENING

Acts 1 stands between Luke’s Gospel and the worldwide mission. Jesus does not call the question of restoration foolish, but makes the Father the owner of the times and the disciples responsible for witness. In doing so, eschatological curiosity is transformed into missionary obedience. In Acts 3, Peter subsequently speaks of “times of refreshing” and the restoration of all things of which the prophets spoke. Continuity readers hear cosmic renewal in this; future-oriented readers also hear Israel’s national restoration. Both must acknowledge that repentance, Christ’s ascension, and His Second Coming structure the passage.

7. Ezekiel 36-37 - Land, Spirit, and Life

KEY TEXTS AND THE DECISIVE QUESTION

The same Scripture - different hermeneutical emphases

PROMISE & LAND	FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST	ISRAEL & THE FUTURE
● Genesis 12; 15; 17 ● Deuteronomy 30 ● 2 Samuel 7 ● Ezekiel 36-37 ● Zechariah 12-14	● Matthew 5:17 ● John 2:19-21 ● Galatians 3:16, 26-29 ● Ephesians 2:11-22 ● 1 Peter 2:9-10	● Acts 1:6-8 ● Romans 9-11 ● Romans 11:25-29 ● Revelation 7 ● Revelation 20-22

THE KEY QUESTION

Are the promises to Israel transformed and broadened in Christ and his one people, or do ethnic Israel and the land retain a distinct future role alongside them?

Infographic 3 - The core texts and the hermeneutical key question.

David - Ezekiel sees Israel gathered from the nations, cleansed, renewed by the Spirit, and established in the land. The two pieces of wood-Judah and Joseph-become one under one Davidic king. The level of detail makes a purely ecclesiastical application unlikely.

Lucas - The prophecy first spoke hope to exiles. A historic return began under Persian rule. The New Testament uses resurrection and Spirit language for the church. The one shepherd is Christ. Multiple fulfillment is therefore possible.

David - But the combination of gathering, inner renewal, lasting peace, and Davidic rule transcends the return from Babylon. I see in this an eschatological future for Israel.

Lucas - I see the same eschatological future, but its geographical center is not necessarily the modern state. Ezekiel's temple vision, for example, is so symbolic and theologically rich that many Christians connect it with God's presence in Christ and ultimately the New Jerusalem.

David - Some premillennials expect an actual future temple; others understand sacrifices as memorials, and still others symbolically. There is no unanimity within my own camp either.

Lucas - That is important, for Hebrews emphasizes the sacrifice accomplished once for all. Every future model must prevent animal sacrifices from becoming atoning competitors of Christ.

PROPHETIC DEEPENING

The valley of dry bones is explained in Ezekiel himself as "the whole house of Israel" in hopelessness. The primary meaning is therefore collective restoration, not directly individual resurrection. Yet the

prophet uses language of spirit, breath, and life that nourishes later resurrection expectation. The two pieces of wood repair the rift between north and south under one shepherd. Whoever applies this only to 1948 must explain where the spiritual cleansing and universal peace are; whoever applies it only to the church must explain why the ethnic and geographical particularity remains so emphatic. A layered fulfillment therefore deserves serious attention.

8. Zechariah and Jerusalem

David - Zechariah 12 speaks of Jerusalem, the nations, an outpouring of a Spirit of grace, and looking at the one they pierced. Chapter 14 describes the Lord coming, His feet on the Mount of Olives, and the nations advancing. To me, this is concrete eschatology.

Lucas - The New Testament applies “looking at Him whom they pierced” to Jesus’ crucifixion. Revelation universalizes it: all the tribes of the earth will see Him. The prophetic images are transformed by Christ.

David - But transformation does not have to explain away Jerusalem. Jesus returns physically as He ascended. The Mount of Olives and the city can be real places in the completion.

Lucas - Possibly. Yet the canon ends with the new Jerusalem descending from heaven, of which God and the Lamb are the temple. The city becomes bride and cosmic dwelling place. That relativizes any exclusive sanctification of current boundaries.

David - To relativize is not to deny. Locality and universality can come together like the incarnation: one Jewish Messiah in one history brings salvation to the world.

Lucas - That is perhaps our most fruitful analogy, as long as it is not misused to sanctify injustice.

PROPHETIC DEEPENING

Zechariah combines cultic, military, cosmic, and liturgical imagery. “On that day” recurs time and again and binds together mourning, purification, judgment, and kingship. The Gospel of John sees a decisive fulfillment in the pierced Jesus; Revelation extends the image to all nations. Yet Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives remain concrete in the narrative. Therefore, commentators do not differ primarily on the question of whether Jesus is central, but on the remaining reference of the place names after Christ has become the center. The text invites expectation but resists simple conversion into contemporary military events.

9. Galatians 3 and the one seed

Lucas - Paul concentrates the promise in Christ: not “seeds” but “seed.” Whoever is baptized in Christ is Abraham’s offspring. Ethnic titles of access do not confer a higher status in salvation.

David - Fully agree regarding justification. But Paul’s typological argument does not exclude collective promises. The Messiah represents Israel and precisely because of this brings Israel’s calling to fulfillment.

Lucas - My fear is that a strong division between Israel and the church will once again build a dividing wall that breaks down Ephesians 2.

David - My fear is that an undifferentiated unity makes God’s concrete faithfulness to a historical people invisible. biblical unity is often symphonic: the nations bring their glory, the tribes have names, the apostles have names.

Lucas - Then we must distinguish between soteriological equality and salvation-historical particularity. No one is saved by lineage; yet lineage can mark a calling in God’s history.

David - Yes. And that calling is never a basis for superiority. Election means service and responsibility, not moral inviolability.

PAULINIAN DEEPENING

Galatians opposes the requirement that non-Jews must become Jewish through circumcision and Torah boundary markings in order to fully belong to God’s people. The unity “in Christ” is therefore soteriologically radical. However, it does not erase every social history: Paul continues to speak of Jews and nations and collects money as a sign of connectedness between congregations. A Christian theology of Israel must preserve both movements: no ethnic hierarchy in justification, and no amnesia regarding the Jewish origin and future of the gospel. The one seed is Christ; participation in Him is a gift, not a possession.

10. Revelation 20 and the Millennial Kingdom

David - Revelation 20 describes martyrs who reign with Christ for a thousand years, followed by a final rebellion. The simplest sequence places this after Christ's visible coming in chapter 19. That is premillennialism.

Lucas - Apocalypticism often recapitulates the same period from different viewpoints. Augustine and the great amillennialist tradition read the thousand years as the current church period: Satan is bound insofar as he can no longer completely mislead the nations; the saints reign with Christ in heaven.

David - But "first resurrection" sounds physical, and the contrast with "the rest of the dead" supports two phases.

Lucas - Others understand the first resurrection as rebirth or heavenly life of the martyrs. Moreover, only this passage explicitly mentions a thousand years. An entire system cannot be built without checking prophets, gospels, and letters.

David - Rightly so. Historical premillennialism reads Revelation 20 more literally, without all the characteristics of Darby's dispensationalism. That model already existed early on with Irenaeus.

Lucas - And Justin simultaneously acknowledged that true Christians differed on this matter. Early presence thus proves possibility, not a unanimous apostolic norm.

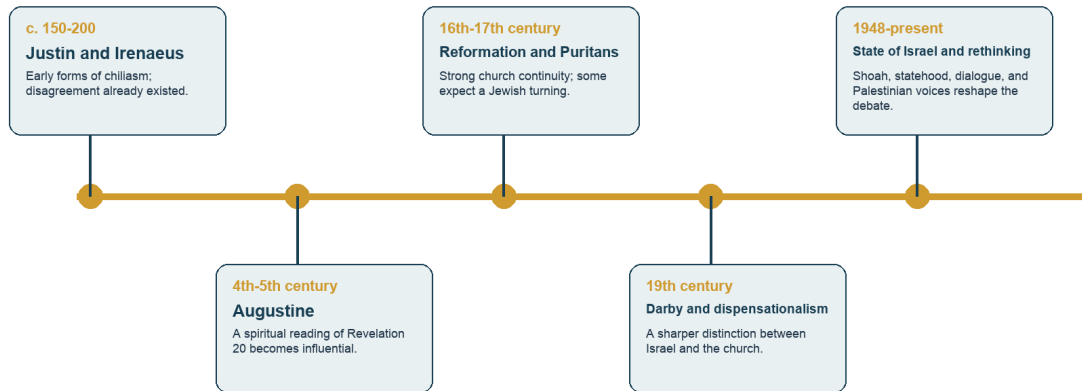
APOCALYPTIC DEEPENING

The reading of Revelation depends on the genre. Numbers, animals, cities, and wars carry symbolic power, but symbolism does not mean unreality. Premillennialists emphasize the succession of chapters 19 and 20; amillennialists point to earlier cycles in which judgment and the end are already reached and subsequently return from a different perspective. Postmillennialists expect a long-lasting historical impact of the gospel before the coming. None of these models follows solely from the word "thousand." The identity of the saints, the binding of Satan, the nature of the first resurrection, and the relationship to chapter 21 must be weighed together.

11. The First Centuries

A HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

Broad outlines - neither a straight line of development nor complete consensus



Historical warning: church language of fulfillment has sometimes degenerated into anti-Judaism; future expectation has sometimes degenerated into political identification.

Infographic 2 - Main lines in the history of interpretation.

Lucas - The early church was diverse. Justin Martyr and Irenaeus expected a future reign of Christ and a renewed earth. Other lines became more reserved towards chiliasm, partly due to excessive speculation.

David - That corrects the claim that every earthly expectation of the future was not invented until the nineteenth century.

Lucas - Certainly. But modern dispensationalism-with a sharp system of dispensations, a particular doctrine regarding the Rapture, and often a far-reaching separation between Israel and the Church-was codified much later.

David - I admit that. A doctrine can be formulated systematically later and still have biblical roots. The Trinity also received precise terminology after the New Testament.

Lucas - True, but analogies with the Trinity must be used with caution. The question remains whether the later system explains the canon better or fragments it.

They note two historical rules: old is not automatically true; new is not automatically false. History is a witness and a warning, not the supreme judge.

HISTORICAL DEEPER EXPLORATION

Justin declared that he and many others expected a thousand-year stay in a rebuilt Jerusalem, but acknowledged Christians of pure faith who did not share this. Irenaeus linked bodily resurrection, restoration of creation, and prophetic abundance. These witnesses are important because they show that the hope of an earthly kingdom is early. However, they do not prove the complete modern

system of the Rapture, seven-year tribulation, and separate divine programs. Historical honesty therefore requires two corrections at once: premillennialism is not simply modern, and modern dispensationalism is not identical to all early chiliasm.

12. Augustine, Middle Ages, and Reformation

Lucas - Augustine's *De civitate Dei* made a non-literal millennium influential. The church lives between Christ's first and second coming; the ultimate city of God must not be identified with an earthly kingdom.

David - That correction regarding political kingdoms of salvation is valuable. But sometimes the church was presented so strongly as the true Israel that living Judaism appeared only as a rejection or a witness of judgment.

Lucas - That is the dark history that we must not conceal. Christian anti-Jewish polemics, coercion, exclusion, and violence have caused deep wounds. Modern churches have therefore revised old replacement language.

David - The Reformation generally retained covenant continuity and amillennialism, but among Puritans, the expectation of a future Jewish conversion grew. A future for Jews is therefore not exclusively dispensationalist.

Lucas - Exactly. Some Reformed interpreters also read Romans 11 with a future-oriented perspective, without land or state formation becoming the center.

The historical center turns out to be broader than the friends initially thought: one church and yet hope for a future turning of Israel.

HISTORICAL DEEPER ANALYSIS

Augustine interpreted the "first resurrection" primarily spiritually and the thousand years as the time in which the church lives under Christ. His approach resisted crude end-time calculations, but was later sometimes linked to an ecclesiastical consciousness of power that left too little room for the enduring Jewish witness. Reformers largely adopted the amillennialist main line. At the same time, expectations of a collective conversion of Jews arose among various Protestants, especially Puritans and Pietists. History, therefore, does not know a simple line from early literal truth to later spiritual deviation-or vice versa.

13. Darby, Scofield, and modern dispensationalism

David - John Nelson Darby systematized the distinction between Israel and the church in the nineteenth century. Through Bible conferences and the Scofield Reference Bible, the model spread widely, especially in English-speaking evangelicalism.

Lucas - Classical dispensationalism could speak of various divine programs and interpreted prophecies as literally as possible for national Israel. Later variants are less sharp.

David - Progressive dispensationalism states that the Davidic kingship has already begun in the exalted Christ and will later be visibly completed. Church and Israel therefore share more than classical schemas sometimes suggested.

Lucas - My criticism focuses primarily on a hermeneutics in which “literal” is presented as neutral. The New Testament itself reads Hosea, Amos, the temple, and the land typologically and Christologically.

David - My counter-criticism is that “Christological” sometimes becomes a code word for the disappearance of the original referent. I want to preserve the pattern of promise-fulfillment-completion.

Lucas - Then the real question is not who takes the Bible literally, but what kinds of language the Bible uses and how later Scripture authoritatively explains earlier Scripture.

HISTORICAL DEEPER

Darby’s significance lies not merely in loose expectations, but in the architecture in which the Church and Israel receive different salvific-historical callings. The Scofield Bible placed that architecture literally alongside the biblical text in influential notes. In the twentieth century, dispensationalists further developed their model; progressive variants speak more strongly of the Davidic reign that has already begun and the unity of salvation. Consequently, criticism must be precise: the argument against a rigid classical version does not automatically affect every contemporary future-oriented vision. Conversely, internal development must not conceal the fact that the sharp dichotomy is historically relatively recent.

14. The State of Israel since 1948

David - Many Christians viewed the founding of the state of Israel in 1948 and the return of Jews to the land as providence or a prophetic sign. After centuries of diaspora and the Shoah, Jewish security acquired an existential significance.

Lucas - But providence is not the same as canonical identification. A modern secular state has citizens, laws, borders, political parties, and military policy. It can be judged morally like any state.

David - I agree with that. "Whoever blesses Israel" from Genesis 12 must not be used as automatic approval of every government decision.

Lucas - And Christian criticism of Israeli policy must not repeat old antisemitic stereotypes, hold Jews collectively responsible, or deny their right to security. At the same time, Palestinian dignity, security, and political rights must be fully taken into account.

David - A theology of election that ignores justice betrays the prophets. Amos and Isaiah actually held the chosen people responsible.

Lucas - Therefore, we separate three questions: Does the Jewish people have lasting theological significance? How do we interpret the state of Israel? And what policy is just here and now? The answer to one question does not automatically determine the other two.

HISTORICAL AND ETHICAL DEEPENING

The modern Zionist movement emerged in a world of European nationalism and persistent antisemitism. The Shoah dramatically highlighted the necessity of a safe refuge for many Jews. The founding of Israel was simultaneously accompanied by war, flight, and lasting Palestinian loss. Theological interpretation that tells only one history becomes morally blind. Christians can defend Israel's existence and Jewish security while simultaneously demanding equal dignity, justice, and security for Palestinians. Eschatology absolves no one of ordinary moral standards; election makes justice more urgent, not superfluous.

15. Palestinian Christians at the table

Lucas - A debate in Europe or America becomes incomplete when Arab and Palestinian Christians are absent. They read the Bible from an existence of loss, occupation, violence, emigration, and threatened communities.

David - Their voice confronts Christian Zionism when prophetic schemes render concrete neighbors invisible. The Kairos Palestine document emphasizes that the promise of land must not become a political program that sanctifies injustice.

Lucas - At the same time, that document is also part of a controversial political and theological debate. We must hear it seriously without uncritically adopting every formulation.

David - Exactly. Jewish traumas and Palestinian traumas must not be played off against each other. Christian ethics demands the protection of citizens, the rejection of terrorism, hostage-taking, collective punishment, dehumanization, and hatred.

Lucas - And she asks listening to local churches, not just to Western end-time teachers or political commentators.

For the first time, there is a long silence. Their maps and schemes make way for names, families, and prayers.

CONTEXTUAL DEEPENING

Palestinian Christians belong to ancient church communities and do not read national texts as an abstract exercise. Their contextual theology emphasizes Jesus, the universal scope of the promise, and the call to just peace. Western Christians do not have to automatically adopt their conclusions, but they cannot treat their existence as a disturbing exception. Nor may a Palestinian voice be used to deny Jewish fear or history. A truly Catholic-global-church allows Jewish, Palestinian, Arab, European, and other witnesses to correct one another under the same Word.

16. How denominations differ globally

Lucas - After Vatican II, Roman Catholic documents explicitly speak against the idea that Jews are rejected or cursed by God. At the same time, the Catholic Church identifies the messianic people with the community of Jews and Gentiles in Christ and does not make the modern state a direct dogma.

David - Eastern Orthodox theology often views the church as the fulfilled Israel and is generally amillennialist. Nevertheless, as contemporary Orthodox publications show, it can reject simplistic “Gentiles replace Jews” language and leave room for Jewish inoculation.

Lucas - Lutheran and Reformed confessional traditions emphasize one covenant people and often read Israel ecclesologically. Some Reformed do expect a future Jewish conversion.

David - Pentecostal and many evangelical churches are more often premillennial. The Assemblies of God explicitly confesses that Christ’s millennial kingdom encompasses the salvation of national Israel.

Lucas - Anglicans have a breadth: evangelical Christian Zionists, classical covenant theologians, and voices seeking a non-supersessionist theology after the Holocaust. The Church of England calls the Christian-Jewish relationship of unique significance.

David - Messianic Jewish congregations combine Jewish identity and the confession of Jesus, but differ among themselves regarding Torah practice, land, and end times. Baptists also diverge: dispensationalist, historical premillennial, or Reformed-amillennialist.

Therefore, no label replaces research into official confession, local practice, and individual conviction.

DENOMINATIVE IN-DEPTH

Official doctrine and popular congregational practice do not always coincide. A Catholic can be politically strongly pro-Israel without becoming a dispensationalist; an evangelical can be premillennial and yet have sharp criticism of government policy. Reformed churches differ among themselves regarding Romans 11. Pentecostal churches outside North America do not always adopt American schemes. Messianic Jewish movements range from evangelical congregations with Jewish liturgy to groups with stronger Torah observance. Therefore, this chapter uses tendencies, not statistical labels. For a local congregation, its confession, synod decision, and actual preaching remain decisive.

17. Jews who do not recognize Jesus as Messiah

David - How does Christian expectation relate to Jews who do not recognize Jesus but do expect Mashiach?

Lucas - With clear difference and respect. Traditional Judaism generally expects a human Davidic king who gathers Israel, restores the temple, promotes Torah faithfulness, and brings peace. It rejects the Christian confession of Jesus as the divine, crucified, and resurrected Messiah.

David - Christians say that Jesus has decisively fulfilled the promises and will complete them. Orthodox Judaism judges messianic claims partly by visible world peace and gathering. Because these are still lacking, it does not view Jesus as the Messiah.

Lucas - Reform Judaism has sometimes interpreted messianic expectation more as a coming time of justice than as a single supernatural person. Thus, variation exists within Judaism as well.

David - We must not confuse similar words with the same content. “Messianic kingdom” sounds shared, but the identity of the Messiah, the meaning of Torah, the cross, and the resurrection differ fundamentally.

Lucas - A conversation must not become an instrumentalization. A Jew is not a prophetic piece of evidence. Love demands knowledge, honesty, and freedom of conscience.

JEWISH DEEPER EXPLORATION

Maimonides describes the Messiah as a Davidic king who restores Torah, gathers Israel, builds the temple, and brings the world into service to God. In his austere view, the natural order need not be immediately abolished by miracles. Other Jewish sources speak more richly of resurrection and cosmic renewal. Reform Jewish traditions often emphasized a messianic era of justice. Christians recognize prophetic themes but confess that the crucified and risen Jesus is already Lord. That fundamental difference demands honest debate, not an artificial agreement.

18. Two covenants or one way to God?

Lucas - After the Holocaust, some Christian thinkers speak of an enduring Jewish covenant and are hesitant about missionary work among Jews. Others fear that this suggests two paths to salvation.

David - The New Testament says that salvation is in Christ. Paul's pain for his relatives would be incomprehensible if Torah offered a parallel path to redemption without the Messiah.

Lucas - Yet Romans 11 also says that they are loved for the sake of the fathers and that God's calling is irrevocable. The church must therefore simultaneously confess Christ and not limit God's mysterious faithfulness.

David - For me, that means: not two Gospels, but a special history and hope for Israel.

Lucas - For me: one new covenant community in Christ, with an unlifted mystery surrounding Israel. The church does not possess God and cannot boast against the natural branches.

Their formulations remain different, but both reject coercion, contempt, and any notion that Jews are collectively guilty or cursed by God.

THEOLOGICAL DEEPENING

After the Shoah, churches rightly wanted to break with coercive missions and contempt. From this sometimes arose "double-covenant theology": the Jewish people would remain in their own relationship of salvation via Sinai, while the church proceeds via Christ. Classical Christian confessions find such a parallel path difficult to reconcile with the universality of Christ. At the same time, Romans 11 compels the church not to reduce God's faithfulness to Israel to a failed past. The tension cannot be resolved by concealing Christ or writing off Israel. Witness must be free, non-coercive, and permeated with repentance for Christian violence.

19. Temple, sacrifices, and Torah in a future kingdom

David - Some readings of Ezekiel 40-48 expect a rebuilt temple in a future kingdom. How does that relate to Hebrews?

Lucas - That is my greatest objection. Hebrews declares Christ's sacrifice once and for all and calls the old cultic order obsolete. A restoration of atoning sacrifices seems like a step backward.

David - Dispensationalists answer differently. Some view sacrifices as remembrance, just as the Lord's Supper points back. Others read the temple more symbolically. Not every future model requires the same solution.

Lucas - But Ezekiel mentions cleansing and sin offerings. "Remembrance" is not explicitly stated in the text. If one reads literally, one must also honestly bear that tension.

David - Rightly so. It is a weak point of very literal diagrams. At the same time, your model has to explain why the prophecy provides so many geometric, priestly, and geographical details.

Lucas - Because apocalyptic temple architecture can be theology in space: perfect holiness, order, life, and God's returned glory. Revelation 21 ultimately answers: no temple, for God and the Lamb are her temple.

CANONICAL DEEPER EXPLORATION

The temple line runs from Eden-like sanctuary language via the tabernacle and Solomon's temple to the returned glory in Ezekiel. John calls Jesus' body the temple; Paul calls the congregation and the body of believers the temple of the Spirit; Revelation ends with God and the Lamb as the temple. This development supports typological fulfillment. Yet prophetic descriptions of worship and nations coming to Zion remain concrete and physical. The challenge is to confess a future materiality without returning behind Christ's completed priesthood.

20. Ethics: prophecy is not a policy program

Lucas - Even if your eschatology is correct, it does not follow that Christians must support every political means to accelerate prophecy.

David - Fully agree. God does not need human sin to fulfill his word. The mission of the church is to bear witness, pray, do justice, and seek peace-not to orchestrate the end times.

Lucas - And even if my fulfillment model is correct, I must not trivialize the Jewish bond to the land, historical persecution, and the need for security.

David - Criticism of Christian Zionism, too, must distinguish between theology, political ideology, and concern for Jewish people. Not every support for Israel is dispensationalism; not every criticism is antisemitism.

Lucas - The same nuance applies to Palestinian solidarity. It can stem from Christian justice, but can go astray when Jewish self-determination or security is declared fundamentally unworthy.

They formulate a joint ethical test: an interpretation that dehumanizes innocent people, equates power with truth, or treats suffering as useful end-time scenery must be rejected.

ETHICAL DEEPENING

biblical prophets judge Israel and the nations based on justice, mercy, and faithfulness. No appeal to election makes civilian casualties, abduction, humiliation, land theft, racism, or revenge morally neutral. Nor can “peace” be a cover for ignoring security or justice. Christian political judgments ought to verify facts, take international law seriously, and resist propaganda from all sides. Because current facts change rapidly, this essay limits itself to enduring norms: every human being bears God’s image; collective guilt is dangerous; citizens must be protected; truth and reconciliation belong together.

21. The strongest arguments on both sides

David - My strongest argument is God's concrete faithfulness. The prophets mention people, land, Jerusalem, Davidic king, and restoration. Romans 11 expects that natural branches be grafted in again. Modernity proves nothing, but shows that the unthinkable-a recognizable Jewish people in the old land-remained historically possible.

Lucas - My strongest argument is Christ as the hermeneutical center. He is the true temple, the seed, the Davidic king, and the place where God and man meet. In Him, Jew and Gentile become one; the inheritance grows into a new creation. The New Testament dares to apply promises more broadly and deeply.

David - Your strongest objection to me is that I can combine loose prophecies into a schema and underestimate the way apostles reread.

Lucas - Your strongest objection to me is that "fulfillment" can be an elegant word for the actual dispossession of the original addressees.

David - I must guard against two peoples and two ways.

Lucas - I must beware of a pagan church that calls itself Israel but forgets the Jewish root.

The debate is not resolved by finding the other's weak spot, but by no longer hiding one's own weak spot.

ARGUMENTATIVE DEEPENING

The two models each carry a particular biblical intuition. The future-oriented view guards particularity: God deals with real people, nations, bodies, and places and does not deny his history. The fulfillment view guards Christological universality: the promise achieves its goal not in ethnic power but in the crucified Messiah and the renewed creation. A mature theology does not ask which intuition can disappear, but how both can be ordered under the authority of the entire canon. The debate persists because different texts correct different dangers.

22. A shared reading rule

Lucas - Can we formulate a method that helps congregations?

David - First: read every text in its historical context. Ask who “Israel” is there, what “land” and “kingdom” do in that passage, and what hope the first hearers received.

Lucas - Second: read canonically. Let the New Testament not destroy the Old, but neither leave it untouched. The Cross, resurrection, Spirit, and new creation are decisive.

David - Third: distinguish between salvation, calling, and politics. One salvation in Christ does not automatically answer every question about collective calling; a collective calling does not legitimize policy.

Lucas - Fourth: test historical fruits. Anti-Judaism, antisemitism, end-time sensationalism, and indifference to Palestinian suffering are not neutral side effects.

David - Fifth: leave unresolved tension. Romans 11 mentions a mystery. Humility is not a lack of conviction, but obedience to the scope of the text.

Together they write underneath: whoever speaks of Israel, speaks of living people before God's face.

PRACTICAL DEEPENING

A congregation can apply this reading rule by reading Romans 9-11 slowly and integrally, alongside Genesis, Prophets, Ephesians, and Revelation. Have participants define their use of “Israel,” “church,” “literal,” and “fulfillment” beforehand. Then ask which text puts their own model under the most pressure. Where possible, invite Jewish and Palestinian Christian discussion partners without making them responsible for an entire people. Conclude every study with prayer against antisemitism and racism, for the church in the Holy Land, for safety and justice, and for the coming of God’s kingdom.

Epilogue - Hope that does not triumph

David - I continue to believe that Jesus will reign visibly and that Israel has a recognizable role in that completion. The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.

Lucas - I continue to believe that all promises find their center and form in Christ and that the church of Jews and nations is the one messianic people. The New Jerusalem is greater than any current state.

David - But we can pray together for Jews who are threatened, for Palestinians who suffer, for hostages and prisoners, for churches in the Holy Land, and for leaders who seek just peace.

Lucas - And together we can refuse to make God a possession of our camp.

It has grown dark outside. The friends do not close their Bibles because the questions have disappeared, but because the Word has made them neighbors again. Their final sentence is not a schema: "Come, Lord Jesus-and teach your church to speak truth in love until that day."

FINAL REFLECTION

The friends do not reach an artificial compromise. David remains premillennial and Luke remains covenantal and amillennialist oriented. Their agreement lies deeper: God is trustworthy, Jesus is the only Lord and Messiah, the church lives by Israel's Scriptures, pride against Jews is forbidden, political power is not sacred, and the future belongs to God's justice. Thus, eschatology becomes not an escape from responsibility, but an exercise in hope. The ultimate truth is not that one interpretive camp dominates history, but that the Lamb triumphs through truth, sacrifice, and resurrection.

Appendix A - Comparison of main models

Model	Israel and church	Romans 11	Land / kingdom
Strict replacement	Church takes the place of Israel	Often church or believing remnant	No separate future
Fulfillment continuity	One people; promises fulfilled in Christ	Can be church, remnant, or future conversion	Land broadened into new creation
Future Jewish conversion	One church; enduring Jewish significance	Broad future conversion	Not necessarily a political kingdom
Historical premillennialism	One salvation; often room for Israel	Often a future turning	Christ reigns after his coming to earth
Dispensationalism	Distinguish between Israel and church	National Israel is saved	Concrete fulfillment of land and kingdom

Appendix B - Key texts with questions for joint study

Genesis 12:1-3; 15; 17 - Which parts are unconditional? How do land, offspring, and worldwide blessing relate?

Deuteronomy 30:1-10 - Does this return concern only exile, also the end times, or both?

2 Samuel 7; Psalm 2 and 72 - How does the Davidic Son reign now and in the future?

Isaiah 2; 11; 49; 60-66 - Are Zion and Jerusalem geographical, typological, eschatological, or plural?

Jeremiah 31-33 - Who receives the new covenant and how does the church share in it?

Ezekiel 36-48 - How do land, Spirit, temple, and God's glory connect with Christ and Revelation 21?

Zechariah 12-14 - How does the New Testament read the pierced one, Jerusalem, and the coming of the Lord?

Matthew 19:28 and 24 - What do the twelve tribes and Jerusalem mean in Jesus' future teaching?

Acts 1:6-8 and 3:19-21 - Does Jesus correct, confirm, or shift the expectation of restoration?

Acts 15:13-18 - How does James use Amos 9 for the Gentile mission?

Romans 9-11 - Who is Israel in each verse? What do remnant, fullness, until, all Israel, and unrepentant calling mean?

Galatians 3:16-29; 6:16 - How does Christ concentrate the promise and who is "the Israel of God"?

Ephesians 2:11-22 - What differences remain within the one new man?

Hebrews 7-13 - What does Christ's once-for-all sacrifice mean for future temple expectation?

Revelation 7; 20-22 - Are the chapters chronological or recapitulating; how do tribes, millennium, and new Jerusalem relate to each other?

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Methodological note

Denominations are internally diverse. Official documents are more representative than isolated statements, but even they do not fully summarize local beliefs. The modern state of Israel is not directly equated with the biblical covenant people in this essay; nor is any relationship denied. Political and legal judgments require additional historical and legal analysis.

Concluding remarks

The internet sources were consulted in August 2026. The essay summarizes viewpoints and quotes only to a limited extent; for doctrinal precision, the linked primary or official documents remain the guiding principle. The dialogue is educational and pastoral in nature. It claims no ecclesiastical teaching authority and no definitive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.