



ISRAEL, SCRIPTURE, *and* THE Promises *of* God

A PANEL DISCUSSION WITH

*Dr. Mark Bailey, Dr. Darrell Bock,
and Dr. Mark Yarbrough*

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In the discussion of Christ as the fulfillment of all biblical promises, we sometimes lose where Israel fits within that overall picture. In fact, many evangelicals today claim that the church has entirely supplanted Israel in the promises of God and that Israel as a people has no further part in God's redemptive plan.

Drs. Bailey, Bock, and Yarbrough gathered for a Cultural Engagement Chapel for a panel discussion of the promises made to Israel and what Scripture has to say about their future fulfillment. We pray their detailed exegesis of many important passages will equip you to understand God's plan for Israel and inspire you with God's faithfulness.

Since Christ is the fulfillment of all covenant promises, how does Israel fit into the overall picture?

Dr. Mark Bailey: God chose Israel to be a channel of the Messiah but not just the channel of the Messiah. He chose them to be a repository of the truth, and he chose them to be a witness to the nations. An Israel-centered covenant, at its root, has worldwide blessing as its ultimate goal. Israel was chosen to be a blessing. There [was] a corporate national identity of them as a kingdom of priests to our God, and there was also the singular one—the Seed who [came] from Israel the blesser of the world.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough: While the whole Bible is Christocentric, many evangelical writings and teachings today move from the Fall straight to the Gospels. But the “macro structure” of the Bible is outlined as: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation.

There are 38 books in between the Fall and the Gospels, and when we skip past them, there is an incredible loss. God’s reclamation project is much larger. Israel is being marginalized in contemporary evangelicalism today, especially in the West. When Israel is marginalized, it begs us to go back and ask some larger questions about what the story of Scripture is.

Looking at the story of Scripture, how does the New Covenant fit into the covenants of promise and does it exclude Israel?

Dr. Mark Bailey: Israel is the primary focus in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, because of who Jesus Christ is, we become the beneficiaries of forgiveness through the blood of Christ. [However,] that does not cancel what God has promised to do with Israel as so many passages of the Old Testament articulate. While the church participates in the blessings of the new covenant, that doesn’t mean that God will not establish the New Covenant with Israel after those times of discipline for Israel. If the rejection of Christ cancels the plan for Israel, then Paul going to the synagogues would be a non sequitur.

Dr. Darrell Bock: The way I’d like to say it is Gentile inclusion doesn’t mean Israelite exclusion. Just because you expand the promise and include Gentiles within it, with Christ being the means of blessing for everyone, you don’t lose the commitments made to the original receivers of the promise.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough: It is amazing [that] the historical context [of] New Covenant dialogue is frequently thrown out the window. The New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:27–40 is directed to the house of Jacob and Israel. It’s very, very precise, but when discussion about the New Testament generally takes place in the church today, that historical context is just gone.

What are some other passages evangelicals today overlook concerning God's plan for Israel?

Dr. Bock: When we come to the New Testament, you find a series of what I call “until” passages in Luke and Acts that tell you there’s more to the story than what we’re focusing on right now.

In Luke 13:35, Jesus says, “Behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, ‘BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!’ ” This statement anticipates that there will be a time when the nation *does* respond and embrace this message. The exilic-like judgment and language, “Your house is desolate,” is in place *until* that day.

In Luke 21:24, the Olivet Discourse, Jesus says, “Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” You wouldn’t talk about “until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” unless you think there’s something on the other end. When you contrast the nations with anything in Scripture, you contrast it with Israel. So this passage suggests there’s a time when Israel comes back into the loop.

In Acts 1, the disciples have just spent 40 days with Jesus, and at the end of this time, they ask him, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). He has been expounding the Old Testament to them, and nothing he has said leads them to believe anything other than that there’s a time when Israel will be restored into the kingdom program. When they ask him that question, Jesus doesn’t object to the premise behind it. He simply says, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority” (Acts 1:7). In other words, “This is the Father’s business. In the meantime, you’ve got an assignment. You’re going to be filled with the Spirit and take the gospel to the ends of the world.”

The last of these “until” passages is Acts 3:19–21, in which Peter says, “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.” In other words, “If you want to know what Jesus is going to do when he comes back, just read your Hebrew Scriptures; this is where the details are.” There is no footnote or asterisk that says we should re-read those Old Testament texts in light of the New Testament. What the Old Testament says is the way it’s going to be.

All of these texts point to the future of Israel, which is more fully explained in Romans 11.

Isn't Romans 11 really about the church, not Israel?

Dr. Bailey: Many people are saying that God has canceled and rejected Israel. But in Romans 11, Paul asks the question, “God has not rejected His people, has He?” (Romans 11:1), and the answer is, “No.” If we believe God has decided to pull the plug on Israel in favor of just the church or just the Gentiles, then Romans 11 would be a really bad passage to study because it says exactly the opposite.

Paul himself is an example of a Jew who has come to Christ “post-Cross”. He identifies Himself as part of the “remnant,” and Romans 11 presents a series of statements that presuppose a redemptive future for Israel.

Why would God want Gentiles to make Israel jealous if there wasn’t a future for Israel (Romans 11:11–14)?

Why is there an announcement of a future re-grafting in of branches that have been cut off because of a partial, not total, hardening (Romans 11:17–24)?

Paul concludes by saying, “The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29). You have a whole series over verses all the way through Romans 11, argument after argument after argument presenting a future for Israel. So God is not finished with Israel. His promises are still in vogue.

Dr. Bock: Romans 9–11 fits in with the thrust of Luke/Acts that says, “There are times coming when the restoration of Israel will be in place.” What’s at stake in all of these passages are God’s faithfulness, God’s Word, and God’s commitment. He’s made a commitment to a certain people. He will follow through on it, and that’s why the passage ends with, “The calling of God is irrevocable.” Paul is trying to emphasize the faithfulness of God to Israel as an example of God’s faithfulness also to the audience that he’s writing to.

What are some passages that speak to God’s faithfulness to fulfill the promises to Israel?

Dr. Bailey: One of the most unlikely passages that points to the future of Israel is Matthew 22:23–33, when the Sadducees ask their classic question about the woman who lost her husband, got remarried, lost her husband, etc., and they ask whose wife she will be in the resurrection.

Jesus answers them, “You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29). The Scriptures he has in mind are those of the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants—not only the land promises but all of the promises that God gave to Abraham and his descendants. He argues that if Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be in the kingdom, then resurrection is essential.

If there is no earthly kingdom, there would not be a need for resurrection of the body. If all we did was die and go to heaven, why would there be a need for a resurrection? That passage arrested my attention. If Abraham and his descendants will experience the promise of the Abrahamic covenant, there must be a resurrection prior to eternity so they can enjoy the land promises promised to them on the way to eternal blessings that are promised to everybody.

What practical impact does accepting this future role for Israel have on our lives?

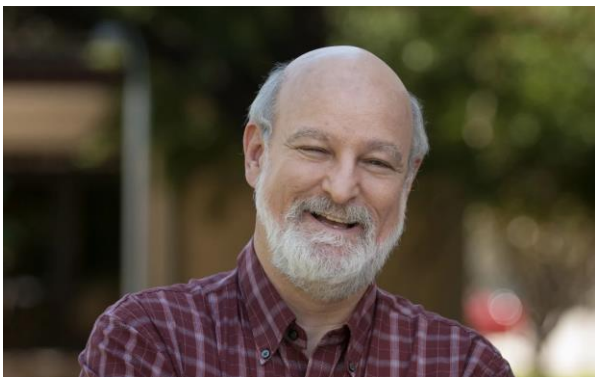
Dr. Bailey: While we believe in a future for ethnic Israel in fulfillment of God's promises to her, it's very important to understand the difference between the dominantly secular state of Israel and the Arab nations at war with each other and the ideologies of those who are trying to take over by force. That's a different issue than the heart of God for the Jews and the Arabs. God's heart is that both Jews and Gentiles to come to know the Messiah. That's where the practical aspect comes. Do we have a heart and a ministry directed toward both Jewish unbelievers and Arab unbelievers? Do we have a passion to see Jewish believers and Arab believers in right relationship with each other?

Dr. Bock: There's [also] a practical aspect related to the character of God and what this has to say about his faithfulness and keeping his promises. There's another aspect that shows that God is going to bring Jew and Gentile together in the end, in full reconciliation that is the product of the gospel. That full reconciliation is a model for us about how we're supposed to relate to one another. We see that the product of the gospel is not something individually just for me, but it's something that binds us all together and will ultimately unite all of us under the headship of Jesus in a way that brings praise and honor and glory to God.

About the Authors



Dr. Mark Bailey served as Senior Professor of Bible Exposition and President at Dallas Theological Seminary until 2020. Dr. Bailey assumed the Seminary's presidency in 2001 after years of service as both a professor and the Vice President for Academic Affairs as well as his role as pastor of a local church. He currently serves as the Chancellor of DTS.



Dr. Darrell Bock serves as Executive Director of Cultural Engagement and Senior Research Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. He has earned recognition as a Humboldt Scholar (Tübingen University in Germany) and as author of around 40 books, and he also hosts the Seminary's Table podcasts.



Dr. Mark Yarbrough serves as the President and Professor of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary. He has also served as the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Academic Dean.